The life experiences of Eastern European migrant children in Scotland

Children and Young People’s Report

“There is no place like home.”
(Frank Baum, The Wizard of Oz)

Project website:
www.migrantchildren.net
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What is this report about?
The At Home Abroad report tells you about project we did with Eastern European children and young people who have recently moved to Scotland, to make this their new home.

Who we are and what we did
We are team of researchers from the University of Strathclyde. We believe that it is important that all children and young people feel happy, safe and included. They should all have a chance to make the most of what Scotland has to offer, regardless where they come from or where they live.

What we are doing with the things the children told us
We have discussed the project with teachers, doctors, social workers and other people who work with migrant families, and people in the local councils, so they know what migrant children need. We believe that adults need to listen to what young people have to say about their experiences and make things better for migrant children.

What was like for other children to move to a different country?
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Most children were happy about living in Scotland and enjoyed their new schools. Moving to a new country made
Not all children who came here straight away had the same experiences. Some liked moving here, others didn’t. Some children and their families went to lots of different places in Scotland, getting to know the country and its culture. Some children were not allowed to go out on their own or with their friends as their parents did not feel it was safe enough. They missed the freedom they had before coming to Scotland. Because of the area in which we live, my mum doesn’t want me out much, she says it’s not safe and my English is not good either. So I tend to stay mostly at home, while back in Lithuania I could go out by myself. (Radzis, Lithuanian, age 13)

Many children spoke to their friends online. They chatted to friends in the UK, but also to friends and family they had left behind when they moved.
I come home and sit on my computer, maybe read the news, look at cool websites and then I just wait for my friend from Poland to finish her homework so we can chat. (Marta, Polish, age 12)

What are the hardest things when you move to a new country?
Not all children came to Scotland with their family straight away—some stayed behind for a while, with grandparents or other relatives. This was hard and upsetting for many children and parents.

Some of the young people also missed pets, foods and celebrations.
I miss the food, the food doesn’t taste the same here. Meat is maybe better, but I don’t like the fruit and vegetables. (Gintare, Lithuanian, age 14)

Sometimes it was difficult for families to meet new people and have fun together, because the parents had to work long hours and had little time to go out.
I miss my best friend, Dorothea. We used to go together on trips, spend a lot of time together, just chat, go for a pizza or to the cinema. It was fun… Now I don’t have a friend like that. (Kasia, Polish, age 10)

Children missed their old friends greatly and sometimes found it hard to keep in touch with them. Making new friends was very important, although it wasn’t always an easy thing. New friends helped the young people learn English and about Scotland and find out about places they could go to.

There are different ways how you say things, then different words for things, and you maybe play different games and maybe you have different clothes. So it’s difficult to make friends because you are different at the beginning. (Agatha, Czech, age 11)

Which services did young people like?
School was the main place that all children and young people went to. The school was very important in making the children feel at home in Scotland and most of them were happy at school and wanted to do well. Health and leisure services were used a lot.

Kasia: I go to school and maybe shopping, that’s about it.
Interviewer: And your art and music lessons?
Kasia: The teacher comes to my house
Interviewer: What about swimming-pool or cinema? Or maybe parks?
Kasia: We don’t really go. (Kasia, Polish, age 10)

I went once with my dad to the swimming pool, but he works late and I’m not allowed to go by myself because my English is not so good. So I sit at home and wait for my friends to come and chat on Skype, when they finish their homework. (Viktor, Slovak, age 12)

A few children (and their parents) felt that they were working below their ability in certain subjects, often because they didn’t understand things, but I’ve done much harder stuff back home, for example in Maths and Science. (Gintare, Lithuanian, age 15)

Most parents preferred taking their children to the doctor or the dentist back in the old country, as they felt that they knew the system better or they had to wait too long in Scotland.
Some children and their families went to lots of different places in Scotland, getting to know the country and its culture. Some children were not allowed to go out on their own or with their friends as their parents did not feel it was safe enough. They missed the freedom they had before coming to Scotland.

What makes life easy or difficult when you live in a new country?
Not all children who came here with their parents had the same experiences. Some liked moving here, others didn’t and had a hard time at the beginning. Children’s experiences depended on whether their families had enough money, their parents’ work situation and the area where they lived.

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A few children were unhappy because they felt that others looked down on them or they had bad experiences of being called names. Some felt left out at the beginning.
We had some problems in the playground. Some children are not that nice. They tried to scare us, shouted ‘Poles, go home’ and threw stones at us. But most people are ok and treat you nice. (Marta, Polish Roma, age 11)

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When I arrived about three years ago, I was the only Polish child in the school. It was very difficult to make friends. I was talking in Polish as I didn’t know English at all. They laughed at me and no one wanted to be my friend. But then I learnt English and I was fine. (Klaudia, Polish, age 13)

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School is good here, it makes me happy. My teacher asked two girls in my class to show me around and to help me with Science and History lessons and they are all very nice to me. (Wiktoria, Lithuanian, age 15)

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