



'Za Chlebem'

**The Impact of the Economic Downturn on
the Polish Community in Northern Ireland**

'Za Chlebem'

- Literally means 'for bread'
- To 'earn a crust' or 'to earn your bread and butter'
- Research looking at how the day to day lives of Polish people in Northern Ireland as the economic downturn hits

Migration Context

- Poland became a Member State of the European Union on 1st May 2004 as part of 'the A8'
- A8 nationals subject to restrictions in their access to labour market in the UK under the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS)
- Inflows to Northern Ireland peaked in 2006 and 2007

Economic Context

- Northern Ireland and the economic downturn
- As the economic downturn took hold in 2008 and continued into 2009, its effects have moved from financial markets of stocks and shares to the labour markets of employment and unemployment
- Unemployment rate in Northern Ireland up from 4.2% in April – June 2008 to 6.7% in the same period in 2009

Aims of the Research

- How has the Polish community in Northern Ireland been affected by the economic downturn?
- More particularly, what have been the employment effects in terms of unemployment and job security
- What are the experiences of racism and discrimination of the Polish community in Northern Ireland?

Aims of the Research

- Look to see if Polish community have access to services they need during the downturn
- The research to give a regional snapshot that can be compared to other regional, national and international trends

Methodology

- Questionnaire based
- Translated into Polish and also available in English
- Quantitative questions with an open question at the end: What are the main issues you are facing at the minute?

Key Findings

- A specific concentration of unemployment among our respondents amidst the economic downturn
- Low take-up of Jobseekers Allowance, with respondents highlighting communication barriers, bureaucracy and difficulties with the WRS as obstacles to accessing benefits. Fears about losing jobs, apprehension about fewer working hours or being employed on temporary contracts and general financial concerns
- These findings emphasise the vulnerability of our respondents in terms of poverty in their daily life and especially child poverty

Key Findings

- There remain real difficulties in getting qualifications recognised for our respondents, even more acute now in the economic downturn
- 108 respondents saying they have been victimised because of their country of origin, colour or religion, 52 people saying they had been intimidated in their home and 70 people in their neighbourhood

Key Findings

- Our respondents highlighted concerns about the health service in Northern Ireland and we have attempted to give context to these experiences by outlining the differences in health service in Poland and in Northern Ireland
- People decided to move to Northern Ireland for economic reasons, that is, to work here and our respondents work across a number of sectors in Northern Ireland, positively contributing to key areas of the economy. We found half our respondents said they intended to settle in Northern Ireland while half said they did not
- Communication and language issues are a concern of our respondents and we have considered how the current provision of English classes meet the social and economic needs of the Polish community

Recommendations

- The Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) create a crisis fund to assist those workers who have been made unemployed by the economic downturn but are unable to access public funds. These measures would reduce the risk of poverty for migrant workers, their families and in particular their children, who are vulnerable during the present economic downturn
- We recommend the Department for Employment and Learning establish specific training courses that include ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) provision to help use the skills of Polish workers in order to assist economic recovery and integrate Polish workers into the labour market

Recommendations

- Appointment of bi-lingual benefits advisors at Jobs and Benefits offices to enable migrant workers to access benefits and to assist in finding new employment and skills
- The Department for Employment and Learning should work to improve the process of qualification recognition under the European Directive on Qualifications

Recommendations

- The Department for Employment and Learning to ensure the European Directive on Temporary Agency Workers is transposed to Northern Ireland as soon as possible. The Department for Employment and Learning should extend the terms of this protection to workers who have registered with employment agencies outside the UK.
- Northern Ireland Office and the OFMDFM take the lead on measures to tackle the racial harassment and attacks in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Office takes the lead to establish a multi-agency mechanism to deal with racial harassment and attacks in light of the economic downturn and the OFMDFM to publish the Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy as soon as possible.

Recommendations

- Carry out a comprehensive health needs assessment of the Polish community in Northern Ireland
- We are aware the Department for Employment and Learning has commissioned research into the labour market impact of migrant workers in Northern Ireland and we call on the Department to publish these findings as soon as possible
- We recommend further specific research to give more detail and nuance than existing A8, A2 or migrant worker focused research

- A note of thanks to all those who helped to distribute the questionnaire!
- Most of all a huge thank you to all those members of the Polish community who took the time to fill in a questionnaire!