



Polish Psychologists' Association



## Polish Migrants in Great Britain

A Psychological Perspective on Integration, Social Participation and Wellbeing

**Polish Migrants in Great Britain:**

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For promoting our research and helping us reach our respondents



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## Foreword

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The 1st of May 2014 marked the 10th anniversary of Poland's accession into the European Union. As a result of the accession, nearly 1.6 million Poles migrated westwards in pursuit of prosperity and work opportunities. Whilst many European countries became hosts to Poles eager to try their luck abroad, the majority of migrants chose the British Isles as their destination.

Although it was initially believed that the mass-migration would be short-lived and that migrants would eventually return home, the grand majority chose to remain in Britain despite the economic crisis and other socio-political obstacles. According to the 2011 ONS census, the Polish community is now the second-largest minority in the UK, with 580,000 registered Polish-born residents.

Minorities are known to adapt in different ways - ranging from marginalisation through integration to assimilation. As with any minority - and a large one in particular - questions arise as to how well Poles integrate into the British society. Psychologists and sociologists alike are now faced with determining a course of action to best support Poles in their new circumstances.

This report aims to add to the existing body of research on the subjects of integration, social participation and wellbeing of Polish migrants. The purpose of our research is to illuminate factors other than monetary responsible for maintaining a large Polish community in the UK. More specifically, this investigation focuses on two frequently overlooked factors: (1) levels of social participation, and (2) the wellbeing of migrants residing in Britain.

Although much research is yet needed, we believe that this report brings us one step closer to understanding why so many Poles chose Britain as their new home.

# Table of Contents

**About the Survey** .....1  
**Wellbeing** .....2  
**Integration** .....5  
**Social Participation** .....8  
**Conclusions** .....13

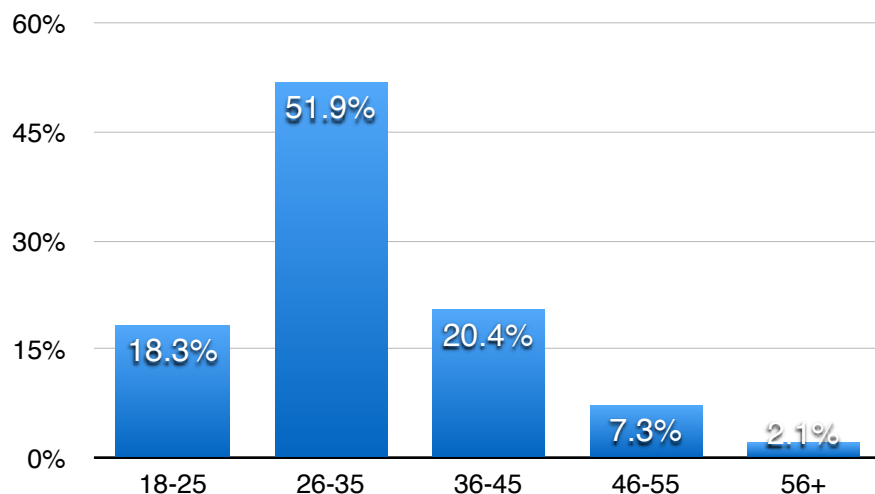
## About the Survey

Data for this research was collected using a web survey client over a period of 16 weeks; the research began on the 1st of March and ended on the 20th of June 2014. To reach the widest range of respondents, the survey was distributed and promoted by our media patrons. Moreover, a number of volunteers were enlisted to distribute the survey in-person and via different internet channels (such as Internet forums, electronic newsletters and social network websites).

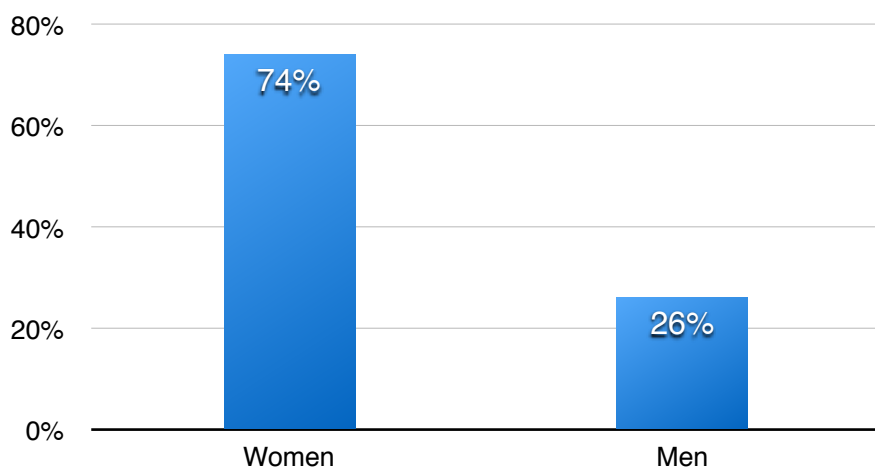
The survey included 59 questions<sup>1</sup>, out of which 26 provided respondents with the opportunity to select multiple options as well as leave written feedback<sup>2</sup>.

A total of 1561 respondents took part in the survey and 1296 completed the survey in its entirety. The majority of the respondents were aged 26-35 and finished secondary education. Noteworthy, significantly more women partook in the survey than men.

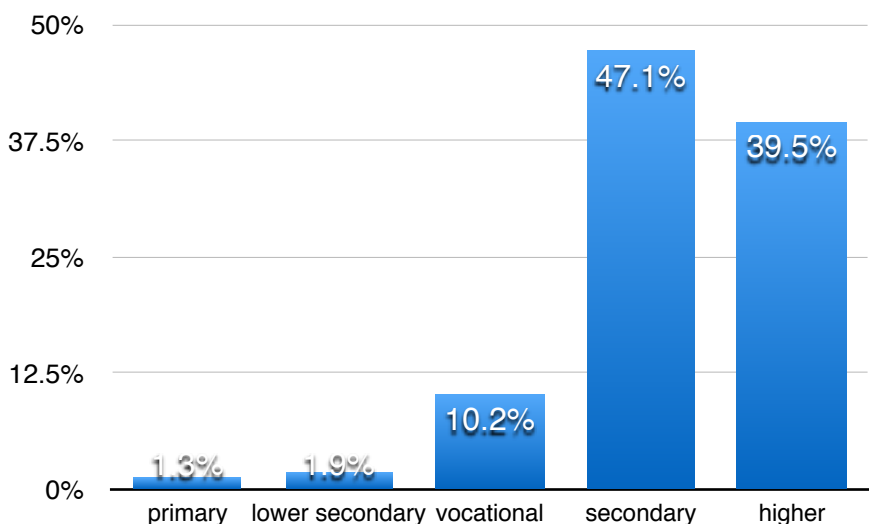
### Age



### Gender



### Education



<sup>1</sup> Only 23 questions are accounted for in this report. Please contact the PPA RU for more information.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that multiple choice questions do not sum up to 100%

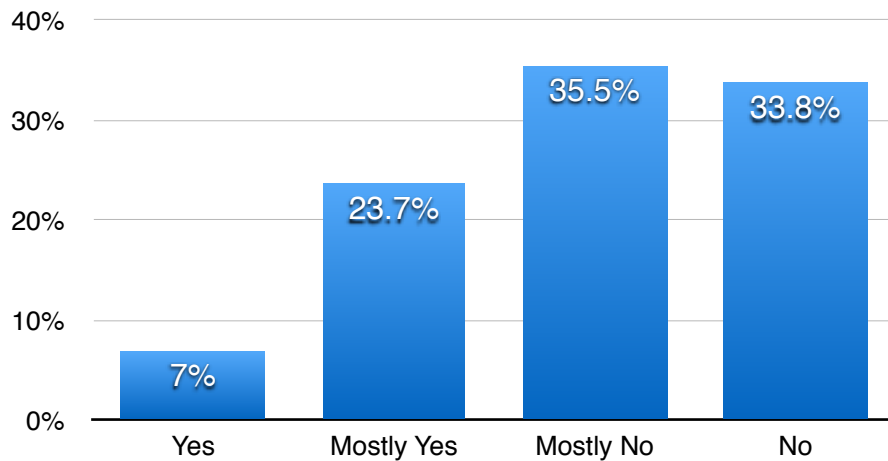
# Wellbeing

*I do what I like and get good money for it*

*~ Respondent #1310*

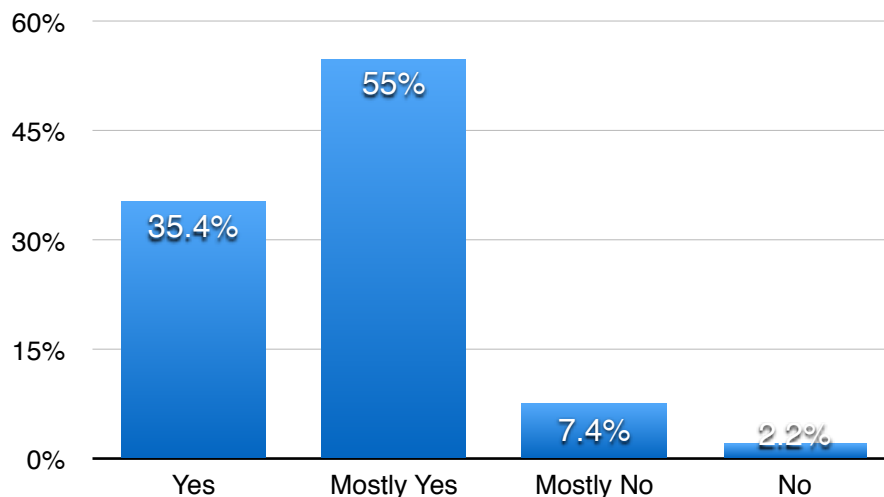
The presence of the Polish community in the UK ought to be understood in the context of the migrants' subjective assessments of their past situation in Poland and their present circumstances in the UK. Only 7% of all respondents reported being satisfied with their personal situation prior to leaving Poland. Indeed, the majority reported being dissatisfied with their situation in Poland.

## Were you satisfied with your situation in Poland?



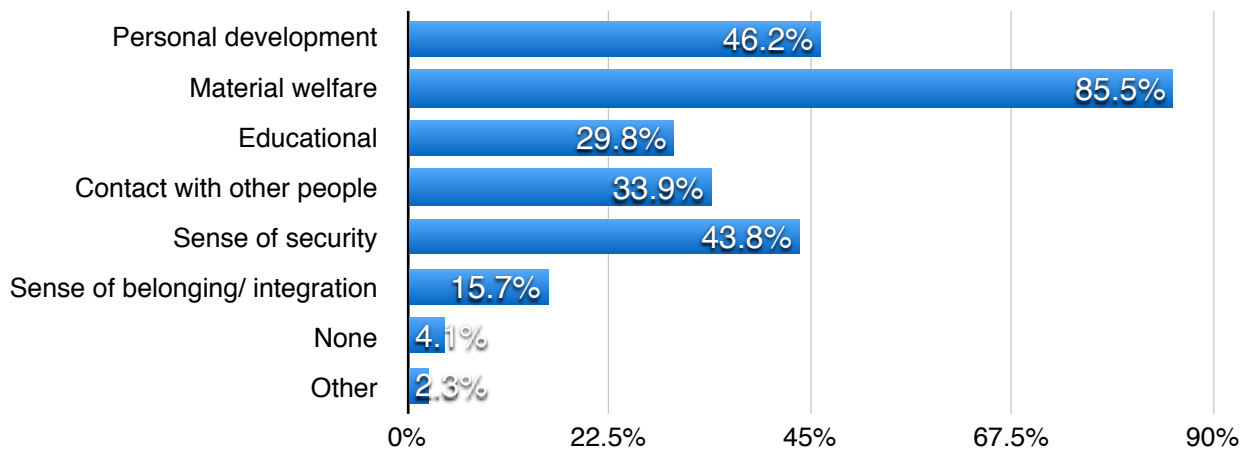
In contrast, the majority of the respondents reported being satisfied with their present situation in the UK. Only a mere 10% answered that they are either completely or mostly unsatisfied with their current circumstances.

## Are you satisfied with your present situation in UK?



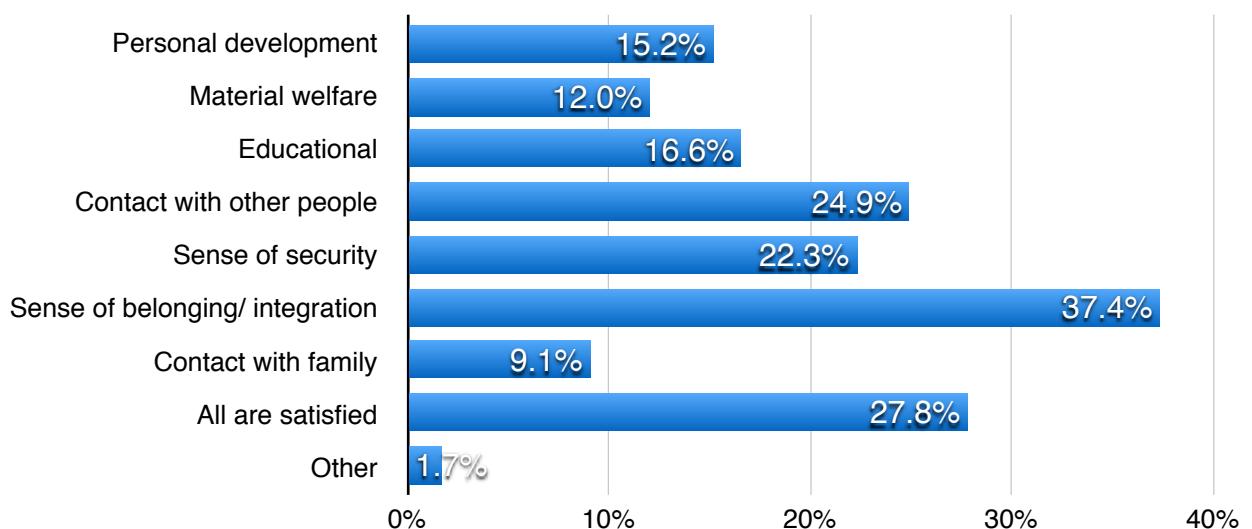
There are numerous reasons as to why Poles may feel satisfied with their present situation in Britain. While the majority of respondents readily chose *material welfare* - a factor frequently noted in other studies - as their best satisfied need, other important factors transpire from the results. Nearly half of all respondents listed *personal development*, and more than 40% chose *a sense of security* as their best satisfied needs. A third of the respondents also listed *education* as well as *contact with other people* as needs that are best satisfied. Noteworthy, only 4% of all respondents felt that *none* of their personal needs are presently catered to in Britain.

### Which of your needs are best satisfied in the UK?



Conversely, the most frequently reported 'unsatisfied need' was *a sense of belonging and integration* - and yet it only amounted to a third of all responses. A quarter of all respondents also listed *a sense of security* and *contact with other people* in their answers. That said, approximately a third of all respondents stated that all their needs are satisfied in the UK.

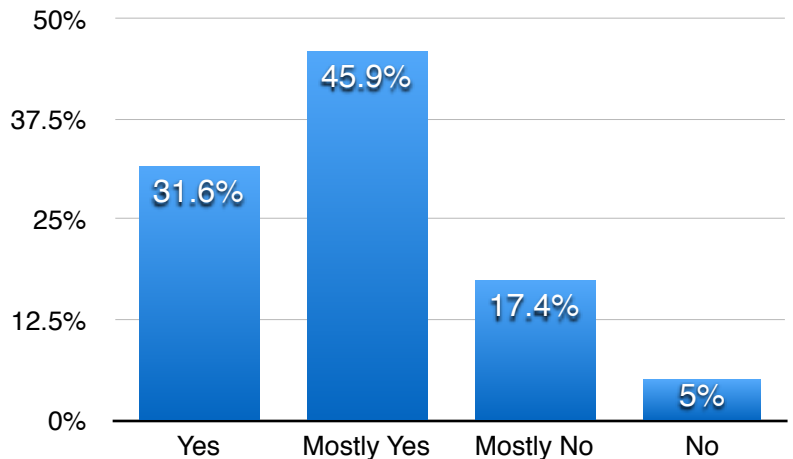
### Which of your needs are not satisfied in the UK?





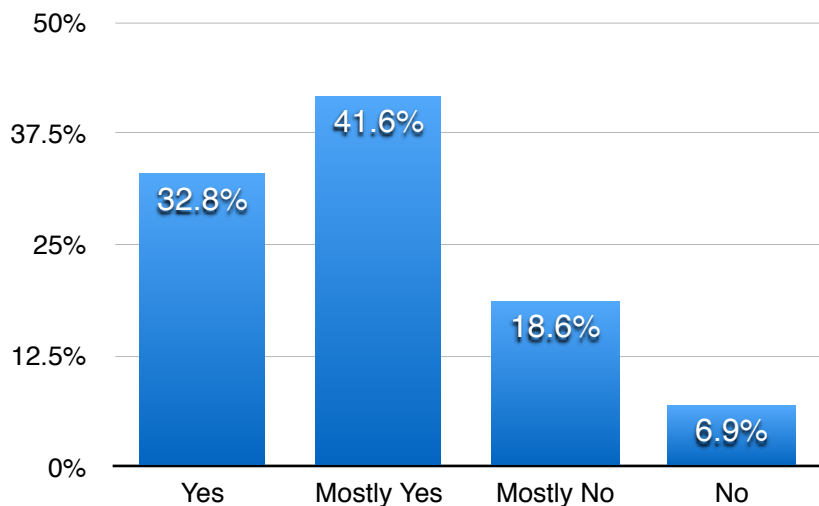
We also asked whether respondents felt that they were achieving their goals in Britain, to which the vast majority responded positively. In fact, only less than a quarter answered that they were either not achieving or mostly not achieving their goals.

### Do you feel that you are achieving your goals in the UK?



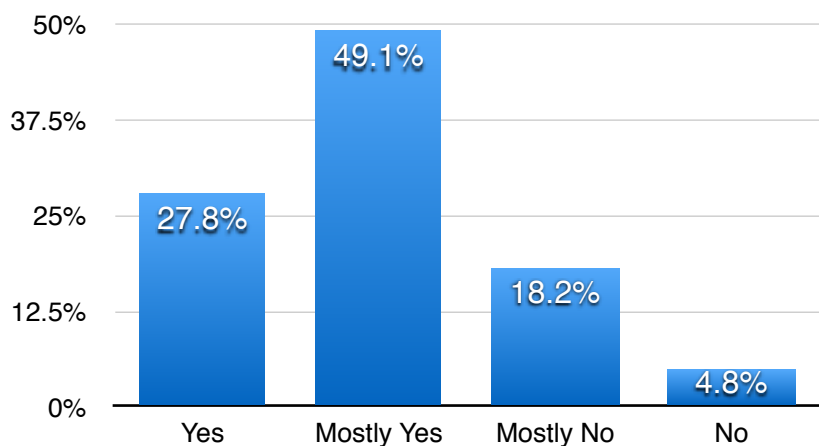
Similarly, the majority of those who partook in this survey felt satisfied with their personal development in Britain. A third of all respondents reported being completely satisfied, and just under 40% reported being mostly satisfied with their personal development in the UK.

### Are you satisfied with your personal development in the UK?



The majority of respondents also reported being satisfied with their social relations in the UK. Nearly half of all respondents reporting being either mostly satisfied, and close to a third being completely satisfied with their social relation in Britain.

### Are you satisfied with your social relations in the UK?



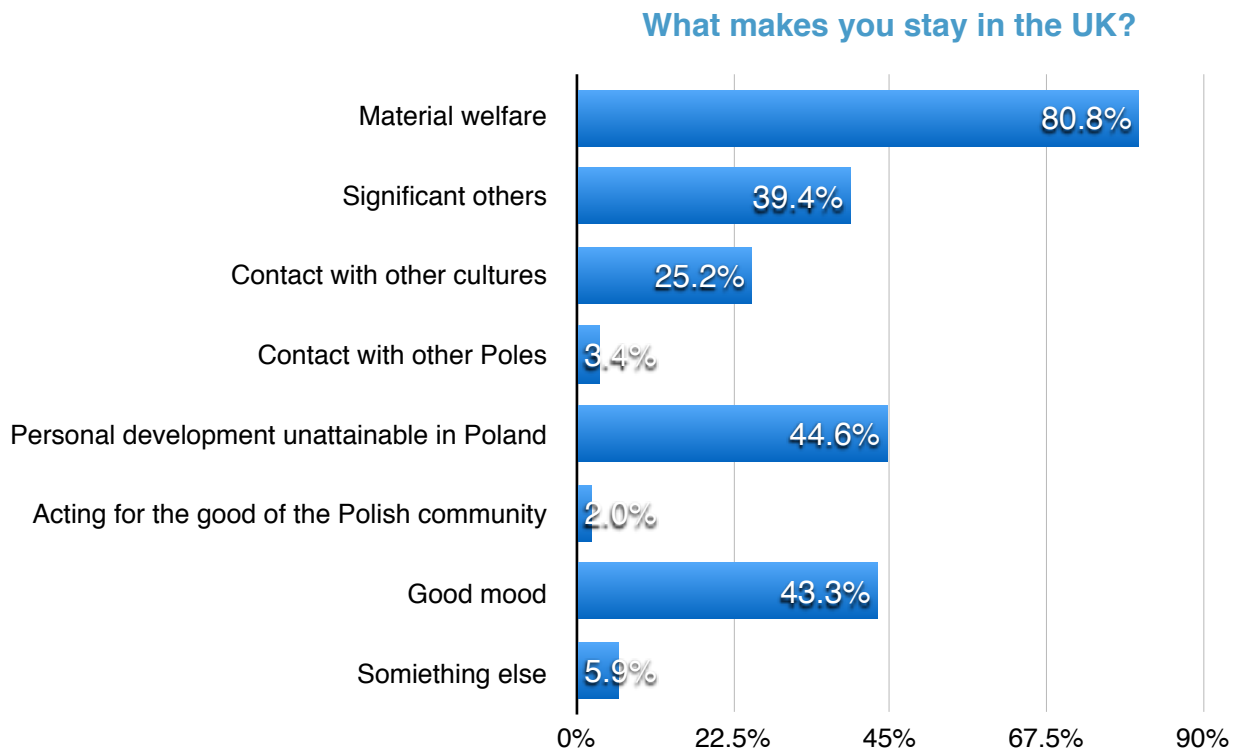
# Integration

*No matter how you look at it, there is definitely more tolerance for cultural differences, sexual orientation and personal belief here than in PL* ~ Respondent #867

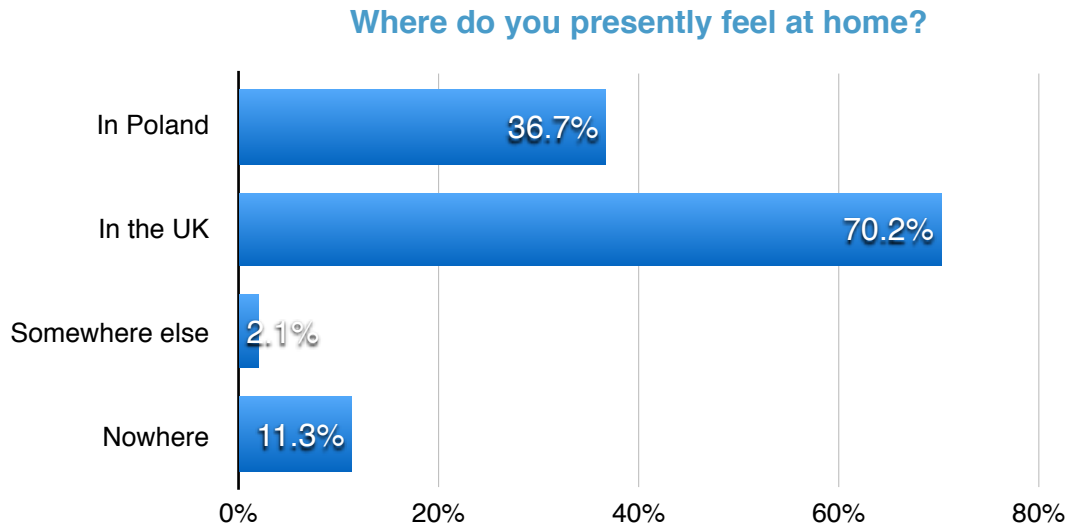
The presence of Poles in the UK needs also to be understood in the context of how they perceive the host country and interact with society at large. When asked about their motivations to remain in Britain, the majority once most frequently listed *material welfare* as a key factor. That said, more than 40% also selected *personal development unattainable in Poland* and *good mood*, as important factors contributing to their decision to stay.

In addition, more than a third indicated that close proximity to their *significant others* plays a role in their decision-making. The majority of those who provided a written answer - under the category *something else* - listed the presence of family, children and partners as reasons for remaining in Britain.

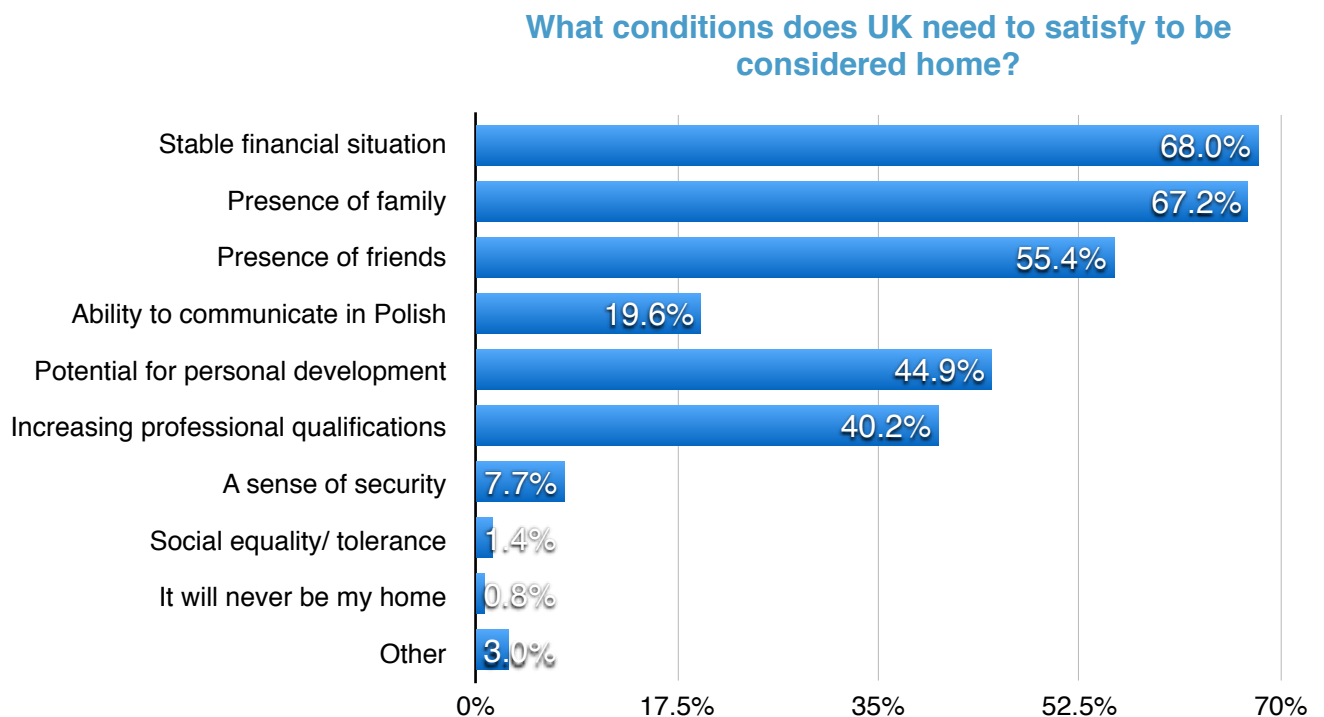
Noteworthy, a quarter of respondents reported that *contact with other cultures* is a factor in their decision, whilst only a minority considered *contact with other Poles* as a contributing factor to their decision to stay in the UK.



When asked about where they now feel at home, the majority responded *in the UK*. Considerably fewer respondents (more than a third) reported feeling at home *in Poland*, and roughly one in ten of all respondents felt displaced.

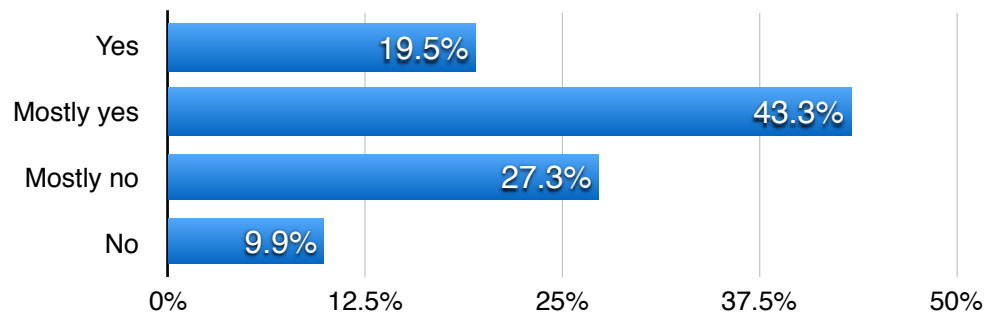


We also asked about what conditions need to be satisfied in order for Britain to be considered home. The two most frequently listed factors were *stable financial situation* and *presence of family*, followed by *presence of friends* and *potential for personal development*. Interestingly, only less than a fifth considered the possibility to speak Polish a vital factor.



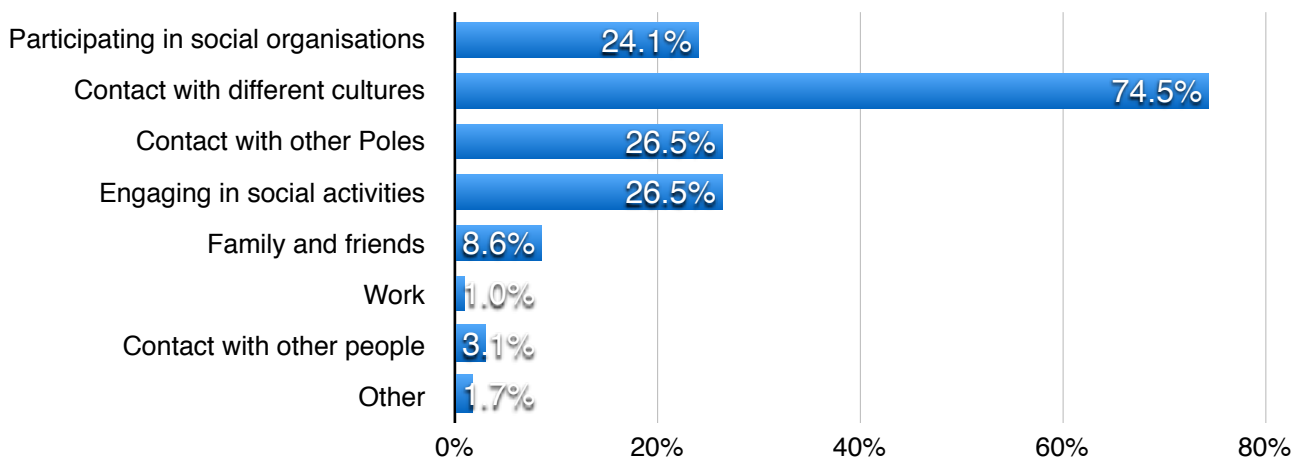
The majority of respondents in our sample reported feeling a part of their local community. Nonetheless, more than a third did not (completely or mostly) share this view.

### Do you feel a part of your local community?



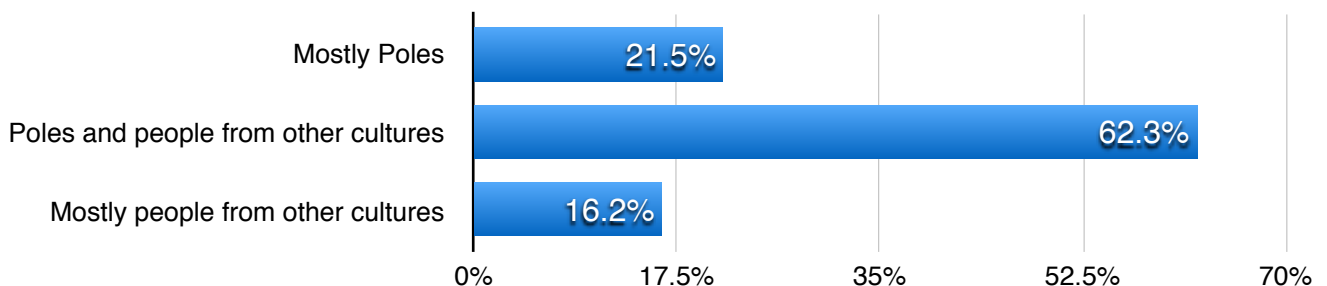
The most frequently listed reason for feeling a part of the local community - an option selected by 75% of respondents who answered this question (n=891) - was *contact with different cultures*. In contrast, only a quarter showed interest in *contact with other Poles*. In addition, around a quarter of the respondents also felt it necessary to *engage in social activities* to feel a part of the local community.

### What makes you feel a part of the local community?



We also asked our respondents about their more immediate social surroundings. Over 60% of all respondents reported having a multicultural social network.

### Who belongs to your immediate social network?



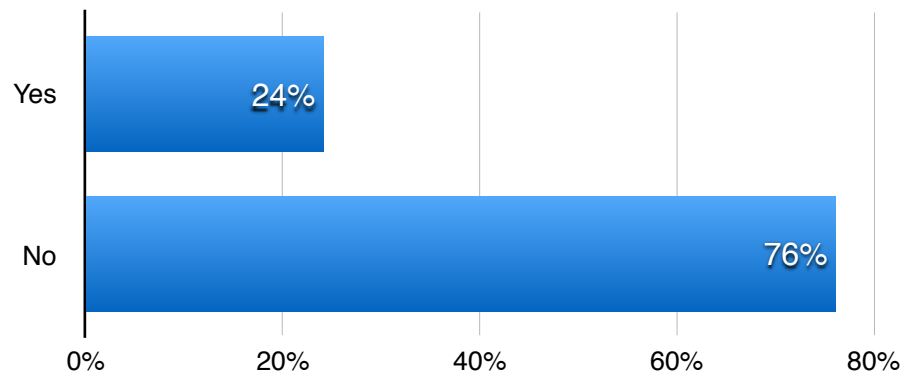
# Social Participation

*Accumulating wealth is my priority right now so I devote no time to social organisations*

~ Respondent #59

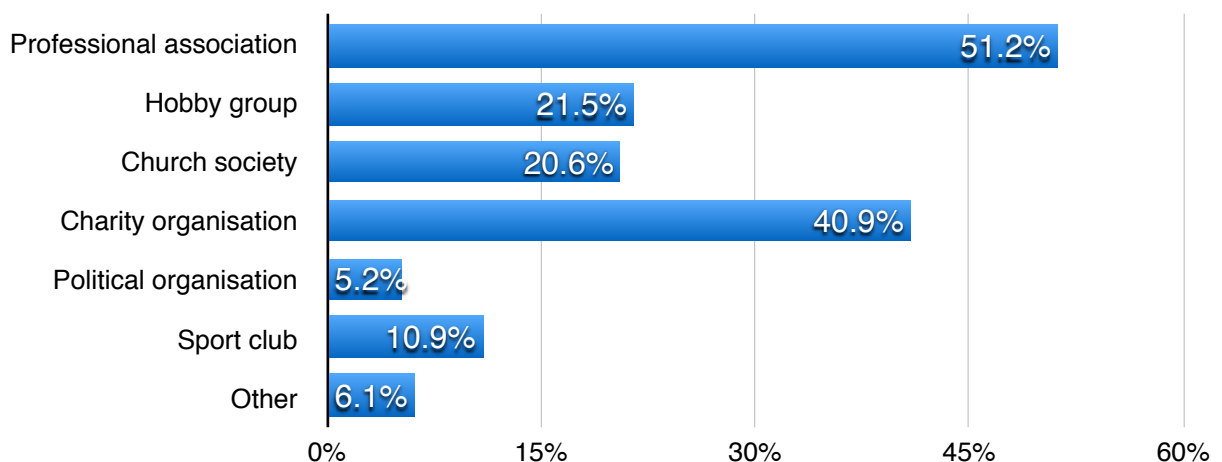
Social participation is arguably one of the most important factors facilitating the integration process. We inquired as to whether Poles living in Britain participate in social organisations such as church societies, professional associations and charities. We found that just under a quarter of our respondents belong to a social organisation or society in the UK.

## Do you belong to an social organisation/ society in the UK?



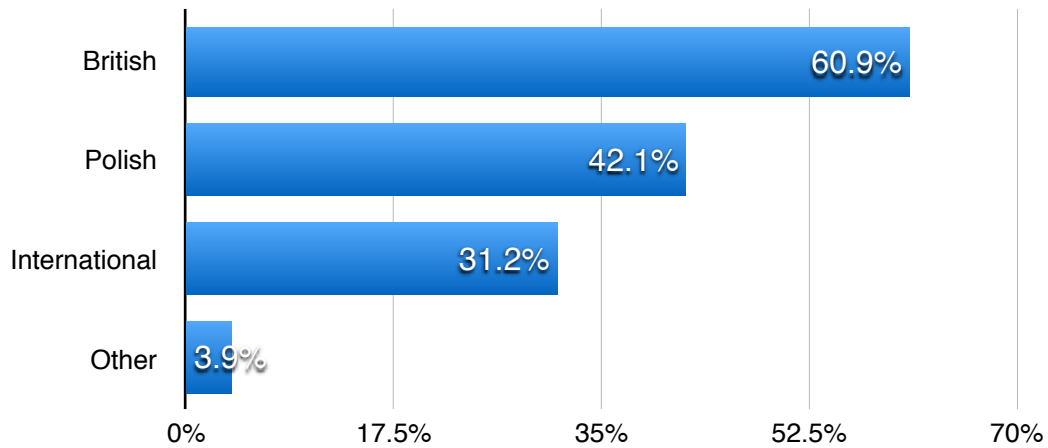
Out of those respondents that do belong to a social organisation (n=330), approximately half joined a *professional association* and more than 40% joined a *charity*. In contrast, only around one-fifth reported belonging to a *hobby group* or *church society*, and yet fewer (one in ten or less) to a *sport club*, *political society*, and other types of social organisations.

## What type of social organisations/societies do you belong to?



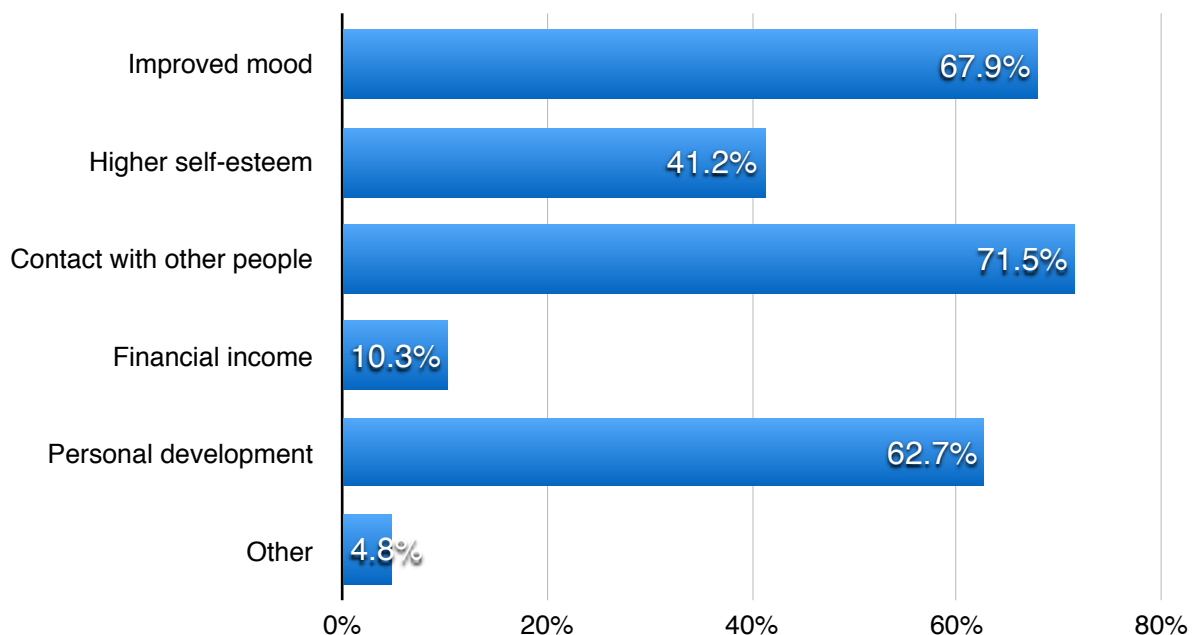
The activity of our respondents is not limited to partaking in Polish organisations. Indeed, most respondents belong to *British* societies, but 30% also selected *international* organisations in their answer to this question.

### Do you belong to social organisations/ societies that are:



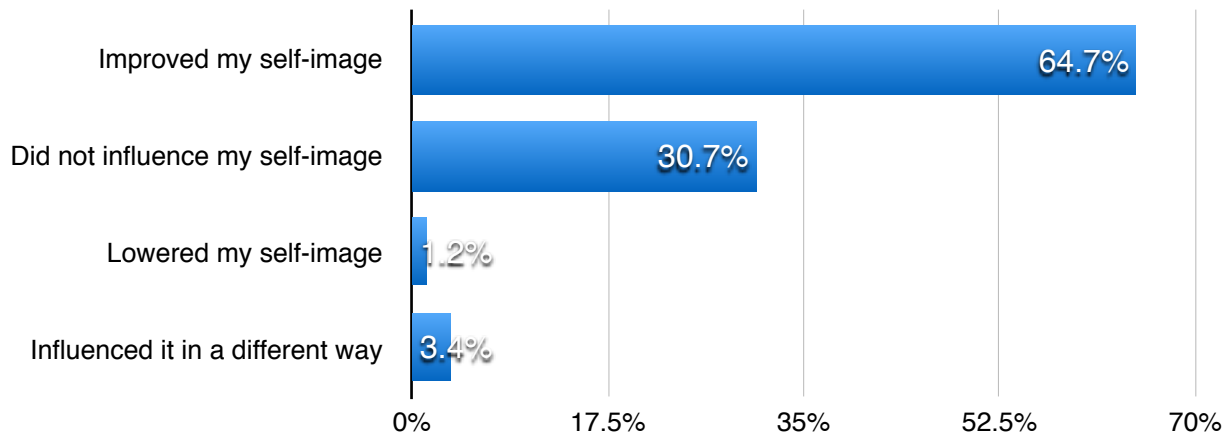
When asked about the benefits of belonging to an organisation, nearly three-quarters responded that *contacts with other people* and *improved mood* are the main benefits. Close to two-thirds also reported *personal development* as an important facet of belonging to an organisation. Noteworthy, approximately 40% also listed *higher self-esteem* in answering this question.

### What are the benefits of belonging to a social organisation/ society in the UK?



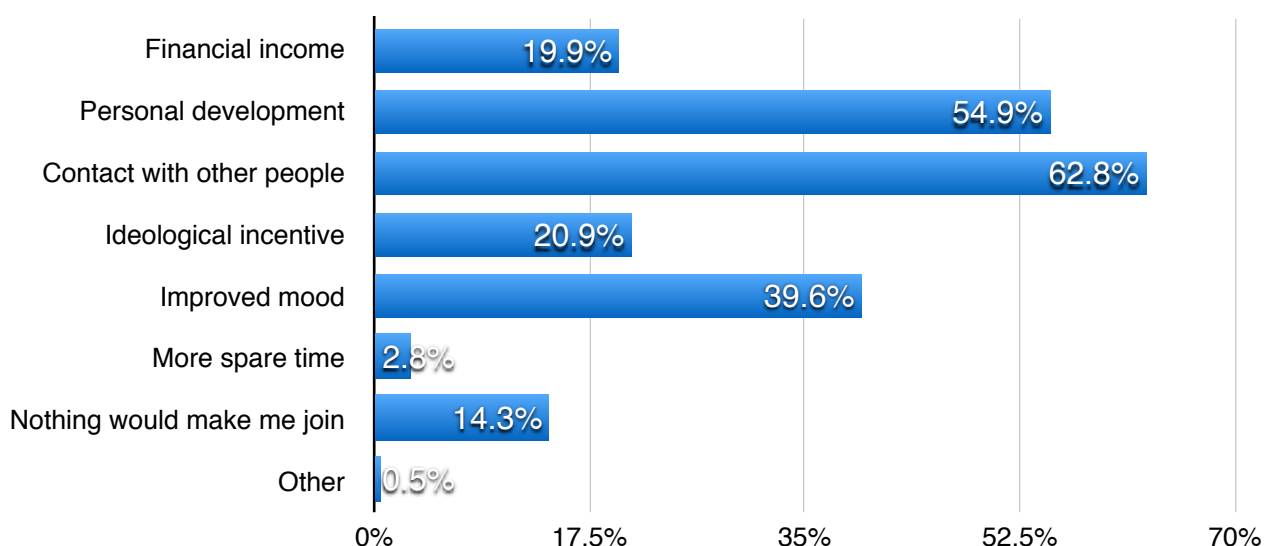
We were curious to find out how participation in an organisation influenced our respondents self-image. As it turns out, nearly three-quarters felt that participating in a organisation has *improved their self-image*. Only 1% of all respondents felt that their *self-image was lowered* by participating in a social group or organisation.

### How has partaking in an social organisation/ society in the UK influenced your self-image?



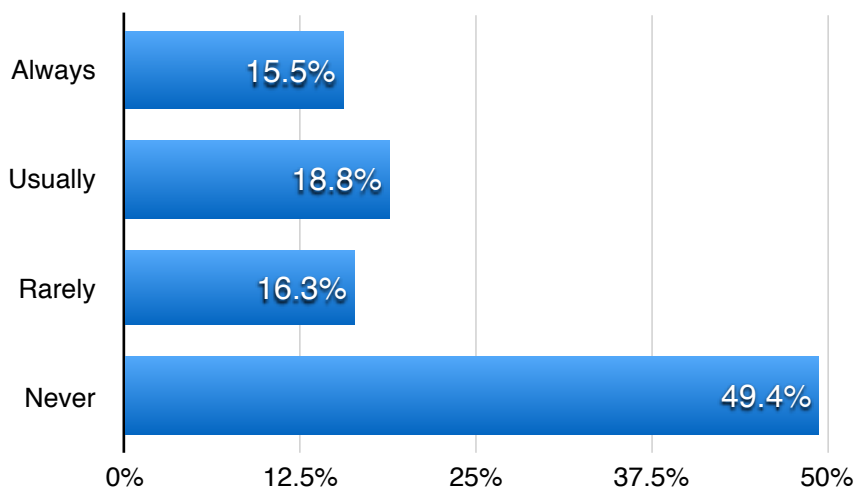
When we asked about what would motivate respondents to participate in social organisations, the majority answered that *contact with other people* would be a key motivating factor. More than half of all respondents also felt encouraged by the prospect of *personal development*. A considerable number would also seek to *improve their mood* by joining a social group or organisation. Interestingly, *financial income* was not a frequently listed factor in this question.

### What would make you join a social organisation/ society in the UK?



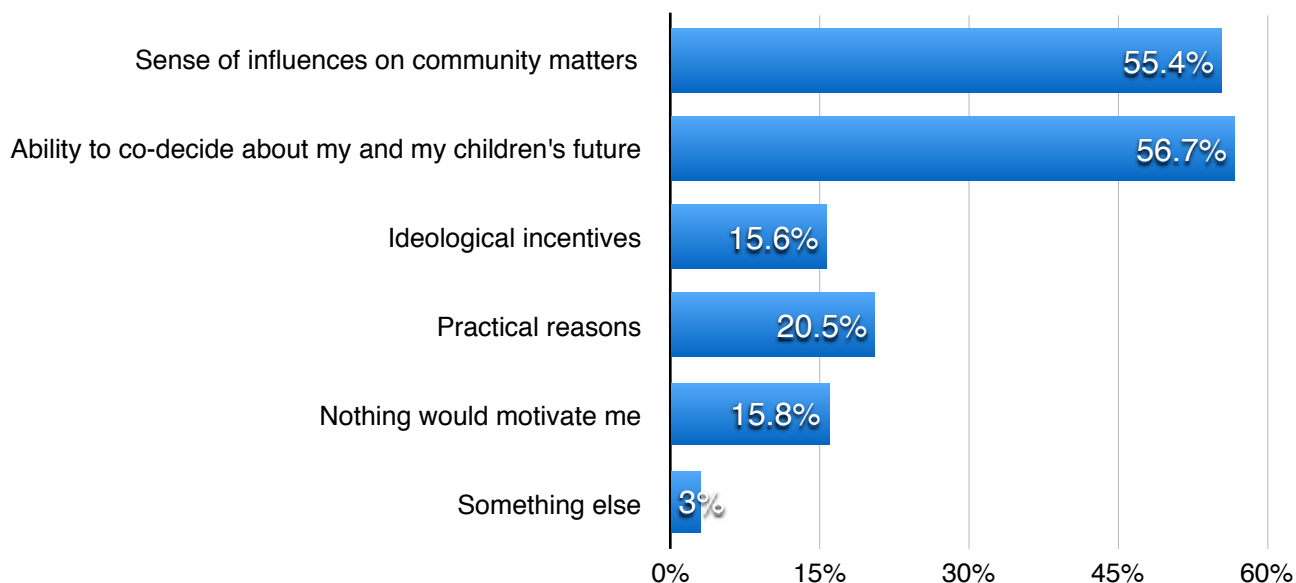
Since Poles are such a large minority, it is safe to say that their vote counts in the local elections in Britain. We were hence interested to find out how many of our respondents attend local elections. Half of our respondents answered that they *never* participate, and an additional one-fifth that they *rarely* participate in local elections. Only 16% of all respondents always go to cast their vote.

### Do you vote in local elections in the UK?



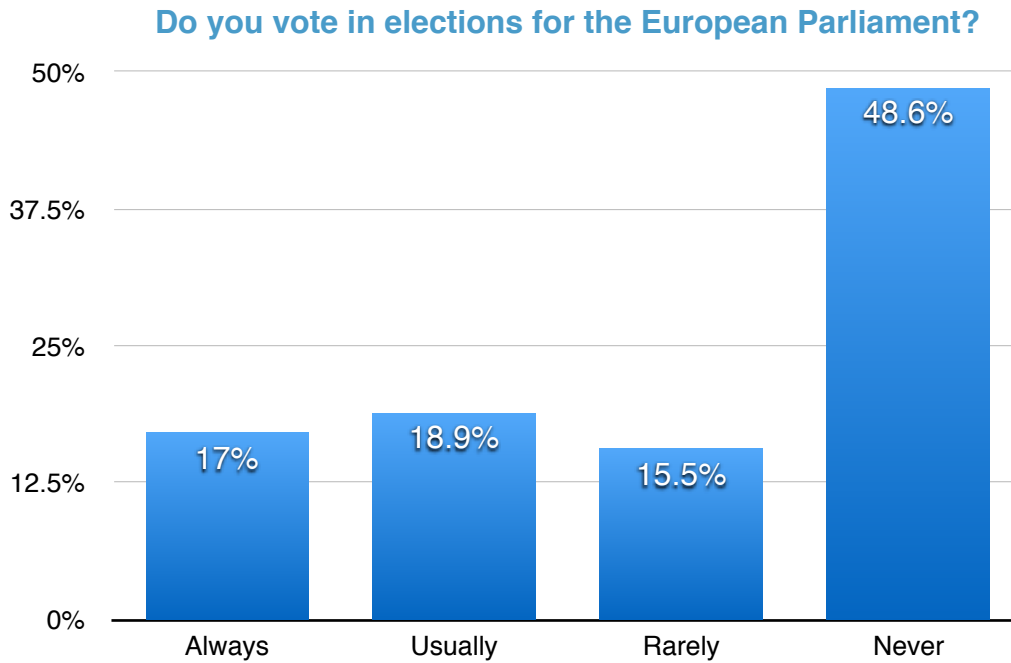
We followed up this question by asking about factors that would motivate our respondents to participate in the local elections. The most frequently chosen answer was '*a sense of influences on community matters*' as well as the '*ability to co-decide about my, and my children's future*'. An additional 16% answered that *nothing would motivate* them to participate in the elections.

### What would make you vote in local elections in the UK?

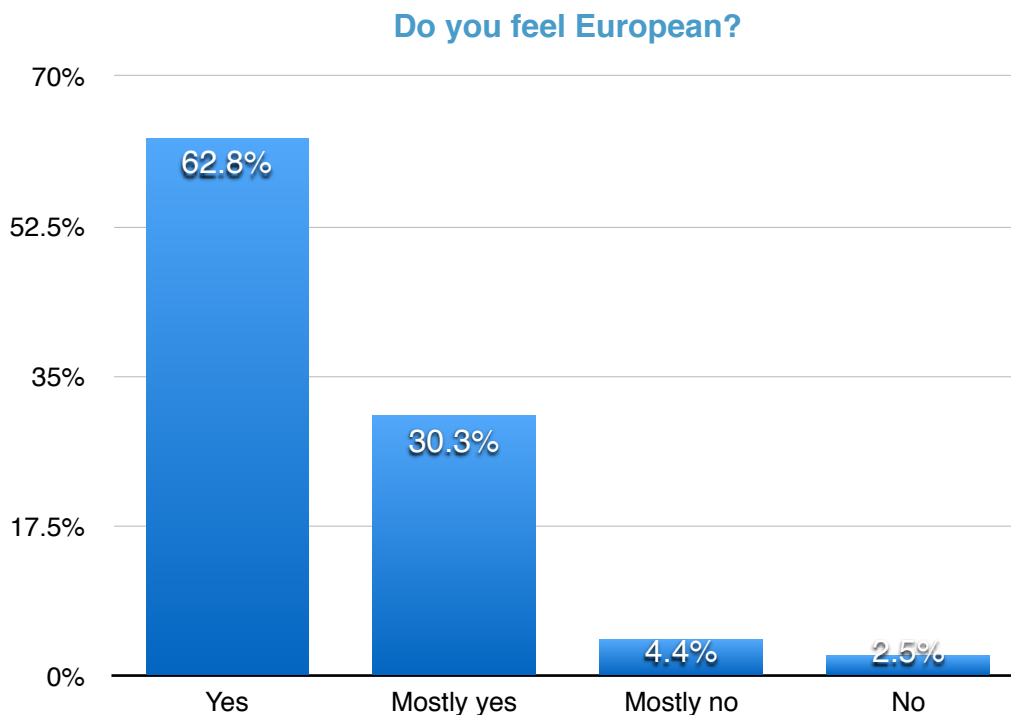




As was the case in the previous question, nearly half of our respondents reported having *never* participated in European elections; and only approximately one-fifth reported *always* attending elections for the European Parliament.



Given the importance of the ten-year anniversary of the Polish accessions into the EU, we were also interested in finding out whether Poles residing in Britain felt European. The majority of our respondents answered positively to this question.



## Conclusions

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Given that so many of our respondents feel at home in Britain and are satisfied with their present situation, it is hard to imagine Poles returning en masse back to Poland in the foreseeable future. As things stand, the majority of our respondents feel well in Britain and have many of their needs catered to. It is safe to say that Poland's accession into the European Union has permanently changed the British social landscape.

The collected data suggests that financial income and material welfare - whilst still prime incentives - are not the sole reasons motivating migrants' decision to stay. Our respondents demonstrate an appreciation for a much wider array of opportunities available to them on the British Isles. For one, it is clear that those who partook in our study are eager to take advantage of opportunities in Britain that were unavailable to them in Poland. Moreover, the opportunity to engage with people from other cultural backgrounds is something that our respondents are clearly very fond of. This would suggest that members of the Polish community do not isolate themselves from the society they live in. Such a conclusion is supported by the finding that our respondents have multicultural personal networks and do not only belong to Polish organisations. In fact, the majority is not necessarily inclined to seek out contact with other Poles.

Interestingly, the willingness and ability to engage with other members of the society is not always associated with a sense of belonging and integration - which remains the most unsatisfied need, accounting for a third of the respondents in our sample. One way of promoting integration and wellbeing is social participation. However, whilst Poles frequently feel a part of their local communities, relatively few decide to join social groups or cast their vote in local elections. Similarly, even though Poles clearly feel European, this does not translate into a turnout in elections for the European Parliament.

There are multiple reasons as to why this may be the case. One possible explanation is a lack of a broader civic culture in Poland, and thus also amongst the migrants. Another possibility is that Poles living in Britain may not perceive social participation as a mean of addressing their needs - such as, for instance, attaining financial stability. Similarly, the poor electoral turnout may be deemed a result of a diminished sense that immediate circumstances can be improved by voting.

A potential limitation of this study is its focus on how migrants feel about their local communities, which is not necessarily representative of their views concerning the larger British society. Thus, it is conceivable that while Poles may mingle well with their work colleagues and neighbours, they might not feel a part of the larger British society.

A piece of information of practical importance for psychologists and sociologists alike is that Polish migrants would be more willing to engage in social organisations if they could recognise the role such groups play in addressing their needs - for instance, aiding personal development and enabling contact with other people. Research findings concerning the positive effects of social participation - such as improved mood and self-image - can additionally inform professional practice whilst advocating for social engagement.

There is work to be done to increase migrants' awareness of how voting can influence their personal circumstances if we are to witness a greater visibility of Poles in the public sphere in Britain. This may include promotion of cooperation between British and Polish organisations in the UK, as well as encouraging public debate on issues vital to the Polish community. Much research is yet needed to establish the relationship between the noted tendencies in this study, but one thing is certain - material welfare, whilst a key driver, is not the only reason why Poles choose to remain in Britain. Therefore further consideration needs to be given to the subject of developing a proactive strategy aimed at addressing the needs of the Polish community in Great Britain.



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