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Andrew Pickup Bursary Report

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'So why did you stay?' - precarity, agency and (im)mobility of Bulgarian migrants in the UK

This research project explores the lived experiences of Bulgarian migrants who face multiple and interrelated forms of precarity. Drawing upon qualitative interviews with Bulgarian migrants in the UK post-Brexit, the paper illustrates how the decision to stay is shaped by both structural constraints and individual aspirations. The study highlights the blurred lines between forced/free and mobility/immobility by focusing on migrants' own narratives and sense making.

The research questions at the heart of this paper are:

- **Why do migrants who face varying forms of precarity stay in the UK?**
- **What are the modalities of agency in the face of precarity?**

Research Placement

This paper is based on qualitative research conducted among Bulgarian migrants in the UK as part of my MA Research Placement with Work Rights Centre (WoRC) [1] a charity that supports migrants to access employment justice and improves their social mobility. Their services are available in eight different languages and vary from providing advice and information to actively helping beneficiaries with social securities and employment justice claims. As part of my placement, I was embedded within the organisation between 6th June and 29th July 2022. As a Service Provision Assistant in the Bulgarian team, I worked with various cases under the supervision of a line manager. I assisted with translation and support for welfare inquires over the phone, gathering evidence regarding an ongoing social security claim and drafting emails or grievances letters on behalf of beneficiaries. Usually, an individual case would last from a few weeks to many months. I also joined two drop in sessions in Leytonstone library, London where I supported the team in providing free and confidential multilingual advice. As a native Bulgarian speaker, I also helped with translations and reaching out to the wider Bulgarian community in the area.

[1] To visit Work Rights Centre's website available at: <https://www.workrightscentre.org/> (Accessed: 20 Sep 2022)

DROP IN SESSION, LEYTONSTONE, LONDON -
22ND JUNE AND 6TH JULY 2022



**FREE.
CONFIDENTIAL.**

MULTILINGUAL ADVICE.

- Employment rights (unpaid wages, holiday entitlement, statutory sick pay, grievances, etc.)
- CV building and job searches
- Welfare (Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Child Benefit, etc.)
- EU Settlement Scheme

WHERE?
Leytonstone Library
Church Lane
Leytonstone
E11 1HG

WHEN?
10:30 am - 4.30 pm
JUNE: 8th, 22nd
JULY: 6th, 20th
AUGUST: 3rd, 31st

SEPTEMBER: 7th, 21st
OCTOBER: 5th, 19th
NOVEMBER: 2nd, 30th

contact@workrightscentre.org
0300 4000 100
Registered charity (No. 1105476), 219-221 High Rd, London E15 2PL

Ethics

The research was conducted in line with the University of Sussex ethical review process and the charity's own research and ethics guidelines. Main ethical consideration was to make sure that beneficiaries did not feel pressured to participate in this research and did not think that the information shared would influence their ongoing case with the charity. I conducted interviews only with people I was directly helping through casework and advice and only after I had built a relationship of trust with them, I would invite them for an interview. At the time of the interview, I had already built a relationship with them, to varying degrees and had a good understanding of their case. This was key for them to be willing to share the intimate and emotional stories analysed in the paper.

1-2-1 in depth interviews

The seven in-depth interviews with migrants were conducted over the phone as the majority of them do not have access to computers or/and have low IT literacy. For this purpose, a special phone number was created, while the recording was through Microsoft Teams. As a Bulgarian native speaker, I conducted the 40-50 minutes interviews without a translator. The interviews were then transcribed and translated in English, and the names of participants were replaced with pseudonyms.

The interviews were semi-structured which allowed the conversation to take a different direction dependent on participants' own narratives. The use of a qualitative approach does not attempt to test a hypothesis, but to delve deeper into their subjective stories. This allowed me to understand how the participants construct and express their reality.

Participants opened about their experience coming to the UK and prior. Main themes were occupation, housing and health precarity. They also shared personal stories rich in emotions such as disappointment, frustration, belonging, hope and aspirations.

Bursary contribution

The Andre Pickup Award bursary allowed me to give £20 compensation as a thank you gift to each participant for their time. There are two main reasons why this bursary made a difference for my ability to undertake the Research Placement:

1. Interviews included highly vulnerable migrants in precarious working conditions. In this context, any cost such as time and effort they incur has a disproportionately higher value. My privilege as a University of Sussex postgraduate places me in a different position to them, despite being a native Bulgarian. The compensation accounted for this power imbalance. This strengthened the ethical underpinnings of the research.
2. The bursary allowed me to cover my cost of travelling for the two drop in sessions in London.

Total bursary sum:	£150
Interview x 7	£20x7 = £140
Travelling in London	£5x2 = £10

Thank you!

I want to express my gratitude to the School of Global Studies and Andre Pickup Bursary for this financial support. This invaluable help was crucial in carrying out this research and being able to share the stories of Bulgarian migrants in the UK.