



# Migrants' experiences of material and emotional security in rural Scotland: Implications for longer-term settlement



Moya Flynn, Rebecca Kay\*

University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on qualitative research with Central and East European (CEE) migrants living and working in rural areas of Scotland, this article explores what it is that facilitates a desire to stay longer term and how this relates to theorisations of social security and migrant-led understandings of normality. The article makes three original contributions: (i) new empirical insight into the relationship between material and emotional aspects of migration and settlement in Scottish rural contexts; (ii) greater understanding of rural migrants' diverse lived experiences; (iii) attention to the changing nature of migration to rural contexts through a focus on longer-term settlement rather than seasonal or circular migration. The article is structured by three key questions: To what extent are rural destinations actively chosen by migrants? How are migrants' experiences shaped by the realities of rural life in the particular Scottish contexts studied? How do migrants interpret these experiences through their understandings of a normal life and how does this impact on longer-term plans? The qualitative insight which the article provides has wider relevance and significance for policy and practice across other rural contexts and can help to reveal ways in which rural social systems could better respond so that areas of 'new' migration may develop into positive places of settlement.

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## 1. Introduction

We're definitely staying here longer term ... I can live normally and earn my keep'.

(Iza, 31, Poland, Angus)<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on qualitative research with Central and East European (CEE) labour migrants living and working in rural areas of Scotland, this article explores what it is that facilitates a desire to 'stay longer term' and how this relates to conceptual theorisations of social security and migrant-led understandings of normality. Taking our lead from the experiences of migrants like Iza, we explore what it is 'to live normally' and how this links to both material (e.g. access to jobs and housing) and emotional (e.g. positive relations and social connections) aspects of social security. It is this combination of factors, we argue, which allows a present and future life to be

imagined in rural Scotland.

Increased migration from Central and Eastern Europe to the UK since the start of EU accession processes in 2004 has prompted a growth in research into this phenomenon. This has included studies exploring various aspects of migrant identities, social networks and strategies and the ways in which these intersect with experiences of migration and longer-term stays (Datta and Brickell, 2009; White and Ryan, 2008; Trevena et al., 2013; Galasinska and Kozłowska, 2009; Rabikowska, 2010). However, the overwhelming majority of studies have been concerned with urban contexts, largely in England, and many have focused exclusively on the experiences of Polish migrants. As a result there is little insight into the ways in which understandings of recent migration to the UK might be nuanced by taking account of migrants' lived experiences of rural contexts or by looking more broadly at CEE migrants rather than focusing on specific national groups.

A small but growing body of work on migration from Central and Eastern Europe to rural locations in a range of European countries does exist, although in relation to the UK, much of this

\* Corresponding author. Central and East European Studies, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, 9 Lilybank Gardens, Glasgow G12 8RS, United Kingdom.

E-mail address: [Rebecca.Kay@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Rebecca.Kay@glasgow.ac.uk) (R. Kay).

<sup>1</sup> All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

has focused on rural development and socio-economic impacts of migration (de Lima and Wright, 2009; Findlay and McCollum, 2013). A number of existing studies provide more detailed insight into the lived experiences of this group of rural migrants, whilst also calling for more qualitative research of this kind, and in a wider range of rural contexts (Rye, 2014: 328; McAreavey, 2012: 489). Such a broadening of research can help to foreground both the diversity of migrant experiences and the heterogeneity of rurality, and to explore intersections between the two. Rural contexts are dynamic, changing over time (Cloke, 1997: 260; Halfacree, 2007). Therefore research insights need to be regularly updated to keep pace of change which is both generated and experienced by rural migrants.

In light of such concerns, the original contributions of this article are threefold. Firstly, it provides new insight into lived experiences of migration and settlement in two Scottish rural regions with little previous experience of international in-migration on such a scale. This is achieved through the use of the concepts of social security and normality to reveal the relationship between material and emotional aspects of migration and settlement. Secondly, the article provides greater understanding of the diversity of rural CEE migrants' lived experiences in the UK. Thirdly, the article draws attention to longer-term settlement rather than seasonal or circular migration which had been the focus of earlier studies (de Lima and Wright, 2009; Jentsch et al., 2007; Findlay and McCullom, 2013) highlighting the changing nature of migration to Scottish rural contexts. In developing this focus we do not seek to deny the importance of continuing experiences of precarity and temporariness for many CEE migrants. The dominance of gangmasters, seasonality of employment, instances of trafficking, discrimination and abuse unfortunately persist in many areas (EHRC, 2015). Nor do we wish to suggest that all migrants desire to stay long-term in rural Scottish locations: many chose to migrate on to other, often urban, destinations, others return to their countries of origin. Nonetheless, our focus on exploring what it is that facilitates and encourages CEE migrants to stay longer term in rural locations offers a different perspective, one which has as yet rarely been explored for this migrant population.

These original contributions are developed through an examination of three key questions which also structure the empirical sections of the article:

- To what extent are rural destinations actively chosen by migrants and how do (in)securities and perceptions of normality influence these decisions?
- How are migrants' experiences shaped by the realities of rural life in the particular Scottish contexts studied? In responding to this question we focus on issues of employment, language learning and social connections which emerged as key for our participants.
- How do migrants interpret these experiences through their understandings of a 'normal' life and how does this impact on longer-term attachments to and plans for settlement in rural places?

Before exploring each of these questions in turn, section 2 explores the article's theoretical underpinnings, in particular concepts of social security and normality and the ways in which these relate to understandings of migration and settlement. Section 3 provides an overview of existing studies of CEE migration to rural contexts in Europe, the UK and Scotland. Section 4 explains the two specific rural contexts where our research took place, the fieldwork methods employed, and provides an overview of the migrants whose experiences we draw on in this article.

## 2. Theories and concepts

Key to the wider research project on which this paper is based is an attempt to explore the connection between an experience or sense of social security and the likelihood of longer-term settlement in Scotland. We move beyond limited conceptualisations of social security as equivalent to formal welfare provision, and draw on more holistic anthropological theorisations (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann, 1994; von Benda-Beckmann et al., 1998). These focus attention on the diverse and complex ways in which people produce securities (social, economic, personal and cultural) and mitigate risk, through a combination of public and private resources, formal and informal networks, state and non-state structures. Further, these theorisations encompass both material and emotional aspects of security.

The concept has been further explored in the post-socialist region. Here researchers have paid attention to the significance of historically informed attitudes and practices from the state socialist period, as well as the contemporary context and developments since 1989. Taken together these shape people's expectations and strategies in relation to both state provision, and the use of informal networks and personal resources in attempting to create securities (Thelen and Read, 2007; Kay, 2012). These theoretical perspectives provide analytical space for the consideration of existential and temporal aspects of security: emotions, affects, memories, aspirations (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann, 2000: 7). Alongside and in interaction with more practical and material elements, these help to create a sense and lived reality of security in the present and thus a potential for longer-term plans and forms of settlement, projecting into the future.

During analysis of interview data we explored how our participants connect material and emotional aspects of security in the realities of their everyday lives, and further, how they link this to their decision to stay in the medium to longer-term in rural regions of Scotland. As part of this a strong narrative of a normal life or sense of normality emerged. In seeking to understand how this related to theorisations of social security we engaged with the wider literature on CEE migration where normality has gained prominence. Here the concept has been theorised and explored empirically in relation to the experiences of Polish migrants in the UK, primarily in urban areas of England (Galasinska, 2010; Galasinska and Kozłowska, 2009; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010; McGhee et al., 2012; Rabikowska, 2010). The category of normality is used for observing processes of adaptation and identity negotiation which occur through the migration process. As Rabikowska suggests, 'Empirically ... normality passes as everyday reality which is but the materially and pragmatically experienced state of being' (Rabikowska, 2010: 286). Thus, the focus is upon how the individual perceives and creates their own normality, within the context in which they are experiencing settlement. Normality is understood as something that is relative (i.e. in contrast to what has been experienced before or elsewhere); and as often being constructed by people to make sense of the reality of their contemporary lives (see also Misztal, 2015: 1). As will become evident through this paper, normality can be used in a normalising way to order, rationalise and make the best of the situation faced.

The research cited above found that normality is talked about by migrants to suggest some sort of stabilisation in their lives, and has tended to focus on how a normal life is perceived by migrants in the future, as something to be strived for but not yet achieved (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010: 349). In addition, it is often discussed as something that is in contrast to the abnormal state of being which was left behind upon departure from their home countries, a creation of a new sense of normality, both different from, but also imitating

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