

# Polish migrant children experiences of schooling and migration in Scotland

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## Polish migrant children in Scottish Schools

- Polish migrant children are one of the fastest growing groups of the Scottish school-age population
- Their number has increased since 2004 to 2009 by about one thousand every year
- The overall number of pupils in publicly funded schools has been falling – by almost forty-seven thousand pupils between 2004 and 2009 – alongside a general population decline
- Cities remain the main centres of concentration and diversity of languages, but rural areas are increasingly affected by newer flows of migration

## Main home languages in publicly funded schools in Scotland, in 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009

2006		2007		2008		2009	
<i>Number of languages</i>	137	<i>Number of languages</i>	138	<i>Number of languages</i>	147	<i>Number of languages</i>	139
<i>Number of pupils</i>		<i>Number of pupils</i>		<i>Number of pupils</i>		<i>Number of pupils</i>	
English	673,874	English	664,497	English	653,731	English	647,292
Punjabi	4,672	Punjabi	4,682	Polish	4,677	Polish	5,460
Urdu	3,771	Urdu	4,002	Punjabi	4,622	Punjabi	4,531
Cantonese	1,509	Polish	3,347	Urdu	4,207	Urdu	4,345
Polish	1,508	Cantonese	1,508	Cantonese	1,506	Arabic	1,662
Arabic	1,131	Arabic	1,277	Arabic	1,403	Cantonese	1,494
French	649	French	740	French	788	French	801
Gaelic (Scottish)	656	Gaelic (Scottish)	638	Gaelic (Scottish)	681	Gaelic (Scottish)	626
Bengali	532	Bengali	531	Bengali	539	Bengali	572
German	391	German	473	German	496	German	511
Spanish	383	Spanish	412	Spanish	461	Spanish	473

## Marie Curie Project April-October 2008 fieldwork statistics

<b>Number of families and children focus groups interviewed</b>	<b>25</b>
Number of children:	<b>27</b>
Primary	
Secondary	14
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Number of Parents interviews</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Total number of persons interviewed</b>	<b>65</b>

<b>Total number of school</b>	
Edinburgh – 1 RC Primary, 1 Community Secondary	2
Aberdeen - 1 Primary	1
North Lanarkshire - 1 RC Secondary	1
Highlands – 1RC Primary, 1 Secondary	2
<b>Total number of school</b>	<b>6</b>

## Listening to migrant children: 'Scotland it is my country which I also love'

- *'My dad came here three years ago, my mum 2 years ago, I have been one year here and my sister was born here. So, for my dad it is the fourth year here, for my mum the third for me the second and my sister is one year and couple of months old. I lived one year in Poland with my grand parents after my mum and dad left to go abroad'.*

(Wiktorja, 10 years old)

- *'I came for summer holiday (...) I liked here very much and after that summer I have started to think that Scotland it is my country which I also love. After summer mum asked me whether I would like to stay and I decided to stay. I knew that I didn't want to live with grand mum any longer [in Poland for 3 years] and to tire her any more, she did a lot of bringing me up. I decided I would like to stay'.*

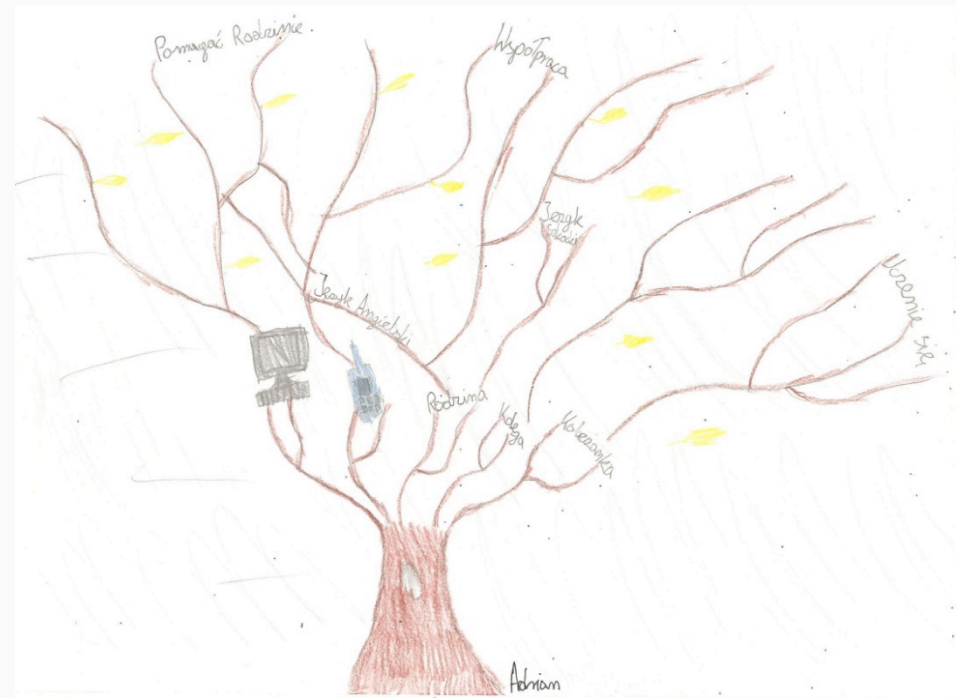
(Robert, 11 years old)

# Transition to the new school (1)

Migrant children are highly motivated to succeed in school:

*'I drew a special tree, the tree of important things: help to my family (I should help my family) is important; the cooperation (with the colleagues here to cope with the English language); the Scottish language is important here; and the English language is important when we need to go somewhere outside of Scotland. On my tree there is also the family, friends and learning'.*

(Adrian, 13 years old)



## Transition to the new school (2)

Formative assessment of new pupils focuses almost entirely on their language abilities:

*'I did not expect to be very good in maths; I was definitely not in Poland. I go to the first class here, I should be in the second but they put me in the first because I do not know English enough'.*

(Adrian, 13 years old, rural high school in Highlands)

## Transition to the new school (3)

Migrant children are not always effectively assessed and are not been pushed to perform at their potential:

Polish Saturday School focus group:

- **Maciek, 8 years old:** *I like in school here that I have good results and the teacher praises me.*
- **Alex, 11 years old:** *The teachers praise you because you are Polish, I do have the same situation.*
- **Weronika, 10 years old:** *Me too.*
- **Alex:** *The Polish pupils are better, because we have better learning, four times more knowledge we could learn, in one week as much as they (Scottish children) learn in one month. They learn recently about 'hexahedrons', and in Poland this is done already in the third class.*
- **Alex, Weronika:** *The school is easy here.*

## Transition to the new school (4)

Differences between educational systems across Europe in what content is taught to children at a certain level:

- *'I think I would have difficulties in Polish school now for sure, because with my Scottish level of knowledge they would put me to the '3rd class' while all my old friends would be already two levels above me. That wouldn't be nice at all, because my friends would make fun of me and it would be still difficult at Polish school to learn so I prefer the school here'.*  
(Robert, 11 years old)
- *Would you like to come back to Poland now?*  
*'Sincerely? Not now, because I would not pass any entry exams to any class, because here the level of requirements is so low and I am already accommodated to that level. I would like to finish academy (high school) here and then have a vocational internship and I will see what to do later'.*  
(Adam, 13 years old, rural school in Highlands)

## Language support for new pupils (1)

There is increased pressure on schools and local authorities for places and for English language support services:

- *'I would introduce more help to make it easier: right now a support teacher is coming once a week, she should be here all the time to help'.*  
(Robert, 11 years old; city primary school)
- *'I would like some Polish teacher to assist our lessons all the time and to help us and translate for us what we cannot understand. At the moment the teacher asks Magda (Polish classmate) to help us but she is not always able to help us'.*  
(Wiktorija, 11 years old)

## Language support for new pupils (2)

Increased numbers of children of migrants and the issue of resources:

*'In my school the teacher does not help us because in my school there is not enough places, so I and my cousin and four Scottish children we go to third class, (even though we are at the fourth) and the teacher concentrates to help these from the third class instead of us and we have to learn alone'.*

(Maciek, 8 years old)

## Language support for new pupils (3)

Equally important than human and material resources, is a supportive atmosphere in the school which can help the new pupils to overcome the language difficulties:

- *'I am happy with the help I get here, the teacher always explains everything I cannot understand in English, and sometimes I understand sometimes not. There is a lot of help in fact and the school is better than in Poland'.*

(Adam, 13 years old, rural high school in Highlands)

- *'When I came to Scotland I didn't know English at all, but the school was very welcoming and nice and I started to learn without problem. I didn't get any support at that time so I had a kind of pressure on me, but in a nice way, to learn'.*

(Robert, 11 years old; city primary school)

## Home-school relations (1)

- Language barriers and lack of understanding of how the system works cause misunderstandings for parents.
- Children integrate quickly if they are in full-time schooling, and may act as 'go-betweens' for their parents.

*'I meet two Polish friends here; we meet sometimes but not very often. There were some meetings in my son's school organised by the Head Teacher, I had a translator. Every Thursday women from different ethnic groups met there for tea or coffee and for a chat about their country of origin, to learn something together like photography or present their national cuisine. I made 'bigos': the Scottish liked it, they even asked about the recipe so I gave them but I am not sure if they used it.*

(Ewelina 41 years old, mother of 3 children)

## Home-school relations (2)

Frequently children act as translators for their parents who are not able to communicate in English:

*'When I arrived I had a break and from September I went to school. We had no problem with enrolment and documents because my brother speaks English (as the only person who did in the family at that time).'*

(Gosia, 14 years old)

## Home-school relations (3)

Parents appear relatively satisfied with their level of involvement in the school and the communication with the school:

*‘Comparing schools here and there: the level of knowledge is much lower in Scotland however the atmosphere in school is perfect here. I like the Head teacher here, she is interested in helping, the atmosphere in school is very friendly and they do not produce the problems for children. I have mostly contact with the Head teacher and the mainstream teacher but there is not a problem to meet other teachers if I would wish to talk with them’.*

(Sabina – mother of two children 11 and 5 years old, city school)

# Conclusions

- Schools have different strategies for addressing the issue of integrating children into the classroom. Some have developed specific language support. Others tend to rely on their teachers' abilities to cope and on the Polish-speaking assistants or other Polish-speaking children.
- Many of the interviews with Polish children and parents reinforced the stereotype of the Scottish school as being 'easy' and having lower expectations of pupils in comparison with Polish schools.
- Although there was also evidence of greater friendliness and support.
- Most of the parents interviewed were positive about the new schools and the efforts being made by the schools to welcome and facilitate new migrants.

# Recommendations

- It is important that schools can communicate effectively with all parents and that there is a need for more consistent means through for example standardised documents about the children's background to make their transition to the new school easier.
- There is a need for all education systems to look at providing opportunities for foreign language tuition as this in itself can be a way for cutting down cultural barriers in the classroom.
- European countries are affected by migration, whether as countries of origin or countries of destination. Most policies that deal with migration are national/regional policies, yet migration is trans-national in its character and requires international governance, as well as trans-national cooperation.
- A distinct positive role for the EU would be to identify areas of best practice and exchange in the area of education and migration.