

**Posted Labor Migrants in EU - The lives of other migrants**  
**Extended Abstract for**  
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By

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## **1. Introduction**

While temporary migration has been always part of migratory movements of the population (Torresi and Ottonelli, 2011), only in recent years has posted migration been a major part of migratory movements. This rising importance of ‘posting’ abroad has been driven by the accession of Eastern European countries, and changes in the regulation of intra-EU mobility. The European Commission defines posted workers as individuals who for a certain period of time work in the territory of an EU Member State other than the State in which they normally work’. The definition does not apply to migrants who individually decide to seek employment in another Member State, or self-employed migrants (Euro found, 2011). In a legal sense then, ‘posted worker’ refers to a person sent by their employer to another country, and whose employment relationship is in the first instance determined by the rules of the sending country. In regard to worker experiences and practices of employers the reality is not so black and white. Overlap with the grey economy, and conceptual issues make it difficult to give an accurate estimate on the exact numbers of posted workers, however, the European Commission estimates that in 2005 almost one million workers, or 0.4% of the EU’s working-age population, could be classified as posted workers (Euro found, 2011).

Being an increasingly prominent group of migrants in the European Union, there is a growing impact of posted migrant work on industrial relations. European integration is deterritorializing regulatory institutions, as nation states are losing the ability, and even the sovereign right, to regulate the movements, activities and relations of firms and workers from other EU member states (Lillie, 2010). These issues are the core interests of a broader research project on posted work in the European Union, involving field work in Finland, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. This paper focuses on one aspect of the results of the overall project, investigating the perceptions and experiences of posted migrants. We explore the following questions: how do the above regulatory configurations affect the way posted migrants work and live? How do they experience this lifestyle of isolation and hypermobility? What sort of social space is created by men (basically, in the industry we investigate, we are talking about only men) far from home, located in isolated housing, working long days under uncomfortable and dangerous conditions, in a multi-national work environment, with the labour market explicitly segmented by nationality and ethnicity? We seek to grasp the experiences and perceptions of posted migrant workers in the construction industry in several EU countries at the work place and in their housing sites. We investigate the ways in which posted migration trigger the formation of new forms of social identity, networks and livelihoods, and compare these with what is known about similar phenomena in other migrant communities.

### ***1.1 Topics and research questions to be explored***

The main topics we want to explore in this paper are:

- a) Experiences and perceptions of posted migrant workers in relation to their lives within and outside of work places, in particular in relation to housing sites, access to information and advice, use of their leisure time, language barriers and social relationships.
- b) Experiences and perceptions of posted migrant workers in relation to discrimination and the differences in treatment in the working places and housing sites. How does the gradation of treatment differ according to nationalities, positions, legal frameworks etc?
- c) Factors that influence posted migrant worker's perceptions and their coping strategies including nationality, legal status, length of stay, formal and informal networks.

## **2. Approach and Methods**

This paper is based on interviews of workers conducted at housing sites and workplaces of posted workers in Germany and the Netherlands. It was conducted in the context of a larger project involving also interviews in Finland and the UK, and at the EU level, and draws on this data, including many interviews of experts as well for context, but the focus of this paper is on the experiences of workers at selected sites in Germany, Finland, and the Netherlands. Gathering posted migrants perceptions and experiences has required close engagement with the study population. Accordingly, we use an ethnographic approach, consisting on participant observations and in-depth interviews. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008:16) to do qualitative research means to go past the known and to see the world with the eyes of participants, to gain in-depth understanding of the phenomena from the perspective of the people. Observing participants' experiences in the context in which they occur is a characteristic of the ethnographic approach (Nurani, 2008). Wiersma (1986) maintains that through an ethnographic approach, the researcher can reach people and interact. The analysis of the generated data set is made using specialised qualitative data analyses software, MaxQDA10 version R180811.

Posted workers come from a great many different countries, and frequently do not speak any but their native language with fluency. Because of the great number of languages involved, no research team could have all the needed language expertise. This project relies on assistants who speak the languages which we in the research team do not. We have trained undergraduate students to use interview guides to conduct interviews under the supervision of project staff. Where possible, we conduct the interviews ourselves. Most of the worker interviews are conducted at housing sites, because it is difficult to gain the cooperation of employers, who are often employing them under illegal conditions, or at least under conditions which do not match with local norms for wages and conditions.

## **3. Results**

### *a) On place making and identity formation*

Although the existing migration and place-making literature claims that places have the ability to facilitate common identities and collectivity among migrants triggering their sense of belonging to the destination country, we argue that this is not always the case especially with regards to

temporary posted migrants. We postulate that the particular organizational and regulatory forms used in posted migration result in a migratory experience which is in some ways different from other, more traditional, forms of migration. Hence, the way posted work is regulated might produce unusual living situations for posted workers. Recent globalization literature has proclaimed that transnational workers engender new senses of belonging manifesting multiple identities, which in turn transform national or regional identities (Sarup, 1994). This research has found out that temporary migrants create in-between spaces and identities. We find that posted migrants tend to be more isolated than other kinds of migrants. They live in isolated spaces, and create in-between identities. Issues such as integration, assimilation or cohesion do not have the same meaning and importance. This is in part a function of their motivations, which are purely economic, and relate to maintaining a standard of living in their host societies rather than integrating into the host society. They also consider themselves as temporary, highly mobile with no need to settle, no need to learn the language and no need to integrate. These in-between spaces posted migrants work and live in are not aimed at creating a regional consciousness or identity. Their life is largely disconnected from the region's inhabitants and culture. The paradox thus is that these temporary work spaces are located within a region but stay isolated from it. In fact, the temporary work spaces and housing sites can be seen as non-places (Augé, 1995), ahistorical, alocal vacuums that do not create a regional identity, but follow their own disembedded logic.

*b) Perceptions of discrimination and stereotyping migrant workers according to nationalities.*

It is difficult to define, research and especially to measure discrimination. We can, however, present some perceptions of the posted migrants have regarding discrimination and unfair treatment in the work place.

*I told you Italians and Portuguese I don't see them working hard as we do. But nobody does anything about this. They just keep on like that get a lot of money at the end and we work like animals and we get half of what they get working double of what they work. (Polish worker)*

*I think everyone will agree that the Italians are the worst workers in Europe. The further you go the south the more lousy workers you get (Polish worker)*

*R. We are working with the third gear and they (Finnish/natives) work with the first one. This is the difference.*

*I. Ahaa, what does this mean?*

*R. What does it mean...we are working faster and they work slower....Finland work easy (he laughs). (Rumanian worker)*

As we can see from these quotes, there is an emerging tendency of stereotyping migrant workers in relation to their nationalities, skills and payment. Especially the Polish and Rumanian workers we interviewed felt unfairly treated with regards to payment and holidays.

c) *Importance of networks - The case of Polish posted workers*

Although some social researchers have characterized Polish migrant communities as having weak ties, mistrust towards each-other and lack of solidarity (Irek, 2011), we have found Polish posted migrants often have a good network and solidarity among them that goes beyond the work place and country. Often they use these networks as resources to find work. The solidarity is evident also at the housing sites where Polish migrants seem to use their ethnic networking as a social and psychological resource (Çaro, 2011).

*I think that they (Polish) just interact the most with their co-workers and I think that regardless of what they said – they spend significantly more time with their fellow Poles, especially that only Janek<sup>1</sup> seemed to be proficient in English enough to conduct seamless conversation. (Field Diary)*

*Pioter mentioned Bercik as “Young and with such less experience – he said: I teach him some things I know”. He said so when asked about the level of solidarity and cooperation of workers on the site. (Field notes)*

Other nationalities also appear to have strong ties and solidarity. Italians and Portuguese create solid communities within the work place and housing sites. As was mentioned previously, it is not the aim of posted migrant workers to integrate into the host society, and they prefer instead to build ties with their co-nationals.

#### **4. Further research**

Up until now we have gathered little ethnographic data on the perceptions and experiences of posted migrant workers to illustrate their experiences and perceptions at the work place and housing sites regarding place making, identity formation, discrimination, differences among nationalities and importance of social networks in coping with the new environment, building up social spaces and identities. Further research will explore the following topics:

- a) Different ways of recruitment as factors of isolation or integration. (Friends/Family; temp agency; Contractors/subcontractors; Legal posting; Posting by a firm).
- b) Different kinds of networks for finding jobs, changing jobs. What are the networks involved? Do these networks differ according to nationalities?
- c) Different motivations of choosing a job, country, site etc. The decision making process; influence of family; friends in the decision making process.

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<sup>1</sup> The real names of the participants are changed in order to conserve their anonymity

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