

Many young East Europeans have experienced more racism and xenophobia since the Brexit vote

April 11 2018, by Tony Trueman

Half of young East Europeans living in England and Scotland who were surveyed by researchers said they had experienced an increased level of racism and xenophobia since the Brexit vote.

Academics from the universities of Strathclyde, Plymouth and Durham surveyed or spoke to 1,120 people aged 12-18 from Eastern Europe who have lived in the UK for at least three years.

The British Sociological Association's annual conference in Newcastle heard today that that 49.3 percent said that they had experienced more [racism](#) and xenophobia since the Brexit referendum in June 2016 than before it. Also, 23.6 percent said they had seen about the same amount of racism, and 4.7 percent had seen less (the rest were uncertain).

Three out of four of those surveyed (77.8 percent) said they had experienced racism since moving to the UK.

An 18-year-old Polish woman told the researchers that she had experienced "incidents of being called a prostitute based on my background, being told to go back to my own country – a couple of more severe incidents included having rocks thrown at me and me being chased down the street by a group of teenage boys."

A 17-year-old boy from Poland said: "I moved here when I was six years

old, and even though I speak English with a British accent as a result of using it for over 11 years, when people find out I am Polish, I often face racism and discrimination. I find that I belong as long as no one finds out my nationality."

The researchers working on the project were: Daniela Sime, Naomi Tyrrell, Claire Kelly, Christina McMellon and Marta Moskal. Dr. Sime, of the University of Strathclyde and project leader, told the conference: "Young people commented that the result of the Brexit referendum had altered their feelings of belonging to the UK and sense of security because of increasing hostility towards migrants being expressed openly by people they knew."

The researchers, who also talked to 22 groups of [young people](#) in schools and youth clubs in Scotland and England and 20 families, found that despite the increase in racism and xenophobia, most of those interviewed felt they belonged in the UK and wanted to stay here in future.

They found that 29.4 percent said they 'definitely' felt that they belonged in the UK, and 33.2 percent said that they felt they belonged 'most of the time'. Only 3.9 percent of survey respondents said that they 'definitely did not' feel that they belonged in the UK.

One 16-year-old Polish girl said: "I very much feel like a part of the UK, which is why Brexit makes me sad. They're cutting away from the EU, so people who move here after Brexit will feel like they don't belong or are intruding, and no one should feel that way."

A 15-year-old Lithuanian girl said: "I feel like England is a country I belong in, the identity I created here is something I don't want to change."

"Here to Stay?" is a research project that explores the lives of young

people who arrived in the UK as migrant children from Central and Eastern Europe after 2004. The survey took place between October 2016 and April 2017. In total, 1,120 young people completed the survey, with 806 full completions.

Those surveyed were almost all white (96.7 percent). Over half of the respondents were Polish (56 percent), and other large groups were Romanian (10.4 percent) and Lithuanian (9.1 percent) nationals. Over a third said they had lived in the UK for 10 or more years.

The sample was recruited through schools, youth clubs and social media and the data is not necessarily representative of all young Central and East Europeans in the UK.

Other quotes:

"I am considering moving to the EU after finishing university, despite the fact I enjoy living in this country." (male, 18, Latvian)

"I feel like I belong in the UK, however I am fearful of what will happen now. I'm scared for my future and how the referendum will affect me." (female, 17, Poland)

"I feel like a European more than anything. The Brexit referendum has me severely worried for the future of this country, its people and foreigners living here." (male, 16, Czech Republic)

"Although the EU referendum has made the futures of many European migrants uncertain, I love this country and will do anything in my power to stay here as it is my home."

Provided by British Sociological Association

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