Home Sweet Home?

The nature and scale of the immigration of older UK nationals back to the UK
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The nature and scale of the immigration of older UK nationals back to the UK

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Migration, Equalities and Citizenship Team, IPPR on behalf of Age Concern and Help the Aged

Age Concern and Help the Aged
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- the economic impact of migration;
- migration and development;
- analysis of changing migration flows;
- migrant integration and diversity in the UK.

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Foreword

Immigration is one of the most discussed subjects in UK life. That is fair enough, as the scale of immigration in recent years has been large and unprecedented. But the debate tends to focus on a few of the more contentious aspects of immigration, such as the influx of Eastern Europeans or illegal immigration from poorer parts of the world. By contrast, other inflows are almost completely neglected, as if they do not really count as immigration at all.

At IPPR we have been focusing on what we have termed ‘hidden flows’ – both into and out of the UK. It was therefore a perfect match when Age Concern asked us to carry out a small research project on older Britons returning to this country after living abroad. The project was prompted by some evidence that this inflow was on the increase and people were returning with health and welfare issues that, for one reason or another, were not being addressed.

As the report shows, there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ returning older British immigrant. Indeed, we ended up using the term ‘British immigrant’ because the group includes those for whom Britain hardly counts as ‘home’ at all. We have become used to the idea that foreign immigrants need help to integrate into our society; this report shows that in many cases we need to take the same approach with British nationals coming back to the UK – in particular, those who have been away a long time, among them many who are elderly.

A diverse group always has diverse needs, and older British immigrants are no exception. However, the report makes clear that there are things that could be done to help this group, and that particular measures could be taken to help the most vulnerable.

Just getting people to plan a bit more carefully for their move to the UK would be a start. Individuals have the main responsibility for this perhaps, but the government and NGOs could also do more to build on some good initiatives in this area. Once people get back to this country it is clear that those who need help often have difficulties finding it, particularly with regard to housing and benefit entitlements. Government departments, local authorities and other bodies sometimes just pass these people around, with nobody willing to take responsibility. We hear this call often, but in this area, as in so many, a more ‘joined-up’ approach is needed.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that this short report only scratches the surface of an interesting and potentially important aspect of migration. If we are to look after this group of older citizens better in the future than we do now, we need to know a lot more about them and their needs. This is a challenge not just to bodies lobbying for change but to government and other statutory agencies.

Carey Oppenheim, IPPR Co-Director

Lisa Harker, IPPR Co-Director
Key findings and recommendations

The UK population has been migrating around the world for many centuries and today the ‘British’ diaspora is one of the largest extra-territorial communities, rivalled only by the Indian and Chinese diaspora. In 2006 an estimated 5.5 million UK nationals lived abroad on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. There are also between 55 million and 200 million people living abroad who are overseas nationals with no formal rights of abode in the UK, but who claim an emotional attachment to the UK as a consequence of their ancestry.

For many, life overseas is not the end of their journey. Between 50,000 and 100,000 UK nationals return every year, among them many older people. Some of this group are frail and vulnerable and may find it difficult to integrate back in the UK.

Compared with a large research literature on non-UK immigrants who move to the UK, there has been much less research on the migration of UK nationals. Consequently, little is known about the scale of ‘British’ immigration into the UK, or the background of these immigrants. Older immigrants are an even less researched group – a hidden community within a hidden community. Without an awareness of the prior experiences of this group, their specific needs may not be understood by those who plan health and social care services.

Home Sweet Home? is a response to this concealed UK migratory movement. It was funded by Age Concern and Help the Aged, a charity (and hence a NGO) working with and for older people. The study aims to map the scale and nature of the migration of older UK nationals to the UK as well as to analyse how central government, local public services and NGOs responded to this population movement.

Our research methodology comprised:

- a literature review;
- a secondary analysis of population datasets such as the International Passenger Survey and the Labour Force Survey;
- ten life-history interviews with UK nationals who had immigrated into the UK after a period of residence overseas;
- interviews with key informants in central government, local public services and NGOs.
What we know about the UK diaspora

Understanding the scale and nature of UK immigration flows back to the UK requires an understanding of the UK population who live abroad. Our analysis highlighted the diversity within the ‘British’ diaspora in terms of migration pathways, social class and ethnicity.

The older ‘British’ diaspora comprises a number of different groups:

- UK nationals who emigrated when they were younger and who have grown old while overseas: this group includes those who have migrated to work and for marriage;
- older ‘super-mobile’ labour migrants who have lived in many countries during their working lives, but unlike other UK migrants have no attachment to a particular place outside the UK: this group includes forces personnel, diplomats and some employees of international companies who are in the last years of their working lives;
- those who have moved abroad to retire;
- older second-home owners who live abroad for part of the year;
- overseas nationals with no formal UK citizenship rights, who may claim an emotional attachment to the UK as a consequence of previous emigration;
- categories of British citizenship that do not include a right of abode in the UK: these include British Overseas Territories Citizen, British Overseas Citizens, British Subjects, British Nationals (Overseas) and British Protected Persons;
- stateless persons with UK travel documents, those with refugee status or indefinite leave to remain in the UK, who have left the UK.

UK nationals who live overseas are a group with diverse ethnic origins. They comprise those who consider themselves English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh. They also include older UK nationals from minority ethnic communities who have returned to their countries of birth after a period residence in the UK. Some of this group may hold dual nationality.

Prior to 1980 most UK emigrants moved to other western European countries, the US or old Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada. More recently, the countries of destination of UK emigrants have become more diverse, partly as a consequence of UK nationals from minority ethnic communities who have returned to their countries of birth after a period of residence in the UK.
In 2007, the top ten countries of overseas residence for UK nationals were Australia (1,310,000 persons), Spain (990,000), United States (685,000), Canada (609,000), Ireland (320,000), France (261,000), New Zealand (217,000), South Africa (214,000), Germany (126,000) and Cyprus (65,000).¹

Across different countries of residence, the age distribution of the UK population varies considerably. Among UK nationals resident in Canada, US and Spain, high proportions are over 50. In the US and Canada, this age distribution is a consequence of post-1945 emigration while the high proportion of UK nationals resident in Spain is a consequence of retirement migration.

For many people life overseas is a positive experience. However, in some parts of the world UK nationals are not well integrated into the communities that receive them. In particular, retirement migrants, including those who spend part of the year in the UK, appear to be the least integrated in relation to local language skills, participation in local civil society organisations, engagement with local taxation regimes and local social interactions. Limited fluency in the local language presents special problems in old age, when a person may have to seek health care or social care.

While often not fully integrated in local communities, many older UK nationals who live abroad have very little contact with UK state institutions or friends and relatives in the UK. For those who eventually migrated to the UK there were a number of consequences of limited prior contact, which include little awareness of rights and entitlements or systems of social support in the UK and lost social support networks in the UK, leading to isolation.

### Research findings: immigration to the UK

Nearly 18,000 UK nationals aged over 45 immigrated into the UK in 2007 and in recent years about 10 per cent of all ‘British’ immigrants have been of retirement age. Most UK immigration is from European countries and this is a trend that may increase in the short term as the value of sterling falls against the euro.

Compared with the overall UK population of a similar age, our analysis shows that older UK immigrants are:

- more diverse in terms of their ethnic origin;
- better qualified;
- more likely to own property;
- less likely to be in work in the UK; and
- less likely to claim welfare benefits, including the state retirement pension.

Our research paints a mixed picture in relation to social exclusion and vulnerability. UK immigrants may possess greater educational and housing capital, but they may not have access to the basic welfare safety-net.

The reasons why older UK nationals migrate to the UK are diverse, but they include the end of a work contract or retirement after work overseas, family circumstances, deteriorating health, economic circumstances and, occasionally, political unrest.

Among those we interviewed, the most frequent reason for migration back to the UK was the end of an overseas job contract or retirement after overseas employment. A change in family circumstances, such as the death of a spouse or the desire to be near new grandchildren, was another significant reason for immigration to the UK.

The onset of health problems, compounded by an inability to meet healthcare needs in the locality, is a further significant reason why older UK nationals leave their adopted country of residence. UK emigrants may be unable to meet their healthcare needs locally because:

- they have no access to state services;
- local health and social care provision is rudimentary;
- they failed to take out health insurance;
- they are unable to afford private health insurance or private health and social care;
- they need residential care, but little or none is available locally; or
- they lack fluency in the local language and are unable to communicate with health workers.

While some migration for health reasons is unavoidable, much could also be prevented by the greater uptake of health insurance as well as increased fluency in the local language.

Many interviewees also cited changed economic circumstances as a push factor for their migration to the UK, caused by the devaluation of sterling and lower incomes from savings.
Small numbers of older UK nationals return from countries experiencing unrest or armed conflict. Most return by themselves when the situation in their home country deteriorates. Additionally, the UK government sometimes evacuates its citizens from dangerous situations, most recently through an evacuation programme for older UK nationals from Zimbabwe.

Research findings: integration in the UK

Among those we interviewed, most had had time to plan their immigration, but not all took this opportunity. As with emigration from the UK, lack of prior planning made integration into the UK much more difficult. In particular, some UK nationals failed to plan for their housing in the UK. Secure housing emerged as the most important factor promoting early integration in the UK.

Some UK nationals who return to the UK have few savings and are dependent on the state for benefits and possibly other types of support, such as residential care. Access to these benefits is often delayed by the Habitual Residence Test, which determines a person’s entitlement to some welfare benefits. It is applied to UK nationals who have been absent from the UK for two years. The Habitual Residence Test is defined in case law rather than Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) regulations and our research suggests that there is large variation in the way this test is interpreted.

Almost all interviewees talked about the difficulties finding information about their entitlements to benefits. This is despite the large amount of web-based information available about this subject. The finding suggests that many of those who need this basic information are not able to locate it, or cannot absorb key messages.

Our quantitative analysis shows that older UK nationals who have returned to the UK include a substantial number of people who are below state pension age. We interviewed some of the ‘younger old’, all of whom had found it difficult to find work in the UK. Their unemployment also inhibited their social integration, as many social relationships are formed in the workplace.

Many of those who moved to the UK talked of the isolation and loneliness that they experienced on arrival in their new homes. This isolation impacted on well-being. It also meant that when a person became older, he or she had fewer friends to offer help. However, we felt that service providers in the statutory sector were usually not aware of this additional vulnerability.

More positively, some immigrants had decided to tackle their lack of local friendships and unemployment by volunteering, an activity that assisted their integration.
Recommendations

Our research led us to make a number of policy recommendations that aim to improve the lives of older UK nationals who have moved to the UK.

Collecting better migration and population data

Our research showed that data on older migrants in the UK, as well as immigration and emigration trends, is limited.

We recommend that:

- the sample size of the International Passenger Survey should be increased to enable better analysis of migration flows to and from the UK;
- the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should require all those in receipt of a state retirement pension to register their country of residence;
- the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) should conduct an annual population audit of UK nationals who live overseas, using a range of data, not just consular registration records; this audit should be made available to NGOs such as Age Concern and Help the Aged, the Red Cross and the British Legion, as well as the UK government;
- in order to collect better data on overseas residents, the FCO should examine the experiences of states with compulsory registration schemes for overseas nationals, as well as the future use of embarkation control data to assemble better migration data.

Updating strategic planning

Planning by the FCO and NGOs that work overseas needs to reflect changing migration patterns.

We recommend that:

- FCO strategic plans, including evacuation plans, need to reflect changed settlement patterns of UK nationals and hidden populations with whom consulates may have limited contact;
- using better migration data, NGOs working overseas should review the populations with whom they have regular contact; this review should highlight unmet needs among UK nationals who live abroad.
Supporting local integration overseas

Our research showed that better local integration overseas may serve to prevent some return migration to the UK.

We recommend that:

- the FCO, NGOs and host governments should develop national strategies to encourage the local integration of UK nationals who live overseas; countries where UK nationals are not well integrated should be a priority for the development of these strategies;

- EU governments should review all residents’ obligations towards learning the local language, with a view to promoting all migrants’ fluency in the language of their countries of residence;

- NGOs should encourage all UK emigrants to learn the local language. This might be achieved through public information campaigns to promote the benefits of bilingualism, as well as the organisation of community-based language classes. NGOs should consider recruiting volunteers who could work with co-nationals to encourage local integration.

Pensions equality

The entitlement of UK nationals to have their state retirement pension uprated (an annual increase in line with the UK state retirement pension) varies. UK nationals living in some countries are not entitled to an uprate, a factor that may contribute to the migration to the UK of some pensioners.

We recommend that:

- the UK state pension should be fully uprated in all countries.

Supporting planned migration and return to the UK

Our research showed that significant numbers of UK nationals do not plan their original migration, or any later immigration back to the UK. Yet those who plan their emigration encounter fewer difficulties integrating overseas. Those who plan immigration to the UK find it easier to settle in this country. While there is a great deal of advice material about emigration and return to the UK, not all of this advice reaches its target audience.
We recommend that:

- the FCO, in partnership with NGOs, should research how UK migrants access, understand and use web-based advice material about migration and their social welfare entitlements in the UK;
- the FCO should consider extending its roadshows, perhaps to include Portugal, France, Cyprus and Bulgaria;
- the FCO and those working with older UK nationals might want to consider other ways of reaching migrants, through property exhibitions, property shows on television or through community leaders within British communities themselves;
- NGOs should consider recruiting British volunteers – integration champions – who could communicate planning behaviour within their own communities.

Social care planning

The social care needs of older UK immigrants are similar to those of the broader population in the UK, although older UK immigrants may be more isolated and have fewer support networks to turn to than other sectors of the population.

We recommend that:

- the Department of Health, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and other professional bodies should raise awareness about the specific needs of older migrants.

The Habitual Residence Test

Our research showed that the Habitual Residence Test delays access to benefits among some UK nationals who return to the UK, causing personal hardship.

We recommend that:

- the DWP should define habitual residence in social security regulations to ensure a consistent interpretation of this term;
- the DWP should consider waiving the Habitual Residence Test for UK nationals who have been forced by unrest, natural disaster or other unforeseen circumstances to move to the UK; the criteria for such a waiver should be defined in social security regulations.
Encouraging volunteering

Our research showed that for some older UK nationals who moved to the UK, volunteering promoted well-being and assisted integration by helping them form friendships. Hence, volunteering is an intervention that needs to be supported by those working for the well-being of older people.

We recommend that:

- national volunteering strategies should prioritise older people;
- NGOs working with UK nationals who are considering moving to the UK should promote the benefits of volunteering to those considering return.

Seeing older people as an asset

Our research showed that the experiences and skills of UK nationals who have lived abroad were seldom acknowledged and that this group is sometimes seen as a burden.

We recommend that:

- the communications campaigns of NGOs that advocate for older people should continue to stress the rich life experiences of older people and portray them as an asset; such campaigns also need to explicate the state’s duty of care to its citizens and be targeted at the general public as well as practitioners;
- public events that aim to celebrate migration, such as International Migration Day, should incorporate the experiences of older UK migrants.
I Introduction

‘During my last few years in Kenya, the conditions for our safaris had deteriorated sadly. New safari firms were springing up, catering for package tours in permanent tented camps…. All this of course was progress – but it was not to my liking. When my sons left their schools and universities and based themselves in England, my mind turned more and more to thoughts of a little house in Wiltshire. Perhaps I would never have made the decision on my own, but while I was away in England in 1984 my African landlord, with whom I had enjoyed a long and happy rapport, sold Kiserian [my home] to a rich Kikuyu businessman who demanded vacant possession. I had no inclination to look for another house and so, encouraged by my sons, I packed up after some twenty years in Kenya. Having found jobs for my staff and said goodbye to my friends, I turned my back on that good life forever.’

From Home from the Hill, by Hilary Hook (1918–90), whose disorientated return to the UK was documented in Molly Dineen’s award-winning film of the same title

In 2006 an estimated 5.5 million UK nationals lived abroad on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. An additional 500,000 UK nationals live abroad for part of the year, many through second-home ownership. There are also between 55 million and 200 million people living abroad who are not UK nationals, but claim an emotional attachment to the UK as a consequence of their ancestry (Coleman and Salt 1992; Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006). Among all three population groups are significant numbers of older people. Some are retirement migrants who have left the UK in search of a place in the sun. Others have moved overseas to work or for marriage and grown old in their new home countries.

For many UK nationals, life overseas is not the end of their journey. Between 50,000 and 100,000 UK nationals enter the UK every year as immigrants, among them many older people. Some of these ‘returnees’ are frail and vulnerable and may find it difficult to integrate back in the UK. They may have few friends or family to offer advice and support. Access to benefits, adult education and health and social care is dependent on prior residency in the UK and the interpretation of UK regulations such as habitual residence and local connection. Pensions are determined by prior National Insurance payments. Consequently, some older ‘returnees’ are near-destitute.

This ‘British’ migratory movement raises a number of issues for policy-makers, particularly those in central government who determine access to healthcare and social support for those coming from abroad. The Government has published a social care Green Paper, Shaping the Future of Care Together (14 July 2009), which examines future models of care for older people. It is essential that central government is aware of the scale and nature of migration by older UK nationals and acknowledges they may have few family members and friends in this country who can support and advocate for them.

Not all UK nationals who live overseas define themselves as British. Although they may hold UK nationality, they may see themselves as English, Irish, Scottish or Welsh or identify with other ethnic groups.
The presence of a large diaspora also requires that the UK government has coherent strategy and comprehensive evacuation plans for emergency situations. (While we were undertaking this research, an evacuation programme for elderly British residents in Zimbabwe was announced.)

Compared with a large research literature on immigrants who have come to the UK, there has been much less research on ‘British’ emigration or immigration to this country. Consequently, little is known about the scale of British ‘return’, or the background of these immigrants. Older ‘British’ immigrants are an even less researched group – a hidden community within a hidden community. Without an awareness of the prior experiences of this group, their specific needs may not be understood by those who plan health and social care services.

Our research

Home Sweet Home? is a response to this concealed British migratory movement. It is a research study funded by Age Concern England, a charity and NGO working with and for older people, now part of Age Concern and Help the Aged. The study aims to map the scale and nature of the movement of older UK nationals who move to the UK, as well as to analyse how central government, local public services and NGOs responded to this population movement.

Defining the older ‘British’ community is not as simple as it seems. Their numbers include UK nationals who live abroad on a permanent or semi-permanent basis, as well as seasonal or temporary migrants who live abroad for part of the year. In addition, to this divide, our analysis suggests that this older ‘British’ diaspora comprises a number of different groups:

- UK nationals who emigrated when they were younger and who have grown old while overseas: this group includes those who have migrated to work and for marriage;
- older ‘super-mobile’ labour migrants who have lived in many countries during their working lives, but have no attachment to a particular place outside the UK: this group includes forces personnel, diplomats and some employees of international companies who are in the last years of their working lives;
- UK retirement migrants;
- older UK nationals from minority ethnic communities who have returned to their countries of birth after a period residence in the UK; some of this group may hold dual nationality;
- overseas nationals with no formal UK citizenship rights, who may claim an emotional attachment to the UK as a consequence of previous emigration;
categories of British citizenship that do not give a right of abode in the UK: these include British Overseas Territories Citizen, British Overseas Citizens, British Subjects, British Nationals (Overseas) and British Protected Persons;

stateless persons with UK travel documents, those with refugee status or indefinite leave to remain in the UK, who have left the UK;

overseas nationals with no formal UK citizenship rights, who may claim an emotional attachment to the UK as a consequence of previous emigration: some of the older British nationals evacuated from Zimbabwe fall into this category.

The migration intentions of these diverse groups of people may differ widely, as may their needs in their country of destination or after their migration to the UK. For example, older people who are returning to their countries of birth may be less likely to return to the UK than white English retirement migrants.

The study focuses on older ‘British’ immigrants. The perception of ‘old’ is individually, culturally and spatially defined. A fit 70-year-old may still feel middle-aged and a person may be seen as old in one location, but not so in others. We decided to have no age definition in our research.

We also use the term ‘immigrants’ rather than returnees. Some of those we interviewed had spent very little time living in the UK, had limited links to a locality and sometimes few friends and relatives. They did not consider UK to be their ‘home’ and ‘return’ was not a term that described their migration. We felt that immigration was a more accurate term to describe this journey to the UK.

Structure of the report

The remainder of the report presents our findings and analysis:

- Section 2 describes our research methodology;
- Section 3 draws from qualitative and quantitative research and outlines what we know about older UK nationals who live overseas;
- Section 4 draws from our quantitative analysis and examines the scale and nature of the movement of UK nationals to the UK;
- Section 5 draws from our interviews and examines why UK nationals move to the UK;
- Section 6 looks at how local public services and non-governmental organisations respond to this group; and
- Section 7 presents policy recommendations to these bodies.

In doing the research, we heard numerous different stories as there were very many differences in interviewees’ backgrounds and their experiences, overseas and in the UK.
While some of these immigrants were vulnerable, many had rich life experiences and had much to offer their new communities. We hope that by mapping this hidden migration flow and by telling the stories of ‘British’ immigrants, we will contribute to a more informed debate concerning the treatment of older migrants.
2 Research methodology

Our methodology was informed by four sets of research questions. We wanted to know:

- the scale and nature of immigration flows of older UK nationals who move to the UK. Do re-migrants come from particular countries? Do they settle in particular regions on arrival in the UK? Is their immigration permanent? What future migration trends might emerge?
- the reasons for their immigration to the UK;
- how ‘British’ immigrants experience integration into life in the UK;
- how local public services, NGOs and central government are responding to the immigration of older UK nationals to the UK. Are policy changes needed? What issues does this immigration raise for central government, local public services and NGOs?

These research questions were answered through a literature review, a secondary analysis of quantitative data, life-history interviews with re-migrants and interviews with key informants in central government, local public services and NGOs. While most interviews were conducted in the UK, we were able to interview key informants in Spain.

Secondary analysis of quantitative data

We used data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS), Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey (LFS/APS), overseas population data and pensions statistics from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in our analysis.

At present data on migration flows into and from the UK, including the migration of UK nationals, is collected from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). This surveys a sample of passengers entering and leaving the UK and collects data on their citizenship, destination and purpose of their journey. However, the relatively small sample size of migrants limits its usefulness as a tool for estimating migration to or from particular countries or regions, or analysing particular social groups such as older immigrants. Consequently, we are able only to draw some broad trends from IPS.

Additionally, IPS defines a migrant as someone moving abroad for a period of at least 12 months (Office for National Statistics 2007). This definition does not capture the movement of ‘swallows’ who live abroad for part of the year, often through second-home ownership. Research suggests that among these temporary migrants are significant numbers of older UK nationals (King et al 1998; O’Reilly 2000).
We also analysed data from the LFS/APS. The LFS is a quarterly survey of households that aims to provide information on the labour market, and forms part of the APS. LFS includes questions about country of birth, nationality and country of residence 12 months previously (the OYCRY variable). We took this variable as a proxy for a UK immigrant and analysed it alongside other variables such as age, health status, housing tenure and income to profile this group.

LFS is a survey based on a sample of 60,000 households and therefore prone to sampling errors (Office for National Statistics 2003). These errors get proportionally larger the smaller the estimate, so LFS is of limited use to analyse trends in very small populations. This problem can be overcome by appending datasets together to get a larger sample. Our LFS analyses, four quarterly datasets that make up a one-year period, have been appended. This increases the total sample size and therefore allows for more detailed analysis of socio-economic characteristics than is possible using a single quarter of data, and ensures that the results are representative. In order to ensure that each respondent is included only once in the appended dataset, we have excluded respondents on all but one of their participation waves.\(^3\)

We also examined overseas census and population surveys so as to gather data on migration flows to and from the UK. Many countries do not collate comprehensive migration statistics, so we were limited in this analysis. Nevertheless we were able to collect data from Australia, Canada and New Zealand, all of which are destinations for a significant proportion of UK emigrants from the UK.

Our analysis also drew from DWP pensions data as we were able to access the numbers of people receiving their pensions abroad. This data may not give an entirely accurate picture of older UK nationals who live abroad, as, although pensioners have to inform the DWP of their overseas residence status, not all do so. Additionally, some overseas nationals are entitled to UK state retirement pensions after periods of residence and work in the UK, thus inflating DWP figures. Despite these flaws, these sources of quantitative data enabled us to profile older UK immigrants.

**Life-history interviews**

Much policy research on return migration and migrant integration focuses on the institutions that promote return or integration, rather than migrants themselves. We felt it was important to include these missing voices in our research, particularly as older UK immigrants are such an under-researched group of people.

We conducted ten life-history interviews with UK immigrants; time and funding prevented further interviews. UK immigrants are a ‘hidden’ population who are widely dispersed.
across the UK. We experienced some initial difficulties in locating interviewees and used two different methods to locate potential interviewees. We approached NGOs that represent older people or provide services for this group to identify potential interviewees. These organisations included local pensioners’ forums, local Age Concern groups and the British Legion. We also used personal contacts to identify potential interviewees. Both the organisational and personal contacts were used to assemble a database of potential interviewees from which we selected a smaller sample to interview. The interviewees were aged between 59 and 83. Their countries of prior residence were Belgium, Bulgaria, Iraq, Jamaica, Spain and Zimbabwe.

In order to collect consistent data, we drafted an interview guide which was used as a prompt in each interview. We also gave interviewees some ‘open’ space to tell us what they thought mattered.

Interviews generally lasted between one and two hours and were taped. All participants were guaranteed confidentiality. Interviews were transcribed prior to their analysis.

Reflections on the research methodology

Review was built into the research process. Indeed, a number of issues emerged as the research progressed. We were concerned that data collected from life-history interviews might be unreliable as returnees’ memories may have deteriorated. Nostalgia for a time or place, and the influence of collective versions of the past, might also distort interview responses (O’Farrell 1979; Perks and Thomson 2006). Additionally, some research on return migration has suggested that migrants, when asked, tend to reduce the number of factors influencing their return, in order to make sense of decisions which come with much deliberation (Gmelch 1980).

We approached these methodological criticisms by ensuring that we probed fully all potential reasons for return, as well as questioning perceptions of the ‘old days’.

Key informant interviews

We interviewed 20 individuals from a range of organisations with an interest in the welfare of older UK immigrants. Interviewees came from:

- central government departments;
- local public services: healthcare and adult social care;
- NGOs working with older people in the UK and overseas.

As many of our interviewees wished to remain anonymous, we have not listed their details in this report.
3 What we know about older Britons abroad

To understand the scale and nature of UK immigration flows back to the UK we must first understand the UK population that lives abroad. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, this section profiles the UK population living abroad, with specific focus on older people.

Sizing the overseas UK national community

The UK has no compulsory registration of overseas nationals and consular registration records are incomplete and often out of date. This and the small sample size of the International Passenger Survey means that we have very limited knowledge of the population size of UK nationals who live abroad. The little we know has to be assembled from consular records, individual country censuses and a range of other data.

Based on an analysis of data available in 2005, up to 5.5 million UK nationals with the right of abode in the UK lived overseas on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. An additional 500,000 UK nationals live abroad for part of the year, often through second-home ownership (Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006).

Most, but not all, UK nationals who live abroad have previously migrated from the UK. UK emigration peaked in the period 1965–75 and again in the early 1980s. Many of those who migrated in the 1960s and 1970s are now of retirement age.

Figure 3.1 Patterns of inflow and outflow of UK nationals, 1966–2007

Source: ONS TIM series data
UK emigration increased again between 1996 and 2005, particularly among the 45–64 age group (Figure 3.2), who comprised large numbers of labour migrants, as well as people taking advantage of a strong pound sterling and high UK property prices to sell up and take early retirement.

Figure 3.2 Age distribution of UK-born emigrants, 1975–2004

Prior to 1980 most UK emigrants moved to other western European countries, the US or old Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada. More recently, the countries of destination of UK emigrants has become more diverse. There are UK nationals living in each of the world’s nations. The United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Thailand have recently emerged as major destination countries for UK emigrants. The diversity of destinations means that UK nationals are increasingly returning from a varied range of destinations.

In 2007, the top ten countries of overseas residence for UK nationals were Australia (1,310,000 persons), Spain (990,000), United States (685,000), Canada (609,000), Ireland (320,000), France (261,000), New Zealand (217,000), South Africa (214,000), Germany (126,000) and Cyprus (65,000). Analysis of population datasets suggests that there have been some changes in UK migration flows since then, although the above ten countries remain popular countries of residence of UK nationals of all ages. More data on the countries of residence of UK nationals is given in the Appendix.
Across different countries of residence, the age distribution of the UK population varies considerably. Among UK nationals resident in Canada, US and Spain, high proportions are over 50. In the US and Canada, this age distribution is a consequence of post-1945 emigration. There, the UK population has simply aged in those countries. The high proportions of older emigrants in Spain and Portugal is a consequence of retirement migration. Conversely, there are very few older residents among the UK population who live in Japan and Scandinavian countries. Research also suggests that the UK population living in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are also a young population. In these countries, UK migrants tend to be young workers who are employed in industrial sectors such as IT and financial services where the labour force tends to be young.

Figure 3.3 Percentage of UK-born population who are over 50 in selected OECD countries, 2001
Figure 3.4 gives the top 21 countries of residence for those claiming UK state retirement pensions. Not all those who claim UK state retirement pensions are UK nationals; this group may include overseas nationals who have worked in the UK and have built up an entitlement to a full or partial state pension. Nevertheless, this pension data gives an indication of distribution of the older UK population. It includes countries to which UK nationals have migrated in order to work then remained upon retirement: for example, the United States. The above countries also include destinations for primary retirement migration: for example, Spain. Some UK nationals who had previously migrated to UK are now returning to their countries of birth, which accounts for the high numbers of pensioners in Jamaica, Cyprus,\(^4\) Pakistan, India and Barbados.

The qualifications, occupational and income profiles of UK nationals who are resident overseas also vary considerably. As well as individual differences, there are strong patterns of variation between countries of residence. UK migrants to France comprise higher proportions of those in professional and managerial occupations than UK migrants to Spain. Similarly, among retirement migrants, those in France have more savings per head than those in Spain (King et al 2000).

\(^4\) Cyprus is also a destination for retirement migration among white English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish ethnic groups.
Over the last 20 years, UK residents who live abroad have become a more ethnically diverse population as previous immigrants return to their countries of origin as UK nationals or dual nationals. During the next 20 years we are likely to see growing numbers of UK passport holders living in India, Bangladesh, South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, China and the Philippines.

UK emigration has fallen since 2006. This has been partly brought about by decreased retirement migration of UK nationals. The fall in property prices in the UK, as well as a fall in the value of sterling against the euro has cut retirement migration to the Eurozone. It is likely that the recession will cause further falls in retirement migration.

**Overseas experiences**

As noted above, UK nationals who reside abroad are a very diverse group in relation to their reasons for migration, countries of residence, social class, ethnicity and rights of abode in the UK. Research about the ‘British’ diaspora has tended to focus on sub-categories of this group: for example, retirement migrants or those returning to their countries of birth. There is now an extensive research literature on retirement migration (King et al 2000; O’Reilly 2000; Casado-Diaz et al 2004; Warnes et al 2004; Oliver 2008). There is also a growing literature on the return migration of nationals from minority ethnic communities – groups who had previously migrated to the UK (Byron 1999; Goulbourne 1999; Ley and Kobayashi 2005; Potter et al 2005). However, there is very little research about UK labour migrants.

Many of these studies analyse migrants’ decision-making process. Among UK nationals who retire abroad, contacts established as a result of previous international tourism inform decisions to migrate and eventual countries of destination (King et al 2000).

Most research on the ‘British’ diaspora suggests that there is no overall single British community, rather a series of communities with different class, ethnic and occupational identities and often with different migration pathways. Social networking reflects these different identities, with individuals belonging to a wide variety of associations, formal and informal.

Studies about UK nationals who reside overseas often look at their experiences through the framework of ‘migrant integration’. Although this is a contested term, we define integration as a condition that encompasses:

- psycho-social contentment;
- interaction between members of a household and wider society;
- participation in civil society institutions, public institutions, the workplace and political life;
equality of access: for example, to the labour market, housing, education, healthcare and social welfare; equality of treatment within the workplace and public institutions, as well as progress towards equality of outcome within education and employment; respect for the rule of law and taxation regimes; and the possession of civil, political and social rights (Rutter et al 2007).

Studies such as O’Reilly (2000) and Casado-Diaz et al (2004) suggest that older migrants who are least integrated in relation to their social interactions with the host community are most likely to return to their country of birth.

Much media coverage about older UK nationals who live abroad stresses their limited local integration. It also tends to portray the negative: retired criminals and unhappy, inward-looking pensioners. The reality is much more complex and individual experiences of migration and local integration are varied. Nevertheless, as governments in most developed countries are placing greater emphasis on migrant integration, we can expect increasing scrutiny of the ‘British’ diaspora.

In our view six policy-relevant issues are highlighted in research about older members of the British diaspora, discussed below.

**Selectivity of migration**

Much research that profiles migrants highlights the selective nature of emigration (Gmelch 1980; Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006). Emigration often selects those who have the most social and cultural capital – an emigrant may need qualifications or money in order to meet the visa requirements of their country of destination. Retirement migrants need financial capital in order to purchase property in another country. Migration also selects risk-takers and the most innovative. Our quantitative research (see Section 4), as well as interviews with migrants themselves, confirmed this trend. Throughout, we were struck by their risk-taking and appetite for adventure and change.

‘It was an experiment … I left in 1991, at the time it was the height of the recession, and because I could not afford the mortgage on my house, so I went abroad to find work. There was work there and I started to do reasonably well.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Belgium

‘After the war father wasn’t well and had been recommended the country. So mum and dad, auntie and uncle drove to Rhodesia, through France, Algiers, through the desert and the Congo.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Zimbabwe
Those with a propensity to take risks may be less likely to plan their migration, including any immigration into the UK. More positively, the selective nature of migration means that migrants themselves may be more resilient in the face of difficulties and have resources that aid their integration in the UK.

Prior super-mobility

A significant number of older UK nationals who retire abroad or grow old abroad have had previous experiences of migration (see also King et al 1998). Some may have moved from country to country, as forces personnel, diplomats or other international workers, thus comprising a ‘super-mobile’ population.

‘I’ve spent 30 years living on the road … an au pair in Italy, then in Finland with British Council then Iran, Morocco, Latvia and the last five-and-a-half years in Bulgaria.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Bulgaria

Some of those who show this super-mobility have few ties with the UK and potential support networks in this country may be very limited. Those without family support seem more likely to use consular or evacuation services to return to the UK. Their lack of support networks in the UK may also require a different type of intervention from adult social services.

Lack of preparation for migration

Interviews with UK emigrants as well as consular services and local NGOs highlighted the unplanned nature of much UK emigration. Many retirement migrants sold up and left, without researching local conditions, welfare entitlements or planning for their future health and social care needs.

‘People sometimes have the rose-tinted glasses “Oh, it’s a hot country, it seems like a much more relaxed way of life, stress-free” [attitude to living abroad]. But people don’t know what entitlements they’re going to get, what benefits they’re going to lose if they leave the UK, let alone what they’re going to be able to claim when they get over there. And just things like language barriers and isolation – people just don’t think it through properly. … I have heard of cases where people have just picked somewhere, maybe a country they’ve never even been to before, and packed their bags and gone. Seemed like a good idea at the time and then come against all types of problems.’

NGO worker
Research suggests that the health status of UK emigrants tends to be better or similar to host communities of a similar age and income. La Parra and Mateo’s (2008) study suggests that UK retirement migrants in Spain have a similar health profile to the local Spanish population, and score higher than the Spanish on some health indicators, such as mobility and positive perceptions about their state of health. While UK emigrants may be healthier, research, including our own, indicates that a significant minority of them fail to make adequate provision for their healthcare while overseas. Many fail to check their entitlement to healthcare (or other types of benefits), although verifying such information while still in the UK can be difficult. Other migrants fail to take out health insurance where they have no entitlement to state healthcare, or where state healthcare provision is rudimentary (Goulbourne 1999). Many migrants may fail to register with the appropriate authorities in their country of residence, thus preventing access to state healthcare.

UK nationals from minority ethnic communities may perceive their migration as going home and fail to take out insurance.

‘Brits who are visiting family in India or Pakistan or Bangladesh, for example, they don’t see it as travelling abroad, because they’re visiting family. So they don’t take out travel insurance. Because for them, they’re safe – because they’re going to extended family.’

Civil servant

Older people who are in good health may also resist planning for their old age because they do not wish acknowledge their ageing or consider their future vulnerability.

‘There is something about the Peter Pan syndrome. People don’t like to admit they’re getting old. And we see that any time you have a focus group with the 50-plus age group to talk about long-term care plan – absolute denial they’ll ever need it. Now the statistics are against them.’

NGO worker

The FCO and NGOs working with older people and UK emigrants have tried to address this lack of preparation through web information, Age Concern, for example, has web-based information on planning for overseas retirement and is shortly to be publishing country-specific information for older UK nationals planning a move to France, Jamaica, Portugal or Spain. The FCO has organised information roadshows in Spain, stressing the need for planning, although not in other retirement migration destinations. Additionally, those most likely not to plan for their emigration are probably the persons least likely to absorb the wealth of information about planning emigration. In addition to extending FCO roadshows, perhaps to include Portugal, France and Cyprus, the FCO and those working with older UK nationals might want to consider other ways of reaching migrants, through property exhibitions, property shows on television or through community leaders within British communities themselves. Such community leaders might be recruited by NGOs working with UK nationals to work as volunteer informers.
‘You need key vectors in the community who are not necessarily part of an organisation but are willing to work alongside and to be informed friends, if you like – who can give out good information and can steer people when they know that Doris is getting a bit tottery on her feet or Jim’s dementia is getting worse. They can say, “Do you know Age Concern or a French organisation does a bit of help around that?”’

NGO worker

Local integration

Studies show that older UK migrants’ experiences of local integration are very varied and UK nationals integrate in different ways in relation to social interaction and participation in civil society institutions. There are parts of the world where the sparsity of the UK population requires high levels of integration. In the United States and other developed English-speaking countries, most UK nationals are well integrated into their local communities. There are no demarcated British enclaves, although some UK nationals from minority ethnic communities may manifest higher levels of residential and social segregation. Elsewhere – for example, in Bulgaria – UK nationals may be integrated into a cosmopolitan international community of similar levels of wealth, but have less social contact with the host community.

There are also locations where large numbers of UK nationals have limited contact with those outside British communities. Spain is usually cited as the most obvious example where there are distinct British enclaves and where UK nationals often have limited contact with the majority population. Indeed, throughout our research, UK nationals resident in Spain were seen as a problem community by key informants in central and local government as well as NGOs.

Those who were returning to their countries of birth and those had emigrated early in life, to work or for marriage tended to be the most integrated as older people in their adopted countries of residence. Even these groups did not always feel that they fully belonged in their local communities.

‘We were seen as foreigners … It makes me feel uncomfortable. Because we don’t have a strong Jamaican accent. From the minute we open our mouths, they would speak to you different.’

British retirement migrant, Jamaica

‘The majority of my friends were Jamaicans who have been abroad … They have a broader view and we have a lot in common really – living abroad, we can share conversations.’

British retirement migrant, Jamaica
Retirement migrants, particularly those who spend part of the year in the UK, appear to be the least integrated in relation to their language skills, participation in local civil society and organisations, engagement with local taxation regimes and social interactions (Casado-Diaz et al 2004; O’Reilly 2000). Indeed, the ‘swallows’ — seasonal and temporary migrants — are singled out for criticism in many EU countries. They are seen as an under-enumerated population, unwilling to pay local tax and unwilling to integrate. Within the EU, there is growing pressure to regulate the population registration of temporary migrants.

‘We don’t know how many Brits really live here as many of them do not register with the Town Hall. The swallows are the worst offenders: they don’t want to pay taxes here and they don’t want to lose their entitlement to services in the UK … The Spanish rely on up-to-date population numbers for funding their public services, so we get lots of complaints about the Brits.’

Civil servant

Two factors may make local integration more difficult among older retirement migrants. First, they are rarely accompanied by young children whose attendance at schools can often initiate friendships with other parents. Second, among retirement migrants local integration is not assisted by the formation of workplace friendships.

‘If you have children of school age, that’s great, because it’s an automatic entry into the social life. So your social network immediately opens up. But it can be quite different if you go without children and if you are not used to life, you don’t really know where to start.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Bulgaria

Lack of fluency in the local language also emerges as a major barrier to local integration in our study and in much other research (Casado-Diaz et al 2004; Oliver 2008; O’Reilly 2000; Warnes et al 2004). This was a particular barrier in Spain but throughout the world the local integration of UK emigrants is often limited by poor levels of fluency in the local language. In one study 65 per cent of retirement migrants living in Malta and 71 per cent living in Spain spoke little or nothing of the local language (Casado-Diaz et al 2004).

‘They live in their own enclave and don’t really have to go out of it. The shops are English, the newspapers are English, everything is in English … They have survived as tourists and now they think they can survive when they live here.’

NGO worker

Limited fluency in the local language presents particular problems in old age, when people may have to seek health care or social care. In Spain, many older UK retirement migrants find it difficult to communicate with home helps or carers in residential homes.
'My father didn’t learn the language even after 11 years living in Spain. He didn’t ask for translation help in the hospitals. I think the biggest problem of all with the Brits is that they don’t learn the language. If you don’t make an effort it’s very hard to get health services.'

Immigrant who returned to the UK with elderly father

Evidence from interviews suggests that it is not the absence of language classes that causes a failure to learn the local language. For example, there are many Spanish-language classes organised for UK nationals living in Spain and the British consulates in Spain direct their nationals towards these classes. Rather, it is the ubiquity of English and the feeling that UK nationals can survive without learning the local language.

Improving this situation is likely to need more than a cultural change in attitudes towards bilingualism. EU governments are already debating ways in which migration policy can be used to encourage language-learning among non-EU migrants. Many EU member states now require prospective citizens to pass a test in the official language of their new homeland. In the UK, those applying for citizenship or permanent residency have to sit and pass a ‘Life in the UK’ citizenship test in the English language, or pass an English-language course with a citizenship component in the teaching. (Those over 65 are exempted from this obligation.) But as EU nationals seldom apply for UK citizenship, because they already have residency rights guaranteed by EC Directive 2004/38/EC, few take the English-language test.

Given the move across Europe towards contractual citizenship, we suggest that EU governments might review all residents’ obligations towards learning the local language. Such a move will bring the language-learning obligations of EU migrants into line with those from outside the EU. It is a controversial suggestion, but perhaps local language knowledge could be made a condition of purchasing property within the EU.

Betwixt and between communities

While often not fully integrated in local communities, older UK emigrants emerged as people who did not feel fully British (or English, Irish, Welsh or Scottish). Like many migrants, UK emigrants often occupied a liminal cultural space between the UK and the country of destination. (Liminality is term used by some anthropologists to describe a threshold state between two different cultures (see O’Reilly 2000).) One feature of this ‘betwixt and between’ condition was a difficulty negotiating social interactions with other UK nationals, particularly those whose class or ethnic origins were different from their own.
‘We had a close friend who had been in Spain for 15 years teaching at an international school very happily and she just had to leave. She just could not cope with the South London gangster who would come and threaten her because she had told his grandson off. And I mean threatened. I’m afraid Costa del Sol became the Costa del Crime. Not crime being committed but the people who were living there. It was almost like caricature, with certain bars where they congregated with the gangster’s moll.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Spain

Super-mobility also contributed to this liminal condition, with those who moved around throughout their working lives often feeling that they did not belong in the UK or in their eventual country of residence.

Some interviewees had ideas about the UK that were formed at the time of their original departure. For them, contact with the UK was very limited. Indeed, a further component of migrant liminality among overseas UK nationals appears to be limited contact with the UK. While abroad, UK emigrants’ links with the UK can be maintained in different ways, including:

- visits home;
- maintaining property in the UK;
- telephone and online contact with friends and family in the UK;
- following current affairs in the UK media, including online media;
- contact with ex-pat associations, formal and informal;
- continued use of the English language;
- remitting monies to the UK;
- paying UK taxes and National Insurance;
- receiving welfare benefits from the UK, such as pensions;
- voting in UK elections; and
- contact with embassies and consulates.

Among interviewees, most had very limited contact with the UK while abroad. Apart from the continued use of English, most links were restricted to telephone contact with friends and family. A few interviewees had also kept a UK property. Few emigrants followed UK current affairs or voted in UK elections, an issue highlighted in much other research (O’Reilly 2000).
For many, the UK was a memory and links with UK state institutions were to be avoided. For those who eventually migrated to the UK there were a number of consequences of limited prior contact, namely:

- little awareness of rights and entitlements or systems of social support in the UK;
- few social support networks in the UK, leading to isolation;
- culture shock upon migration to the UK.

‘We came here as total strangers. You can’t imagine our simple life in Africa. And we came here with all the mysteries of paper-filling and form-filling. Which – thank goodness for the Legion, they have been tremendous.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Zimbabwe

We felt that the UK government and NGOs need to give greater consideration to the links between diaspora communities and the UK. Those who have maintained links with the UK are less likely to face dislocation on arrival in the UK. Additionally, by developing strong state-emigrant links, one can expect more from emigrant populations in return. These benefits may involve increased remittance payments, increased compliance with UK taxation regimes and the championing of UK interests.

Arbitrary benefit entitlements

The entitlements of UK nationals living abroad to UK welfare benefits vary from country to country. Benefits earned by UK National Insurance contributions (for example, the state retirement pension and incapacity benefit) may be exportable to where a person chooses to reside. Non-means-tested benefits such as the Disability Living Allowance and the Winter Fuel Allowance are exportable within the European Economic Area (EEA), although means-tested benefits are not usually exportable.

The state retirement pension is fully exportable and can be claimed anywhere in the world. However, the yearly pension increases are not received if that person lives outside the EEA or a country that has a reciprocal pension agreement with the UK. A UK retiree living in Jamaica will receive an annual pension uprate, whereas a UK retiree living in St Lucia will not. For the latter, the pension will be frozen at the same level as when the individual left the UK; in some cases this can cause hardship (Age Concern 2007).

The other Britons abroad

In addition to UK nationals who hold full rights of abode in the UK, there are other ‘British’ populations who may claim some attachment to the UK and who may, as the Zimbabwean evacuation has shown, return to the UK. These groups include:
(1) Overseas nationals with permanent settlement rights in the UK. These are a group of people who may have come to the UK as asylum-seekers, spouses or labour migrants, and later been granted settlement in the UK. Although large numbers of people — 124,885 in 2007 — most of this group go on to acquire UK nationality (Home Office 2008). However, small numbers of migrants with permanent settlement in the UK do leave prior to gaining British citizenship. Their ties to the UK, created by previous residence, may mean that they return. During our research we interviewed an older Iraqi Kurd who had sought asylum in the UK and was granted indefinite leave to remain before he decided to return to Iraq. The unsafe situation in which he found himself caused him to return to the UK.

(2) Categories of British citizenship that do not have a right of abode in the UK
These include British Overseas Territories Citizens, British Overseas Citizens, British Subjects, British Nationals (Overseas) and British Protected Persons. Many of these categories of citizenship were granted when the UK was a colonial power and therefore apply to a small and increasingly ageing population. In 2007, however, 3.44 million UK Nationals (Overseas) were given a new citizenship category created through the Hong Kong Act 1985.

Of those who hold these categories of citizenship, many also hold other nationalities and are thus not de facto stateless. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 made provision for some stateless persons, with the above categories of citizenship to be granted full UK citizenship and the right of abode in the UK. There is no research about migration to the UK of this group, although key informants in the Somali and Yemeni communities suggest that small numbers of older migrants with British Protected Persons status have migrated to the UK.

(3) Overseas nationals with no formal UK citizenship rights, who may claim an emotional attachment to the UK as a consequence of previous emigration
Between 1840 and 1914 at least 14 million UK nationals left the UK, with emigration peaking in the period 1845–55, 1880–5, 1903–6 and 1910–14, but fell in the period after 1945. As a consequence of this past migration, between 55 million and 200 million people across the world may claim British ancestry or identify themselves in some way with the UK. The largest non-citizen diaspora communities are in Canada, United States and Australia and New Zealand, but there are still substantial diaspora communities and mixed-ethnicity communities in parts of Asia and Africa. About 30,000 persons of British or part-British descent remain in Zimbabwe, of whom some are entitled to UK nationality and others are not. There is ample historical evidence that after political upheaval some members of long-settled British diaspora communities migrate to the UK, including high proportions of older people.

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5 Includes indefinite leave to remain, permanent residence.


7 Commonwealth nationals who have at least one grandparent with UK nationality may be eligible for a UK Ancestry visa.
Government evacuation plans may need to account for some of these groups. It is also important that UK NGOs advocating on behalf of older persons are aware of these older UK residents, who may on occasion need support.

Conclusions

Our evidence highlights the diversity of the British diaspora, in relation to migration experiences, countries of residence, social class, ethnicity and rights of abode in the UK. It is essential that consular services, as well as NGOs working overseas, are aware of this diversity and that it informs their planning of services.

While many UK nationals have positive experience of emigration, a number have negative experiences, often caused by a lack of planning prior to emigration or failure to learn the local language. Policy interventions need to encourage better prior planning of immigration as well as encouraging local integration.
4 The scale and nature of ‘British’ immigration into the UK

The immigration of UK nationals to the UK is, as already noted, an under-enumerated population movement. This section draws from quantitative datasets such as the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to analyse UK immigration. We look at the total numbers of British people moving back to the UK and their socio-economic profiles.

The scale of immigration

In 2007 an estimated 71,000 UK nationals immigrated into the UK with the intention of remaining for at least a year (Figure 4.1). Most of this group were in the 25–44 age group, but 15 per cent of UK immigrants between 45 years and retirement age, and a further 10 per cent were over 60/65 years (women/men).

Figure 4.1 gives an age breakdown of these UK immigrants in the period 1991–2007. While UK immigration has fallen since 2003, the immigration of older UK nationals has remained fairly constant. The data, which is drawn from IPS, does not include figures for 2008. We do, however, expect the immigration of older UK nationals to increase, as a consequence of the falling value of sterling against the US dollar and the euro. This change means that the local value of sterling pensions will decrease.

Figure 4.1 Immigration of UK nationals in thousands, by age group, 1991–2007

Source: IPS
UK immigrants have lived in a diverse range of countries prior to migrating to the UK. Very few countries collate and analyse emigration data, so we are unable to draw on overseas datasets to analyse UK immigration into the UK. IPS data does not break down country of prior residence by the nationality of the immigrant. However, the LFS records a person’s country of prior residence three months and 12 months previously, which we have used as a proxy for a UK immigrant. The numbers of UK immigrants who fall into these two groups are rather small and do not allow a detailed country analysis. Nevertheless, the data suggest that most UK immigrants had previously lived in European countries prior to returning to the UK (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 UK nationals aged over 45 by country of residence 12 months ago (excluding UK), 2008

The analysis of quantitative data, as well as our qualitative research, suggests that UK immigrants are diverse in relation to their age on migration. LFS data suggests that most UK immigration occurs among those just under retirement age (Figure 4.3). This would suggest that there is significant migration of people who have worked overseas but intend to live in the UK on retirement.
What we know about the class and ethnic background of UK immigrants

Popular portrayals of the British diaspora suggest a group of people who are largely white, predominantly working-class and not very well educated (O'Reilly 2000). This representation is not borne out in quantitative data. Older UK nationals who had lived abroad 12 months ago are much more likely to possess a Level Three (equivalent to A-level) qualification than UK nationals who were in the UK at this time. This suggests that UK immigrants are better educated than the overall UK population. UK nationals who migrate back to the UK are partly drawn from the population of UK emigrants who have previously left the UK. Since 1982 the numbers of UK emigrants from a professional and managerial occupational background have exceeded those of emigrants from a manual and clerical background, who are less likely to have higher-level qualifications (Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006).

Retirement migration from the UK may also select in favour of those with greater educational and financial resources, since capital is usually needed to move overseas. Similarly, former retirement migrants returning to the UK may be better qualified than those who have not migrated.
Figure 4.4 UK nationals aged over 45 by country of residence 12 months ago and highest level of qualifications, 2008

The assertion that UK immigrants have greater financial resources than those who have remained in the UK is also supported by LFS data on housing tenure. Figure 4.5 suggests that UK immigrants who previously lived overseas are more likely to be owner-occupiers than those who have resided in the UK.

Figure 4.5 UK nationals aged over 45 by country of residence 12 months ago and housing tenure, 2008
UK immigrants are also a diverse group in relation to their ethnic origin (Figure 4.5). While 96 per cent of the UK population aged over 45 is white British, Irish or European, 90 per cent of people who had previously lived abroad were white. This suggests that UK immigrants are a more ethnically diverse group than those who live in the UK. There may be a number of explanations for this. UK nationals from ethnic minority communities may show a greater propensity to move around the world than their white British peers. There may also be a return migration to the UK of retirement migrants from minority ethnic communities.

**Figure 4.6 UK nationals aged over 45 by country of residence 12 months ago and ethnicity, 2008**

![Bar chart showing percentage of UK nationals and those overseas by ethnicity](chart.png)

Source: Labour Force survey and IPPR calculations

**How UK immigrants support themselves when they return**

The LFS also allows us to analyse economic activity among UK immigrants (using those who lived abroad 12 months ago as a proxy for immigration). While LFS data highlight higher levels of qualifications (educational capital) and owner-occupancy among UK immigrants than within the overall UK population, the same data also suggest that the majority of older UK immigrants are not working after they return to the UK. Figure 4.7 gives an occupational breakdown of UK immigrants in relation to the overall UK population. Some 67 per cent of over-45s are listed as having no occupational category – a group who may be unemployed, retired or otherwise economically inactive. LFS data on UK nationals aged over 45 who lived overseas 12 months ago suggests that 46 per cent were in employment in 2008, 10 per cent were unemployed and 44 per cent were economically inactive, the latter including those who had retired.
Despite lower levels of economic activity, UK immigrants who lived abroad are less likely to claim benefits than those who have remained in the UK (Figure 4.8). LFS data also allow an analysis of the type of benefits claimed. In 2008, 33 per cent of UK immigrants aged over 45 years were in receipt of a state retirement pension, compared with 44 per cent of the resident population. The younger age profile of the UK immigrant population (Figure 4.3) means that fewer will be receiving a pension than the overall UK population. Additionally, entitlement to some benefits is dependent on a UK national being habitually resident in the UK. ‘Habitual residence’ is not defined in welfare benefit regulations but in case law, where pension claimants have to show that they have a settled intention to reside in the UK and must have been resident in the UK for an ‘appreciable period of time’. Although government is able to waive the Habitual Residence Test, at present many newly arrived UK immigrants are unable to claim welfare benefits when they first enter the UK.
Future immigration trends

UK immigration varies from year to year, as a consequence of changes in the UK and abroad. It is important that central government and NGOs consider how ‘British’ migration flows may change.

In the short term the return of retirement migrants to the UK may increase slightly, as a consequence of the falling value of sterling against key currencies such as the euro. However, economic reasons are rarely the main reason for return of retirement migrants, so we expect this increase to be small (see Section 5, p. 48).

British labour emigration from the UK will fall in the short term as a consequence of the global nature of the recession. It is likely that British labour migration to the USA and Canada will be made more difficult in the next few years, owing to a decreasing need for immigrant labour. UK retirement emigration will fall over the next three years, due to the devaluation of pensions and the fall in UK property prices, as well as a fall in the value of sterling against the euro. In the medium term both factors will lead to a fall in the numbers of UK nationals returning to the UK, as returnees are drawn from previous emigrants.

In the long term retirement migration is likely to increase, as the numbers of healthy older people increase in the UK.
Immigrants may come back from a more diverse range of countries. We are likely to see the emergence of new countries of retirement migration outside the Eurozone: for example, Bulgaria and Thailand. As transnational (diasporic) communities grow elsewhere, we may also see the increased onward migration of minority ethnic UK nationals, to join family living in other countries of migration. For example, a British Sri Lankan Tamil may leave the UK and migrate to Canada, which is now home to the largest Tamil community outside Sri Lanka. More British emigrants who had previously been immigrants in the UK may return to unstable countries such as Iraq, Kosovo, Lebanon and Nigeria.

Discussion

Our analysis of IPS and LFS has enabled a better mapping of the scale and nature of UK immigration. Most of our analysis draws from the LFS and relies on a proxy measure for UK immigrants – those who were resident outside the UK 12 months ago. Despite this improved profiling, our picture of UK immigrants is still rather limited. We have very limited information about their countries of prior residence or reasons for moving to the UK. We are unable to present a gender breakdown of UK immigrants and we do not know how much in savings they bring with them. This is because the International Passenger Survey (IPS), the main measure of migration flows to and from the UK, is based on a small sample of passengers. The small sample size prevents any analysis of national subgroups within immigration flows. Thus IPS data does not distinguish between British and non-British immigrants.

Despite these shortcomings, our analysis has enabled a better understanding of the scale and nature of UK immigration. In summary, nearly 18,000 UK nationals aged over 45 immigrated into the UK in 2007 and in recent years about 10 per cent of all UK immigrants have been of retirement age. Most UK immigrants return from European countries and this is a trend that may increase in the short term as the value of sterling falls against the euro.

Compared with the overall UK population of a similar age, older UK immigrants are:

- more diverse in relation to their ethnic origin;
- better qualified;
- more likely to own property;
- less likely to be in work in the UK; and
- less likely to claim welfare benefits, including the state retirement pension.
Our analysis paints a mixed picture in relation to social exclusion and vulnerability. UK immigrants may possess greater educational and housing capital, but they may not have access to the basic welfare safety-net.

It is also vital to note that our analysis highlights the average characteristics of UK immigrants. Just because a particular community has certain average features does not mean that all members of that community share those features. There will be some UK immigrants who are substantially different from the average. This group may include people who are very vulnerable because they have few qualifications, no work and no benefit entitlement. It is essential that both government and NGOs respond to these most vulnerable people.
5 Moving to the UK

Our research suggests that the reasons that cause older UK nationals to migrate to the UK are diverse. They include the end of a work contract or retirement after work overseas, family circumstances, deteriorating health, economic circumstances and occasionally political unrest. This section examines why older migrants return and how they experience integration in the UK.

Immigration after overseas employment

Our research and data from the IPS suggests that the most frequent reason for UK immigration into the UK was the end of an overseas job contract or retirement after overseas employment. Almost all of those who return because of their employment has ended are under 60 (women) or 65 (men), and usually, but not always, in good health. Their numbers include many former armed forces personnel, a group of people who have moved around during their working lives and may have little by way of a supportive social network left in the UK.

Immigration because of family circumstances

A change in family circumstances is another very significant reason for immigration to the UK of older UK nationals. If a spouse or partner dies, life overseas may be too challenging without them. Older UK nationals may also immigrate to the UK to be near grandchildren or other family members.

‘Usually the man dies. The widow is left. She probably speaks less of the native language than her husband did, so she’s struggling again because she now can’t communicate. Maybe she doesn’t drive. Maybe she’s not confident enough to drive and get around. And a lot of people seem to have bought houses which are miles from anywhere.’

NGO worker, Spain

‘I came back when my youngest daughter had her first baby. I came to help her, then I stayed on when she went back to work. I thought I would stay for six months, then two years later I am still here.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Jamaica
Immigration due to deteriorating health

Our research, as well as a number of other studies, shows that the onset of health problems, compounded by an inability to meet healthcare needs in the locality, is often a significant reason for older UK emigrants leaving their adopted country of residence (Betty and Cahill 1996; Wames et al 1999).

‘I was fine for six or seven years, then I started to walk badly. I went to have another X-ray and they said my back was crumbling. I had another operation, but Mr Newby [her surgeon] had left then and the nursing had started to go wrong. People were leaving like mad because of Mugabe. … I thought we would see it through. … When I came out of the operation I was in intensive care and screaming and my children said, “We must get you back” (to England).’

Immigrant formerly resident in Zimbabwe

UK emigrants may be unable to meet their healthcare needs locally because:

- they have no access to state services;
- local health and social care provision is rudimentary;
- they failed to take out health insurance;
- they are unable to afford private health insurance or private health and social care;
- they need residential care, but little or none is available locally; or
- they lack fluency in the local language and are unable to communicate with health workers. Lack of fluency in the local language can delay a person seeking medical help or other assistance. A diagnosis may be delayed or a person may reach crisis point before they seek assistance.

While some migration for health reasons is unavoidable, much could be prevented by greater uptake of health insurance as well as increased fluency in the local language.

Most older UK immigrants who travel because of deteriorating health arrange their own journeys, but some are given assistance by consular services, NGOs such as Age Concern and Heathrow Travel Care, as well as social service departments that are local to ports of entry. Heathrow Travel Care sees approximately 1,000 new clients every year, of whom about half have very severe health or social care needs.
Economic reasons for immigration

Many interviewees also cited changed economic circumstances as a push factor causing the migration of older UK nationals to the UK. The most commonly given reason for leaving an adopted country of residence was the devaluation of sterling against the euro. As most retirement migrants receive their occupational and state pensions in sterling, they have recently faced a major fall in their income. Low interest rates mean that savings income has also decreased, while the recession means that many people will be unable to raise capital by remortgaging property.

‘It’s really bad at the moment: the cries for help almost. They can’t sell their properties. They’re getting at least a third less on their pensions. Everything has gone up in euros, the same as it has here. They’re really struggling.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Spain

While many interviewees narrated accounts of clients, friends and acquaintances who had been forced to migrate to the UK by straitened economic circumstances, not one of the immigrants we interviewed cited economic reasons as being the major factor in their return. It is worth noting that research on return migration intentions suggests that migrants when interviewed tend to reduce the number of factors influencing their return – not deliberately, but as a way of making sense of their decision to themselves and others (Gmelch 1980). Return migrants may also feel shamed by their lack of economic success while abroad. Indeed, our analysis of interview data suggests that while UK retirement, changed family circumstances and deteriorating health were the major factors causing return, changed economic circumstances were sometimes an additional factor that could tip the balance and cause an older UK national to leave their adopted country of residence.

Immigration due to unrest and persecution

Small numbers of older UK nationals return from countries experiencing unrest or armed conflict. Those who are returning include UK nationals who may have been born in that country before an earlier migration to the UK, as well as UK nationals who emigrated from the UK. Most return by themselves when the situation in their home country deteriorates. We interviewed UK nationals who had left Iraq and Zimbabwe after the situations in these countries became intolerable.
‘I left in 2004. I had retired and I longed to go home … My children and friends tried to stop me. They said, “Don’t go.” But I went. I thought I could make a visit to see if was safe to go home. I left my wife here in the house and the children stayed as well … I remained for nearly a year. At first it was fine, but then it got bad – car bombs, IEDs [improvised explosive devices], the militias, kidnappings … everything. You could not go out. When the militias took my neighbour’s son, that was that. I left for Jordan, then I came back here.’

UK national of Iraqi Kurdish origin formerly resident in Iraq

‘We were burgled and we were having to find milk, bread. Everything was becoming a major worry. Thousands became millions, millions became billions, and just as we left became trillions … [i.e. inflation]. My nephew, whenever he went off the farm he always had a suitcase with him: firstly, he never knew if he’d get off the farm and secondly he never knew if he’d get back. All these things add up to what the hell are we doing here? We kept putting it off. We had no intention of coming back, we loved Africa in the old days. We only started thinking about it two years ago, making enquiries just in case.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Zimbabwe

Additionally, the UK government sometimes evacuates its citizens from dangerous situations. One of the largest evacuations was of 25,000 UK nationals from the Lebanon in 2006, whose numbers included older people with health and social care needs.

At the time of writing, the UK government had recently announced an evacuation programme for UK nationals from Zimbabwe. The Government anticipates that about 750 people will arrive in the UK. Applicants to this programme have to be over 70 years old and be vulnerable because of their health or social care needs. They will be evacuated to the UK in groups and the Government will pay for their flight to the UK. On their return they will be housed in emergency accommodation near Gatwick airport while their needs are assessed. Afterwards, they will be moved into more permanent housing in the areas in which they wish to live. Here they will be assisted by local authorities and a range of NGOs, led by the British Red Cross. Recognising pressure on adult social care budgets, central government has agreed to reimburse local authorities for the additional costs incurred to them by the Zimbabwean evacuees. As with the Lebanon evacuation, the Government has also waived the requirement for evacuees to satisfy the Habitual Residence Test before accessing a pension and other benefits.

In future we are likely to see greater retirement migration by UK nationals from migrant and minority ethnic communities. They will retire to a diverse range of countries, among them some that are unstable. This diverse retirement migration may mean that greater numbers of older UK nationals will return to the UK as a result of unrest. Hence, government evacuation plans for UK nationals need to be kept up to date. Another requirement is that UK consuls have accurate data on UK nationals who are resident overseas.
Other reasons for immigration to the UK

While retirement, changed family circumstances and deteriorating health emerged as the main reasons causing UK immigration into the UK, the research highlighted the deportation of some older UK nationals to the UK as well as the return of prisoners who have served custodial sentences overseas. Although there has been little coverage of this issue, UK nationals comprise a significant proportion of irregular migrants in some countries. In Australia, UK nationals are numerically the second-largest national group to be apprehended and deported (Sriskandarajah and Drew 2006). A significant proportion of those deported from Asian and North American countries are older men in their 50s and early 60s who have moved many times in their adult lives. Their age and lack of sustained work experience mean that they find it difficult to secure employment in the UK and many may migrate again.

Unplanned return to the UK

A minority of UK nationals were forced to leave their adopted countries of residence very quickly, perhaps because of sudden illness or political unrest. But most UK immigrants took the decision to return over a period of weeks, months or longer. Most immigrants had time to plan their immigration, but not all took this opportunity. As with emigration from the UK, lack of prior planning made integration into the UK much more difficult. Just as emigration was often unplanned, many immigrants also failed to plan their immigration; in particular, they failed to plan for their housing needs.

Those immigrants who failed to check their benefit entitlements were often singled out for criticism by NGOs as well as local authority adult social care services.

‘We sometimes get emails from people who say, “I’ve come back from the UK and, gosh, I’ve got to do a habitual residency test.” Maybe they should have thought about that. Obviously we would help people but you do think they should have researched these kind of things.’

NGO worker

This criticism may in some places be justified. However, the inconsistent interpretation of the Habitual Residence Test and differences in extent of social care provision across the UK may mean that migrants’ expectations of support may diverge from what they eventually receive.
As already noted, the FCO has tried to encourage planning for return to the UK through roadshows targeting British communities in Spain. We have suggested that these be extended to other countries with large UK populations, such as Portugal, Cyprus and Bulgaria. We have also suggested that NGOs such as Age Concern and Help the Aged recruit community volunteers who could disseminate information that encourages the prior planning of migration.

Integration in the UK

We examined UK nationals’ experiences of immigration through the framework of integration. We were therefore interested in their well-being, their social interactions and participation in civil society institutions, and in political life. We were also interested in any emerging inequalities between them and non-migrants of a similar age band within the UK. We also consider the possession of civil, political and social rights an aspect of integration and we were interested to see how the Habitual Residence Test impacted on the lives of older UK immigrants.

Secure housing emerged as the most important factor promoting early integration in the UK.

‘I think if you come back and you’ve got to find somewhere to live, you’ve got to set everything up, with the utilities, the bank, because for all of it you need proof of address, how long you’ve lived there, so on and so forth, it must be a bit of a nightmare.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Bulgaria

The previous section highlighted the higher levels of home ownership among UK immigrants compared with the overall UK population of the same age cohort: 87 per cent compared to 58 per cent (see Figure 4.5, p. 42). Those who had kept property in the UK, or purchased a house prior to their eventual immigration, encountered far fewer difficulties rebuilding their lives in the UK. They had somewhere to stay on arrival in the UK. Additionally, their immigration appeared to be a planned process.

Many immigrants we interviewed did not have housing when they migrated to the UK. They may have sold it to move abroad, or never have owned property in the UK. Among those we interviewed were a number of former armed services personnel who had lived in tied accommodation throughout their working lives. They were a significant group who found themselves homeless when immigrating to the UK. Those who were homeless usually turned to relatives to accommodate them in the first place, although this arrangement sometimes brought its own problems. Later, they moved into rented accommodation or turned to the local authority for social housing.
Some of those who returned needed supported housing or residential care. In every case, access to this type of housing was delayed because the applicant first had to show that they were usually resident in the UK and had a local connection.

‘Residential care homes, people needing care. And they’ll just turn up in the UK and just think they’re going to be able to find somewhere straight away. Or they’ll come back and end up staying with a family in an overcrowded property. I think housing is really the biggest issue.’

Employee of NGO working with UK emigrants

Lack of appropriate housing was also highlighted in every interview with key informants in local authorities and NGOs. Every interviewee stated that homelessness was the biggest challenge faced by older UK immigrants. Most NGOs working with older UK migrants were only able to offer housing advice, because are they not registered social landlords.

‘If somebody comes back to the UK we can’t house them and that’s usually their primary need, a home … That is the first barrier. Charities can’t get involved in that because of the costs. We can’t carry a housing stock. Once you’re over that, charities can step in because you need a bank account, you need a permanent address. Once that happens, charities like us can step in and provide assistance.’

Employee of NGO working with UK emigrants

Access to benefits

Many of those we interviewed did not have large savings on their arrival in the UK. They were dependent on the state for benefits, and some needed other types of support, such as residential care. As already noted, access to these benefits was delayed by the Habitual Residence Test. This caused severe hardship in some cases. Key informants working for NGOs supported this finding, and told of cases of destitution.

As noted above, the Habitual Residence Test is not defined in Department for Work and Pensions regulations. While it is defined in case law, its interpretation seems arbitrary. Among those we interviewed there were large variations on how this test was interpreted: for example, immigrants had to wait very different lengths of time in the UK before they were judged to be ‘habitually resident’. Key informants within NGOs also told of the arbitrary nature of the test.

‘It is deliberately vague and varies, from region to region, from one job centre to another, even within the same office. Depending on the person who interviews you, it will determine whether you have access.’

NGO worker, UK
Almost all interviewees talked about difficulties in finding information about their entitlements to benefits. This is despite the large amount of web-based information available about this subject. The finding suggests that many of those who need this basic information are either unable to locate it, or cannot absorb key messages.

Finding work

Older UK immigrants include a substantial number of people who are below state retirement age. We interviewed some of the ‘younger old’, all of whom had found it difficult to find work in the UK. Their unemployment also inhibited their social integration, as many social relationships are formed in the workplace.

‘In our favour, we didn’t despair, we said to each other, “Well, that’s it, it’s happened. We go past this now, we carry on, we make the best of our lives.” And we had the good fortune to meet a man who I used to work for who fostered children, and he said we should look at that, and we took it a bit further than that and started fostering and we’ve been doing it ever since.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Belgium

Prejudice about older workers and overseas prior employment acted against UK immigrants’ job-seeking. This group of people was adversely affected by prejudices that are widespread within UK society and affect far larger numbers. Yet most UK immigrants have a lot to offer in relation to their skills and entrepreneurship – traits that had supported them as emigrants.

Social integration

Many immigrants talked of the cultural shock that they faced in their migration to the UK. They felt that the UK had changed in their absence and that they had been changed by migration.

‘The biggest challenge was getting back into British society. People were talking about things I didn’t know anything about. I mean I did know about Jade Goody, because you can’t escape it. But celebrity culture is something I have no interest in. Domestic news is very parochial, so you have to listen to the World Service if you really want to know what is going on. It’s easy to get sucked into the narrow-minded view of life here.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Bulgaria
We felt that this cultural shock was one aspect of the liminal position occupied by UK migrants. They did not feel fully British while overseas and their migration also meant that they did not feel they belonged in the UK.

All the immigrants we interviewed talked of the challenges they faced forming new friendships on arrival in the UK. Some immigrants talked of loneliness and isolation after their return to the UK.

‘When you are a bit older it is hard to make new friends. We have made friends, through fostering, but the social services don’t want you to mix.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Belgium

‘The people I knew in Surrey have all left, so we don’t in fact know many people – that’s the trouble.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Belgium

‘I thought it would be difficult, and it has been. Some things work out, others don’t. You have to go out there and grab what there is, but that can be quite daunting. It’s quite difficult to build up a social network.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Spain

The social isolation experienced by many UK immigrants and the absence of support networks were also issues highlighted in interviews with NGOs. This isolation impacted on well-being. It also meant that when a person became older, he or she had fewer friends to offer help. However, we felt that service providers in the statutory sector were usually not aware of this additional vulnerability.

The importance of volunteering

A number of immigrants had decided to tackle their lack of local friendships and unemployment by volunteering. We were struck by the role that volunteering played in assisting the integration of these UK immigrants. It helped them to pass the time in a socially useful manner as well as form new friendships, all of which are aspects of well-being.

‘I wanted to do something. Having arrived, I couldn’t just sit around. It seemed worthwhile just to have a job, to have a title in a way. So I’m a volunteer at the hospice, doing a very menial job – my granddaughter could do it. It’s a job and I think it’s a contribution and it’s a way of getting to know people. They’re a very friendly crowd and what I do is essential. It’s very easy. I just banged on the door so to speak, because I knew of it. I asked the Legion, “What sort of things can we do around here?”’

Immigrant formerly resident in Zimbabwe
In two cases, volunteering led to paid work, as an interpreter and as a home visitor for the housebound elderly.

‘I went back to working with the community organisation and it was good to see old friends. I had been on the management committee before I left. Now I had more time on my hands I spent more time there and one thing led to another and I was interpreting.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Iraq

‘I needed housing, housing that was quiet while I was studying. Staying with my children disturbed them and it disturbed me. I asked the church if they knew of any housing and they said that there is a flat for someone who can work with the older people. So I did this while I was studying, was a volunteer, then I did some training and got paid.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Zimbabwe

Government policy has recently given greater importance to volunteering and in 2007 Baroness Neuberger was appointed as a ministerial volunteering champion. The Home Office considers volunteering opportunities as an integral part of refugee integration programmes; refugee integration case workers employed by NGOs are meant to direct refugees towards volunteering activities. In future, applicants for UK nationality may have their eventual grant of citizenship speeded up by engaging in volunteering. However, there have been few programmes to encourage volunteering among migrants or build capacity within organisations that may use volunteers.

The Home Office has in the past supported volunteering among older people, through the Home Office Older Volunteering Initiative (2000–2) and the Experience Corps (2001–4). At present the Government is prioritising youth volunteering and increasing volunteer participation among members of minority ethnic communities, but not older people, despite the benefits of this activity (Price 2007).

Immigration: not the end of the journey

Our research, as well as a number of other studies, suggests that for some among the 'younger old' immigration to the UK was only a temporary condition, prior to another move.

‘I’d go back if things changed, I’d go back tomorrow. Although London is my home, Iraq is my real home.’

Immigrant formerly resident in Iraq
‘Yes, we have considered moving, life is so cloying here, people are small-minded. We have thought of leaving, but it would be running away, wouldn’t it?’

Immigrant formerly resident in Bulgaria

King et al’s study (2000) highlights mobility among retirement migrants who may move within their adopted countries of residence or move between different countries. The desire to move again may reflect a lack of integration in the UK. It is also a reminder that we are an increasingly super-mobile population.
6 Responding to migrants’ needs

A key research aim of Home Sweet Home? was to examine how central government, local public services and NGOs are responding to the needs of older UK nationals who live overseas, as well as those who migrate to the UK. We interviewed staff from central government, local government and welfare NGOs. Many of the issues raised by them have already been discussed in this report, but here we focus on analysing responses to immigration flows back to the UK.

Overseas

The UK government provides consular services to UK nationals at 200 different posts – embassies, high commissions, consulates and deputy high commissions – throughout the world. Most consular work with UK nationals focuses on assisting them in emergencies. There are large numbers of welfare NGOs working with the UK nationals, or sectors within British communities. These welfare bodies include overseas Age Concern and Help the Aged organisations, the British Legion and local organisations. The greatest emphasis of their work with older people is supporting those experiencing severe difficulties, such as poor health. Some NGOs also organise social events for older UK migrants.

As already noted, the FCO, together with Age Concern, has tried to improve planning for migration, and return to the UK, through the provision of web-based information, as well as roadshows in Spain targeted at the British diaspora.

Our research highlighted the limited local integration of some older UK migrants overseas as well as poor migration planning. The research also highlighted poor planning for life overseas. The Spanish government, supported by British consulates and NGOs, has attempted to improve the integration of UK nationals in Spain. Through roadshows and web-based information they have tried increase the numbers of UK nationals who register with the town hall, as well as encouraging UK nationals to learn Spanish. While many migrants have responded positively to these initiatives, substantial numbers have not.

Outside Spain there have been fewer attempts to encourage the integration of UK nationals. We feel that the FCO, together with host governments, might want to consider a strategy to promote better local integration of UK nationals living in Portugal, France, Bulgaria and Cyprus. We also felt that NGOs such as Age Concern España and the British Legion need to consider the extent to which their work supports local integration.
In the UK

We interviewed staff from central government departments and local authority adult social care services. While civil servants in central government were aware of UK immigration and were apprised of numbers and issues, this awareness did not usually extend to those working in local authorities. Local authority staff did not see UK immigrants as a group that might have some specific needs, such as limited support networks and a lack of knowledge about entitlements in the UK. Concerns about UK immigration were subsumed into wider discussions about older people and mobility within the UK and the challenges for service delivery. Those returning from overseas were not necessarily viewed as any more dislocated or isolated than older people in the UK who were far from their family, or without a support network. UK immigrants place similar strains on local authority budgets to older internal migrants who move within the UK as they become increasingly frail.

Our research with migrants also highlighted the delays to accessing support, and the hardship imposed, by the need for most UK immigrants to take the Habitual Residence Test. Although the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has the powers to waive this test, and did so for the Lebanon and present Zimbabwe evacuation, the DWP has indicated that a large-scale waiver for older UK nationals is unlikely. The Government sees UK nationals themselves as responsible for planning and financing their initial support in the UK. Lobbying by NGOs working for older people is unlikely to change government policy. Instead, these organisations should focus on getting the Habitual Residence Test defined in DWP regulations to prevent inconsistencies in its interpretation. NGOs could also lobby for a more generous system of waivers for those who are forced to migrate to the UK as a result of political unrest, disasters or sudden illness. These waivers should also be clearly outlined in regulations.

Local authorities assess those who need social housing, residential care or other forms of support to determine which local authority is responsible for their support. As noted, some UK immigrants may find it hard to establish a local connection. Local authorities may dispute who is responsible for providing housing or social care, causing hardship.

We were also concerned that adult social care services sometimes saw older UK immigrants as a burden, as tax evaders or as reckless persons who had not planned for their return to the UK. Some of these views are a consequence of tight budgetary constraints in adult social care and may increase with likely cuts in local authority budgets. These views suggest a need for continued public information campaigns that portray older people as an asset and also explicate the state’s duty of care to its citizens. Such campaigns need to be directed not only at the public, but also at practitioners themselves.
7 Conclusions and recommendations

This research project set out to understand why older UK nationals return to the UK, as well as to map the scale and nature of this migratory movement. Our analysis suggests that the end of a work contract or retirement after work overseas, changed family circumstances and deteriorating health are the main factors leading to migration back to the UK. Additionally, changed economic circumstances and occasionally political unrest may also cause people to leave and migrate to the UK.

That deteriorating health is a major cause of migration means that many older migrants who return to the UK have significant health and social care needs. However, UK immigrants are not a universally frail and vulnerable group. Compared with the overall UK population of a similar age, older UK immigrants are:

- more diverse in relation to their ethnic origin;
- better qualified;
- more likely to own property;
- less likely to be in work in the UK; and
- less likely to claim welfare benefits, including the state retirement pension, sometimes because the application of the Habitual Residence Test denies them access to this support.

We also set out to examine how UK immigrants experience integration after their arrival in the UK. Secure housing emerged as the most important factor promoting early integration in the UK. However, many immigrants did not have appropriate housing in the UK and some people needed supported housing or residential care on arrival. In every case access to this type of housing was delayed because the applicant had to show that they were usually resident in the UK and had a local connection. For those without work or savings, access to benefits was also delayed by the Habitual Residence Test. These delays sometimes led to severe hardship.

Many new arrivals felt socially isolated in the UK. Old friendships and support networks had been lost. For some, however, volunteering offered a means to make new friends and assist in their integration in the UK.

Overall, our research showed both resourcefulness and vulnerability. UK immigrants may possess greater educational and housing capital, but they may not have access to the basic welfare safety-net. Many older UK migrants were well-qualified and entrepreneurial people, who had much to offer. On the other hand, some older UK migrants were vulnerable because of age, ill health, badly planned moves or inability to access welfare benefits.

Our research led us to consider a number of policy recommendations that aim to improve the lives of older UK migrants, as well as to harness their skills.
Collecting better migration and population data

Data on older migrants in the UK, as well as immigration and emigration trends, are limited. One consequence of poor data collection is that central government, local service providers and NGOs are unaware of some migratory movements, including the immigration of older UK nationals.

We recommend that:

- the sample size of the International Passenger Survey should be increased to enable better analysis of migration flows to and from the UK;
- the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should require all those in receipt of a state retirement pension to register their country of residence;
- the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) should conduct an annual population audit of UK nationals who live overseas, using a range of data, not just consular registration records; this audit should be made available to NGOs such as Age Concern and Help the Aged, the Red Cross and the British Legion, as well as the UK government;
- in order to collect better data on overseas residents, the FCO should examine the experiences of states with compulsory registration schemes for overseas nationals, as well as the future use of embarkation control data to assemble better migration data.

Updating strategic planning

UK nationals who live overseas are becoming a more diverse population in relation to their ethnicity and their adopted countries of residence. For example, we are seeing the emergence of new countries of retirement migration in southern Europe, Caribbean, South Asia and West Africa. These changes may result in different patterns of demand for consular services or the support services offered by NGOs. It is also essential that FCO-led contingency plans for the evacuation of UK nationals reflects changing migration patterns.

We recommend that:

- FCO strategic plans, including evacuation plans, need to reflect changed settlement patterns of UK nationals and hidden populations with whom consulates may have limited contact;
- using better migration data, NGOs working overseas should review the populations with whom they have regular contact; this review should highlight unmet needs among UK nationals who live abroad.
Supporting local integration overseas

Retirement migrants, particularly those who spend part of the year in the UK, appear to be the least integrated in relation to their language skills, participation in local civil society organisations, engagement with local taxation regimes and social interactions. Better local integration overseas may help to prevent some return migration to the UK.

We recommend that:

- the FCO, NGOs and host governments should develop national strategies to encourage the local integration of UK nationals who live overseas; countries where UK nationals are not well integrated should be a priority for the development of these strategies;
- EU governments should review all residents’ obligations towards learning the local language, with a view to promoting all migrants’ fluency in the language of their countries of residence;
- NGOs should encourage all UK emigrants to learn the local language: this might be achieved through public information campaigns to promote the benefits of bilingualism, as well as the organisation of community-based language classes; NGOs should consider recruiting volunteers who could work with co-nationals to encourage local integration.

Pensions equality

The entitlement of UK nationals to the full state retirement pension varies from country to country. In particular, yearly pension uprates are not received if that person lives outside the EEA or a country that has a reciprocal pension agreement with the UK.

We recommend that:

- the UK basic state pension should be fully uprated in all countries.

Supporting planned migration and return to the UK

Our research showed that significant numbers of UK nationals do not plan their migration, or any immigration back to the UK. They may fail to check their entitlement to health and social care in their adopted country of residence or in the UK. Ample web-based information about planning migration is failing to change the planning behaviour of a significant number of UK migrants.
We recommend that:

- the FCO, in partnership with NGOs, should research how UK migrants access, understand and use web-based advice material about migration and their social welfare entitlements in the UK;
- the FCO should consider extending its roadshows, perhaps to include Portugal, France, Cyprus and Bulgaria;
- the FCO and those working with older UK nationals might want to consider other ways of reaching migrants, through property exhibitions, property shows on television or through community leaders within British communities themselves;
- NGOs should consider recruiting British volunteers – integration champions – who could communicate planning behaviour within their own communities.

Social care planning

The social care needs of older UK immigrants are similar to those of the broader population, although older UK immigrants may be more isolated and be less likely to have support networks to turn to than other sectors of the population. Social care planning needs to acknowledge the greater isolation of some UK immigrants.

We recommend that:

- the Department of Health, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and other professional bodies should raise awareness about the specific needs of older migrants.

The Habitual Residence Test

The Habitual Residence Test delays access to benefits among some UK nationals who return to the UK, causing personal hardship.

We recommend that:

- the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should define habitual residence in social security regulations to ensure a consistent interpretation of this term;
- the DWP should consider waiving the Habitual Residence Test for UK nationals who have been forced by unrest, natural disaster or other unforeseen circumstances to move to the UK. The criteria for such a waiver should be defined in social security regulations.
Encouraging volunteering

For some older UK nationals who returned to the UK, volunteering promoted their well-being and assisted their integration by helping them form friendships.

We recommend that:

- national volunteering strategies should prioritise older people;
- NGOs working with UK nationals who are considering moving to the UK should promote the benefits of volunteering to those considering return.

Seeing older people as an asset

The experiences and skills of UK nationals who have lived abroad were seldom acknowledged. We were also concerned that some providers of social care services saw older UK immigrants as a burden, or as undeserving because of poor planning for their return. These negative perceptions were also reflected in media portrayals of older UK nationals who live abroad.

We recommend that:

- the communications campaigns of NGOs that advocate for older people should continue to stress the rich life experiences of older people and portray them as an asset; such campaigns also need to explicate the state’s duty of care to its citizens and be targeted at the general public as well as practitioners;
- public events that aim to celebrate migration, such as International Migration Day, should incorporate the experiences of older UK migrants.
Appendix

UK-born adult\(^1\) population by age in selected OECD countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>50–54</th>
<th>55–59</th>
<th>60–64</th>
<th>65–69</th>
<th>70+</th>
<th>%50+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>120,211</td>
<td>104,933</td>
<td>87,873</td>
<td>70,113</td>
<td>176,869</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>682</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>2,518</td>
<td>2,312</td>
<td>1,032</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>3,888</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>70,400</td>
<td>78,785</td>
<td>54,855</td>
<td>50,080</td>
<td>147,740</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1,171</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>8,722</td>
<td>6,682</td>
<td>5,124</td>
<td>3,739</td>
<td>7,131</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1,105</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>13,740</td>
<td>11,631</td>
<td>8,601</td>
<td>5,841</td>
<td>12,228</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>3,337</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>2,259</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1,326</td>
<td>1,758</td>
<td>1,008</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>1,034</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>22,272</td>
<td>20,709</td>
<td>19,011</td>
<td>16,746</td>
<td>45,285</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>834</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>8,640</td>
<td>10,380</td>
<td>9,860</td>
<td>7,880</td>
<td>14,040</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1,385</td>
<td>1,165</td>
<td>745</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2,632</td>
<td>2,104</td>
<td>1,364</td>
<td>805</td>
<td>1,609</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1,373</td>
<td>1,146</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>68,520</td>
<td>60,395</td>
<td>54,654</td>
<td>44,110</td>
<td>125,175</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>3,696,653</td>
<td>3,069,195</td>
<td>2,614,026</td>
<td>2,373,403</td>
<td>6,267,339</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD migration dataset

\(^1\) The adult population is defined as those over 16 years of age.
Bibliography


About the authors

Holly Andrew is an administrator and researcher at ippr. She works across the Migration, Equalities and Citizenship Team and the Democracy and Power Team. Holly has previous experience at the e-government unit in the Cabinet Office, the Office of Rail Regulation and the Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University. Holly recently completed a secondment at the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners in the Independent Offices, Cabinet Office.

Jill Rutter is Head of Policy and Communications at Refugee and Migrant Justice (RMJ) and an Associate Fellow of ippr. Before joining RMJ in 2009, she was a Senior Research Fellow in Migration and Equalities at ippr, where she led the institute’s research on migrant integration. She has published extensively on all aspects of migration in the UK and abroad with well over 70 books, chapters, and papers on the issue. Prior to joining ippr, Jill lectured at London Metropolitan University and was a policy adviser at the Refugee Council.

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Lastly, interviewees who gave their time to us deserve particular thanks. They remain anonymous, but we are deeply grateful to them. We hope that this research will contribute to a better understanding of older migrants’ experience and play a part in advocating for better policies to support this group.