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Protracted precarities: The residential mobilities of Poles in Scotland

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Abstract

The significant inflow of migrants to the United Kingdom following the Eastern EU Enlargement of 2004 is noteworthy due to its scale, intensity and geographic diversity. Recent statistical data suggest that these migrants exhibit spatial mobilities that reflect their disadvantage not just from the White British but also from other minority groups. Drawing on 83 interviews with Polish migrants living in Scotland, this paper illustrates the often-persistent residential relocations experienced by this group postinternational migration and considers the drivers behind them. A key driver of this is the cycle of low paid and insecure employment that many migrants become entangled in, most frequently on arrival but often also longer term. These insights speak to wider debates about the scholarly dichotomy between international and internal migration and social inequalities in relation to labour market change and associated exposure to labour market and residential precarities.

KEYWORDS

internal migration, Poles, residential mobility, Scotland

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the period between the Eastern EU Enlargement of 2004 and the United Kingdom's departure of the EU in 2020, the United Kingdom (including Scotland) became a major recipient of immigration from the A8¹ countries, and Poland in particular. In a relatively short space of time, the region of Central and Eastern Europe became one of the principal source regions of immigrants to the United Kingdom. Despite modest figures pre 2004, citizens from these states now constitute some of the largest foreign-born populations in the country: almost a million Polish nationals are currently resident in the United Kingdom, making them by far the most common non-British nationality in Britain (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2020). Likewise in Scotland, Polish nationals are over five times larger in scale than the next biggest non-British nationality, the Irish (91,000 and 17,000 respectively) and constitute almost a quarter of the total non-British population in Scotland (National Records of Scotland

[NRS], 2020). In contrast to previous waves of immigration into the United Kingdom, East-Central European migration has been unusually geographically dispersed, with these migrants constituting important segments of the workforce in both rural and urban areas (McCollum, 2013). As well as being remarkable due to its scale, intensity and geography, these A8 migrants exhibit labour market characteristics, which are distinct not just in comparison with nonmigrants but also from other minority groups. The spatial mobilities of this group, and how these relate to the economic vulnerabilities that they face, is the core focus of this paper.

Although Waite (2009) aptly warns against essentialising the migrant experience, there is nonetheless a recognition within the literature that economic migrants are often especially vulnerable to exploitation and precarious work (Lewis, Dwyer, Hodkinson, & Waite, 2015). In the UK context, the research literature has established that A8 migrants face a distinctive form of labour market disadvantage: they have high employment rates and are relatively well

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educated but tend to be concentrated in low skilled and insecure jobs, resulting in earning levels that are below not just UK-born workers but also other migrant groups (Rienzo, 2019; Scottish Government, 2017). The challenges faced by A8 migrants in achieving sustainable employment and occupational mobility are therefore in some respects well rehearsed (Duda-Mikulin, 2019; McCollum & Findlay, 2015; Scott, 2017). Much less is known about mobility behaviours and residential experiences of this group (and migrants in general) postinternational migration. Drawing on 83 qualitative interviews with Polish migrants in Scotland, this investigation reveals the distinctive residential pathways of Poles ('White Polish' being the largest census-defined ethnic minority group in Scotland) and identifies the drivers of these trajectories.

The concern in this paper with prolonged residential mobility and its negative ramifications is in contrast to wider normative expectations concerning the living of 'mobile lives', where sedentariness is considered undesirable, and even stigmatised as problematic and a marker of personal inadequacy (Halfacree, 2018). For example, spatial mobility is positioned as a necessary precursor to social mobility (Favell & Recchi, 2011; Fielding, 1992), and the EU Enlargement is often presented as having opened up new opportunities for East-Central Europeans to work and live elsewhere in Europe (Botterill, 2011). Yet as argued by Cohen and Gössling (2015), a wider societal glamorization of mobility ignores what they term its 'darker side', which includes the physiological, psychological, emotional and social costs of mobility for individuals and societies. Residential relocations, whether internationally or more locally, are actually often made reluctantly and are associated with negative impacts on the well-being of movers (Halfacree, 2018). In this respect, the experiences of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom are especially intriguing as they seem to be much more residentially mobile than other groups (Jivraj, Simpson, & Marquis, 2012; McGhee, Heath, & Trevena, 2013; Trevena, McGhee, & Heath, 2013) yet simultaneously experience distinct labour market disadvantages. Despite its quantitative and qualitative significance, the internal migration behaviour of international migrants remains a relatively underresearched field for a number of reasons, including data limitations (Jivraj et al., 2012). It is only recently that quantitative data revealing the residential 'hypermobility' of Poles ('White Polish') has emerged (McCollum, Ernsten-Birns, Feng, & Everington, 2020). In seeking to contribute to understandings of these issues, this analysis aims to address the following research questions:

1. Which processes are responsible for producing the distinct residential precarities experienced by Poles in Scotland?
2. What factors can contribute towards some Poles in Scotland achieving residential stability over time?

The following section sets out the conceptual context within which this research sits. This is followed by a description of the research methodology. The presentation of the empirical results is followed by some reflections on the theoretical and policy implications of these findings. In line with Coulter, van Ham, and

Findlay (2016), this analysis acknowledges the challenges associated with strict definitions of what constitutes residential mobility and how this differs from migration. As such, residential mobilities in this paper are taken to mean any changes in place of usual address within Scotland (or, in a few cases, moves between locations in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom).

2 | ONGOING MOBILITIES POSTINTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International and internal migration have conventionally been treated as distinct fields of study, largely as a consequence of the differing conceptual and methodological perspectives that they have been approached from (King & Skeldon, 2010; King, Skeldon, & Vullnerati, 2008). However, a growing body of literature is calling into question the validity of this bifurcation as in reality, internal and international relocations are often intertwined (Hugo, 2016; Nestorowicz & Anacka, 2019; Trevena et al., 2013). As noted by Skeldon (2006), internal migration is often a precursor to international moves, internal and international migration can be substitutes for one another, international migration can influence the internal migration of the native population and return migrants often adapt distinctive patterns of internal migration upon return. Another significant crossover emphasised by Skeldon (2006) in this respect is the tendency for international migrants to have distinctive patterns of internal migration at their destination country compared with nonmigrants. This is a logical observation since ongoing spatial mobilities are frequently part of a longer period of adjustment arising from international migration (Trevena et al., 2013). Despite this, the internal mobility experiences of international migrants following their move remains an underresearched field (Jivraj et al., 2012). The internal migration of international migrants inherently sits at the nexus between these two traditionally separate scholarly paradigms but has not yet been adequately incorporated into mainstream conceptualisations of migration.

There is growing acknowledgement of the value of a mobilities perspective in addressing this oddity, since it emphasises that mobility is an ongoing, relational process across one's life course and as such is not just a one-off experiential event (McCollum, Keenan, & Findlay, 2020). The reality of migration as a drawn-out process is demonstrated in Piętka-Nykaza and McGhee's (2017) study of the 'liquid' or 'open ended' trajectories of recent Polish migrants in Scotland. Here, the notion of 'prolonged temporariness' is used to consider the absence of firm and fixed plans about future migration trajectories in terms of mobility within and across borders. These points are especially pertinent to this study. As demonstrated by Kay (2020), Polish migrants in Scotland have been exposed to a series of geopolitical and economic shocks, which have necessitated numerous life rebuilding projects and the spatial mobilities that often accompany them. This includes relocations associated with the transition from living in socialist to free market regimes, accession to the EU, the global financial crash and the decade plus of austerity that has followed it, and most recently Brexit. Hence, Polish migrants'

experiences and expectations of mobility (both internally and internationally) need to be understood within the context of their resilience but also vulnerability and apathy towards geopolitical crises on the one hand, and how these sit alongside more prosaic everyday preoccupations such as earning a living, going to school and looking after the family on the other (McCollum, 2020). It is hoped that this analysis can contribute to nascent efforts to bridge the internal–international migration scholarly divide by examining the mobility patterns and experiences of one of the largest immigrant groups in Scotland.

3 | THE RESIDENTIAL MOBILITIES OF ETHNIC MINORITIES: EXISTING EVIDENCE

Despite the limitations associated with the internal–international migration gap outlined above, it is important to acknowledge a growing body of literature on the residential mobilities of migrants and ethnic minorities over the past two decades. This has been spurred on by concerns about integration and the persistence of inequalities and enabled by developments in data such as the increasing inclusion of ethnic identification questions in Censuses (Finney, Catney, & Phillips, 2015; Manley & Catney, 2012). This largely quantitative body of work has identified notable differences in migration patterns between ethnic groups. However, they have been less able to explain why these distinctive trends exist or what their implications are (Finney et al., 2015; McCollum, Ernsten-Birns, et al., 2020). Another limitation is that much of these analyses have focused on settled ethnic minority populations and have thus omitted the more recent A8 migration which, as noted, has been the biggest wave of immigration ever experienced by the United Kingdom and has been much more geographically dispersed than previous inflows.

Excess mobility on the part of ethnic minorities may well be a negative phenomenon as it could reflect labour market and/or housing precarities. On the other hand, it may simply be a facet of a relatively strong desire, and means, to move. The few existing studies that take a qualitative approach to the residential mobilities of specific ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom suggest that their relative mobility is not through choice yet can be attributed to disadvantageous financial circumstances and that these experiences have negative impacts on well-being. For example, Warfa et al.'s (2006) research involving Somali refugees in London found that the frequent involuntary geographical movements experienced by this group were stressful and that they disrupted family life and child development.

Turning to the focus of this paper, Trevena et al. (2013) and McGhee et al.'s (2013) research on the internal migration of recently arrived Poles in the United Kingdom identifies high levels of residential mobility amongst this group and deduces that this is due to drawn out periods of adjustment following their international moves. The high levels of residential mobility of Poles in the United Kingdom stands in stark contrast to low levels of such mobility within Poland (Nestorowicz & Anacka, 2019), implying that international mobility is acting as a substitute for internal migration there. Recently available

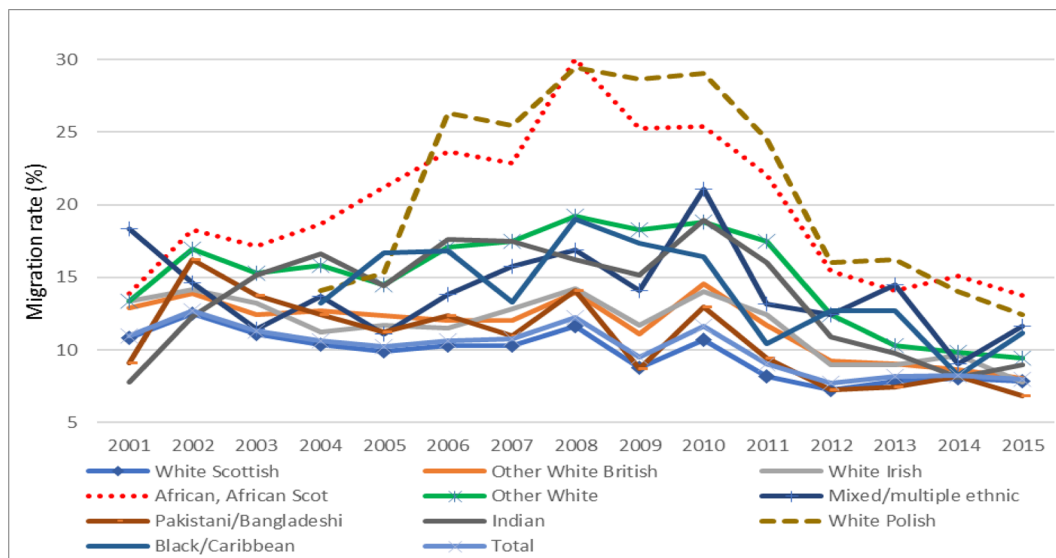
quantitative data on the mobility of ethnic groups in Scotland also points to atypical residential mobility patterns amongst the 'White Polish' group (McCollum, Ernsten-Birns, et al., 2020). Scotland, like many other countries (Champion, Cooke, & Shuttleworth, 2017), is generally experiencing a gradual decline in internal migration. White Scottish individuals, who represent over four fifths of the population of Scotland, appear to be becoming gradually less mobile. This, however, stands in stark opposition to the higher mobility rates of some ethnic minority groups, and the excessive mobility of the White Polish group in particular (see Figure 1). The exceptional mobility of the White Polish group persists across all age categories and is especially noteworthy for the 41–64 age cohort, which is much more mobile than other ethnic groups of the same ages. Interestingly, this pattern cannot be accounted for by compositional effects (time spent in United Kingdom, age structure, household status, housing tenure, socio-economic class and education), with White Poles still being twice as mobile as other groups once these are accounted for (see McCollum, Ernsten-Birns, et al., 2020, for a more detailed discussion).

This paper therefore draws on qualitative data to address the unresolved question of why some population subgroups have distinctive mobility experiences. In doing so, we focus on Polish migrants living in Scotland in particular. We focus on this specific cohort as it is the ethnic group identified as being the most residentially mobile in Figure 1 above and because White Poles are the largest ethnic minority group in Scotland.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The data on which this article is based were gathered as part of an Economic and Social Research Council-funded study: 'Experiences of Social Security and Prospects for Long-Term Settlement in Scotland amongst Migrants from Central Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union' (SSAMIS). Fieldwork undertaken between June 2014 and December 2015 involved the collection of 207 in-depth interviews with Central and East European (CEE) migrants in four locations: the cities of Glasgow and Aberdeen and the rural regions of Aberdeenshire and Angus in North-East Scotland. Although the study involved participants from a number of CEE countries, the qualitative data presented in this paper are based on a subset of 83 in-depth interviews with Polish migrants. Study participants were recruited through various channels including advertising on social media and in public places (e.g., ethnic shops, churches and workplaces), through gatekeepers (such as local third sector organisations, employers, ESOL courses, colleges or local councils) and snowballing from initial contacts (see Kay & Trevena, 2018, for further details).

Study participants had arrived in Scotland between 2003 and 2014 and had lived there for at least a year, with the majority having lived in Scotland for 5–10 years at the time of interview, and some over 10 years. Most participants were aged 25–49, and about two thirds were female. Although the sample included those in professional jobs and students, the majority of participants were involved in low-skilled and low-paid employment, often as agency workers,



Source: McCollum et al. 2020a

FIGURE 1 Share of each ethnic group recorded as changing address per year, 2001–2015. Source: McCollum, Ernsten-Birns, et al., 2020

regardless of their levels of education. Most were overqualified for their jobs.

The in-depth interviews covered a broad range of themes including reasons behind migration and further stay, employment, living arrangements and housing trajectories, family situation, language use, networks, experiences of living in Scotland, access to services and use of formal and informal support and plans for the future. Most interviews were carried out in Polish and translated into English. All interviews were transcribed and then thematically coded by the research team using NVivo 10 software. A coding framework was developed using a mix of deductive codes drawn from the original research questions and more inductive codes developed from the interview materials. A number of detailed codes related to employment (including employment conditions, agency work, vulnerabilities, prospects and occupational mobility, deskilling, job satisfaction and seasonality), housing trajectories (including living arrangements, living conditions, strategies of finding housing and access to and availability of housing) and participants' experiences of living in their neighbourhoods. The study also looked at financial, housing and employment insecurities experienced throughout the life course, both prior to and after migration.

5 | INITIAL ARRIVAL: PRECARIOUS JOBS, PRECARIOUS LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Existing literature has established that the sizeable post-2004 wave of A8 immigration has been economically driven, and this cohort of migrants is overrepresented in low-paying and insecure jobs (McCollum & Findlay, 2015). This pattern was reflected in the study participants' accounts: most emphasised financial or other 'push' factors in Poland as motivating their moves to Scotland. The majority

arrived with very limited financial resources and their initial (and in many cases subsequent) residential experiences were determined by pecuniary constraints. It is worth noting the significant role played by recruitment and employment practices in shaping these residential experiences (Trevena et al., 2013). In the period immediately following the Accession, a large proportion of migrants were channelled into jobs through recruitment agencies, which frequently placed workers in tied accommodation. This was either owned or rented by the employer, or rented and managed by the agency. In some cases, this was seen as a convenient and welcome arrangement.

We [bus drivers arriving on work contracts] were given council flats. In Aberdeen all you had to do was to put in an application and there was a flat allocated. So we got our flat, 3 bedrooms for 3 drivers with a kitchen, living room and bathroom to share. It was pretty good living conditions. They supplied us with furniture, TV, kitchen essentials. And over the next few months they were just taking money off our wages to cover what was bought for us ... couldn't ask for more when settling in. Krzysztof, late 30s, married, arrived in 2005, home owner, Aberdeenshire

However, in many other cases, the housing was of poor quality, overcrowded and expensive, and in these circumstances, interviewees understandably sought to move again as soon as they could. Since the housing was typically tied to employment this meant having to change jobs as well, resulting in simultaneous residential and employment precarities.

We worked on a farm but our living conditions were really poor. We lived (...) in a barn converted into flats.

We literally had a bunk bed, a cupboard and a chair only. There were six boxes there with two people in each one. The conditions were really poor. There was a communal room and a kitchen but we had to share a fridge with six other people. It was really bad. That's why we had to leave. As soon as the contract expired, we got normal jobs. We couldn't continue like that any more. Dorota, mid 30s, married, arrived in 2003, home owner, Angus

The driver of mobility for Dorota and many others was the poor living conditions in their employer-tied accommodation. However, the research also uncovered more drastic cases that involved rogue recruitment agencies providing both accommodation and employment and using this situation to exploit staff. Such practices appeared more prevalent in rural areas of Scotland where migrants were more geographically and socially isolated. They occurred most frequently in the period immediately following the Accession when new arrivals usually had little English or understanding of the British labour market and their rights as employees, and little informal or organisational support. As Polish (and other A8) migrants became more established in Scotland, the role of recruitment agencies in facilitating arrival and providing work and accommodation decreased, and the role of migrant social networks in shaping employment and residential pathways increased (McCullum, Shubin, Apsite, & Krisjane, 2013; Trevena et al., 2013). New arrivals over the last decade have increasingly migrated through personal networks and initially resided with family, friends or acquaintances.

I was working in Poland but my sister came here before me and she decided to take me as well, so I came here to my sister and my brother-in-law as well. I lived with them in [a small town in Angus] first of all. Damian, mid-20s, single, arrived in 2009, private tenant, Angus

Nevertheless, this was usually a temporary solution as overcrowding was commonplace and as such there was pressure to quickly move elsewhere.

It was a terrible time. We lived with my cousin. It was two bedrooms and a living room ... and we lived [there] with my daughter, she was two, my husband, my mum, my cousin and my cousin's uncle. Hanna, late teens, married, Aberdeen (year of arrival and residential status at time of interview not recorded)

Significantly, the tendency to seek initial accommodation through personal contacts was largely a necessity due to barriers in accessing the formal rental market. Most Poles arriving in the United Kingdom not only had limited financial resources but struggled to fulfil estate agencies' and private landlords' formal requirements: they did not have UK-based references; often were not (yet) in (stable)

employment; could not provide proof of address; did not have a credit history or even a UK-based bank account; did not have sufficient resources for a deposit and an upfront payment for rent. Finding accommodation was especially difficult for Poles who moved into rural areas with little history of migration. For instance, Dorota, quoted earlier, arrived to work on a farm in Angus as a student in 2003, prior to EU Accession. She and her boyfriend initially lived on the farm, but the conditions were so poor that after some time (post Poland's EU Accession) they decided to rent a flat in one of the small towns nearby. This proved highly challenging not only due to formal barriers but also local attitudes towards immigrants:

When we came over, (...) there weren't too many foreigners here and it was hard to find a flat. It took us almost a year to get a bank account. Even though we both had letters from our employers. At some point, our manager, who was Dutch, became so irritated that he went to the bank in person and told them that it wasn't safe for his workers to keep money at home. He kicked up a row after which we got our bank accounts (...). They were simply wary of foreigners. Very wary...(...). Luckily, my friend's boyfriend was Scottish and it's not difficult for a Scot to rent a flat. So he rented one under his name and we lived together: they had a room for themselves and we had one. Dorota, mid 30s, married, arrived in 2003, home owner, Angus

While Dorota's experiences were particularly difficult due to the location she was in and the timing—searching for accommodation shortly after Poland's EU Accession—difficulties in accessing the formal rental market were mentioned by interviewees in both rural and urban areas, and irrespective of when they had arrived in Scotland. Therefore, entry into the formal rental market continues to be unfeasible for many new arrivals, leading to ongoing residential mobilities.

6 | PROLONGED RESIDENTIAL MOBILITIES

For most postaccession Polish migrants arriving in Scotland, their initial accommodation was either always intended to be a temporary foothold with friends or family, or something that necessitated a further move due to being overpriced, overcrowded or in poor condition. In many senses, this is unsurprising; what is more intriguing is the subsequent persistent residential relocations reflected in both quantitative and qualitative data. Statistical data (Figure 1) shows a rapidly increasing rate of address changing amongst White Poles in the years immediately following the 2004 Accession, and especially over 2007–2010, with Poles having at least twice the level of residential mobility of the White Scottish and most other ethnic groups. Indeed, our qualitative data reflects this propensity for frequent

moves. Typically, postinternational migration interviewees had relocated three or more times over their length of stay (which varied between 1 and 11 years at the time of interview). The most residentially mobile study participants had changed address multiple times every year postinternational migration. The analysis revealed that the key drivers of this prolonged residential turbulence were economic precarity on the one hand (often exacerbated by the recession) and barriers to accessing the formal rental market on the other. As mentioned earlier, the challenges faced by new arrivals in the latter respect can persist over a considerable period of time, as was the case for Krystyna, a respondent who arrived in Scotland as a mature student:

I was forced to just rent rooms [over a period of a few years]...If I wanted to rent a whole flat, I was supposed to pay six-months' deposit in advance...Apart from that, some kind of references and bank statements, however, (...) they only accepted British banks. I didn't have any regular income in Britain ... so I couldn't meet the eligibility criteria. Krystyna, single, late 50s, arrived in 2008, home owner, Glasgow

As a consequence of these ongoing hurdles, interviewees were frequently forced to rent informally, which further restricted their ability to achieve residential stability. Those unable to meet the formal requirements for rental were often offered accommodation through casual acquaintances. Instances of interviewees abruptly having to relocate at short notice as a consequence of these legally dubious arrangements were common. Helena, for example, went through a particularly traumatic experience when it transpired that the property she thought she had rented legally was in fact a council house:

We rented a house that we wanted to share together [with my brother and his partner] as two couples. And the next day or two days after that I gave birth [and] the City Council Housing Officer arrived in our flat (...). She said that our landlady made a fraud against Aberdeen City Council and against us. So, because we were victims of, like, a crime and she said we were allowed to stay in this flat for a month more to look for something else. (...) But then we informed our landlady and she was really angry and she arrived and she threatened us and she started to be aggressive (...). So, we had to leave the flat actually that night because it was police decision and the Housing Officer was trying to look for some homeless accommodation for us but there was nothing available in Aberdeen. Helena, late 30s, married, council flat tenant, Aberdeen (year of arrival unrecorded)

Following this event, Helena, her husband and their newborn baby became homeless and initially were accommodated in the local hospital and then with various friends on a short-term basis. It was

only with the intervention of a medical practitioner that they were placed into temporary accommodation, which subsequently 6 months later led to them moving to a council flat.

Aside from unscrupulous landlords, the financial burden associated with renting accommodation privately also acted as a trigger for ongoing residential mobility for many. This was especially the case for interviewees in low-paid and precarious employment. Those working through agencies were prone to sudden termination of jobs or reductions in working hours, resulting in acute financial insecurity. Failure to secure another source of comparable earnings quickly (be it through employment or state support) often meant a relocation to less expensive accommodation, especially if renting informally. Migrant exposure to these precarities was exacerbated by the recession, which may explain the particularly high rates of address changing amongst White Poles 2007–2010 that was evident in Figure 1. Nevertheless, such precarities often persisted in later years, too.

Single people working in low-paid and/or precarious jobs appeared especially economically and hence residentially vulnerable, especially those arriving alone, with little English or understanding of local conditions and under pressure to secure work and accommodation quickly. This group was especially prone to exploitation in both the labour and housing markets, and subject to repeated residential moves. These vulnerabilities were often exacerbated by being limited to and dependent on Polish networks for work and accommodation. For example, 48-year-old Bartosz arrived in England through his personal networks, with little knowledge of English and little awareness of what to expect. A friend of his who lived in an industrial town in England told him there was well-paid work there and he could share a flat with him and his flatmate. Upon arriving, Bartosz realised he had been lied to. His friend and the flatmate were both out of work and needed another flatmate to pay the rent, hence why they invited him to come over and move in with them. Bartosz had thus been taken advantage of by his friend. He also disliked the industrial town where he was staying in and was eager to leave and so made contact with another Polish man who lived in Glasgow. His new acquaintance offered to help Bartosz move to a small town in Scotland where his friend offered him accommodation. Bartosz enjoyed living there and worked in a local factory. However, he lost his job due to a decline in production in the factory and found it very difficult to find alternative work in the town. Again, through contacts within the Polish community, Bartosz later found work in Glasgow. As he did not have a car and commuting was both time-consuming and expensive, he eventually took the decision to move to the city to be closer to his workplace. Again, he was offered accommodation through an acquaintance, but the living conditions turned out to be very poor so Bartosz had to move again. Bartosz thus provides an example of intersecting circumstances, which resulted in high residential mobility: a combination of exploitative networks and precarious employment but also but also desire for change.

Indeed, employment circumstances shaped interviewees' housing trajectories in more ways than one. Similarly to Bartosz, many Poles in low-paid employment and/or working unsociable hours tended to seek accommodation close to their workplace by necessity. This was

motivated by both financial and logistical issues: commuting from one place to another is costly and time-consuming, and in some cases public transport to/from the workplace is simply unavailable, especially to those in rural areas and/or doing night-shifts. Living within walking distance to work, typically understood as up to 30 min by foot, was thus prioritised. As such, migrants—single people and childless couples in particular—would often simply relocate every time they changed jobs.

I decided to move from Glasgow to [a town in Greater Glasgow], because I was working here now, so everything was closer and I decided – why should I spend money on commute if I can simply move. Honorata, late 20s, married, arrived in 2007, private tenant, Greater Glasgow

Aside from employment issues, changing family circumstances were a frequent driver of prolonged residential mobility, either in order to ‘upgrade’ when a household is expanding, or to ‘downgrade’ in cases of changing living arrangements, such as relationship breakdown or adult children moving out:

We moved 5 times [in the 8 years we’ve been here], I think. [Why?] Bigger places for starters. The first place was just a one bedroom flat. It was a bit too small. We kept upsizing. And now we are in our own flat (...) and my mum lives with us [again]. Adam, late 20s, living with partner, arrived in 2007, homeowner, Angus

The role of interpersonal dynamics in residential mobility are also noteworthy here as a number of our interviewees shared flats with nonfamily members—friends, acquaintances or strangers—for extended periods of time. Conflicts between flatmates or a change in their personal circumstances often spurred subsequent moves, especially in the case of single people and childless couples:

[W]hen we stayed in that big flat, a friend moved in for some time (...). But, she started going out with a Scot, Andy. We really didn't like him. Gently speaking, he was terrible. It was impossible to live with him (...). We were not able to cope with that and moved out after 3 months over here. Hanna, mid-30s, married, arrived in 2006, private tenant, Glasgow

In some instances, residential precarity and multiple moves stemmed from particular non-job-related vulnerabilities, such as addictions or domestic abuse, sometimes resulting in periods of homelessness. The latter cases involved women fleeing their homes to escape abusive partners, typically (but not exclusively) to other parts of the country. Since their decision to move was usually sudden and motivated by an immediate need to escape a threat, some of these women became temporarily homeless and were not always eligible for formal support. For instance, Marta moved to Glasgow from another town in

Scotland after her husband's growing abuse had become life threatening. She had a contact in Glasgow who referred her to a support organisation. Due to her immigration status, Marta's eligibility for help was questioned and she and her children were placed in temporary accommodation for an extended period of time. It was only after the intervention of a local politician that they were eventually offered social housing.

I left everything behind and I came here. [The organisation I was referred to] told me that I had been here for too short to qualify for help and sent me to [a centre supporting homeless people]. (...) I got a small flat there (...) It wasn't the best place to live with children (...). You had to pick up your keys at the window and there were junkies and drunks hanging around and waiting for a place to sleep...And when you have kids who went through a lot like mine, then it is quite stressful...I always held them close by me like a hen with their chicks. (...) Eventually [a local politician] helped me and put forward my application so that we got this flat. Marta, late 30s, re-married, arrived in 2008, social housing tenant, Glasgow

Although Marta's story of homelessness was evidently traumatic, entering such an acute state of vulnerability did open up the opportunity to access social housing, a matter returned to in the next section.

Finally, in a small number of cases, frequent moves were an active choice and thus were not interpreted negatively. For example, Michal, a young professional seeking to advance his career, was content to remain footloose at this stage of his life course:

I like it here and providing I have a good job, I'm quite happy here. I don't want to make any long-term plans because there might be a better opportunity for me elsewhere in the next few months, next year. Maybe I will move back to England (...). I'm not really tied to a place. I will go wherever the best opportunities are. I don't mind moving about. I've done the same in Poland. I will settle once I find my favourite place. [The small town in Angus I currently live in] is ok but I'm not sure I would like to stay here forever. Michal, early 30s, living with partner, arrived in 2007, renting privately, Angus

Summing up, the phenomenon of frequent residential moves, with some interviewees moving as many as five times a year, was typical in the initial period postinternational migration. However, in many cases, this residential turbulence was prolonged and predominantly driven by employment-related issues (employment instability, low earnings and the recession) and barriers to accessing the formal rental market. It can also stem from other vulnerabilities or changing family circumstances, although in some instances moving frequently can represent an active choice to pursue a footloose lifestyle. The

following section describes the mechanisms that allow some migrants to eventually break out of these ongoing residential precarities and achieve residential stability.

7 | PATHWAYS TO RESIDENTIAL STABILITY

As will be evident from the discussion thus far, for many migrants, persistent undesired residential moves were a consequence of wider financial vulnerabilities, which in turn resulted in further practical and emotional costs. Almost all study participants thus reflected negatively on their experiences of frequent moving. It was only once they were in a more stable housing situation that they felt 'settled' and thus able and willing to try and 'put down roots' in particular places (Kay & Trevena, 2018). This may partly explain the White Polish post-2010 decline in rates of address changing in Figure 1. However, entering housing stability was often a long and challenging process and was not achieved by all interviewees. This section focuses on the two main pathways to housing stability identified in our research: homeownership via improved personal circumstances and entry into social housing for those facing acute personal challenges.

Stable employment and the enhanced financial security that accompanies it present opportunities to enter homeownership. This was particularly the case for couples who could pull resources for this purpose. For many, homeownership was valued for offering residential stability, the privacy of not having to share with others, and was regarded as financially prudent.

[We've decided to buy our own house] to start investing in our own property instead in someone else's. The amount we're paying for renting seems like wasted money because we're left with nothing. I mean we have somewhere to live but we give the money away. Whereas if we buy a house and keep paying the mortgage rates we invest in our own property then. So that's the main reason. Plus the truth is, it has become a bit crowded here because we live three people [in a one bed] at the moment [and] to be honest, it wouldn't be possible to rent any cheaper. Agata, mid-20s, married, arrived 2012, private tenant, Angus

Although homeownership brings with it the benefits mentioned above, the often precarious nature of migrants' work means that the financial commitments that accompany having a mortgage can present other challenges. Homeownership thus came to be regarded as a significant burden for some interviewees. For example, Aneta and her young family found themselves facing severe financial stress after purchasing a property.

My husband had problems with work, lost two jobs last year. It hit us hard. We have our home we are still paying for. And it took only one month without his wages

and all our savings disappeared. We were dreading losing the house. (...) The way things are there is no way we would survive if our earnings would drop as much as a pound. So we can't make any life changing plans. It's a lot to do with us buying our home. Aneta, mid-30s, married, arrived 2006, home owner, Glasgow

The apparent stability that comes with achieving homeownership can thus actually be a source of further financial and emotional stress. Another incongruity in the residential pathways of migrants is that stability in this domain is often only achieved via social housing, and in some cases once their wider circumstances become acutely precarious. As the earlier quotes from Helena and Marta hinted at, traumatic experiences resulting in homelessness can act as a route into social housing. Likewise, those experiencing financial problems due to precarious employment, and especially families with children, often also become eligible for social housing. As discussed below, this form of housing tenure presents some of its own challenges. However, it was widely praised for being affordable and offering security of tenure, meaning that migrants tended to relocate much less frequently once in social housing. Social housing was thus a major pathway through which residential precarity was ended, enabling migrants to potentially settle in place over the longer term.

It's true that it [social housing] is in those not very friendly neighbourhoods but on the other hand, a flat is a flat, right? This flat is in a way for life if you want it, and you pay some sort of minimum ... you pay £200 but for the whole flat and not £300 for one room. Marek, late 20s, single, arrived 2014, private tenant, Glasgow

As indicated by Marek, although valued by migrants, the areas in which social housing is available to them are also often characterised by multiple deprivation. As noted by McGhee et al. (2013) and Kay and Trevena (2019), many vulnerable migrants who move into social housing thus find themselves in neighbourhoods with other population subgroups facing significant socio-economic challenges. Instances of disputes with neighbours, or verbal and even physical abuse, were often reported by study participants living in these circumstances. As this quotation from Katarzyna illustrates, although social housing tenants are usually content to be living in affordable and stable housing, this often comes at the cost of other insecurities and compromises.

It wasn't nice to live there. We had accident like someone kicked off the mirrors of our car. Someone wrote nasty stuff on our door. That was flats so upstairs we had neighbours who were fighting all the time and doing incredible stuff. The guy who cheated and abused my husband And that was a time when he started to be ill so he couldn't go to work and we had no money. It was horrendous. When my husband was ill they were flooding us all the time about once a week

at least so it was horrendous. Katarzyna, early 40s, widowed, social housing tenant, Aberdeen (year of arrival not recorded)

In some cases, the stress of longer term abuse from neighbours prompted Polish tenants to apply for social housing in a different area. Others did not wish to stay in 'bad' areas due to fears around safety and their children's future. Therefore, despite offering stability, receiving social housing did not necessarily end the trajectory of residential mobility for some Polish migrants.

8 | CONCLUSIONS

Despite representing its largest single wave of immigration, little is known about the subsequent movements of the sizeable and geographically dispersed cohort of post-2004 Polish migrants in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, recent statistical evidence points to distinctively high levels of residential mobility amongst the White Polish group in Scotland. In this paper, we analyse 83 in-depth interviews with Polish migrants living in Scotland to unpick the reasons behind this phenomenon. Our paper demonstrates that Poles living in Scotland have indeed been exceptionally mobile in terms of residential relocations and that these frequent moves were predominantly undesired and largely a consequence of their particular labour market circumstances.

These findings build upon the modest but growing body of research on the residential pathways of international migrants postarrival in their new country (Finney et al., 2015; Jivraj et al., 2012; Kay & Trevena, 2019; Trevena et al., 2013). Conceptually, they further expose the fallacy of the internal-international migration scholarly divide (Nestorowicz & Anacka, 2019). As should be evident from the lessons of this paper, the processes that determine the relocations of immigrants within a country cannot be theorised in isolation from those that shaped their mobility across international borders (Skeldon, 2006). In this case, a specific set of political and economic circumstances (decades of constrained mobility under communism, significant disparities in wage levels and the sudden removal of legislative barriers to migration) has generated significant flows of labour migrants from Eastern to Western Europe in the last decade and a half. The integration of this sizeable cohort of economic migrants into the United Kingdom's already relatively flexible labour market has arguably extended precarious recruitment and employment norms within it (McCollum & Findlay, 2015). As revealed in this paper, one of the many consequences of these processes has been the exposure of a particular set of immigrants to exceptional levels of prolonged residential mobility. It is therefore apparent that being a migrant, under a specific set of wider structural circumstances, has considerable impact on the frequency and nature of subsequent relocations, both internally and internationally. This is something that conventional conceptualisations of migration as a one-off event, rather than a relational process that is ongoing across the life course, fail to adequately acknowledge (McCollum, Keenan, & Findlay, 2020). For most

economic migrants, including the group that is the focus of this paper, migration clearly does not cease with the transition into a new country but is part of a longer term and uncertain process of mobility (Piętko-Nykaza & McGhee, 2017; Trevena et al., 2013). Greater recognition of this point is important as it is central to concerns about the integration of migrants and ethnic minorities and the persistent socio-economic inequalities that they face.

This analysis and other research has shed light on the specific role of particular population subgroups in the functioning of parts of the low-wage economy and illustrated how this relates to the intersection between labour market change, precarity and spatial mobilities. The research was conducted prior to the Brexit referendum in June 2016 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, yet both of these seminal crises are likely to exacerbate the precarities already faced by migrants as outlined in this paper. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and deepened already stark ethnic inequalities (Blundell, Costa Dias, Joyce, & Xu, 2020). Brexit and its aftermath has led to discriminative practices towards them on the part of landlords, employers and public sector organisations (McCollum, 2020; Trevena, 2019). Therefore, Brexit has already had and will continue to have further impact on internal mobility pathways of international migrants in the United Kingdom. Decisions about whether to migrate to, move around within or indeed leave the United Kingdom are now being taken within the context of a shifting legal framework whereby the rights of EU migrants living in or moving to the United Kingdom are uncertain. Against this backdrop of prolonged uncertainty, migration studies will need to be increasingly sensitive to the characteristics, causes and consequences of the close connections between relocations within and across national borders and how these shape the well-being of migrants and the communities they are embedded within.

In addition to the conceptual reflections above, this research has some significant practical implications for nations like Scotland, which is facing population ageing. Owing to modest fertility rates and a tradition of population loss rather than gain through international migration, Scotland is reliant on immigration for demographic (and thus economic) stability and growth. Polish migrants, the focus of this analysis, are now one of the largest non-Scottish/British ethnic minority groups in Scotland. They are also younger and have higher employment rates than the general population. Their mobility experiences and intentions thus have significant wider fiscal implications. Aside from geopolitical threats such as a more restrictive UK immigration policy for EU nationals post-Brexit, practical barriers to achieving employment and housing stability may prevent migrants from settling in Scotland. More vigorous policy efforts to counter the labour market insecurity and underemployment faced by many migrants and the difficulties in accessing the formal rental sector could thus generate significant long-term demographic and economic benefits. A positive step in this regard would be toolkits and information campaigns directed at landlords and letting agencies, since there is evidence that Brexit induced concerns about the legal right of EU citizens to live and work in the United Kingdom is already leading to discriminatory practices in the private rented sector (Trevena, 2019), thus

undermining efforts to achieve housing stability. Due to a paucity of relevant policy levers, Scottish local authorities have consistently struggled to implement successful policies to attract migrants to their areas, both from within the United Kingdom or overseas. Improved coordination and collaboration both between local authorities, as well as with national governments, would also aid efforts to encourage migrants to put down roots in the places facing demographic challenges (Scottish Government, 2020). Because population ageing and burgeoning ethnic minority populations are two of the defining demographic features of higher income countries, these issues will continue to occupy the minds of social scientists and policy analysts for the foreseeable future.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the UK Data Archive at <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=852584>. Persistent identifier: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-852584. doi: <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-852584>

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ENDNOTE

¹ A8 or Accession 8 countries are the eight Central and East European states that joined the EU in May 2004: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

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