Everyday Life in Great Britain and Poland During the Covid-19 Pandemic and Brexit

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Abstract

In recent years, everyday life and interpersonal relationships in a broad sense have been shaped by the SarsCov-2 pandemic and its extensive consequences – both on a local and on a global level. Other phenomena have made their presence felt at a local and global level too – Brexit, for example. In this article, based on research carried out in Poland, England and Northern Ireland in August and September 2021, we present various dimensions of everyday life and the relationships of migrants with people who are important to them in Poland – in the context of these two main processes. The results of our research indicate that the new circumstances affect the everyday lives of migrants and their relatives in Poland on various levels, such as routine activities, work, interpersonal relations, and transnational contacts. We have also identified the stages of these processes and the accompanying emotions, and the pandemic emerged as the leading theme, overshadowing Brexit.

Keywords: everyday life, pandemic, Brexit, Polish migration, stayers

Abstrakt

Na przestrzeni ostatnich lat życie codzienne i szeroko pojęte relacje międzyludzkie, tak w skali lokalnej jak i globalnej zdeterminowała pandemia wirusa SarsCov-2 i jej rozległe konsekwencje. Naturalnie towarzyszyły jej jeszcze inne zjawiska, które również nie pozostały obojętne w wymiarze

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lokalnym i globalnym, czego przykładem jest brexit. W artykule bazując na wynikach badań prze-prowadzonych w Polsce, Anglii i Irlandii Północnej w sierpniu i wrześniu 2021 roku, prezentujemy różne wymiary życia codziennego i relacji migrantów z ważnymi dla nich osobami w Polsce, w kontekście tych dwóch procesów. Wyniki naszych badań wskazują, że nowe okoliczności rzutują na codzienne życie migrantów i ich bliskich w Polsce na wielu poziomach, takich jak: rutynowe czynności, praca, relacje międzyludzkie czy kontakty transnarodowe. Zidentyfikowałyśmy również przejścia przez kolejne etapy tych procesów i towarzyszące temu emocje, przy czym pandemia wyłoniła się jako temat wiodący, przesłaniając brexit.

Słowa kluczowe: życie codzienne, pandemia, brexit, polskie migracje, stayers

Introduction

The everyday life of many societies and individual people today is characterised by uncertainty. Omnipresent crises – including social, economic, climatic, cultural, and geopolitical crises – generate conflicts and tensions that can be categorised as internal or external – as well as global or local. Costis Hadjimichalis (2021) discusses this issue in detail and claims that a crisis is manifested in terms of social inequalities, gender, centre-periphery relations and in the field of social classes. Ulrich Beck (2002), on the other hand, in the context of describing personal, environmental and health risks, also provided a general characterization of the conditions in which modern societies function: interrelated and multifaceted crisis situations constitute the background for everyday life today.

The SarsCov-2 pandemic is certainly a very good example in this regard. An already extensive literature[3] reveals that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought changes in almost every sphere of human activity, provoking health, economic, political and social crises. For individual regions, the hardship of living in a pandemic was exacerbated by other local situations – as evidenced by Brexit. There was a kind of multiplication of crises, and it was hard to define the sources of problems faced by UK inhabitants in recent years. These problems included difficulty in gaining access to health care (Antosa, Demata 2021), food fraud (Brooks et al. 2021), labour shortages (Sumption 2022) and the UK's political instability (Baldini et al. 2022).

The aim of our article is to present the results of the study, carried out in Poland, England and Northern Ireland in August and September 2021. The subject of the study was everyday life of Polish migrants living in the UK during the pandemic and Brexit and of people important to them: stayers, those who remain in Poland. In the study, we consider cross-border relations between migrants and stayers. We would like to point out that the term "stayer" is used to describe a person important to the

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[3] At this point we do not cite particular publications. Their very number – as evidenced by entering "coronavirus" into the leading academic search engines – scholar.google.pl / 2 570 000 results – reveals the extent of the phenomenon. Cambridge Journals Online – HSS collection – 2 706 results, JSTORE – 13 040 results (Accessed: 02.07.2023)

migrant who may or may not have made joint decisions with the migrant about his or her migration. Stayers are taken into account in everyday life and in plans for the future; stayers connect the place of origin with the migrant, because they remain there (in Poland, in this case) throughout the migrant's absence (Dziekońska 2023; Dziekońska 2022).

Everyday life

In British and Polish society, the Covid-19 pandemic has imposed a new social-life dynamic, and in the United Kingdom, Brexit has added particular meaning to the change. This phenomenon is related to Piotr Sztompka's discussion about contemporary society and everyday life where he pointed out that the so-called "first sociology" treated society as a whole, the second analysed its individual elements, while the third deals with the relations between the components of society (Sztompka 2009). According to Sztompka, society "happens", which means that in every space of social life there are constant transformations at the micro, meso and macro-social levels. Society "becomes"; it is constructed in the space of interpersonal relations. This process takes place in groups, but also in the context of the global society where humanity is an element in the network of interpersonal relations (Sztompka 2009: 1–2). Thus, as Norbert Elias (1978/1998) postulated, the analysis of everyday life can be done in relation to both micro and macro social processes, and there is no contradiction in the above. Generally, the term "everyday life" in its usual meaning implies a kind of regularity, repetition, routine: "everyday life is not opposed to festive, it covers the whole of our activity" (Sztompka 2008: 24). The concept of everyday life is characterised, among others, by daily, routine experiences untouched by major and extraordinary events, as well as an "emphasis on the present" that results in unreflective but direct immersion in the current experiences and activities (Featherstone 1992: 160–161). On the one hand, this focus may be on the "here" and "now", and on the other hand, it may generate thoughts about future experiences and activities (Hilbrecht 2013). As the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1992) pointed out, life is inextricably linked to inner experience, which is all the more indicative of the range of challenges posed by the analytical category of "everyday life".

Applying the concept of daily life to the analysis of the experiences of migrants and stayers, we want to bring up two more points. First, in everyday life outside the home country, migrants can negotiate contradictions, dilemmas, inequalities, and anxieties through the lens of their ethnicity. Moreover, "The study of ethnicity in everyday life includes and requires dialogue and understanding of ourselves (or at least the part we have access to and can understand) as well as others" (Karner 2007: 3). Secondly, in migration studies, it is not only mobility but also immobility, as two processes – local and transnational – are interrelated aspects of daily life (Glick, Schiller,

Salazar 2013). Many aspects of the daily lives of Polish migrants and the stayers, have already been noted: international contacts and family relationships (Dziekońska 2023; Kloc-Nowak 2022), everyday lifestyle practices (Jarosz, Gugushvili 2020) and the impact of migrants' place of settlement on daily practices (Bell, Domecka 2018).

The new phenomena of the pandemic and Brexit lead us to reconsider the general sense of stability acquired through the regularity, repetition, and routine that are characteristics of everyday life. Now it seems that both the concept of society as a system of interpersonal relations that is constructed, and the postulate of living life continuously – are in some way combined in the realities of everyday life during the pandemic and Brexit in the group of Polish migrants and stayers. New multi-level dependencies and new relationships created by the Brexit process and the pandemic, and at the same time emotions experienced both individually and collectively, have impacted the nature of everyday life in both countries. Below we present nuances concerning daily life in these special circumstances.

Everyday life during the pandemic

The new Covid-19 virus and its effects have been well described by researchers from various fields of science in a relatively short time, thereby revealing a number of changes in everyday life. This work shows that it impacted almost every sphere of human activity, drawing attention to new phenomena, and highlighting old ones. It naturally made itself known most quickly in the area of (physical) health, but simultaneously, it led to a tremendous mental health crisis (Amorini-Woods 2021), reflected in psychological problems reported and their causes: anxiety caused by the increasing number of deaths announced daily (Vezzoli 2021); loss of loved ones, often without the possibility of saying goodbye, without the normal process of mourning (Hernández-Fernández, Meneses-Falcón 2021; Kumar 2023); depression, anxiety or panic (Alimoradi et al. 2021); fear and phobia – "coronaphobia" (Lee, Jobe, Mathis, Gibbons 2020); conflicts in relationships (Feeney, Fitzgerald 2022); loss of physical contact with family members and social networks (Walsh 2020), family dysfunction (Brock, Laifer 2021); loss of employment and financial security (Długosz 2021); the requirement of self-isolation and compliance with new regulations (Alimoradi et al. 2021) which often required sacrificing individual rights and freedoms and strengthened police powers in case of non-compliance (do Rosario Anjos, Martins 2022); and many other pre-crisis ways of life that were lost. Also, the way the pandemic developed in different countries and regions varied (Kallio et al. 2020)[4].

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[4] In the UK and in Poland the restrictions were, among others, travel restrictions, school and workplace closings, bans on public gatherings, stay-at-home requirements, testing policies, or contact tracing. However, presenting government policies comparably over time in both countries is also proving both difficult and methodologically challenging. We signal here the most important dates of introduced and lifted restrictions in the battle against the pandemic. They were introduced in more or less similar times, but in

The effects of the pandemic were particularly pronounced in the area of mobility. First of all, the boundaries between the "kinetic energy" of those who could move freely and the "kinetic underclass" of those who could not (Miah, King 2021) deepened. It became clear that nationality, citizenship, membership or affiliation meant unequal treatment before the law (Triandafyllidou 2022). International Travel Restrictions (IOM 2021) highlighted migrant groups most affected by lockdown measures: asylum seekers, refugees, irregular migrants, low-paid, low-skilled and undocumented foreign workers (Abella 2020; Jauhiainen 2020) and frequently international students (Raghuram, Sondhi 2022). Conversely, the status of needed, though not necessarily wanted, essential workers in labour markets was gained by certain migrants whose work enabled them to live in host countries. This was particularly true in sectors such as health and care – e.g. domestic workers (Rosińska, Pellerito 2022) and agriculture and food workers. Special regulations enabled them to reach their destination countries and efficiently provide basic services, but they were not important enough for safety measures to be introduced regarding their everyday living and working conditions in the pandemic – they were left with little or no protection against viral infection (Corrado, Palumbo 2022; Triandafyllidou 2022) and were ineligible for public benefits and better health care (Reid et al. 2021). Their high vulnerability to the pandemic increased the transmission of the virus, causing tensions between them and the host population (O'Brien, Eger 2021; Bonnet, Rüegger 2021).

Travel restrictions have also changed mobility patterns, for example reversing internal migration flows (Fielding, Ishikawa 2021;Le Nestour, Moscoviz 2020) or leading to more frequent cross-border returns (Mencutek 2022; Martin, Bergmann 2021; Ratha 2020). The latter, especially vulnerable to risk and new problems, signal the need to reconsider the simple dichotomy of voluntary versus forced return.

In terms of everyday life, visible manifestations of the new times include the permanent changes in human communication: on the one hand pushed even deeper into the Internet, and on the other hand influenced at a surface, linguistic layer by

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both countries, responses differed in strength and range. In the UK, the first lockdown was announced by the PM on the 26th of March 2020, and on the 5th of November a second national lockdown came into force in England and similarly in other parts of the UK. On the 6th of January 2021, England entered the third national lockdown (Institute for Government 2022). Some relaxations of restrictions were introduced between the lockdowns: in June 2020, further eased in August, and in December; on the 22nd of February 2021, the UK Government published a plan to ease lockdown restrictions in England; in July 2021, most legal lockdown restrictions were lifted in England (Institute for Government 2022). In Poland the first lockdown measures were implemented on the 10th of March 2020 and the restrictions were even strengthened on the 25th of March, when the state of the epidemic was announced (limitations were introduced such as non-family gatherings limited to two people or religious gatherings to six, and non-essential travel was also forbidden). Those restrictions were lifted slowly, beginning on the 20th of April 2020, to be reintroduced at the end of August in response to the growing number of coronavirus infections. A national quarantine was in effect from the 28th of December 2020 to the 17th of January 2021, and limitations were maintained (Duszyński et al 2021). From April 2021 the restrictions were gradually being eased, and on the 1st of July 2023, the state of epidemic was finally lifted in Poland (Ministerstwo Zdrowia 2023).

"corona language" and a specific pandemic jargon (e.g. "lockdown", "New normal", "Remote work", "self-isolation") (Trstenjak, Živaljić, Miščančuk 2022:228). The pandemic also affected civil society which carried its pro-social activity based on gatherings, now in the form of video meetings, online lectures and conferences, also thereby recognizing the numerous benefits of this form of meeting – therefore worth continuing in the longer term (Trstenjak, Živaljić, Miščančuk 2022). The same solutions implemented in the seven Polish Sunday schools in the UK surveyed by White and Young (2023) helped strengthen and expand their activities and contacts with other schools and organisations in the UK and other countries, including Poland.

These various phenomena took place in the "pandemic" everyday life of most societies. However, the UK, "entered" the pandemic during the Brexit process, which over time itself turned into a crisis.

Everyday life during Brexit

Brexit has come to be seen as a long-term process (cf. Baldini et al. 2022), but today, we can identify several stages of this process: pre-Brexit, Brexit, post-Brexit, as well as Covid in post-Brexit (Gupta et al. 2023). It started from the emergence of the idea of the UK leaving the European Union, through the referendum campaign, the vote itself and its effects, up to the moment of leaving and the creation of a new reality in the UK and in the entire EU. This led to many tensions and anxieties that became an element of everyday life the in the UK. They appeared at the levels of so-called "ontological security" (Browing 2018) and of social and political identification in terms of European Union membership or national identification (Hobolt et al. 2021; Delanty, 2017). In recent years "unsettling events" [5] (Kilkey, Ryan 2021) have become an integral part of "migration projects" (Ryan 2023). This has been met with a mixed response from migrants. Ronald Ranta and Nevena Nancheva (2018) have pointed out that both before and after the referendum, migrants – who constitute a large part of British society – were somehow forced to renegotiate forms of their affiliation. The authors noted four overlapping groups or patterns of behaviour that emerged: runaway, cosmopolitan, in-between, and patriot. In this way, a new dynamic of belonging was created, one burdened with a great emotional charge. Poles living in the UK have also confronted their settlement. Some have still confirmed their deep embedding in local relationships, others noted dis-embedding from host societies expressed in a radically reduced sense of belonging and attachment, and other confirmed re-embedding in new context – in the country that has changed its geopolitical status (Ryan 2023). The diversification of reactions and strategies of migrants facing risk and uncertainty posed by Brexit and possible further migration movement

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[5] Unsettling events – "transformations on the structural level that have implications on the individual level in ways that provoke re-evaluation of migration projects" (Kilkey, Ryan 2021: 234).

depends on the life stage, length of stay abroad, or socio-economic status (Trąbka, Pustułka 2020). Nevertheless, research conducted among Polish migrants in the UK (Kilkey, Ryan 2021; Jancewicz, Kloc-Nowak, Pszczółkowska 2020) indicates that although Brexit has caused a lot of anxiety about the sense of belonging and provoked discussion about future migration, researchers did not expect a massive outflow of migrants from the UK triggered by Brexit.

Tensions were also noticeable in the relations between individual groups of migrants and the British (Narkowicz 2023; Rzepnikowska 2019). The issue of racism began to be widely discussed, in a kind of new setting (Virdee, McGeever 2018). The space of everyday life has witnessed an increase in direct physical attacks on migrants (Dalle Carbonare et al. 2020). The accumulation of a variety of anxieties and fears led to emotional costs throughout British society. A mental disorder called "Brexit anxiety" (Hughes 2019) was increasingly noted, one characterised by, among other things, a sense of powerlessness, sleeping problems and increased levels of stress. It is an important fact that the groups most affected by Brexit anxiety were citizens from outside the UK and ethnic and religious minorities (Kousoulis 2019). However, the majority of British society declares it suffers from Brexit fatigue (Carl Senior et al. 2021). It can affect one's sense of well-being, the quality of everyday life, as well as the sense of life stability (Winiecka 2021). Brexit, combined with the pandemic brought crises that have generated a division in the labour market between privileged foreigners and low-skilled migrants in the UK (Andrejuk 2021).

Brexit naturally draws a "social change" perspective, that is: "... The difference between the state of a social system (group, organization) at one moment in time and the state of the same system at another moment in time" (Sztompka 2007: 437). Brexit, like the pandemic, has definitely generated such differences. It provoked changes in society, economy, politics and culture. It influenced the quality of everyday life for the whole of British society. Social change is associated with trauma, which is manifested through its typical symptoms (see Sztompka 2007), such as the lack of trust syndrome directed, for example, at public institutions, the media, and elites (Marshall, Drieschova 2018), but also at other members of society (Zontini, Genova 2022). Sztompka (2007) argues that at some point change may become the norm. However, with the UK leaving the European Union simultaneously as the Covid-19 pandemic develops, it is difficult to argue for the institution of a new status quo. Dan Degerman and co-authors (2020) point out that the Covid-crisis came at a time when "Brexistential angst" was getting close to being solved – the process of emotional recovery from Brexit anxiety was interrupted.

Finally, these two overlapping processes have created a difficult time also in terms of emotions. Many EU citizens living through the pandemic in the post-Brexit UK stressed their own relation with the UK (Ruggerone, Hackett 2023). Those relationships were dominated by anger, boredom, sadness, grief, nostalgia, guilt, and the feeling of being torn apart. Emotions such as love took on a new meaning. It was

interpreted as heartbreak – "…a consequence of Brexit and the lost love for Britain, the 'home' that had rejected them," and also as a symbol of their home in the country of origin and loving family life during lockdown (Ruggerone, Hackett 2023:9).

At this point, one might find analogies between the new living conditions of British society and the concept of liquid fear (Bauman 2013). That fear is felt everywhere and at the same time it is a reflection of human insecurity. It is divided into basic fear (fear), anxiety and tension occurring episodically (the distinction is not sufficiently clear), and derivative fear (secondary fear). Derivative fear means a certain type of disposition where the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty prevails. It is difficult to tell whether Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have provoked a change in people's dispositions however, another property of derivative fear can be assumed i.e. its permanent nature. It may come to dominate the ongoing routines of everyday life of many UK residents, especially migrants.

Altogether, Brexit was an "internal shock" and Covid-19 pandemic was an "external shock" (Markova, King, 2022); even if people tried to find ways of dealing with stress in a pandemic, it was still a "crisis in a crisis" (Markiewicz 2019). In addition, there were even more overlapping and interpenetrating crises in the UK that had gradually emerged before the Brexit referendum. Such a multifaceted process as Brexit, followed by the pandemic, could entail changes in everyday biographies of individual people, but also, in the case of migrants, could lead to a reformulation of thinking and practices in the field of transnational relations with loved ones – stayers.

Methods

The aim of our research study was to analyse the experiences of migrants and stayers in the context of the pandemic and Brexit, the creation of new socio-emotional borderlands and their impact on cross-border relations. In the study, we formulated two main research problems:

1. Did the two (temporally) overlapping processes, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic determine the creation of new, symbolic borderlands?

2. How did Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic affect everyday life and cross-border relations between Polish migrants (UK) and "stayers" (PL)?

This article takes up the second research question, as we have discussed the issue of borderlands elsewhere (Winiecka, Dziekońska 2023). But though this text is devoted to the everyday life of migrants and stayers in the reality shaped by the pandemic and Brexit, it cannot be said that the issue of creating new borderlands is not closely tied to the analysis of the everyday life of migrants and stayers.

The study was carried out using a qualitative approach. We used structured, in-depth interviews. The interview scenario was divided into three categories of questions, about: a) everyday life during Brexit, b) everyday life during the coronavirus

pandemic, c) cross-border relations during this time. Due to the participation of two groups of respondents – migrants (UK) and stayers (PL), we used two analogous interview scenarios, based on the three aforementioned categories of questions.

The study involved 24 people – 5 men and 19 women. In the group of migrants in our study, there were nine women and three men. The women aged between 27 and 44 (median age was 38); four of them lived in Northern Ireland and five in England; the average length of their stay abroad was 13.7 years (ranging from 6 to 20 years). At the time of the interview, seven women were working professionally, and two were not. The men aged between 39 and 41; two lived in Northern Ireland and one in England; the average length of their stay abroad was 12.3 years (age range from 7 to 16 years); they were all working professionally. In the group of stayers, there were nine women and three men. The women aged between 32 and 71 (the median age was 51), seven women were working professionally, and two were retired. The men aged between 39 and 73, two were working professionally, and one was retired.

We carried out the interviews in pairs: UK – Poland, migrant – stayer. We conducted 10 interviews in five pairs of Northern Ireland – Poland and 14 with seven pairs of England – Poland. We used purposive sampling. An important criterion was the time spent on migration. Interlocutors were required to have lived in the UK for at least one year before the Brexit referendum. Recruitment of the research sample using the snowball method began with a group of migrants who could point to important persons (stayers) in their lives remaining in the sending country. The study participants were informed of the objectives of the study and gave their consent to participation. All the interviews were transcribed. The data was anonymised. In the description of the research results, we use the notation "S" for stayers and "M" for migrants, and we indicate the type of relationship between them.

To analyse the collected research material, a technique of qualitative content analysis was used which is "...used for provision of descriptive knowledge and understandings of the phenomenon under study" (Assarroudi et al. 2018). In our analysis, based on the data obtained and referring to the concept of daily life (Glick, Schiller, Salazar, 2013; Hilbrecht 2013; Sztompka 2008; Kraner 2007; Dilthey 1992; Featherstone 1992) we focus on the work situation, and routine activities in daily life during the pandemic and Brexit. We analyse the relationships mentioned by the study participants, that is, transnational relationships and contacts with stayers in Poland and how they change or not (e.g. trips home). We also focus on other relations (within the family, friends, neighbours, at work, etc.) that have marked respondents' lives in new circumstances. We pay attention to the emotional charge of the new situation and how the respondents cope with it as the stages of the pandemic unfold.

Research results

In Poland, as in Great Britain, the pandemic has led to a new kind of organisation of everyday life. However, at the time of the study the impact of Brexit, which might seem obvious, was not clearly perceived among the Polish interviewees and the researched migrants had divided opinions about its effects. These two perspectives are presented below.

Everyday life in Poland and the UK during the pandemic and Brexit

Routine activities

Routines organise and order daily life, providing a sense of stability and predictability. Likewise, their absence can disrupt a sense of balance. The research shows that the pandemic was most easily accepted by the elderly parents of migrants – usually retirees. Although the new situation kept them at home, the change in their already regulated daily schedule was not great. Janina (S, 71, migrant's mother) spends most of the year at home and in the summer works in the garden. From the perspective of the isolation order, Janina spends a lot of time away from others anyway – regulations related to the pandemic only slightly affect her everyday life. Mirosław (S, 73, migrant's father) is also happy that he "got" some time, which he can devote to finally catching up on his overdue reading. For these people, acceptance of the changes resulted from the need to maintain their own and others' safety, which for them is worth making sacrifices. As Maria (S, 63, migrant's mother) puts it: "If I have to infect someone, it's better to wait it out." The pandemic has especially reorganised the everyday life routine of young parents – both in Poland and abroad. The obligation of distance learning has meant that they treat this new element of their everyday life as a difficult challenge, a troublesome and absorbing one (cf. White and Young 2023), both physically and mentally exhausting. Neither the stayers in Poland nor the migrants reported that Brexit affected their everyday life practices or routine activities. Their everyday routines were not disturbed by the sense of instability and unpredictability, but their sense of belonging and attachment with wider society was affected (we discuss that below).

Thus, the time perspective is needed, as it may show that the process might have impacted the way of experiencing each day (Sztompka 2009), which consequently might become a kind of new routine – a new order (cf. Amorin-Woods 2021) at least for some study participants in both groups.

Work and money spending

An area particularly marked by the consequences of the pandemic and Brexit is professional work, with changes in the forms and timing of work, thereby imposing changes in migrants and stayer's lives. Now it is often remote work, assessed as something which has also altered the rhythm of the respondents' day. Drastic changes in everyday life were experienced by Małgorzata (S, 49, migrant's mother) who was forced by pandemic restrictions to close her own business, and then introduce a new daily schedule and face the uncertainty of tomorrow, with no plans for the future. Although the case of Małgorzata in the group of stayers was unique, it represents the situation of many professionally active people around the world. For example, in Poland in the first quarter of 2021, 70.2 thousand jobs were liquidated. At that point, almost 24% of the job losses were related to the spread of Covid-19 (see Statistics Poland 2021). At the same time, around 7.6 million jobs in the UK were at risk due to pandemic-related restrictions (see Allas, Canal, Hunt 2020). Among the migrants, one person also struggled with job loss, which in her opinion was caused by both the pandemic and Brexit. One interviewee, though, recognizes the changes triggered by Brexit in the employment sector as an opportunity to improve his living situation as a migrant. Sylwek states: "It seems to me, and, for example, I know about it, that at the moment there is a lot of work and there are fewer and fewer people," (M, 39, stayer's son) which results in the potential to choose more financially appealing job offers. Sylwek works in the transportation sector, which has been hit by fairly restrictive regulations under Brexit, thus limiting the ability to take up or continue employment for many people.

Clear and significant changes were observed by the researched migrants employed in the health service during the pandemic. From the perspective of those employed in hospitals, everyday life took on a new, hitherto unknown dimension, manifested primarily in psychological, social, and economic dimensions. Kasia (M, 31, stayer's sister) working in the hospital says:

> And there's also such a panic, which of course is natural – it's a normal thing that people, you know, panic and want to survive (...). When there was a shortage of food, or people, I don't know how they bought toilet paper when Covid started, I just heard a woman on the bus saying that she had bought a freezer to be able to buy more food. And on TV they showed a nurse after a twelve-hour shift crying because there was no food and she didn't have time to go buy it. (…) I don't know, there are carers who have to travel to dying people to wash them or give them medicine, and they don't have petrol. (…) Well, I did not expect that ... that everyday things like that might be lacking, so to speak.

Dorota (M, 32, stayer's sister), who also works in the hospital, complained about the additional activities that had become part of the daily routine and about the fact that due to restrictions related to employment in the health care she could not meet other people:

We change clothes, we put things from the hospital away in plastic bags, in two bags, we come, we immediately throw them in the washing machine, wash them at a certain temperature and so on, and so on, Jesus, well, if she's changed, I'm changed, we change our shoes, well – Why can't I go with her in the car, you know? You know… Why can't I meet her?

Dorota's case highlights discrepancies and inconsistencies in restrictions on key workers in the health and care sector, widely discussed in the literature (see Triandafyllidou 2022; Rosińska, Pellerito 2022; O'Brien, Eger 2021; Bonnet, Rüegger 2021).

The study participants who did not have to work remotely and were not employed in the medical sector tended not to notice drastic changes in everyday life.

Migrants report another significant aspect of the changes under the new circumstances: rising prices, which have exacerbated the quality of life in the UK over this time, although, as emphasised several times, it is hard to determine whether the pandemic or Brexit contributed most to the lowering of the quality of life in economic terms. Kasia (M, 31, stayer's sister) says:

So for sure it is easier when there is just one factor. It certainly seems to me that this matters – it is easier to deal with one problem than two big ones… Brexit is a big process and a time-consuming one, and then, what's more, there is basically the biggest pandemic that has swept the whole world.

Kasia's statement is, in a way, an example of a situation identified by Degerman and co-authors (2020). The ongoing crisis was joined by another crisis, and this resulted in a decline in the quality of life. At the same time, the additional problem intensified the sense of fatigue with the situation that was already being experienced (Brexit anxiety). |

Migrants also emphasised that the pandemic allowed them to drop consumer-lifestyle habits, although, as they stress, separating the influence of the pandemic from Brexit is difficult here. Łukasz (M, 41, stayer's son) admits that he misses the cinema, ice rink and similar attractions, but "I don't feel like going to the shops anymore, except for groceries," and Monika (M, 43, stayer's sister) adds:

For example, shopping – it's a whole different thing now. It would be best not to go to the shops at all and just buy everything online, right?! Well, here it is, but maybe with Brexit. Because the pandemic and Brexit here can't be separated so much either, because some products started to run out of stock in stores, so there was no point in going to these stores to look for these products, because they simply are not physically there and stuff like that. So these consumption habits have changed, for sure.

The above statements show that, partly due to Brexit and then Covid, migrants' consumption behaviours have changed. The consumer lifestyle pursued, among others, by satisfying economic needs has been inhibited as a result of limited access

to particular products and services. However, as illustrated by Kasia above (M, 31, stayer's sister) – a key essential worker at a hospital – among other things, there was also overconsumption of the most needed products. No accounts of paying back loans, saving money, supporting family back home, or general efforts to increase living standards (see Dziekońska 2020) – often part of the narratives on migrants' consumption behaviours – came up during the interviews. Presumably, this was due to the UK's political and economic instability (Sumption 2022, Baldini et al. 2022) during the Brexit process and the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential risks posed by migrants' advanced financial steps. Nevertheless, fatigue from the crises, which led to reduced consumption, and fear, which in turn led to overconsumption, were noted in the narratives.

Interpersonal relations and transnational contacts

The respondents told us about various relationships accompanying them in this new, pandemic time and how that time determines these relationships. Emotions were mentioned in this field. They mainly shared with us the experience of relationships within the family, between friends, and those across borders. The migrants in our study admitted that Brexit came up in conversations with stayers, but at the same time, they stressed that the whole process had not affected their relationship. Monica (M, 43, stayer's sister) made an interesting point: "…with my uncles, I spoke to them on the phone. and it turned out that in general, well, they just don't understand the whole situation". A lack of understanding of what Brexit may be, suggests that this topic is not of particular interest and does not impact the quality of relationships with loved ones.

Nevertheless, the pandemic made the respondents even more aware of the importance and need for physical contact and how much freedom they had previously enjoyed with those contacts and how much they needed them, how much they had become used to them. Older study participants in the stayers group miss the physical presence of their children much: "He always visited us, several times a year, twice a year and now it will be two years in September since he was last here" – says Janina about her son living in the UK (S, 71, migrant's mother). Renata, in turn, adds (S, 66, a migrant mother):

> My daughter would come for Christmas and Easter, for the holidays – as much as three times a year. And the year before last, because now they were here, now they were here and for Christmas. But the previous year, not to tell a lie, but I think we did not meet at all face to face. And for me that was… For me a month or two, half a year seemed like an eternity.

At times like these, physical distance is extremely disturbing, mothers in particular felt this lack. Renata (S, 66, migrant's mother) emphasises that her daughter's place **47**

of residence is a barrier for her today – a barrier which mothers of children living in Poland do not have to overcome. Children who are "closer to home" are subject to the same mobility regulations, but they have shorter distances to travel and are thereby more likely to enjoy time together with parents. Children of stayers must first cross a series of obstacles raised between countries by the pandemic in order to be together, even for a short time. Some people however, see positive aspects of this new situation for their transnational relations. They explain to themselves that their contacts were often via instant messaging or telephone anyway – so nothing has changed in this regard. Only Christmas and Easter spent online are a new thing to them. Some relationships have even grown stronger under the new circumstances – precisely because of more frequent, longer online conversations. They note that good relations cannot be ruined even by a situation such as the Covid-19 pandemic, but they also point out that good relations can be maintained regardless of the difficult situation: "You could always meet whenever you wanted – while maintaining all safety rigours," admits Mirosław (S, 73, migrant's father).

Younger stayers participating in the study admit that their ongoing, everyday relationships moved online, but then this turned out to be an inadequate solution. The social distancing introduced by the pandemic became entrenched. Laura (S, 38, friend of a migrant) explains that "Everyone is now afraid of people, afraid of closeness" – what results in withdrawal and resignation. "I noticed that I had lost all desire to meet people," adds Weronika (S, 41, sister of a migrant). These respondents also report more negative changes caused by the pandemic in their everyday lives.

Migrants, just like stayers, have often noticed that the pandemic has intensified their cross-border contacts. Migrants who managed to go to Poland, especially those who returned after the UK left the EU, pay attention to the changes in regulations at border crossings. They emphasise that Brexit is a huge barrier to travel and observe that the pandemic has made the process of moving more complicated, sometimes even impossible. For example, Dorota (M, 32, stayer's sister) points out that there is now an interrogation at the border, while Eliza (M, 41, stayer's daughter) sees problems with proving her identity or choosing the right queue when your children, your spouse or partner is a UK citizen. For the respondents, these kinds of situations, at an experiential level and sometimes also at a logistic level, lead them to perceive the maintenance of cross-border relations as difficult. As well as the physical borders, they perceive mental boundaries (see Winiecka, Dziekońska 2023). In addition, crossing borders, especially in the realities of Brexit, can turn into an example or symbol of the process of negotiating and giving a new meaning to one's belonging and identification with the country of settlement, the country of departure or a wider community – the European Union. (See Ranta, Nancheva, 2018; Ryan 2023). What is noteworthy is that crossing the border was just one of many examples in which migrants negotiated their affiliation and connection to the UK. For example, Justyna (M, 39, stayer's daughter), who at the time of the research described her ties to the

UK as stronger than those to Poland, stated that she had to prove anew that the UK was the right place for her to live and redefine her belonging on new terms (see 're-embedding' Ryan 2023).

Cross-border relations, in the case of migrants, bring out the issue of difficult emotions. There is anxiety related to the inability to see each other "live", fear about when the next meeting will be, frustration related to the inability to spend important events and holidays together (as one was used to doing), and above all, fear related to the loss of loved ones and even when the worst happens – the inability to say goodbye (see Hernández-Fernández, Meneses-Falcón 2021; Kumar 2023).

The interviewees agree that the new pandemic regulations made maintaining relations across borders and everyday life much more difficult. Interestingly, migrants show a greater understanding of the restrictions than their relatives in Poland. Highly upsetting to respondents in both groups the financial cost incurred, e.g.: lost airline tickets, cancelled flights, lack of agreement between countries when it comes to opening and closing borders or illogical, incomprehensible rules leading to bizarre situations. Marta (M, 38, stayer's friend) gives the example of quarantine and Covid-19 tests for arriving guests. Once she had managed to adjust to the pandemic regulations in both countries and came to Poland, she still could not meet her relatives until she had gone through a quarantine of several days. This significantly shortened her time with her loved ones; confusion about what exactly the rules were at any moment added to the difficulties (changes in the Polish rules could occur practically overnight). This all meant that Marta – as well as other respondents – remained "suspended", not knowing what information to rely on. Maria (S, 63, a migrant's mother), when asked about both the pandemic and Brexit and their impact on relations with her son living in the UK, responded: "They say there that it will come back, the pandemic. There's no end to it." Therefore, it is easier not to make any plans, even though the respondents are anxious about the future.

Pandemic stages and new strategies in everyday life

The analysis shows that the many stages of the pandemic were charged with various, often difficult emotions, but certain emotions had also been triggered before – by Brexit. Interviewed migrants described the pre and post-referendum time as emotionally hard and full of anxieties. Justyna (M, 39, stayer's daughter) says nervously: "I felt great disappointment (…). We all fell into panic!" As in Ruggerone and Hackett's (2023) study, anger and sadness were mentioned by many interviewed migrants. Even if some did not have such feelings, they noticed such feelings were part of everyday life for many other migrants they knew. Some of them stepped into the Covid-19 pandemic with these feelings, which in some cases took on a permanent character (see Bauman 2013).

The study revealed clear stages undergone in the experience of the pandemic. This resulted in the formation of various strategies for dealing with the pandemic in everyday life.

The respondents in Poland notice the changes in the pandemic – they are able to identify its individual stages, some of them they see very clearly. The first – one that is even positively evaluated by some – is "rest and slow down". "I'll stay at home, I won't walk, I'll make up for it later" – admits Weronika (S, 41, migrant's sister). However, it soon turns out that this can't go on forever. The second stage is more difficult – it involves entering a completely new world of work, education, and online relationships. The next stage is about realising what the world is facing, what a pandemic really is and that it may last for no-one-knows-how-long – the subjects are no longer able to imagine when it will end definitively. They also change their approach to the pandemic, and this is the next stage: changes in themselves. Barbara (S, 43, migrant's sister) says, sadly: "At some point I just stopped reading and watching TV, and now I explain to myself in a different way: we have to come to terms with it now and learn to live with it, because I don't think it will disappear."

Analysing interviews with migrants broadens our understanding of the stages of the pandemic to encompass their emotional significance. We were able to distinguish stages such as: disbelief, growing fear, anxiety, doubt, attempts to cope with the situation, acceptance – searching for solutions and strategies for adapting to the new situation. Mateusz (M, 41, stayer's cousin) recalls:

And I remember that period – I think it was February – when one of the team leaders from my side just started telling that something was going on in China (…). And so the guessing began, what will happen if and when it reaches here and so on. No one quite believed it would come here. (…). It was the period of Easter there, Great Britain announced a lockdown and it was a pretty strong lockdown, hard, where you really weren't allowed to go out on the street without an important reason, I'll tell you that then my approach changed, my work system changed dramatically (…). And then, unfortunately, as a result of Covid in the summer, I got a call from a colleague that the company was going to introduce job cuts (…). Well, then there was fear. (…) I know people who really couldn't survive, saying that it was a hoax, that they had had enough, that they would like to go on holiday.

The stages in which difficult emotions arose were linked to changes in the migrant's environment. The outbreak of the virus and, over time, growing restrictions caused anxiety associated with the demands to change the previous life in many ways. The new realities made adaptation a necessity.

The study revealed that various stages of the pandemic were experienced and perceived differently in each country. Respondents, both those in Poland and those in the UK, devised their own strategies for moving around in the pandemic-ridden world. They developed a whole set of behaviours making it easier to get on. Some

adapted to this situation by questioning the usefulness of certain pandemic regulations. Marta (M, 38, stayer's friend) recalls:

> *We could feel it when we went to the shops, those queues, it was raining, and we were standing there like idiots, outside the shop, because you know it's cold, me I'm standing there with my child, waiting and there you go – they just walked in… So what difference does it make? Anyway everyone was bumping into each other in the shop. Made no sense.*

Other people completely accepted the new regulations and followed them closely. Weronika (S, 41, migrant's sister) comments: "What contortions do you have to do to be together" – and yet, these people remained within the boundaries set by the regulations. Another strategy was to block access to knowledge and new information about the pandemic. "I cut myself off from it all," admits Barbara (S, 43, migrant's sister), while Sylwek (M, 39, stayer's son) says: "As long as I don't turn on the radio or TV, it's pretty cool." Another way was to dive into familiar things, routine activities, or to mark off new private territories – like a new hobby, or to give new meaning to the old people. Some people chose to stay on the verge: "I don't have the strength to cross the lines" Weronika (S, 41, migrant's sister) declared with resignation. A fairly common strategy is to create one's own territory, "Where we just do our own thing" says Marta (M, 38, stayer's friend), or as Eliza did: "It didn't cover the whole area of my life, this problem of this pandemic" (M, 41, stayers's daughter).

The successive stages of the pandemic reveal a number of parallel processes: redefining one's own priorities and values and the emergence of new values, stopping to wait, but also to slow down and think. Next is the refusal to give meaning to the new situation – when the pandemic did not disturb everyday life, or even could be made to fit in well. This applies to people who had already led a lifestyle similar to that introduced by the pandemic – such as Łukasz (M, 41, stayer's son): "I have always existed as I would have existed before".

The narratives make it clear how demanding the pandemic was on an emotional, economic, and social level. Yet they show that the same is true of the prolonged Brexit and the period of facing the new rules of daily life.

Closing remarks

In this article we present the accounts of the everyday life of Polish migrants in England and Northern Ireland and stayers living in Poland during the pandemic and Brexit. We have identified the spheres of everyday life affected by these two processes, their stages, and accompanying emotions.

Both processes occurred at the same time and reveal changes in everyday life in terms of routine activities, work, interpersonal relations and transnational contacts.

The pandemic, unlike Brexit, forced changes in daily routines, introducing new and eliminating some old habits in migrants and stayers in Poland. Additionally, for migrants, Brexit, while affecting their sense of belonging and attachment to broader society, also impacted their experience of everyday life in the UK. Based on that, Brexit created a particular internal (local) order, and the pandemic has created an external (global) order. That may be the transitional form between the old and the new order (cf. Amorin-Woods 2021).

The pandemic forced changes in the form and rhythm of work and a change in the previous approach to spending money and consuming goods and services. Brexit circumstances revealed exacerbated shortages of various products (Brooks et al. 2021) in the UK market. These, combined with an intensified discussion on the shortage of workers (Sumption 2022) – especially migrants – working in key sectors, leads us to believe that Brexit may have had a higher impact on everyday life than reported by the study participants.

Relationships with stayers in Poland (cf. Walsh 2020) have been particularly redefined by the pandemic, both in place and transnationally. New and difficult circumstances in everyday life have also made family and friends more important and closer than ever before. It might even be said that the more restrictions, the greater the concerns about the safety and well-being of people in relationships across borders. Paradoxically, the changes that have taken place, involving the denial of physical closeness, contributed to the deepening of mutual relations.

The two-year period of living with a pandemic is perceived differently by respondents in Poland and in the UK. As the pandemic unfolded, varied, and often difficult emotions emerged. The common ones were fright, anxiety (Alimoradi et al. 2021) and fear – including fear of other people. The stages of the pandemic, such as rest and slow down, growing awareness of the pandemic, and developing strategies of adaptation, on an experiential level, indicate that the shaping of everyday life was conditioned, among other things, by factors like age, the kind of employment (Długosz 2021) or personal experience and life situation. In both countries, strategies developed for navigating the new everyday life with its new and constantly changing regulations, restrictions including limitations on personal freedoms (do Rosario Anjos, Martins 2022) and movement (IOM 2021).

The pandemic, and accompanying emotions, emerged as the leading theme in respondents' narratives, overshadowing Brexit. Disbelief, fear, anxiety, and doubt were most often listed. However, migrants entered the pandemic with accumulated Brexit tension (Hughes 2019) and fatigue (Degerman et al. 2020), so it is likely that prolonged Brexit anxiety may have worsened their daily functioning in various fields during the pandemic.

Our study is a snapshot of unique and highly dynamic realities in two countries at a unique time. For the picture of living through the pandemic and Brexit in both

societies to be complete, it is essential to continue exploring the subsequent stages, that is, in our view: Covid-recovery and life in the post-Covid UK and Poland, as well as post-Covid and post-Brexit realities in the UK.

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