“You have to be flexible”—Coping among polish migrant workers in Scotland

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Abstract

Migrants after international relocation are confronted with various stressors that can challenge their adjustment capacities and lead to decreased health. Based on the analysis of interviews and focus groups, this article is the first to explore successful coping strategies of Polish migrants in Edinburgh, thereby providing insight into the coping process after economic migration across the European Union. The study reveals that Polish migrants are very resourceful in dealing with the stressors they face. It confirms the employment of various types of coping including problem-solving, emotion-regulating and appraisal-oriented strategies. Social support and appraisal emerge as important variables and seem to considerably influence the subsequent stages of the adjustment process. Based on the assumption that the degree of coping is likely to have consequences for the health of migrant populations, a better understanding of coping and the factors influencing it followed by tailored support for international migrants might have a positive influence on public health, particularly in societies where international mobility and large migrant populations are increasingly common.

Keywords: international migration; Scotland; Polish migrant workers; appraisal; coping
Introduction

As a consequence of globalisation and the free movement across European borders, work-induced mobility and economic migration across the European Union (EU) have increased throughout the last decade (Eurostat, 2008). The process that people undergo when confronted with a changing cultural context, i.e. the procedure of dealing with acculturative challenges, coping and developing a certain level of adaptation to the new culture, has been described by Berry and colleagues (2002) as acculturation or adjustment. A growing field of academic research reveals that international migration can produce acculturative stress (Kim-Godwin and Bechtel, 2004, Mirdal, 1985, Mirdal, 1984, Berry et al., 1987, Furnham and Ying, 1993, Sundquist, 1994, Khan and Watson, 2005, Magana and Hovey, 2003, Griffin and Soskolne, 2003, Weishaar, 2008), require the activation of coping strategies (Berry et al., 1987) and coincide with diminished physical and psychological health (Griffin and Soskolne, 2003, Hull, 1979, Khan and Watson, 2005, Sundquist, 1995, Kim-Godwin and Bechtel, 2004, Magana and Hovey, 2003, Chung and Seok, 2000, Ryan et al., 2006, Hovey and Magana, 2002).

Migration across the EU became a topic of particular interest after 1 May 2004 when, as part of the biggest enlargement in the EU’s history, ten countries became new members of the EU. The 15 member states which had been part of the EU before May 2004 had the right to regulate labour market access for A8 Central and Eastern European migrants\(^1\) for a transition period of five years. The UK was one of three European member states\(^2\) which chose not to do so, but opened its labour market without restrictions. This flexible labour market policy

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\(^1\) A8 migrants include migrants eight of the ten accession countries, namely from Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia.

\(^2\) The other EU member states who did not restrict access were the Republic of Ireland and Sweden.
combined with high unemployment and low wages in some of the new accession countries resulted in an unexpectedly high influx of economic migrants to the UK. By May 2009, a total of nearly 1,000,000 A8 applicants had registered with the Workers Registration Scheme (WRS)\(^3\) of which approximately 80,000 A8 migrants had registered in Scotland alone (Home Office et al., 2009). According to recent WRS-data, 81% of all A8 migrants are within the age group of 18 to 34 years, about half are male, the majority (66%) are of Polish origin and though many A8 migrants are highly qualified, most find work in manual or so-called “low-skilled” jobs (Home Office et al., 2009).

Recent research has dealt with migration of A8 migrants (Sim et al., 2007, Anderson et al., 2006, Ruhs, 2006) and the stressors Polish migrants experience when coming to Scotland have particularly been identified (Weishaar, 2008). It can be assumed that the high influx of Polish migrants to the UK and the stressors they are confronted with after economic migration might lead to adaptation problems which affect both the individual migrant and the host society and be of relevance for the health of the migrant population. Although theories suggest that coping is an important factor in the adjustment process and therefore a highly relevant concept when exploring and analysing successful and unsuccessful adaptation after international migration, so far little data exists on coping among Central and Eastern European migrant workers in the UK. By analysing interviews and focus groups, this study makes a first attempt to address this issue by aiming to explore and identify successful coping strategies of Polish migrants in Edinburgh and to gain insight into the coping and its potential influence on acculturation after economic migration. The findings might help to develop,

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\(^3\) The Workers Registration Scheme is a scheme under which all A8 migrants who have come to the UK to work for more than one month since May 2004 have to register.
support, challenge and advance theoretical frameworks and future studies on coping and adaptation after international relocation.

Conceptual framework of the adjustment process following migration

While research has shown that acculturation is moderated by a variety of factors, including stressors, appraisal, social support and coping strategies (Berry et al., 1987, Kim and Gudykunst, 1987), existing studies do not embrace a common model of acculturation nor a common explanation (Salant and Lauderdale, 2003) and little is known about how migrants transform “potentially stressful conditions into opportunities” (Aroian, 1990, p. 5). For the purpose of this study, a conceptual framework was developed, drawing on three wider theoretical concepts on adaptation including (i) the theory on stress, coping and adjustment by Lazarus (1965), (ii) Berry et al.’s (2002) theory on acculturative stress, adjustment and adaptation and (iii) the concept of life events and onset of disease by Holmes and Rahe (1967). Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the adjustment process following migration, trying to accommodate the three concepts in a single model.

Insert figure 1 here

The model draws on Lazarus’ stress theory (1965) which states that the confrontation between the individual and a stressor\(^4\), i.e. the relationship between the individual and the environment has the potential to result in conflict and stress. An individual that is confronted with a stressor appraises, i.e. undertakes an assessment of the situation. Lazarus distinguishes between primary and secondary appraisal with primary appraisal being the individual’s

\(^4\) The term “stressor” is used according to Lazarus (1999, p. 32) as an external input on a social, physiological or psychological system which creates a physical, emotional or social challenge.
judgement whether or not the stressor poses a serious threat and secondary appraisal being the evaluation of one’s own capabilities, external support and coping options. Lazarus assumes that appraisal as the cognitive process preceding coping not only influences the inner state of the individual but also the further process of coping, adjustment and adaptation and is therefore the most significant element in the adjustment process (Lazarus, 1965).

The process that follows appraisal and therefore the next stage in the model is coping, which is defined as the “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person” (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Lazarus (1999) distinguishes between (i) problem-solving, (ii) emotion-regulating and (iii) appraisal-oriented coping. Problem-solving coping includes altering the situation; emotion-regulating coping comprises dealing with one’s emotions; appraisal-oriented coping encompasses altering one’s own perceptions by re-appraising the situation.

Lazarus concludes that the appropriate exertion and combination of the three coping strategies can lead to successful adaptation. This concept is taken up by Berry et al. (2002, p. 369) in their theory on the response to migration. They use the term “adaptation” to describe the outcome of the adjustment process, i.e. the level to which a migrant manages to cope with the new and different culture. Adaptation can range from successful adaptation (the migrant manages life well) to unsuccessful adaptation (the migrant is not able to carry on living in the new society). Confirming this concept, Hull (1979, p. 28) points out that the variety of stressors and demands on migrants can result in an over-burdening of the “psychosomatic adjustment capacity” and that unsuccessful adaptation can become manifest as emotional distress, diminished well-being and illness. Brown and Harris (1978) assume that
unsuccessful coping and adaptation can either provoke direct health-related reactions or changes in health later on in life, an idea that is consistent with Holmes and Rahe’s concept of life events (1967). The latter hypothesise that life events (for example change in residence) provoke coping and are related to the onset of diseases. Accordingly, a relationship between acculturation stress and diminished mental health and depressive mood has been found in samples of Russian and Iranian migrants in Germany (Haasen et al., 2008) and Bosnian refugees in the Netherlands (Knipscheer and Kleber, 2006) and Hiott et al (2008) found high levels of anxiety scores and depressive symptoms among migrant farmworkers in the United States. The causality between acculturative stress and health is not clearly proven and the process not fully understood (Day, 1984), yet some authors have emphasised a number of factors which might explain diminished health after migration. These include the interruption of lifestyle (Fisher, 1988), unfamiliarity with a new culture where familiar rules for interaction do not work (Oberg, 1960, Zapf, 1991), role and identity change (Fisher, 1988), loss and social disruption (Fisher, 1988), reduced control and powerlessness (Fisher, 1988, Oberg, 1960, Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1984,).

**Methods**

Interviews and focus groups have proven to be culturally sensitive methods of investigation through which very personal, “tacit” (Blaikie, 2000, p.25) and complex knowledge can be teased out (Khan and Watson, 2005). They appear to be particularly suitable to explore subconscious or partly conscious processes and strategies like those involved in coping and have been used to study individuals’ experiences after international migration before (Khan and Watson, 2005, Elliott and Gillie, 1998). The data for this paper derives from eight qualitative interviews and two focus groups with Polish migrants working in manual and low-skilled jobs in Edinburgh conducted by the author from April to June 2007. With snowball
sampling as a proven and tested technique in research on migrants (Haasen et al., 2008, Elliott and Gillie, 1998), a convenience sample was recruited through gate keepers, advertisements, flyers and snowball sampling among the Polish community in Edinburgh. Interviews and discussion groups focused on the acculturation process with an emphasis on coping. Interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes, focus groups between 90 and 105 minutes. Supplementary sources of information for the study were interviews with professionals involved with Polish migrants and notes made during observations of places where Poles met, including churches, community centres, Polish shops and language classes. All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using the computer software Nvivo, the data was subsequently coded, analysed thematically and categorised in order to identify core issues.

Ethical guidelines of the University of Edinburgh Public Health Sciences were followed with particular attention being paid to careful recruitment and close monitoring of the research process. An information sheet as well as a consent form was translated into Polish in order to ensure that all research participants understood the objectives of the research, were able to consider their voluntary informed consent and aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and, after the final analysis, were provided with a summary of the research results. As research suggests that peoples’ emotional experiences and expressions are less aroused in a non-native tongue (Church, 1982), interpretation was offered to all interviewees. Every other interviewee (n=4) was fully or partly interviewed in Polish. A Polish student of the University of Edinburgh served as the interpreter. Because literal translation would have risked free and fluent narration, only the general content of the answers was interpreted during the interviews. Later,
the recordings of the interviews were translated word for word to allow an accurate analysis of the data.

Focus groups were organised with four and five participants respectively. They were conducted after a first analysis of the interviews in order to increase the researcher’s understanding of specific issues that had arisen from the interviews as ambiguous, had remained unclear and required further elaboration. Statements from the interviews were used to stimulate discussion and charts served as visual prompts. For practical reasons, both focus groups were conducted in English. Table 1 shows the main interview and focus group elements.

Insert Table 1 here

Results
Six men and nine women participated in the research. Participants were on average 29 years old, ranging between 17 and 51 years. One third was married, and 50% had dependants living with them in the UK. Respondents had migrated on average 19 months previously, ranging from 1 to 47 months with men generally having been in the UK for a longer period of time (average of 31 months) than women (average of 10 months). Further demographical data of the sample is presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 here

Only two study participants had immediate plans to return to Poland, all others were inclined to stay for at least a few more years. The majority reported being better off economically
compared to when in Poland. Ten out of fifteen respondents gave the impression that they had adapted well, were integrated into UK society, felt comfortable or described themselves as content. All respondents acknowledged migration as a life event which challenged attitudes, conventional structures, coping strategies and adaptation abilities. As this article aims to identify factors contributing to successful coping, the following section only lists factors which were mentioned as helpful and supportive. Unsuccessful coping strategies were not explored in detail and are only listed sporadically for comparative purposes.

Problem-solving coping

Problem-solving behaviour was identified as a factor with a major impact on coping. When asked about problems, one interviewee put it very simply:

“Oh with me, if I have a problem, I find a solution. I don’t stop and say “Oh no, what am I going to do?” I am trying to find out what I am going to do and then I will do it.” (male, I)

Migrants felt that they relied on themselves and had to cope on their own and thus had to be proactive. Some respondents reported that the transition to a foreign country had helped them realise that it was their responsibility to make the most of their life:

“You know, people in Poland, for them it’s responsibility to everyone around, but not himself. And that is definitely change here. For me, I understand for 100% that there is everything in me, in myself.” (male, I)

The decision to take responsibility and grasp opportunities was mentioned as a crucial feature in the adjustment process. Active problem-solving became particularly apparent with regard to the job search with migrants searching for jobs on the internet, going to the job centre several times per day, submitting applications and seeking out potential employers in order to personally hand in their CVs. One interviewee described how he had set himself a “minimum

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5 Attached abbreviations indicate whether the quote is taken from an interview (I) or a focus group (FG).
“I had a system of looking for a job: I looked for a job eight hours per day with a two hour break in between. So that was four hours in the morning and four hours in the afternoon with two hours in between for lunch.” (male, I)

Determination, commitment and the will to “push a bit harder” (male, I) were identified by many participants as key factors for successful coping. They stressed, however, that determination had to be linked with flexibility:

“You have to be flexible to survive. That is why humankind is such a terribly popular species. We can adjust.” (male, I)

All interviewees were aware of opportunities for formal support and many reported that they had called upon official places for help including job centres, trade unions, public offices, citizen advice bureaus, churches and Polish community centres. A specific strength of the latter was the opportunity to access information and advice in Polish without having to overcome the usual language barrier. Obtaining information via the internet was valued as it did not require much effort or the request for help. Taking initiative was also seen as helpful with regard to meeting people and establishing friendships. While respondents admitted that taking the first step towards other people required a certain degree of courage, they emphasised that taking the initiative was often key to successful adaptation. One interviewee proudly gave account of an encouraging experience when trying to establish friendships during a weekend away with a club:

“I offered that I would organize some drama games. […] So I had to break the ice that was in me. And it was absolutely awesome, ’cause the people, they loved it. […] And after [this], I started to be recognized in [the club]. People just came a bit closer, and so did I.” (male, I)

Leisure time activities like doing sports, reading books, going out with other people or simply enjoying the outdoors seemed to divert attention and prevent migrants from worrying, were identified as creating a feeling of usefulness and belonging, as means of doing something for oneself and thus seen as crucial to successful adaptation. Particularly when working extensive
hours, taking time aside for leisure and hobbies was perceived as important. One focus group participant pointed out that since he balanced his work and leisure time better, he felt more alive and much better:

“Hobbies and your free time, that’s the most important thing. [...] I feel much, much, much better. And I feel that I am alive, that I am human. And that is for me the most important.” (male, FG)

**Emotion-regulating coping**

Those who had been in Scotland for a longer time emphasised that adjustment took time and endurance was needed to bear and to overcome difficulties. All participants seemed to be relatively undemanding and many put up with extremely strenuous situations without complaining. The immediate time after migration was seen as a time where one could not be picky and during which modesty and sturdiness were useful character traits. It was remarkable how positive and humorous respondents evaluated their situations and how they were able to positively appraise and joke even about major problems.

Personality traits were mentioned as influential for how a situation was evaluated and informal contacts were highlighted as important for dealing with emotions, for making respondents feel less alien, more appreciated and understood and for increasing a sense of belonging. Nearly all respondents said that they had found people to socialise with, either through work, shared accommodation, language classes, church or hobbies. Having family members in the new dwelling was identified as a particularly strong source of encouragement as they helped respondents to cope and settle and increased motivation to carry on:

“What helped me? ...Probably, like, when I seen [my son], [my daughter] and [my wife], that makes me keep going. I really need just them to be around, and I know everything is fine. As far as they are fine, I am fine. And that was all, really, to keep me running.” (male, I)
Some respondents also referred to family members or close friends in Poland as a source of emotional support and gave account that going home to see friends gave them new strength and cheered them up. While friendships in the UK were mainly forged with other Poles, respondents said that the open, welcoming and helpful manner of people in Edinburgh made it easier to cope:

“The Scots are friendly and very helpful. [...] When you ask about the way or when you ask about… They smile, and they talk to you. [...] And it’s easier to live when they are friendly. Then it’s easier to live.” (female, I)

**Appraisal-oriented coping**

Appraisal emerged as being crucial and stood out as a very important factor in the coping process with different aspects of positive appraisal being mentioned as influential. Positive, forward-looking appraisal and the ability to develop a positive view and optimism were seen as particularly helpful. Not regretting was specifically described as an important feature:

“We live on planet earth, and planet earth has one special thing: You can’t move back in time. And there is this. It’s like: What’s done is done. You can’t fix this. You must look forward.” (male, I)

One interviewee stressed that she and her husband were “can-do people” (female, I) with a belief that problems could be solved. Several interviewees’ accounts underlined that their trust in the manageability of a situation and in a positive outcome helped to actively solve problems:

“I am a kind of resourceful person. I am still here, so that means I survived, no matter what. I always find some way out or something.” (male, I)

Believing in one’s abilities, knowing one’s value and a positive self-image seemed to facilitate active problem-solving while, in turn, positive experiences and successful coping helped to build up self-esteem and appraise situations positively. One interviewee described his strategy of building up self-esteem, confidence and competency by deliberately
confronting himself with small challenges and gradually making the challenges more
difficult:

“Now I know that I have some experience and nobody can take this from me. And
it’s very helpful. […] Everyday, when you have work, when you can pay bills, it’s
like a small victory. You know, every day feel better, every day you can feel that
you can do more. […] Some days I spend like a winner, it’s like Napoleon. I find I
am so big, that…. I am, it’s enough!” (male, I)

Evaluating a difficult situation as temporary and appraising it positively in comparison to
difficulties experienced at earlier points in one’s own life or to other people’s struggles was
seen as a source of optimism towards life in Scotland. A shocking account was given by a
woman who had been to her home town for a visit:

“I have been in Poland recently […] There, even in supermarkets, the work
conditions are terrible. They force cashiers to wear diapers and not go to toilets.
Who would do this here? […] I[t] explained a lot of things. [I was] saying to
myself that it is worse there than here.” (female, I)

Scotland was seen by many migrant workers as a place where it was easy to find a job or as a
place providing opportunities to advance professionally and personally. One interviewee
expressed that in Scotland, he saw an opportunity to develop his potential and achieve
something through courage, ambition, dedication and hard work:

“Here, I can develop. I can do more than I could in Poland. […] And if you can
use it [your opportunities], if you are not afraid to take a chance, just like that, you
can make things happen. And that is almost like a dream…” (male, I)

The respondents’ perception of their move as a chance to develop, to try out new things and to
use their abilities seemed to lead to a positive and active approach to obstacles.

Interdependence of coping factors

The interview data suggested that coping factors were intertwined, applied in combination
and could not easily be categorised. To clarify this, focus group participants were asked to
rank the different coping strategies according to their importance. Respondents found it
difficult to tie themselves down to one single most successful factor and were eager to point
out that the various factors enhanced and influenced each other: Personality traits like
determination and flexibility, but also a positive self-image and high self-esteem did not only
determine appraisal but also the activation of informal or formal support and the drive to
actively solve occurring problems. Respondents highlighted that people who were open-
minded, outgoing and willing to learn were more likely to draw on support, to make friends or
to engage in activities while being shy, withdrawn and lacking self-confidence seemed to
hinder respondents from contacting support and hence prevented active problem-solving.
Proactive behaviour, in turn, was described as partly dependent on the information one had
 gained by drawing on formal support. Appraisal was identified as a crucial factor, influencing
both mood and the ability to solve problems actively. Finally, successful and unsuccessful
coping seemed to replicate itself: Most migrants reported that the experience of successful
adaptation enabled them to cope with further obstacles while those who had not adjusted well
 seemed to be trapped in a downward spiral of acculturative difficulties.

Discussion
This study on coping among Polish migrants in Edinburgh supports Lazarus’ theory on
appraisal and coping (1965, 1999). The migrants interviewed employ a wide diversity of
successful coping strategies, ranging from problem-solving to emotion-regulating and
appraisal-oriented coping. With no particular strategy emerging as superior and various
factors influencing each other mutually, it is confirmed that coping factors are most effective
when applied in combination. By identifying individual and context-specific differences, the
study supports Lazarus (1999) assumption that successful coping is a dynamic social process,
a matter of appraisal, of learnt mastery techniques and of the suitability of a coping
mechanism in a specific situation. The conceptual framework illustrated in figure 1 provides a
suitable concept to explore the adjustment process Polish migrants undergo after migrating to
Scotland. It can serve as a useful starting point for the development, refinement and testing of currently rather sketchy models and theories on adjustment after international migration.

This qualitative study allows drawing a few implications about the factors which are closely connected to successful coping and which might therefore enhance conceptual frameworks and theories. The findings confirm appraisal as an important feature of the coping process which seems to have an impact on the inner state of the individual, on coping and on the degree of physical, psychological and social adjustment. The study also indicates that appraisal varies greatly between individuals: Some participants stress adaptation difficulties, others see the confrontation with something new as a positive experience, and some feel that adjustment is a natural process of growth. Even the same situation can be perceived as stressful and threatening by one person but as totally manageable by another. Antonovsky’s (1979) concept of the importance of a sense of coherence seems to be central to appraisal and coping with the findings suggesting that individuals who perceive a situation as manageable, comprehensible and meaningful are more likely to employ active, productive and successful coping strategies. The importance of the ascription of meaning in the adjustment process has also been identified by Wong et al (2008) in a recent study on the effect of meaning of migration on the mental health of female Chinese migrant workers. In order to measure and objectively quantify the connection between sense of coherence, appraisal and coping it could be investigated whether migrants who display higher scores on Antonovsky’s sense of coherence scale are also more likely to positively appraise their situation and resources and employ more successful coping strategies.

6 The term “sense of coherence” is used according to Antonovsky as a global orientation to view the world and the individual environment as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful.
The findings further point to the crucial role of social support in the appraisal and coping process. Polish migrants in Edinburgh cope by drawing on strong informal social networks and seem to be well connected. A high prevalence of Polish migrants in Edinburgh and, as a result, the strong Polish community which can draw on several formal and informal services (e.g. shops, community centres and churches) seem to provide numerous opportunities to establish informal networks of support. Social support by family members and friends emerges as a crucial feature of coping and seems to be a buffer against stress, a facilitator of adjustment and protector of good mental health, a finding that is consistent with previous research (Copeland and Norell, 2002, Berry et al., 1987, Kirkcaldy et al., 2006, Kim-Godwin and Bechtel, 2004). Copeland and Norell (2002, p.260) claim that relationships can fulfil different functions, a phenomenon known as the “multiplexity of social support” which is confirmed by the present study. Friendships emerge as important for practical support and general socialising but, more importantly, seem to have the potential to increase a sense of belonging (a finding in agreement with Ward and Styles’ (2003) study on identity-building after migration) and to provide emotional support. Social networks and the formation of close friendships that encourage the migrant in times of loneliness and psychological distress are helpful to regulate emotional distress and seem to abet successful coping.

The reported scope and variety of coping strategies among Polish migrant workers is striking. While the common perception might be that migrants are a particularly deficient population, this study shows that the opposite might be the case. Polish migrants who come to Edinburgh to work seem to be very resourceful and able to employ several coping strategies, a finding for which a few potential explanations can be given. One explanation might be that successful coping among the respondents is due to the “healthy migrant effect” (Kirkcaldy et al., 2006, p.875), a concept which assumes that individuals who leave their home country and endure in
a foreign culture are particularly robust, healthy, resilient and more resourceful than non-migrants or migrants who have returned to their home country. If this was true, a “healthy migrant selection bias” could explain why the migrants interviewed for this study seemed to be particularly able to cope with stressful situations and adaptation stressors. An alternative explanation for the successful adjustment of the sample might be found when investigating the location and the host society of this study. Scotland’s capital is a city with an international flair, a university which attracts many foreigners and a high percentage of foreign nationals. Tailored services are available to Polish migrants, including translation services, trade unions, the Citizen Advice Bureau, churches providing services in Polish and community centres which offer language classes and regular meeting opportunities for Polish migrants. While the coping factors identified in this study are presumably not entirely specific to Polish migrants in Edinburgh, specific characteristics of Edinburgh, its society, its labour market and the forms of official support offered to Polish migrants might have an impact on the situation of this particular migrant group. The cross-sectional study design, the size of the sample, the highly selective recruitment and the specifics of the location of the study do therefore not allow the results to be generalised and it cannot be assumed that the findings would be replicated when conducting the study among a different migrant group or in a different location. While this study can provide a first insight into the strategies Polish migrants employ in order to cope with international migration, it would be interesting to conduct a larger, longitudinal study on diverse cultural groups migrating to different locations to explore coping strategies and differences in coping with regard to gender, age, culture and changes in coping over time in more detail. Such a study could further help to refine theories on coping.

Cross-border migration as a time of transition demands adjustment not only on part of the individual migrant but also on part of the country of settlement. A better understanding of
coping and adjustment among migrant workers has the potential to increase the effectiveness of policies, programmes and tailed support for migrant workers, can aid migrants in their attempts to cope with international migration and thus contribute to public health. The interdependence of coping strategies suggests that a joint and comprehensive approach is needed. Cooperation between local communities, employers, trade unions, health care providers and other access points including various service providers, community centres, churches, local media and formal and informal groups within the migrant community might be key to successful adjustment. Findings on coping strategies, on migrants’ resources and on existing sources of formal and informal support could possibly be acknowledged and utilised more when designing services for migrants and whether existing support is truly tailored to migrants’ coping strategies might have to be critically assessed. Tailoring support with a focus on empowering migrants might help to activate pre-existing potential and mobilise successful coping strategies. It might also, through the reiteration of positive coping experiences, trigger a positive cycle of self-assurance and contribute to successful adjustment with a long term perspective.

Although the influx of A8 migrants to the UK has been declining over the last year (Home Office et al., 2009), with the prospect of free and unlimited labour movement across all current EU member states by 2014 and at a time of economic downturn, international economic migration will remain an increasing phenomenon and important challenge for modern societies. Building on several studies which have shown that unsuccessful adaptation to physical and cultural transition can bring about emotional distress, diminished well-being and illness (Griffin and Soskolne, 2003, Hull, 1979, Khan and Watson, 2005, Sundquist, 1995, Kim-Godwin and Bechtel, 2004, Magana and Hovey, 2003, Chung and Seok, 2000, Ryan et al., 2006, Hovey and Magana, 2002) and drawing on theories of appraisal, coping and
adjustment, this research explores successful coping and its role in the acculturation process. Understanding the process of acculturation after international migration can help to support migrants, increase adjustment and sustain a valuable and healthy workforce in modern societies where migration remains an increasingly common phenomenon.
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