

This section examines the creative energies that migrants inject in the economic structures in both private sphere (in terms of entrepreneurship and social enterprise) and public spheres (in terms of contribution to organisational and occupational life).

## **CHAPTER 8 - THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF WORK LIFE PPRESSURES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter considers the main features of the employment situation of migrant workers to which existing research points. It begins by considering the type of employment in which they are typically located and the implications this has for their work and non-work lives. It then considers the dangers of generalizing about the employment position of migrant workers and examines some of the reasons for diversity. Consideration is given to the impact on migrant workers' perception of their situation of the comparisons they make between their migrant situation and that which they experienced in their country of origin. Finally, the

chapter exemplifies the issues raised by reporting a study of the work and life relationship of migrant workers in London.

### **EMPLOYMENT VULNERABILITY**

There is a consensus in the literature on the employment of migrant workers that they tend to be disproportionately employed in 'bad jobs' (McGovern, 2004). They are particularly likely to be employed in unskilled and low skilled work.

In the United Kingdom, a TUC (Trade Union Congress) study (2007) of Polish and Lithuanian migrant workers found a high incidence of low pay and long working hours in sectors such as hospitality, manufacturing, transport and caring. In the hospitality industry migrants are meant to provide a constant supply of unskilled employees (Janta et al., 2011). The TUC evidence to the Migrant Advisory Committee's review of migrant employment (2013) indicated that the majority of the A8 **(1)** workers who arrived after labour market restrictions were lifted in 2004 were employed in poorly paid low skilled parts of the economy. Datta et al. (2007), in a study of migrant workers in 5 low paid sectors of employment in London (UK), found that migrant workers had to maximize their income by accepting jobs for which they were significantly over-qualified, undertaking regular overtime, and taking on a second job.

There is some consensus in Western European literature about the types of jobs and sectors where migrant workers are likely to be employed. An OECD report (2001) points to their concentration in blue collar and low status jobs in construction, hospitality, health and personal services. Bryson and White, using data from the WERS **(2)** survey, found that 30% of UK work forces employed migrant workers and that their main sectors of employment, in declining order of importance, were hospitality, health, manufacturing, distribution and business services. Research on migrant workers in Finland emphasized their concentration in the hospitality and cleaning sectors.

Not only do migrant workers suffer disproportionately from 'bad jobs' but they are also more likely to experience unemployment. In Ireland, workers from the A8 countries suffered more from unemployment than native workers. Their unemployment rate in 2009 was 19% compared with an overall national rate of 12%. In the USA, De Lara<sup>1</sup>, Reese and Struna (2016:

312) found that “70 percent of immigrant workers remain unemployed for several months” in California, even for blue collar warehouse jobs. A higher unemployment rate among Chinese migrant workers than among native workers was part of the employment context of Chinese migrant workers (Baines 2007). For many migrants from the global south the situation has become worse because of increased competition from migrants from the new member states of the European Union (Datta et al., 2007).

The growing number of migrant workers taking up employment in western countries has raised the issue of whether the influx of migrant workers has a negative impact on the employment situation of native workers. However, research has found little evidence that migrant workers have negative consequences for native worker employment and pay (OECD, 2001). The adverse wage effects, for example, of migrant workers are not discernible (Bryson and White, 2019). In relation to employment an examination of migrant jobs in Ireland found no evidence that migrants substituted for native workers (Turner, 2010).

The reasons for the disproportionate employment of migrant workers in ‘bad jobs’ are varied and complex. In some cases, the regulatory status of being a migrant worker can have an important impact upon their power in employment (Kononen, 2019). Thus, a migrant who is not eligible for welfare state support is in a more vulnerable position in employment which may influence a decision to accept low paid work. The attitudes of employers often contribute to migrant workers being employed in ‘bad jobs’. Employers take advantage of the precarious situation of many migrant workers and the greater power it gives them in the employment relationship to limit their employment rights (Kononen,2019). A result of A8 migrants’ presence in the labour market has been to ‘oil the wheels’ of Britain’s flexible economy encouraging the growth of atypical contracts (McCollum and Findlay, 2015). The ready supply of A8 workers has given employers few incentives to move away from flexible employment practices.

Employers often are unwilling to recognize the qualifications of migrant workers as qualifying them for appropriate employment. Kyoung Hee’s (2019) study of migrant accountants in Australia showed that despite their qualifications the migrants had to go through a succession of low paid and low skills employment before eventually obtaining professional employment.

Although much of the accountants' experience was based on discrimination the employer often gave reasons related to the requirements for the job in terms of cultural fit, local accents and lack of experience. This experience of overqualification, or underemployment seems to be a problem faced by most migrant workers to some degree and at some time. Educational qualifications do not give the same advantages to migrant workers as to native workers. They tend to suffer an occupational downgrading – a type of brain-drain (Turner, 2010).

Apart from employer discrimination a number of other factors can contribute to the underemployment of migrant workers. These include language problems, a lack of experience in competition with native workers, and a lack of information. A lack of knowledge of the employment system and of any support network can result in them being locked into an underemployment situation and low paid sectors.

All of these factors can contribute to a feeling of vulnerability among migrant workers, which can result in an eagerness to show extra effort and send a signal of higher productivity through a stronger work ethic, making them an attractive employer option to employers. Thus the disadvantages of A8 workers (poor English, poor labour market information, low portability of qualifications) encourage them to be absent from work less than native workers. Dawson et al. (2018) found that initially migrant workers displayed a level of absenteeism three times lower than native workers although after 2-4 years the difference tends to decline.

Their disproportionate experience of 'bad jobs' inevitably puts migrant workers at risk of experiencing problems of work life balance.<sup>3</sup> Low pay and the associated inequality have been increasingly linked to longer working hours. Bosch (1999) in a detailed analysis of working hours, found that in those countries (UK, USA, and New Zealand) where income inequality has increased and average and lower incomes have stagnated or fallen, working time has increased with workers trying to compensate for their decline in earnings. In a US context, Voss and Fligstein (2001) suggest that an important reason for longer working hours is the level of inequality in North American society, where from the 70s through to the 90s, wages at the bottom end of the income spectrum stagnated and people had to work harder just to maintain living standards. Increasing inequality does not only manifest itself in long

working hours for full-time workers. A common strategy is for families to seek to maintain living standards by part-time women members opting to work longer hours. The work life experience of low paid workers is portrayed by a study of life in a low income South London neighborhood (Dean and Coulter, 2006). A majority of the economically active working-age parents were not content with the work life balance they achieved under the current working arrangements. The researchers emphasized the sense of powerlessness and lack of control over their work life balance expressed by respondents, which was not helped by that lower paid workers having less access to flexible working practices (Gray and Tudball, 2003; Heyman, 2005).

However, in addition to low pay and associated long hours, migrant workers may experience other pressures which make a difficult work life balance more likely. One of these is the need which many perceive to send remittances to their country of origin. Remittances have usually been discussed in terms of their role in helping developing countries. Little attention has been paid to the sacrifices migrants have to make in the process of generating these funds. Datta et al.'s study (2007) found that 71% of migrant workers regularly sent remittances, averaging about 20-30% of their income. The migrants working the longest hours were the most likely to remit. Of those who worked more than 48 hours per week 76% remitted, while of those working 18 hours or less only 61%. Thus, many migrant workers experience the pressure to work longer hours to meet the additional need to send money home. Coping strategies include multi-earning (18% in Datta et al.'s study had more than one job) and sharing accommodation.

Migrant workers may also face tension in the relation between work and non-work roles as a result of the demands of childcare. The negative impact of low paid work, long working hours and home obligations in relation to remittance upon family roles is exacerbated by the frequent absence of close kin networks. Such networks would otherwise help with childcare. In a country such as the United Kingdom, where a market-based approach to childcare pertains, there is often a lack of accessible and affordable care. Provision can then become very complicated for migrant workers. There is little evidence of migrant families using formal childcare facilities. This is often because of its cost but cultural factors may also be relevant -

the migrant worker may not trust non-parental care. Parental care therefore tends to be the normal response (Roder et al., 2018). Women work less after starting a family, either giving up work entirely or finding a way to work without using additional child care support ('the jugglers', Roder et al., 2018). Highly qualified professional migrants are an exception to this problem as they are more likely to be able to afford private childcare. An exception is highly qualified professional migrants who can afford private child care (Rubin et al. 2008). The 'jugglers' have to find low cost solutions to help with care. Most common is the strategy of delegating care and the use of 'other mothers' (Dyer et al., 2011) such as members of the extended family, sometimes not available locally, but in the country of origin where many adult migrant workers have left-behind children or spouses. Workplace care, use of older children or negligence may be other approaches (Wall and Jose, 2004). Regardless of the option chosen it will often put more pressure on the male migrant worker—to work more hours and leave women to cover both work and caring commitments resulting in work life challenges.

Finally, migrant workers can experience considerable stress as a result of role discontinuity (von Mende, 2008) which in turn can complicate the relationship between work and non-work life. This role discontinuity may be a result of not getting their previous educational credentials and work experience fully recognized by employers, as discussed above. Thus, they may have to take up job roles in the new country that are of a lower level and status than those they may have had at home (Green, 2007). The hospitality sector is a clear case of the general phenomenon that migrants are over-qualified relative to the skill level required in their work role (Barrett et al., 2006). As a result migrants, locked into low skill jobs far below their level of employment prior to migration, experience a loss of status and self-esteem (Bauder, 2003; Liversage, 2009). Some migrant workers confess to being ashamed of their jobs (Datta et al., 2007). However, over-qualification is not the only discontinuity experienced by migrant workers. Other cultural identities related to roles in their home country may be deeply embedded, but may not be respected in their new country. This makes it difficult for the migrant worker to view positively their new life and change to meet the requirements of new roles.

## DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCE

Different groups of migrant workers are exposed to different structural and cultural factors which impact upon their employment situation. Women migrants would seem to face particular work life difficulties. Women migrants tend to be concentrated in a limited number of occupations, especially in those where women have typically dominated and which are associated with female roles and sex stereotypes – domestic workers, ‘au pairs’, entertainers, sex workers, helpers in restaurants and hotels, cleaners, sales staff and manual workers in labour intensive manufacturing (ILO, 2003). The demand for women migrants is high because they often represent a form of replacement mobility for female nationals who are freed from household and care responsibilities to take up other positions in the labour market. Thus women migrants have limited representation in the professional and skilled categories with the exceptions of teaching and nursing. Their jobs tend to be low skilled and low paid with inferior working conditions. Women migrants are in addition often concentrated in the informal economy where working conditions are poorest. Public work life balance policies benefit migrant women less than nationals in part because of their lack of knowledge and language barriers (Rubin, 2008). In addition, because many women migrant workers have ‘worker’ rather than ‘employee’ status (e.g. casually employed through agencies) they may have fewer rights to such benefits. Therefore, given the prominence of the family role in their role set and the aforementioned difficulties in making adequate child care arrangements, these additional work-related pressures might be expected to make the challenges faced by women in reconciling work and non-work roles particularly difficult.

The work of several researchers emphasizes the need for caution and the dangers of generalizing because the pressures faced by migrant workers may be managed through the use of agency. Focusing on migrant workers as passive victims ignores their ability through agency to negotiate the barriers they face (Syrett and Lyons, 2007). Alberti (2014) provides a countervailing view to the negative employment experience of migrant workers with a study showing how migrants exercised mobility and used their temporariness strategically in order to exit difficult situations, gain time, re-invest their skills or simply renew their capacity to be mobile. Migrant workers hope to use temporary roles as an opportunity to develop their English skills and move on to a higher skilled position, which better uses their other skills

(Hopkins and Dawson 2016). The stories described by Dyer et al. (2011) highlight the diversity of migrants' experiences of and strategies for work life balance with gender identities, social class, earning potential and formal visa or citizenship rights all impact on the strategies which migrant workers are able to draw upon. They are a heterogeneous group with internal ethnic, gender, and class divisions.

There are also important differences in the pressures faced within different sections of the migrant population. For example, white migrant workers tend to suffer less from low pay and overqualification than ethnic minority migrants (Hack-Polay, 2008). Similarly Kyoung Hee's (2019) Australian study of migrant accountants found that Caucasian applicants faced less discrimination than Asian migrants. Immigrants from Western Europe are less likely to experience unemployment (Turner, 2010) An additional year of education increased earnings by 10% for white immigrants but by only 4-4.5% for ethnic minority workers (Baines, 2007). The unemployment rate of women migrants from the global south is 5.6% higher than that of European born migrants (Rubin et al., 2008). There are also important differences in the burden of remittances. In Datta et al.'s (2007) study while 80% of African migrants and 67% of Latin American migrants regularly sent remittances home, this went down to 49% for Eastern European migrants. Whereas the remittances sent by African migrants tended to be for more immediate subsistence needs, remittances to Latin America often had longer term objectives e.g. investment in mandatory education.

Researchers have pointed to the different situation faced by migrants from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) compared with other migrants. Von Mende (2008) found that problems of adaption and role discontinuity were significantly less for migrants from CEE than for migrant workers from the global south. Ciupijus (2015) suggests that however contingent and circumscribed rights are under EU citizenship, this citizenship adds a qualitatively new dimension to the labour migration process. The UK government has not been able to control the mobility of CEE workers who are not dependent on a restricted scheme or tied to a single employer. With EU citizenship CEE workers have greater freedom to navigate the labour market than without it (their status in the event that the UK leaves the EU is as yet unclear) Notwithstanding these advantages, migrants from Central and Eastern Europe face more



difficulties in achieving recognition for their qualifications than home workers (Sirkeci et al., 2018).

These findings stress the important of exploring in some detail the context in which migrant workers move and operate before making assumptions about their situation. This is further exemplified by the tendency to conflate migrant and ethnic minority experiences and challenges. Holgate (2005) cites, in this respect, the failure of a young Asian woman graduate to be effective as an union organizer of Asian migrant workers. In making the appointment the trade union did not take into account the very different background of the organizer compared to the workers, being female, British-born, university educated and unable to speak any of the languages of the workers.

## **DUAL FRAMES OF REFERENCE**

Just as it is important not to generalize about the employment experience of migrant workers so it is important not to make assumptions about their perceptions of and reaction to their work experience. It is important to understand the importance of expectations (Vroom, 1964) in forming orientations to work. In the case of many migrant workers their most importance experience of work and life in general has been in their country of origin and this is likely to have played an important role in the formation of their expectations. In this context migration literature has developed the concept of dual frame of reference to refer to the process whereby the migrant worker assesses the conditions of the host society by reference to a comparison with the conditions of the home society (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). As a result, migrants do not necessarily see their new employment situation as all that bad and they may appreciate low paid work (Wright and Clibborn, 2019)

The existence of dual frames of reference is certainly likely in relation to migrant perception of the relations between work and non-work. The pervasive influence of culture on the interplay between work and family has been emphasized (Shaffer et al, 2011). A comparison of three regions with the United Kingdom in respect of corporate initiatives on work life issues displays this. In CEE countries, all former socialist societies, state support has traditionally

been generous in areas such as parental leave but less so in respect of flexible working. At the company level, where more traditional attitudes to gender roles may pertain, support for work life balance from both managers and colleagues appears limited. (Abendroth and Dulk, 2011). Crompton et al. (2005) suggest that this may be a reaction to the socialist state and its interference in the life of individuals.

A similar lack of company interest in work life balance would seem to exist in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa not least because the informal economy accounts for a major share of employment in which workers are commonly exposed to long or irregular hours of work with little or no social protection (ILO, 2009). In Latin America, although the general trend is for increased flexibility of hours, this is largely in the form of employer driven flexibility, with schedules being determined and varied according to operational requirements (Arriga, 2005). The consequences of such flexibility for working conditions are negative. A Columbian study argues that it is generating widespread 'mental overcharge' and leading to stress and associated pathologies (Guerrero and Puerto-Barrios, 2007) while in Mexico employer-led flexibility has significantly affected the working conditions of women. Unstable working schedules and multi-purpose responsibility at work has increased the risk of women giving birth babies of low weight (Villegas et al., 1997). In predominantly collectivist cultures such as in Sub-Saharan Africa the emphasis for managing the work life interface would appear to lie primarily on the extended family. Given the typically high rate of unemployment, employers do not have the kinds of incentives to offer work life balance policies often articulated in the UK e.g. to help attract recruits and reduce labour turnover (Wang, 2008). In Nigeria workers seem to accept work life conflict as inevitable (Akanji, 2012). Coping strategies appear to be to suppress the conflict rather than eradicate or reduce the factors which cause it. These include of an institutionalized social support system, corruption, high unemployment and employer driven flexibility.

These three examples are to be contrasted with a situation in the UK characterized during the last two decades by a succession of legislative initiatives in the work life area and company initiatives in the area being heralded as an indication of a model employer. One might expect therefore migrant workers based in the UK to afford their migrant experience a favorable comparison with that of their home country.

## **MIGRANT WORK LIFE TENSIONS AN EMPIRICAL EXAMPLE**

The issues raised in the discussion of the literature on the employment situation of migrant workers were examined empirically in a study of migrant workers in London who had been in the UK for at least three years. Data was collected via a survey and focus groups.

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Questionnaires were distributed to migrant workers from three regions, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), and Latin America (LA) in the Greater London area. These regions were chosen strategically as they represent very different cultural contexts and potentially interesting and contrasting pre-migration experiences. The three groups represented a substantial proportion of the London migrant community (37%). The sample was stratified by age and marital status. The questionnaire covered a number of themes including employment; work-life balance, caring responsibilities and remittances. One hundred and fourteen valid questionnaires were received. In addition, six focus group interviews were carried out, two with migrants from CEE, three with migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and one with migrants from Latin America. Areas covered in the interviews included covered personal circumstances, employment roles, pre-migration roles, perception of work/non work relationships. A snowball sampling strategy was employed in the case of both the survey and the focus group interviews given the difficulty in identifying members of the desired population and the absence of any sampling frame, which would have facilitated probability sampling.

There was ample evidence in the survey data of the kind of pressures faced by migrant workers, which have been discussed in the literature (Data et al., 2007; Von Mende, 2008). In terms of employment status, 39% of respondents were employed in categories 1-5 (higher skilled or managerial) of the Standard Occupational Classification. This compares with 66% for the UK populations as whole and 71% for London (ONS, 2015). Thus, more of our respondents of the survey occupied lower status jobs than the UK working population as a whole.

In terms of hours worked most of the migrants reported working over 40 hours, with an average of 44 weekly hours across the three regions, which is above the national average of 40.8 hours. Ten per cent of these respondents work over 50 hours per week. 60% of CEE respondents worked more than 40 hours weekly compared with 57% for Africans and 46% for Latin Americans. 21% of respondents had a regular second job compared with 4% for the United Kingdom as a whole. More Latin American respondents had a second job (33%) than CEE (9.5%) and African (5%).

Overall, a significant proportion of respondents reported doing jobs well under their qualification level **1**. An average of 61% across the three regions believed that the job role they were in at the time of the research was below their qualifications. The proportion of respondents reporting being in employment well below their qualifications was higher for Africans compared with CEEs and Latin Americans. The measure of over-qualification used was comparing qualification level with job level, e.g. graduates being employed in non-graduate jobs or holding unskilled jobs (Bonfati et al,201; Sirkeci et al., 2017; Mutuku, 2017).

In relation to remittances 32% of respondents sent money regularly to their relatives back home (37% in the case of African respondents, 35%, Latin American respondents, down to 25% in the case of CEE respondents). Most respondents remitted money back home on a monthly basis. The amount sent home annually varied considerably. Overall 71.4% sent less than £1000 per year to relatives in the home country. When the participants who send remittances were asked whether this leads to them working more hours, 51.4% indicated that it did.

Despite these pressures the migrants surveyed were less dissatisfied with the relationship between work and non- work than the UK working population as a whole. 48% of the UK population expressed dissatisfaction with work life balance (ONS, 2012) compared with 31% of our respondents. When satisfaction with work life balance was cross tabulated respondent profiles, the differences identified were not significant. Despite the points discussed in the literature, therefore, the situation of women was not significantly different from that of men.

The survey data presented therefore an interesting puzzle – why were the migrant workers displaying higher levels of satisfaction with their work life balance than the UK working population as a whole despite working longer hours, being more likely to have a second job and, in a minority of cases, being responsible for remittances? This issue was explored in the focus group interviews.

The data from the focus group interviews largely coincided with the survey data in respect of the kind of challenges faced by migrant workers. A significant number of the respondents faced the pressures identified in the literature. Thus, in respect of working hours about half the respondents regularly worked hours above their contractual commitment but in only two cases did these hours involve a second job. In most cases, the extra hours were worked in their prime employment:

‘Contractually I work 37 hours weekly but in reality much more - not uncommon for me to be working to 7-8 in the evening; 45-50 hours per week’ (Polish HR professional).

Similarly, in respect of role discontinuity, half of the respondents considered they were in job roles at a lower level and status than those in which they been employed in their country of origin or possessed qualifications which were at a higher level than required by their current employment.

‘I work in a completely different area from the one I used to work in. I’m a qualified civil engineer and I lectured in universities; but my qualification is not recognized in this country. Do I think my job is equivalent? Not at all’ (Latin American administrator).

Role discontinuity was particularly evident in the case of Sub-Saharan African respondents:

‘I had a degree in micro-biology in Nigeria and then working in a Bank as a Treasury manager’ (Customer service officer with the Post Office).

About half the respondents regularly sent remittances to relatives in their country of origin including most of the Sub-Saharan African respondents who typically remitted home on a monthly basis to support their family. None of the respondents had older dependent relatives living in the UK. However, six of the respondents had dependent children, all women, two

CEEs and four Sub-Saharan Africa respondents. Their perception of their caring challenges resonated with the literature, emphasizing the lack of family support and the high cost of childcare in London:

‘I realized when my son was in hospital for a while it was quite lonely without family here. In Poland you have grandparents- child care is less common.’ (Polish estates administrator).

Sub-Saharan African respondents with dependent children particularly emphasized the high cost of childcare whereas ‘in Nigeria it would have been easier to receive support from relations or neighbors at no cost’. Respondents’ strategies for dealing with child care issues including working part-time, deferring working initially to take over child care and in one case working longer hours to finance child care costs.

Table 1 shows the spectrum of responses from respondents on their view of the relationship between their work and non- work lives. Overall, they provide little evidence for major role conflict between work and non-work roles and were less dissatisfied with their work life balance than the UK working population as a whole.

This is not to say that some respondents did not feel their work life balance could be improved. Several stressed the problem of working and living in a large city like London, emphasizing the cost for work life balance of the time spent on commuting and that a city as large as London is a tiring place to live in, adding to the pressures of work. Thus, for one of our Polish respondents moving out of London figured as an important strategy for improving his work life balance:

‘Friends have moved to Cambridge for similar jobs and salaries – where the housing is cheaper – working much closer to their jobs –I think I might try this’.

While another Polish respondent is wistful for her hometown:

‘It’s a very small town- everyone knows each other- when I left at 18 I thought I would never go back to such a dead place. Now I’m completely opposite –it’s lovely’.

Only comment 10 from a Latin American respondent indicated a fundamental role conflict relating to the pressures of his work role and unsympathetic supervision, and in the context of significant role discontinuity:

‘She (his mother) is an elderly person and I’d like to have the feeling I have spent as much time as I can with her –with my brothers and sisters the relationship has suffered because I’m constantly here – thinking about work- doing work at home’.

**Table 6 Respondents' views on work life balance**

1. I have enough time to do what I want to do- to sit on my couch watching TV-If I want to go out and meet friends –I can also do that
- 2 I's much easier to sustain work life balance in the UK because of flexible work arrangements
3. We have enough time for self and family- in Nigeria flexibility from the workplace is very limited and vacation times rigid.
- 4 My current job at TFL is quite demanding with variable shifts so rest days not fixed but with ten weeks annual leave I believe my work life balance is quite reasonable.
5. I am quite happy now – I had less time in the private sector- as a restaurant manager and in a law company there were longer hours
6. Happier here than in Poland – with the balance – family and work
7. I used to work long hours in Poland and not get the hours back
- 8 When you take everything into account –not many hours left – it is difficult in London when you spend so much time commuting but I think I am moving slowly in the right direction- having a diary and planning ahead.
- 9 The sheer volume of work-have talked it over with my manager, about work life balance- we have now agreed to keep a close eye on how many hours we work each day and try to reduce them –to keep within 37 hours.
- 10 I don't think there is a balance – members of my family in Columbia complain- I used to talk to them, write to them more regularly than I do now.
11. By the nature of my working arrangements I have created a satisfactory work life balance
12. In Nigeria my job was clearly defined allowing for little flexibility so work life balance was hardly in control- it was hardly possible to schedule work so one could work from home
- 13.I can be working here to 6-6-30 – by the time I get home it can be 8 –it does not give me a lot of time- travelling takes a long time,
14. I'm quite flexible with my working hours- with the biotech progress some hours are longer-sometimes there is weekend or evening work but I get 52 days holiday a year.

We looked to the focus group data for help in explaining the puzzle identified in the survey data that migrant workers' dissatisfaction with work life balance was lower than that displayed by UK working population as a whole. The positivity of the focus group respondents in relation to work life balance was based on a number of dimensions but in most cases it was



possible to identify a strong interconnection between the migrants' perception of work in the UK and their home country experience. Their experience of work in the UK was seen positively in comparison with their pre-migration experience. The areas of comparison which were emphasized were strongly related to region of origin.

For CEE respondents the key area of comparison was that of employment conditions generally. They appreciated the better conditions available in the UK:

'In the UK you are more relaxed –not as pressurized- also the wages in Poland are much lower. UK salaries are five times those in Poland; the cost of living is not that much less. In the UK when you pass the probation you get a permanent contract; it gives you lots of security whereas the message I get from friends in Poland is that organizations are exploiting people- lots of zero hours contracts and people have no security'.

The organizational culture in the UK was compared favorably with that of Poland:

'People work harder in Poland – you don't get lunch breaks- you don't really go off sick –no way can you ring in and say I'm not well – you must have a doctor's certificate- you have to be on time – in the UK if you call your line manager and say you are stuck in traffic she would not cut your head off- if it happens more than once in Poland there would be consequences'.

For Sub-Saharan African respondents the most important area of comparison was flexibility at work and it emerged as a key issue influencing their perception of work life balance, particularly for the five women with dependent children (comments 2, 3, 11, 12 from table 6). For one respondent a pattern of part-time hours enabled her to combine work and caring in a way which would not have been possible in her country of origin:

'Contract work of fifteen hours per week. This is a deliberate arrangement so I can have more time with the children since my spouse works full-time. This wouldn't

have been possible in Nigeria; it was you either took the job and work along the lines of set work hours or you had no work’.

Although these two areas of comparison, working conditions in general in the case of CEE respondents and flexibility in the case of Sub-Saharan African respondents, were the main dimensions emphasized as contributing to a positive work-non-work relationship, in the case of both groups, in addition pre-migration values and the application of those values to their UK experience also contributed to this positivity.

Thus, CEE respondents seemed to draw self-esteem in their UK work situation from the superiority of the work values with which they arrived in their new country:

‘My attitude to work is that I think I should complete the task – if I work extra hours I would not ask for extra time – recently during the tube strike I did not ask to work from home- it was my duty to be at work’.

For another CEE respondent his different values were because of a feeling ‘you have to work for what you want – inculcated by previous generations’. More explicitly the comparison was drawn with UK workers: ‘I was shocked by some people- how they would not complete deadlines – cancel meetings at short notice’.

For Sub-Saharan African respondents, most of whom were members of Pentecostal Christian Churches, their pre-migration religious values also played a part in the development of positive values towards work. One respondent was very firm that his Christian background affected his attitude to work: ‘You should view your employers as an authority to be loyal to; one should therefore measure up to one’s pay’. For another ‘Being fervent and diligent at work are important Christian virtues and one should be guided by these principles –one should be conscious of your commitment to your employer’. Religion was therefore perceived as a mitigating factor that helps migrant workers reframe their perception of work life balance, seeing it in more positive terms.

In the case of the CEE respondents, particularly, there was some evidence of agency in achieving a satisfactory relationship between work and non-work life. Initial employment experiences in the UK had not been conducive to a satisfactory work life balance but respondents had resolved this situation and at the same time reduced role discontinuity by job moves. In one case, this was by moving from the private sector to the public sector:

‘As a restaurant manager and in a law firm there were longer hours – more work to take home; time is more stable in the public sector. I have five evenings a week to spend with the family’.

Another respondent moved from property management to university administration with positive consequences:

‘At the end of my previous job I was really stressed – as a property manager- I was getting calls on my mobile at night (my bathroom is flooded); my job at the university was more organized and controlled-less pressurized’

The Latin American focus group was the exception in that its members were significantly less positive about the work – non-work relationship than other respondents. However, as in the case of other respondents there was a strong connection between their frame of reference and home country experience and values. One of the group complained about the spill over from work compared with their home country:

‘A thing that happens here is that you tend to be thinking about work. I come from a rural part of Columbia and I don’t want to take work home but I can’t help thinking about it. I don’t think that happens in Columbia.

Another member of the group felt he had not balance (comment 10 in Table 6) and compared negatively aspects of his work situation in the UK in relation to Columbia:

'I never remember being as stressed as I am here and there I was managing important projects- compared with the long lunch break in Columbia many people here eat at their desk- here people tend to have a sandwich – two slices of bread with something inside –is that lunch –it is a joke'.

## **CONCLUSION**

This chapter on the employment situation of migrant workers and the relation between their work and non-work lives has identified a degree of consensus in the literature. First migrant workers typically face a number of challenges in their work situation: jobs which are of low status and low pay, excessive working hours, additional financial burdens such as obligations in respect of remittances to their home country and jobs which do not reflect their level of qualification.

However, it is important not to generalize those challenges equally to all migrant workers. Some groups are less likely to face them than others while through agency migrants can eventually overcome challenges, which they face when first taking up employment in their new country

Despite the challenges of their employment situation, many migrant workers remain positive about their work and not as dissatisfied with the relationship between their work and non-work lives as home workers as we saw in the empirical study of migrant workers in London. This positivity can be related to their attachment to dual frames of reference – that of their country of origin and their new country. Because often employment conditions in their new country compare favorably with those of their country of origin, they are satisfied with their new employment, despite its disadvantages. In addition, as the study of migrant workers in London displayed, often the values migrant workers bring to their new country give them a degree of resilience, which enable them to accommodate to the challenges they find.

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