

Brexit and Polish children in the UK

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From the psychological point of view, Brexit may be seen as a failure of human resources management in organization at the state level. The Brexit referendum and its result created a lot of unease among the broad Polish community in Britain. It is still unclear what arrangements will be in place when the UK leaves the EU and the lack of clarity continues to generate concern among adults and children within the Polish community in Britain.

The Polish Educational Society records that in 2017 32,336 Polish children attended British schools in London alone.¹ Around 100,000 Polish children attend school in the UK. Much of this number is due to the ‘Polish baby boom’. Data from the Office for National Statistics indicate that in 2015 Polish-born mothers were the most fecund group in England and Wales. They gave birth to 22,928 children.² Children of Polish parent(s) experience what the British adult world creates for them. At the moment, there is a great deal of scope to develop a good, responsible, long-term social strategy for Polish children in the UK.

Recent political changes in the European Union will have an impact on Poles in Britain. Many Poles who live and work in the UK do so as EU citizens. Since the Brexit referendum Poles in Britain have been asking ‘what is next?’ At the moment, there is some fear, including a fear of the unknown. It remains unclear what will happen after 29 March 2019.³ Any decision that Poles in Britain make in the short term – whether to stay in the UK or to go somewhere else, including Poland – will be based on limited information. Such decisions will have profound effects on Polish families including children. For most people, making substantial changes to one’s life are not easy and only a few people may relish making such changes.

Usually it is not easy, for many of us, to get out of our comfort zone. Almost all of us prefer to choose what we are used to and what already works for us. But it is important, in this uncertain time of Brexit, to make the right decisions - whether to leave or not. Many Poles in the UK will

¹ Polish Educational Society internal database, (Accessed: 13.10.2017)

² Office for National Statistics website:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/parentscountryofbirthenglandandwales/2015> (Accessed: 13.10.2017)

³ British Government website: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/status-of-eu-nationals-in-the-uk-what-you-need-to-know> (Accessed 13.10.2017)

definitely choose to return to Poland. But the question is, what will they find there? Will they find a decent job and salary? How will children deal with the Polish education system? Furthermore, are we, adults who have lived in a different country and in a different culture for years, ready for the contemporary Polish reality and the general quality of life in Poland?

The group of friends our children are growing up with constitutes their known world of friendships. Brexit may change this in various ways. Friendships can be sustained despite distance and time. Polish children who move to Poland may be spatially distant from their British friends but with technology, they do not necessarily have to be cut off from them. Social media, mobile messaging applications and phone or video calls can be used to sustain friendships. But developing new friendships in Poland will take time, in the same way as it did when Polish children moved to the UK. Let's not forget how much effort and sacrifice it costs. It is important to think about this issue in order to develop strategies to limit the possible stress families, and children in particular, may face if they leave the UK.

Those Poles who move to Poland may find that they would like to return to the UK after a few months or years (if that remains a possibility) as a result of lower wages in Poland or diminishing savings. Those Poles who live alone, or without family in Britain, have a lower number of considerations to take into account when they think about their future. In contrast, parents take into account how moving will impact on their children's life experience and their children's future when making a decision.

Children usually are quite likely to settle down in a new place, but parents should guard against making dramatic changes to their children's social and education environment too often. Constant changes of schools and friends can affect children's social and educational development. It can contribute to low self-esteem now, and undermine the ability to co-create local community life, or even to build long-lasting relationships in the future as well.

Any decision Poles make, in relation to Brexit will be significant and impact on their children. It is important that Polish parents in Britain fully evaluate what is the best course for them and their children. There is a lot of hard thinking in front of Polish families in the UK until 2019.