



# ‘No right to dream’

The social and economic  
lives of young undocumented  
migrants in Britain

A report commissioned by

 Paul Hamlyn  
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Alice Bloch (City University London), Nando Sigona and  
Roger Zetter (Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford)



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# Foreword

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Since it was established in 1987, Paul Hamlyn Foundation has always been committed to helping tackle social injustice.

We are particularly concerned to help those people who experience prejudice and harm early on in their lives, and as a consequence struggle to realise their potential. What motivates us is that many young people experience difficulties that are needless, and avoidable.

That is why our Social Justice programme supports organisations that try to help those on the margins of society build better lives for themselves, and contribute to the communities in which they live. But we also take the view that by listening to young people more carefully, we can find better ways of helping them overcome the challenges they face.

We commissioned this research because we wanted to draw attention to the situation of young ‘undocumented’ migrants living in Britain, and to stimulate debate about how, as a society, we should respond.

This report, produced by researchers at City University and University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre, gives us an insight into a group of young people about whom there is much anecdote, but very little robust evidence. They tell stories that begin full of hope and expectation, and youthful vigour and enterprise, but often end up being shaped by fear, uncertainty, mental distress and exploitation. Many end up unable to do anything about their predicaments, scraping a living in the hidden economy, open to harm and exploitation, unable to find help when they are in trouble.

The title of the report, ‘No right to dream’, uses the words of one young person, but reflects the sentiment shared by many more – namely, that they had lost so much associated with a normal youth, even imagining a better future was slipping from their grasp.

This situation would seem to be at odds with our core values as a society, and in particular the emphasis we give to protecting and supporting young people. We hope that this report will stimulate wider discussion and debate, and encourage a wide range of organisations to look at ways of helping these young people.

I would like to thank the extremely dedicated team who conducted the research, particularly the community researchers across England whose industry and tenacity has enabled us to hear these compelling accounts of young people’s lives.

**Jane Hamlyn**  
Chair, Paul Hamlyn Foundation

# Executive summary

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## Aims, objectives and methodology

What does it mean to be young and undocumented in contemporary Britain? How do young migrants cope with life in Britain at a time of economic downturn and the introduction of the government's 'tough touch' on undocumented migrants? Built around the voices of 75 migrants from five different countries (Brazil, China, Kurds from Turkey, Ukraine and Zimbabwe), this research captures a complex reality; it moves between the uniqueness of the individual experience and the search for patterns and commonalities across migrants' accounts of their everyday lives and experiences.

This study was commissioned by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF), under its Social Justice Programme. It explores the social and economic lives, motivations and aspirations of undocumented young migrants in England. It is based on in-depth interviews and testimonies collected between August and December 2008 from 75 young people (35 women and 40 men) living in London, the North West and the West Midlands. Interviews were carried out in first languages by field researchers with the requisite language skills. Just fewer than half the interviewees are aged between 18 and 24 years old, and the remainder are between 25 and 31. Their length of stay in Britain varies between a few months and ten years, with just under half living in Britain for less than three years.

## Key findings

Being undocumented has significant practical, social and economic impacts and permeates the everyday lives and decisions of young people. These impacts can have an effect on jobs and job search, social networks and friendships, housing and access to medical help and justice. Being undocumented often creates a transitory and insecure identity. Lack of status is an all-encompassing experience, producing distinctive forms of social marginality with significant impacts such as 'enforced' mobility in the search for accommodation, for work or to avoid detection.

*I am not scared of my flatmates but of people on the street. I am scared that they will know I am illegal. I have fears in my work place. Because I work there undocumented, I am doing something illegal in a way (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*To work as a cleaner is not a profession. I'm still young. Cleaning your whole life is not interesting for me. If I liked it in the past, earning some money... Now I basically have everything. But I don't have what I want. There is always something missing (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

Motivations for migration differed between country of origin groups depending on their social, economic and political circumstances prior to migration. These differences affected the aspirations and hopes of young people, their plans for the future and their fears of return. Migration by Zimbabweans resulted from the political and economic situation in Zimbabwe and among Kurdish people it was often due to ethnic discrimination: these factors make both groups fearful of return and permeate their experiences and decisions. Chinese young people were

motivated by economic factors and had often incurred large debts financing their journey, which in turn impacted on their choices and decisions. Ukrainians were also largely motivated by economic factors, although for some it was an adventure or the chance to learn English. Brazilians were also motivated by economic factors, but social networks, friendship ties, learning a new language and experiencing a new culture were also important factors. Overall, Brazilians seem to experience relatively easier access routes and show less fear of deportation than other migrant groups.

*I came to this country because I had political problems. I thought England is more honest on this issue... We thought England would not send us back. England would not give us to Turkey. We thought that we can set up a new life in England. We came with this idea in mind (Amed, 29, M, Turkish Kurd).*

*At that time although lots of people were going abroad, most went to other countries. Those leaving for the UK were not so many. It was thought that since not too many were going to the UK, finding work should be easier. It would be easier to find work in the UK (Jessy Chang, 21, F, Chinese).*

*London for me wasn't a dream. It wasn't my dream. But it's not by chance either... I ended up having a relationship, a cool friendship with a crowd who always talked about living abroad... I became very close to this girl my classmate. We lived in the same town, we shared plans and then she said 'Let's go to London. Let's go to London. It's cool there' (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

The reasons why people choose Britain as a destination are based on economic considerations, social and kinship networks, historical, political and cultural ties and/or perceptions about human rights in Britain. In reality though, the migrants knew little about Britain before arrival and there was little systematic effort to collect reliable information.

*Because they [i.e. Britain] have human rights and a better government, it's not like Turkey, if there was freedom and some independence we wouldn't have to come here (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

*At that time, although lots of people were going abroad, most went to other countries. Those leaving for the UK were not so many. It was thought that since not too many were going to the UK, finding work should be easier. It would be easier to find work in the UK (Jessy Chang, 21, F, Chinese).*

Many young undocumented migrants come to Britain to work. The interviews reveal low pay, clustering in a few, generally low skilled, employment sectors, lack of progression and exploitation in the labour market. Employment is crucial for survival, and at the time of the interviews, 55 out of 75 young people were working. Among those not working, or in occasional work, 16 were women, of which six had young children and three were pregnant. Chinese young people were working or had worked in Chinese takeaways and Chinese restaurants, usually as kitchen porters. They were often paid less than other members of staff. Kurdish people also worked in food outlets, usually fast food like kebab shops, but also co-ethnically owned off licences and supermarkets. The experiences of working in co-ethnically owned business were often not positive. Ukrainians tend to work in construction and cleaning, Brazilians in cleaning, bars and shops while Zimbabweans work in more diverse sectors, due to their English language fluency. Migrant work is characterised by low pay, long and often unsocial hours, as well as exploitation.

*Well, at the very beginning, I thought, Oh, God, why did I come? Why did I come? No job. Must pay for everything. Children are in the other end of the world... Then, I went to work... Later I felt very good. I was much better (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

*I work till midnight, well after midnight, until the boss goes... Life is just like this every day. I spend my time like this every single day (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

Increasingly restrictive immigration controls and the impact of the economic crisis are acutely felt by migrants. These conditions are reinforced by anti-immigrant political comments. Not surprisingly, trying to get some kind of status in the UK is a dominant aspiration. The effect of punitive immigration measures, including raids on businesses thought to be employing migrants without permission to work, has lowered wages and increased vulnerability.

*I think for this kind of job in a takeaway shop, normally it should be paid £280, £290 or even up to £300 [a week]. Instead I got £210. He paid less because he said I had no residential status (Gao Zeng, 24, M, Chinese).*

*There's always a fear, I'm always watching over my shoulder as to could I get caught working here? There's always a fear, could a phone call come through, could I get called to the office anytime now as to, 'We've found something out'. 'You are not legitimate' (Ray, 21 M. Zimbabwean).*

*Now it's each day more difficult as the law is much stricter, the conditions for staying... it's not accessible any longer, almost nothing is (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

Social, community and faith group networks are crucial to the social and economic lives of young undocumented migrants. We found that there was little contact with people from outside of the immediate country of origin and linguistic groups. Social networks from the same country-of-origin group were the main ways of finding jobs, although a minority also paid deposits or bought jobs. However, this varies according to the size and settlement patterns among the five groups and is affected by the extent to which community and faith-based groups existed in the UK. Moreover, even when they were present, not all young people elected to use these more formal support organisations and groups, preferring instead to remain hidden and separate.

*All who I socialise with are all Ukrainians, all undocumented (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

*I don't want to go community centres. You do not know who are there. It is dangerous to go to the Kurdish associations because these communities could be under surveillance. I know a lot of undocumented friends and they all think the same (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

The social world of young undocumented migrants is the result of a continuous interplay between their needs and aspirations and the constraints they face due to their lack of status. These constraints affect young undocumented migrants differently and the principal factors that produce differences are country of origin, ethnic group, gender and pre-migration experiences, as well as their experiences in the UK. The issue of trust is central in the creation of social networks among young undocumented migrants.

*The fact that I am undocumented means that I don't feel comfortable socialising because I am conscious of my status and I do not want people to know (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

English language proficiency is an important factor that influences interactions with people from different countries of origin, the chances to expand their social networks and to diversify employment. Many did not speak English or had limited language skills that limited their employment and social networks.

*I don't have any friends from other groups at all. How can I have friends from other groups? I don't even understand English. How could I have friends? All those I know are just like me. They are all like me, more or less (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

Being undocumented limits aspirations and many migrants talked about being trapped, unfulfilled and unable to make plans. For some, life means simply existing; for others it is a temporary phase; some are considering return. Feelings, adjustments, coping strategies and aspirations of young undocumented migrants intersect with gender, country of origin and life courses to shape their experiences and responses. 'Undocumentedness' invades personal and emotional space, which often leads to a shadow existence, a lack of self worth, a lack of trust in others and often the internalisation of fear for migrants and families. Yet the demands of everyday life produce adaptation and adjustment strategies – trying to get documented or adapting to changing social situations with children and personal aspirations. Nevertheless, there is an ever-present sense of feeling trapped in a situation where marginality cannot be resolved and a future cannot be constructed. Thus, making plans for the future – a crucial part of the optimism of youth – is constantly appraised against the possibility of being arrested and deported.

*Being undocumented in this country means that you don't exist (Rojhan, M, 27, Turkish Kurd).*

*You know [you] can't safely build up something before someone knock on your door and takes it all away and says, 'Hey you're working without documents' (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*When you think, wow, you think things can get better, man, each day. I think that's what happened to me. Today it can get better. Tomorrow it can get better (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

In spite of this, most interviewees affirmed that the overall experience had been worth it. Being able to survive and cope is a source of pride. There are some general differences between the five groups of the study. For Kurdish migrants, the experience is worthwhile as much for the discrimination and oppression they have left behind as the freedom they have gained. Ukrainian migrants, overall, regard their experience positively. This is reflected in a clear sense of achievement and viewing migration as an important stage of transition in their life courses. Similar attitudes mark the responses of Brazilians who, overall, are perhaps the most positive of the five groups in presenting a picture of a youthful sense of adventure. Among Zimbabwean migrants, positive and negative views are more balanced. Blocked aspirations are a predominant feature of their reflections, mediated by affirmations of what life has to offer young people in Britain. Living a more 'closed' life, the measure of success for most Chinese interviewees is their ability to earn money.

*Nowadays I like it here. Nowadays I tell everybody that I don't want to leave. I really don't. And the money isn't the most important thing (Celso, 28, M, Brazilian).*

*At the beginning I came to earn but with the time... of course I wanted to go back home but I would postpone [departure] again and again... then, I didn't want... let's do another year... but now I simply want to live here like other people (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian)*

*It's very tiring, but I think it's worthwhile. At least I earn money by offering my labour. I didn't earn the money doing nothing. I earn money with both of my hands, I earn money with my labour. So every time I get my wage, it's also my happiest moment (Yao Xiaomin, 25, F, Chinese).*

The research was carried out by Alice Bloch, Department of Sociology, City University London, and Nando Sigona and Roger Zetter, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.

## Case study: Kirsty

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Kirsty, a 22-year-old Zimbabwean, came to the UK nearly nine years ago as an unaccompanied minor – her parents remained in Zimbabwe. She lived with her sister, who has been in the UK for 15 years and who is documented, but after three and a half years she moved out, as they were not getting along, and, without a job, she could not pay for her upkeep. Kirsty feels settled here.

*If I get the chance to get my papers... this is like home for me... I love Britain to be quite honest... It's got so many opportunities for me that I know I can build my life and I know I can be someone tomorrow.*

Kirsty completed her GCSEs and gained a diploma in health and social care last year. A boyfriend paid her fees. Aspirations for further education were blocked by her lack of documentation. She has worked as an agency-based care assistant and has had some casual jobs. She used to be a charity volunteer at a centre for refugees and asylum seekers. This provided her with a social life, access to information, and the comfort of meeting others in similar circumstances to her own.

Yet, behind Kirsty's apparently youthful optimism, she talks frequently about, 'building my life'. Her situation is complex, very problematic and in a state of flux. She regrets that her sister did not provide more help to get her documented. Both her parents have since died, so she could not settle back in Zimbabwe if she was deported. She is five months pregnant and the child's father, who has indefinite leave to remain, supports her. She has stopped working. She is currently sleeping on a girlfriend's floor, having found living by herself unaffordable. She says her accommodation, '... is not comfortable [and] is so difficult'. If she tries to pay some rent, she cannot, '... afford to buy myself something to eat'. Expressing her anxiety at frequent intervals, her housing situation is a constant source of concern.

*... with my situation I really need help and I don't know how I can get help. I really do feel isolated... I wanted to go to social services [to get rehoused]. I get so scared about asking because they are going to chase you away [because she is undocumented] and to take me home even though there is nobody there.*

Although she goes out occasionally with her 25-year-old boyfriend, she describes her social isolation as really boring, being unable to even afford the fare to the social centre. However, her church is an important source of hope and sustenance. 'It makes me feel so peaceful... I have faith in God... But sometimes... the more [you] pray the more the problems are coming'.

Like so many undocumented young migrants in this study Kirsty lives on the margins, in a social and economic stasis which is interwoven with challenging personal circumstances. She is trapped both by the impossibility of return to her country of origin and by her lack of documentation. This affects her ability to work and access welfare support in the UK, a situation compounded by her family circumstances. Escaping her fear and frustrated dreams, she transfers her hope to her baby... 'I would love my child to have everything'.



## introduction and context



## Background

This research was commissioned by Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF), under its Social Justice Programme. The Social Justice Programme has a particular focus on the integration of the most marginalised young people in the UK, and operates through grant funding and special initiatives. The Foundation's objective in commissioning this research was to find out more about the lives of young undocumented migrants, to tackle a knowledge gap and to find out whether and how grant giving could benefit them. It was hoped that the results would reveal more about the areas of intervention that would most help the disadvantaged, and provide a robust and detailed understanding of the critical pathways in these young people's lives. The first stage of the project was a scoping study carried out between April and July 2007. The scoping study highlighted the need to understand the complexity of the life processes, decisions and choices of young undocumented migrants, set within the context of their undocumented status. Informed by the scoping study, the main research study focused on the voices of young undocumented migrants, about which little is known, and explored their social and economic lives. More specifically, it examined their experiences of employment; social networks; community involvement; links and obligations with friends and family in their country of origin; how being undocumented impacts on their lives and their longer-term goals and aspirations. The project was carried out between March 2008 and June 2009, with the fieldwork taking place between August and December 2008. A requirement, and important part of the project, was that the process of doing the research should involve capacity building of the community researchers, the community organisation participants and partners, and the young undocumented migrants themselves. This involved networking and the development of new networks, the organisation of training and workshops, and activities signposting migrants to sources of help and support. These are described in Appendix 2.

## Parameters of the study and definitions

The research set out to interview young undocumented migrants, so the starting point was to define the concepts of 'young' and 'undocumented'. In terms of the age range, it was agreed after discussions with PHF and the project steering group, that the study would focus on people aged between 18 and 30. The study needed to define what it meant by 'youth' in this context. Young people grow up in varied economic and social circumstances, with different priorities and perspectives, and their gender influences their lives. Therefore, how young people shape their identity and negotiate their place in society – including their role as migrants – varies considerably, depending on a wide range of factors (Wyn and White 1997).

In order to understand the complexity of the situation of young undocumented migrants and shed light on their motivations and aspirations, the many competing, and sometimes contradictory, influences on them must be taken into account (Rose 1996; Hall 1992). According to Rattansi and Phoenix (2005), class, gender and ethnicity remain powerful in the formation of youth identities; this framework is mediated by the intersections of local and global factors. These propositions have particular significance for the study of young undocumented migrants, highlighting as they do a range of factors which will shape both the process and the experience of migration.

Migration represents, for many young undocumented migrants, a rite of passage in the transition to adulthood and to a new social role, but also a formative and transformative experience which shapes their present identity and their relationships with peers and society in general (Mai 2007). This research has explored, through the narratives of young people, the intersection of age and youth with the structuring influences of gender and ethnicity. It also looks at how these intersect with identity, decision making and aspirations, as well as their undocumented status; these variations are evident in the narratives.

The concept of 'undocumented'<sup>1</sup> was defined in our study as people without authorised leave to be in the UK. Much of the literature stresses that different migratory circumstances, such as 'undocumentedness', should be seen as a process and strategy of migration, rather than a defined 'end-state' status (Ruhs and Anderson 2006). However, status is important because of the lack of rights associated with different statuses (Morris 2001, 2002; Kofman 2002).

The tension between the experience of 'undocumentedness' as a process and the official immigration categories forms an important part of our study, which focuses on the migrants' own perceptions of what it is to be undocumented and how and why they might 'migrate' between the different forms of being undocumented or outside a particular status.

Inevitably, given the considerable complexity in agreeing definitive categories of immigration, residence and work statuses, the evidence on the numbers of undocumented migrants is contradictory. The biggest challenge is the lack of accurate data for this hidden population, and the data that do exist consist of estimates that do not disaggregate by country of origin, sex or age. The government has only recently adopted a standardised system of measurement (Home Office 2005), but this is problematic, not only because of the categories used, but also because it relies on data sources which are proxies for immigration status. Based on the 2001 Census, the Home Office estimates that the *unauthorised* (i.e. not necessarily the same as *undocumented*) population lay between 430,000 and 570,000 (Home Office 2005:5; see also Vollmer 2008). A recent report by the London School of Economics (Gordon et al. 2009) reviewed and updated the Home Office figure, adding in an estimate of UK-born children of irregular migrants. The LSE study gives a central estimate of 725,000 irregular migrants at the end of 2007, two-thirds of which are based in London.

## Research context

This research examines the lives of young undocumented migrants, from their own perspectives. We will look at how they negotiate their way through the social and economic complexities of their undocumented status in a strange country, and find ways to survive and live their everyday lives. The research explores the processes by which these migrants are incorporated into the labour market, and the scope for action that the migrants themselves have within the structural constraints of global and local labour markets, along with government policies.

The research took place during a global economic downturn, as well as an era where migrants are encountering an increasingly managed immigration policy; a policy which has brought to an end virtually all avenues for regular migration for those from outside the European Union and for those without high or desirable skills. The economic downturn has affected the kind of immigrants that arrive and leave, as well as the livelihood strategies of those who stay (Papademitriou et al

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the concept, including status definitions and categories, see the report of the scoping study [http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/yum/documents/Final\\_Report\\_YUM\\_Scoping\\_Study.pdf](http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/yum/documents/Final_Report_YUM_Scoping_Study.pdf)

2009; Zetter 2009; Martin 2009). More recently, with an increased focus on undocumented migrants, raids have been carried out on businesses that often employ undocumented migrants (or migrants who are semi-compliant and are therefore legally resident, but working in violation of some or all of the conditions of their immigration status). As the narratives in this study show, both the immigration policies and the economic climate have an impact on the lives of young undocumented migrants and the opportunities that they might have to enter the UK, work here and possibly regularise their status.

The 'official discourse' emphasises the negative and vulnerable conditions of an 'illegal' status, which firmer regulation might mitigate (see Boswell 2003). These imperatives provide part of the impetus for the increasingly stringent regulatory approach adopted by the UK Government (Home Office 2006, 2006a 2006b, 2007). However, as these recent government policy documents make clear, the case for increasing the regulation of migration appropriates and provokes the wider political discourse of 'harm caused to the UK economy, society and individuals' (Home Office 2007:10).

Migrants play a vital role in the labour market, with undocumented migrants usually located in the least regulated parts of the economy; these roles are characterised by low pay and other forms of exploitation (Ruhs and Anderson 2006; Spencer et al 2007). Undocumented migrants form a large reserve supply of low-paid and low-skilled labour to service professional and managerial workers. The global economic crisis and the resultant increase in levels of unemployment are already having an impact on the lives and experiences of the young people interviewed in this study, as there has been a decline in demand for the roles that many of them fill in the service sector, and a general worsening of their working conditions (see Chapter 4).

The government endeavours to regulate and manage migration, but there is no evidence that it has taken into account the (often undocumented) migrant labour necessary to sustain economic growth (Düvell and Jordan 2003; Castles and Miller 2003). Indeed, as May et al. (2006) emphasise, despite regulation, large-scale legal (i.e. regulated), low-wage immigration has still taken place. This has effectively driven down labour costs, with severe negative impacts on the working, health and social conditions of the migrant work force and their broader social cohesion (Hickman et al. 2008; Zetter et al. 2006). While some countries have used regularisation programmes to overcome the problems of undocumented migrants, the UK has limited experience of those problems. More recently, the Government declared a circumscribed amnesty for specific categories of asylum seekers whose cases had been pending for lengthy periods. The benefits of regularisation have been well documented (JCWI 2006). However, regularisation programmes have had extremely limited success since migrants believe that declaration of an 'illegal status' may be more likely to expedite removal than to guarantee the grant of leave to remain in the UK (Levinson 2005:30). Although there is currently a campaign for regularisation<sup>2</sup>, the economic crisis might affect the political expediency of such a strategy, and will also reduce the demand for the kinds of jobs that undocumented migrants tend to fill.

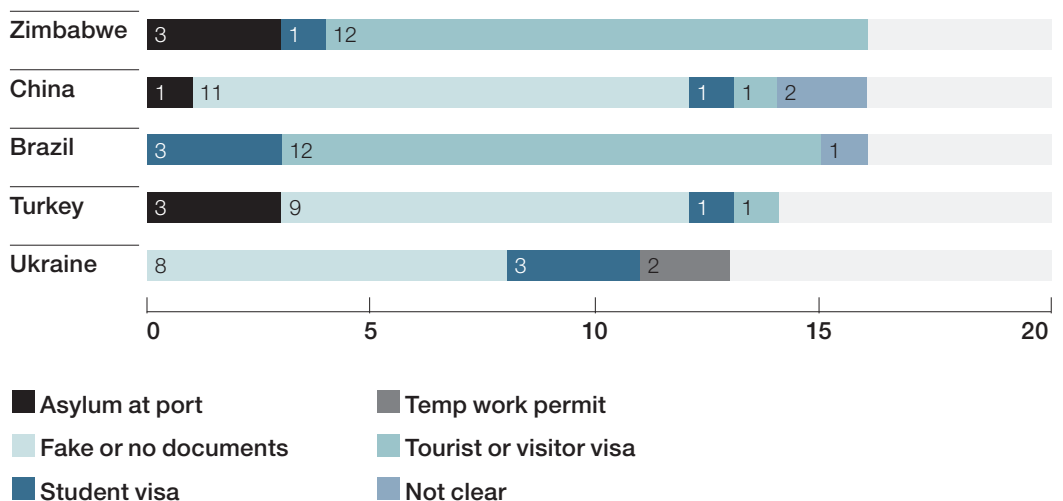
<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk>

## Fieldwork and methodology

Our research was based on 75 in-depth interviews and testimonies with young people from China, Brazil, Turkey (Kurdish young people), Ukraine and Zimbabwe living in London, the North West and the West Midlands. Due to the lack of a sampling frame, interviewees were identified using non-probability methods. So, although the data provides in-depth insights into the experiences of young undocumented migrants from five country-of-origin groups living in England, generalisations cannot be made from the data to the whole population of young undocumented migrants (see Appendix 1 for a full discussion of the methodology and fieldwork).

The countries of origin selected for inclusion in the study provided variation in terms of development; in the case of Zimbabwe, a country with former colonial links to the UK, and in Turkey, migration from a Kurdish minority suffering discrimination. There are also long and varying histories of migration to the UK. People from Turkey, Zimbabwe and China have long histories of migration to the UK and therefore have established community networks, while migration from Brazil and Ukraine is more recent and there are fewer community networks which might help to shape migrants' experiences. The five countries of origin that we researched allowed for an exploration of different initial migration routes and strategies. These included student and work permit overstayers, the use of fake documents, those who had been through the asylum system and people who had paid smugglers to enter the UK clandestinely, as Figure 1 shows.

**Figure 1: Entry routes by country of origin**



Although Figure 1 categorises the ways in which people actually entered the UK, many migrants used fake documents, acquired by smugglers or agents. Others travelled using fake documents and claimed asylum once they reached the border. In addition to those who claimed asylum at the border, 12 other young undocumented migrants – two Chinese, six Kurds and four Zimbabweans – have claimed asylum once in the UK, while a minority of others did not claim asylum because they feared rejection and deportation, so they preferred to remain outside of the asylum system. The migration processes and routes were often complex,

involving multiple factors and, for some, a great deal of expense. Chinese young people almost always used the ‘snakeheads’ to organise their journeys, as summed up by the following quote:

*In China, if you want to go to the UK, you pay a snakehead a certain amount of money. As long as the snakehead gets you in the UK, you pay them that agreed amount. How you get to the UK was the job of the snakehead. Whether you travel by plane or by ship is up to them. You must follow their arrangements. You can't choose what to travel. They tell you what to travel. And that is it (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese<sup>3</sup>).*

The inclusion of very recent and less recent migrants allowed for a better understanding of how experiences are shaped and choices are made by young people over time. Around half the sample (33 out of 75) had been in the UK for three years or less, while 42 of them had been in the UK for four years or more. Young undocumented migrants from China were most likely to be more recent migrants, while those from Zimbabwe and Turkey tended to have been in the UK for longer.

Researchers fluent in the one or more of the languages of each of the five countries of origin were recruited to the project. The topic guide was translated and interviews were carried out in community languages, which were then translated and transcribed into English. Access to interviewees was through a number of organisations and faith groups, as well as snowballing from our initial contacts. Building relations of trust and interviewer verification by potential gatekeepers was crucial to the success of the project, and was a difficult and demanding process. Trust was built up by the researchers who were carrying out the interviews in first languages, and through contacts made by the research team during the scoping study and the main study. The researchers with linguistic skills were the first point of contact for the interviewees, and their skills were crucial to the success of the project.

## Research ethics

Given the sensitivity of the research and the vulnerability of young undocumented migrants, ethical considerations and safeguards were paramount.

The research was conducted following The British Sociological Association and Refugee Studies Centre ethical guidelines. The five researchers who carried out the interviews were all experienced in working with sensitive research topics and vulnerable groups. Even so, particular attention was paid to ensuring their awareness of ethical considerations and standards of confidentiality and anonymity were absolute. Regular debriefings were carried out during the fieldwork to ensure that these standards were maintained.

All participants were interviewed after informed consent, although to protect their identities we did not require written consent. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any time, or request that parts of their narratives should not be recorded. Both withdrawal requests and omissions occurred.

The researchers carrying out the interviews chose the pseudonyms used in this research; only they know the names and identities of the respondents. The recordings of the interviews and testimonies will be retained for 12 months, in case verification is needed, and will then be destroyed.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes will be followed by the age, sex and country of origin of the interviewee.

## Profile of the sample

Of the 75 in-depth interviews/testimonies carried out, there were 16 each with young undocumented migrants from Brazil, China and Zimbabwe, 14 with Kurdish migrants from Turkey and 13 with Ukrainians. In the final sample, 44 interviews were carried out in London, 14 in the North West and 17 in the West Midlands. Forty interviewees were men and 35 were women. Twelve interviewees had children in the UK – six men and six women – and three women were pregnant at the time of the interview. Four people had children elsewhere and one had children in both the UK and Brazil. In terms of age, 34 interviewees were aged between 18 and 24 and 41 were aged 25 and over. While we had set an age range of up to 30, two of the Zimbabwean interviewees were 31 at the time of the interview. The diversity of the sample gives us the opportunity to explore intersections in the data by age, sex, region, and country of origin (see Appendix 3 for anonymised information about interviewees).

## Outline and structure of the report

In addition to the introduction, the report contains six chapters. Chapter 2 examines the intersections of youth, migration, and of being undocumented. More specifically it explores the circumstances and motives for migration, as well as the extent to which the UK was a chosen destination, what was known about the UK before migration, the extent to which being young was an incentive for migration and a reason for being undocumented. Chapter 3 examines what it means, in reality, to be young and undocumented in the UK, and focuses on the everyday lives of young people, including accommodation and access to health and justice. Chapter 4 focuses on employment and livelihoods, particularly the working lives of young undocumented migrants, the impact of being undocumented on employment, the ways people find work without documents or valid documents and survival strategies during periods of unemployment. The chapter also examines people's spending and obligations to pay back debts or send remittances, and the ways in which this impacts on their lives, employment strategies and choices. Chapter 5 considers the social and community lives of young undocumented migrants, including friendships, relationships, how people spend their time, as well as their engagement with organisations and groups. This chapter highlights the impact of English language proficiency on young people's social and community lives and networks. Chapter 6 explores the aspirations and coping strategies of young undocumented migrants and their reflections on the experience of a young undocumented migrant in the UK. This chapter also explores the things young people do in order to escape the pressure and insecurity of their status, whether they make plans for their future and how they have adjusted and coped with changing life circumstances. Chapter 7 is the conclusion, which highlights the main findings of the research. The report also contains three appendices: Appendix 1 is the methodology, Appendix 2 documents the project's capacity building activities and Appendix 3 is a list of interviewees, detailing their main attributes and their employment both in the UK and before migration.

## Case study: Fang Ping

Fang Ping is a 22-year-old woman from Fujian province in China, where she worked as a supermarket cashier. She has been living in the UK for nearly two years and, at the time of the interview, was living in Birmingham with her boyfriend, who is also an undocumented migrant. They rent one small room for £200 a month in a house shared with more than a dozen people. All the occupants are Chinese and most sell DVDs on the streets. She currently sets up a stall in the Sunday market and pays a fee to a friend to borrow residence papers to enable her to have a stall. She sells bags, handicrafts and gadgets sent from China and can make £100 on the stall. In addition, she sometimes works a few hours a day washing dishes and is paid £4 an hour. She has previously worked in the UK distributing leaflets for a takeaway shop and as a kitchen assistant, where she earned £180 a week.

Fang Ping paid 300,000 Yuan (RMB), which is nearly £20,000, to come to the UK in 2006. A girl she knew was arranging to go abroad, so Fang Ping decided to join her, thinking it would be better in the UK than in China. In Fujian, as Fang Ping says,

*... there's a trend to go abroad. When there's a chance to go everyone wants to leave.*

Fang Ping's father has been an undocumented migrant worker in Japan and had warned her of the potential hardships but she wanted to make the journey. She describes her route in the following way:

*I held a visitors visa for... Romania... from there transferred to Germany. We transferred and arrived in Germany. And at the airport in Germany, I stayed there for one night. There were three of us. It was in December and was very cold. It was so cold that the three of us had to hold ourselves together... Later, a local contact (snakehead) got us another passport... a Japanese passport. And with that passport, we flew to the UK... When we were entering the airport (through Passport Control)... It was at a time lots of people were coming in... We didn't say much and let them see the passports... They didn't ask a lot of questions. When they were looking at the passport... I was so scared when I was coming through the gate (Passport Control). I was so scared that we might be caught. If we were caught, we'll then be finished...*

Fang Ping realises that she has been comparatively lucky in her journey because she flew, while others had much more traumatic experiences which had been recounted to her.

*Some had to climb mountains, or walk the tunnels when they smuggled themselves out... Some had to cross borders between countries... there were wire meshes... Say if you hurt your feet, the snakeheads don't even bother! They might as well throw you down the mountain, and let the group continue with the journey. Because if just one of the group is [found] and arrested, all the group may be [found] and sent back home. They can't afford to get the others into trouble just because of one person.*

Fang Ping does not regret her time in the UK, feeling that it has given her chances to accumulate more money than she would have in China. She would like to open her own restaurant or takeaway shop, but can't realise her dreams without status, so she hopes, '... that the UK Government will declare an amnesty'.



# migration and youth – motives, expectations and circumstances



## Introduction

This chapter explores the complex interplay between being young, migration and being an undocumented migrant. These inter-relationships manifest themselves in several different ways in the lives of the interviewees. The narratives clearly demonstrate the ways in which being young and being a migrant and, more specifically, being an undocumented migrant vary considerably. One very important factor in understanding the differences between young undocumented migrants are the circumstances and reasons for their migration. This revolves mostly around their country of origin and the ways in which the pre-migration social, economic and political lives and experiences of young people intersect with this. Age and sex are much less important in terms of understanding the complexities between migration and youth. This chapter focuses on five main areas: the circumstances and motives for migration, the reasons for coming to the UK and the information that young people had before arrival, being young as an incentive for migration and being young as a 'reason' for undocumented migration.

## Circumstances and motivations for migration

The reason or reasons why young people migrated, which for some are closely linked to the political and/or economic situation in their country of origin, affect their everyday lives. The reasons manifest themselves in the migrants' fears about being caught and deported, and in their aspirations and hope for life in the UK, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate. It is for this reason that the migrants' country of origin was an important explanatory variable. Age and gender are less significant in understanding people's motives for migration, as well as their aspirations and everyday lives too. This section explores the situation that led young people to migrate to the UK and how the decision was made.

Among Zimbabweans, the decision was often made by parents or was a collective family decision. For many, the political problems in Zimbabwe were the main reason for leaving, especially in cases where the individual was directly engaged in political activity or family members had been involved, indirectly threatening the safety of the young person. In the case of Bob, who had been involved in information dissemination for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and had been tortured in Zimbabwe, the decision to leave was simply,

*'... because I feared for my life. I was arrested several times'  
(Bob, 31, M, Zimbabwean).*

Around half of the Zimbabwean interviewees came to join a family member who was already in the UK, with seven coming as teenagers. For a few, including Theo and Ray who came to the UK as young teenagers, aged twelve and thirteen, the decision was not their own, but was made by others. Theo's mother had been ill and moved to the UK to obtain necessary medication, which was unavailable to her in Zimbabwe. Theo noted that, 'I just wanted to be where my mum was' (Theo, 19, M, Zimbabwe). For Ray, who was 21 at the time of the interview and had been in the UK for eight years, migration was also his mother's decision, but was based on the situation in Zimbabwe:

*Well it wasn't my decision was it, I was 13, it was clearly not my decision. But I understand the reasons behind it... I think my mum had a vision, there was problems, clearly it wasn't an environment conducive to us being there politically, it just... you have to look at the country to look at how unstable it is... I can understand the reasons for us coming here (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

The ongoing political and economic crisis makes return unfeasible for many young people from Zimbabwe and this permeates their experiences, as it also does for young Kurdish people.

For Kurdish young undocumented migrants, the discrimination they experienced, coming from a minority group – such as police oppression and violence against them and fear due to their political activities and views – was evident in their reasons for leaving. Amed left to 'escape' and went on to say that, 'The deep state of Turkey had issued our death sentence' (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey). Among some young men, avoiding military service was also an important reason, because they knew that if they were in the Turkish army they would be stationed in Kurdistan.

*I don't want to go to military service. I don't want to serve as soldier to Turkish republic... You know the situation in Turkey. There is policy of the state to destroy the Kurds. At the moment they have huge military operations in the east Anatolia. They are my people. When I go to army they will ask me to kill my people. You would go to army to defend your country but they will put me in a position to fight against my people. If I need to protect or defend something I would go to defend Kurdistan... They would send you to Kurdistan to be soldier there. People from my hometown they all went to Kurdistan to do the military service. They all engaged in clashes. It was the same for all of them. This what was going to happen to me as well (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Firat, who has been in the UK for seven years and was politically active prior to his migration, felt that he had to leave suddenly. For Firat, avoiding military service was also part of his motive for migration. He said,

*How I can fight against my own people? How can you fire bullets against your own people? (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

One young Kurdish woman, Jiyan, who was 23 and had been in the UK for seven years, had a completely different reason for coming to the UK – she had received a proposal for an arranged marriage from a distant relative. When explaining her decision, she relates how she did it with 'a childish mind' and how she didn't want to miss such an opportunity.

Chinese young people were much more economically motivated than Zimbabweans and Kurdish young people. For the most part, migration had been the personal decision of the young person and was based on economic considerations. Some wanted to help support their families, as summed up by Fu Chenming, a young Chinese man who has been in the UK for less than two years.

*Wages there can't allow you to make ends meet easily... I wanted to come so my parents didn't have to work so hard (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

While there is a trend for young people from Fujian Province to migrate, one of the problems these young people face is the huge debts they accrue to pay the 'snakeheads' to smuggle them out of China. Gao Zeng, who has been in the UK for two years and eight months, reflects on his situation in the following quote:

*I thought I'd better go abroad to earn money. But the money spent for me to smuggle myself out was quite something, it was already something in the range of 300,000 Yuan [roughly £20,000]. I had to borrow bits and bobs... bits and bobs and I haven't paid back the debts yet (Gao Zeng 24, M, Chinese).*

This level of debt permeates the experiences, choices and aspirations of young Chinese migrants in the UK and is evident in many of their narratives throughout the report.

Ukrainians were, for the most part, motivated to migrate by economic factors and made the decision to migrate themselves. Thus, Rita did not describe joining her husband in England as her main motivation, nor that she was looking to settle in the UK, although she has now been here for more than three years. Instead, she said:

*It was simply to earn and return. Return home. To earn something and come back (Rita, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

For a few, learning English, having an adventure, fulfilling a long-held dream and travel were also the reasons for their migration. Halyna, who had been in the UK for more than eight years, describes her dreams of coming to the UK,

*... since I was in 5th class, I told my English teacher 'I'll go to England'... I just turned 18 and I came here (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

In contrast to the other country-of-origin groups, the migration circumstances of young people from Brazil were, on the whole, socially motivated rather than politically or economically motivated. Some came to join a partner, a relative or with friends. Custódia who had only been in the UK for four months at the time of the interview describes her experiences:

*London for me wasn't a dream. It wasn't my dream. But it's not by chance either... I ended up having a relationship, a cool friendship with a crowd who always talked about living abroad. All of them, at the time, between 20, 22 years old, let's say about 3 years ago. 'Oh, I want to go (abroad). I want to visit this and that place!' You know the dream of university students for after they finish their courses and things like that. Suddenly, life shows you your path, your route, and I became very close to this girl my classmate. We lived in the same town, we shared plans and then she said 'Let's go to London. Let's go to London. It's cool there' (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

For others migration was an adventure; it allowed exposure to another culture and for some enabled the learning of a new language. A few came with the specific reason of developing skills or working to save money, such as Celso:

*I came with the aim of working and studying, learn the English language you know (Celso, 28, M, Brazilian).*

The choices made by Brazilians were much more individualistic, and were not family decisions or household survival strategies. As a consequence, Brazilians are not fearful of return in the way that Zimbabwean, Chinese and Kurdish young people are. Like Ukrainians, Brazilian young people are more economically self-motivated in terms of their migration, but, unlike Ukrainians, the social dimension of joining a partner or having an adventure is prevalent for them. These differences have a very real affect on the lives of young undocumented migrants from the five groups in this study.

## Reasons for coming to the UK: choice or chance

The data from the interviews and testimonies suggests that for most young undocumented migrants, coming to the UK was a deliberate choice and a targeted destination. The main reasons for migrating were perceptions of the economic

opportunities available, because friends were going, family members were already in the UK, or because it had always been an aspiration to come to the UK to experience the language and culture. For some, perceptions about cultural freedom, the asylum system and human rights were motivating factors. A minority would have preferred a different destination and the UK was their second choice or the UK was just more feasible to get to, or it was the destination selected by smugglers, so it was just where they happened to end up.

The diversity of factors motivating the decision to come to the UK is, like causes and motivations for migration, strongly nuanced by noticeably different tendencies between the five national groups. Among most Chinese, Kurdish and Ukrainian migrants, the UK was their preferred choice. For Zimbabweans, especially those who came as teenagers, it was a family member who decided and the young person had little choice in the decision; kinship ties facilitated the journey, so it was an obvious choice. The impetus for choosing the UK among Brazilians was often because of friends or partners, and for others an interest in the language and culture. Antônio, for example, came to the UK after his friend had decided to come, while Bernardo was at a point in his life when he wanted a change and already had a friend in London:

*'Hey mate, I'm going', he said. 'I'm going to London'... Then based on what he told me, he told me he was coming, I thought, would it be okay? Then I started to check it as a possibility and saw that it had many advantages and ended up coming (Antônio, 23, M, Brazilian).*

*I used to play football in Brazil. I even played professionally for a period of time. But when I was 19–20 I felt that I wasn't progressing anymore. I was not having... er... financial return. I was about 20 and still depended on my parents. I wasn't pleased with that situation so I had a friend who was already here and... er... he gave me this idea. I always had this intention of living abroad, especially in England in consequence of the English influence on me in terms of music and everything else, so I always had... er... I don't know, maybe not live here, but I always felt I wanted to come here. That's what ended up happening. I had the opportunity, I wasn't happy with football any longer, even personally I wasn't happy with what I was doing and when the opportunity came, I didn't think twice and came (laughs) (Bernardo, 26, M, Brazilian).*

While for some Brazilians the 'choice' of the UK suggests spontaneity, for the Kurds and Chinese the decision was more deliberate, although for different reasons. For Kurds, safety and the hope of asylum are never far from the surface of their narratives, reflecting the specific conditions which prompt their migration. They perceived the UK, compared with other European countries, as a fair country to lodge their claims – a perception, as we shall see, that is neither born out by their information before arrival nor their experience here. Amed and Avashin typify a number of Kurdish participants:

*I came to this country because I had political problems. I thought England is more honest on this issue... We thought England would not send us back. England would not give us to Turkey. We thought that we can set up a new life in England. We came with this idea in mind (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Because they [i.e. Britain] have human rights and a better government. It's not like Turkey, if there was freedom and some independence we wouldn't have to come here (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

For other Kurds, the human rights situation was just as compelling as a motive to leave, although the specific attraction of the UK was less immediate. Ciwan started in Germany simply because, 'It was easy for the smuggler to get a visa to Germany'. However he was told that Germany had changed its asylum policy towards Kurds, and so the UK was recommended. Likewise, Necirwan had wanted to stay in Belgium, but was advised to go elsewhere:

*I wanted to stay in Belgium but I was told that, the rules are stricter and conditions are difficult to stay in Belgium for somebody like me... Then I was advised to think about France and the UK or any other country. I had some friends with me and we said UK. Then we have started looking for option to get to the UK. Three days later we were in the UK (Necirwan, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I did not plan to come to UK after leaving Turkey. I was planning to stay in Germany. Then my uncle told me that it would be impossible to get asylum in Germany and within the 20 days I have left Germany. He told me that here is better for me to go to the UK (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

The immediacy of the hope of sanctuary was reinforced by a wider sense of what the UK had to offer and a belief that it would provide an environment of stability and freedom as the following quote demonstrates:

*We see [the UK] as a place where we would not lose our identity or culture (Necirwan, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Nearly all the Chinese young undocumented migrants who were interviewed wanted to come to the UK and planned it as a destination. Positive economic conditions, including the exchange rate at the time of migration, and the possibility of work (coupled with social networks) explain their choice of the UK. The following responses capture the financial considerations, which seem to be the overriding reasons for migration among young Chinese people:

*Here in the UK, it is easier to earn money than in China. Salaries here are higher... because of the high exchange rates... each month you get roughly £1,000; if you send it home, you get over 10,000Yuan (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese).*

*At that time, although lots of people were going abroad, most went to other countries. Those leaving for the UK were not so many. It was thought that since not too many were going to the UK, finding work should be easier. It would be easier to find work in the UK (Jessy Chang, 21, F, Chinese).*

Pre-existing social networks are important in the Chinese community and are influential in decision making. In Chapter 4, we see the ways in which these social networks have been crucial in terms of job search strategies and employment, but also in terms of the ways in which young people survive during periods of unemployment. In the following quote, Yao Xiamin describes how social networks transfer into different geographical contexts:

*Whenever some guest comes to a family, everyone would show them hospitality. So when they meet in a foreign land, people would understand that it hadn't been easy for them to have reached this stage. So when you call for help with looking for work, normally they would be quite willing to assist; because everyone has come illegally [and therefore understands how difficult it had been] (Yao Xiamin, 25, F, Chinese).*

For a minority, other factors played a part in their decision making, such as the perception of the UK as a, '... country that was better for us' (Meixin He, 24, M, Chinese), and that, '... everybody says human rights are respected in the UK' (Gao Ming, 30, M, Chinese). Smuggling affected some people's destination, although it is important to note that this was neither exclusive to the Chinese community, nor did it seem to be the principal means of transit and entry (see Figure 1).

*We were trying moving along... whichever country that might be... We kind of had no definitive destination (Meixin He, 24, M, Chinese).*

Two young Chinese migrants, Yao Xiamin and Fu Chenming, would have preferred to go to Japan, but were unable to obtain visas. Yao Xiamin spent six months in Ireland on a student visa, although she worked rather than studied while in Ireland, before coming to the UK. She paid around £6,700 for assistance in making the journey between Ireland and the UK. She describes her experiences as follows:

*At that time most of my friends and school mates had gone abroad, so I wanted to go abroad, too. I tried to apply for a visa to go to Japan, but my application was rejected. I wanted to go to Japan because I had relatives there... We had originally intended to come to study in the UK. The original intended destination was the UK, but this was not granted. So we went to Ireland... I had been in Ireland for about half a year. Then there was someone planning to organise a group of people to come to the UK. This person had come with us from China, so she told me about this (Yao Xiamin, 25, F, Chinese).*

Yao Xiamin was clear about wanting to come to the UK, after Japan, rather than elsewhere:

*Because firstly, the exchange rates of the Pound is higher. Secondly, here in the UK, there are quite a few people from Fujian already living here (Yao Xiamin, 25, F, Chinese).*

For most young undocumented migrants from the Ukraine, England was a planned destination because of the earning potential. Fedia says that, 'I knew before that in England you can earn money...' (29, M, Ukrainian). Sergiy had always been interested in England but would have preferred America. It was a pragmatic decision to travel to England:

*To go unofficially, it was only possible to go to Britain. It was simple to go to Britain. Basically I liked Britain too. And it was more realistic to come here (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian).*

Among Zimbabweans, the UK was the preferred destination, but this was really a consequence of pre-existing family ties. This is exemplified by the young Zimbabwean migrants who came to the UK as teenagers, such as Theo who arrived aged 12 and 'did not know anything because I was a kid' (Theo 19, M).

For most Zimbabweans, the UK wasn't a dream but just an obvious choice. Colin illustrates this when he says:

*Personally I never really thought about it. I knew I had family here, but I never really said to myself, 'I want to come to Britain' (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwean).*

## What information did young undocumented migrants have?

Some young undocumented migrants prepared themselves with information about the UK. However, what is most evident in the narratives is the lack of information many young people had prior to arrival. Those who came to the UK as teenagers tended to know virtually nothing about the country prior to arrival, though some who arrived in their 20s were equally uninformed. Ray, Theo and Welat had been in the UK since they were teenagers while Antônio, Bertiz and Serhado arrived in their twenties.

*Didn't have a clue, didn't have a clue. I just knew it was London (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

*I knew the Queen lived here. I knew there were 5 countries including Northern Ireland and Ireland that all together formed the United Kingdom. I knew about London, that it was the capital city (Theo, 19, M, Zimbabwean).*

*... didn't know anything. Because I was 16–17 (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I didn't have information about how to be here legally, about work or anything. I was completely unaware of all of this (Beatriz, 24, F, Brazilian).*

*I came without knowing anything. It was a real adventure (Antônio, 23, M, Brazilian).*

*I did not know much about England. I can say that I came to [the] unknown (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Others relied on selective hearsay accounts – often from friends and family members, as the quotes from Firat and Dmytro show – and these accounts often resonated with their aspirations or expectations for a better life, or seeking asylum. The reality, however, was often different, as the quotes from Berenice and Levko demonstrate:

*My brother in law asked me if I want to come here and he can help me... He told me that I will have to apply for asylum when I get here. He said he did the same thing as well. I did not have any information on this country (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*My cousin was here three years before me for about half a year. He was here on visa, picking strawberries on the farm. When he came back, he told me, in general, how it is possible to earn and how the life is here; about how people live here and how people [back] home just exist. I become attracted and wanted even more to come here (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

*The information that arrives there [in Brazil] is like this, 'so-and-so has bought a house, so-and-so bought a car, so-and-so works for an hour and earns R\$50,00, works one day and earns R\$300,00'. In Brazil, it's a month salary. So it's the information you hear. Then you only understand part of it. You don't realise that from those R\$300,00, you have to pay for rent, which is very expensive and everything else, you know (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

*When I arrived, I knew that there is a river Thames but I imagined its waters are as clear as in the swimming pool. [Laughs]. When I saw [those] logs [and] wheels [floating] I was in shock (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian).*

Victoria, who has been in the UK for three years, had been told by a friend how hard it was in the UK, although this did not deter her from coming and experiencing the reality herself.

*I knew this girl. Here in England, we met only once and then [shortly] she went back home [to Ukraine]. Basically I knew very, very little. All I knew, I knew it from her. She explained to me how to live here... When I was at home she used to tell me it was very difficult here. Very difficult mentally, very difficult in every aspect. Of course I didn't believe, just like everyone else in Ukraine. We live in some sort of illusion where we build ourselves different worlds where we would go and everything will be under our feet. But in reality, nothing you gain here comes easy (Victoria, 24, F, Ukrainian).*

In some of the narratives, the impetuosity of young people, a willingness to take risks and the adventure of migration comes through. Taffi came to the UK aged 18 and had heard that it offered many opportunities although, as she says, 'I was thinking things like 'how much is a Playstation?'. Taffi elaborates on her feelings and excitement:

*When you are young you just get excited, you know, you're going to a new place, coz, you know, it's like someone whose grown up in this country and if he was given an opportunity to go to a new place at the age 18... just the excitement of going to see what it is like, I think it was the same for me, just the excitement of seeing what the place was like (Taffi, 27, M, Zimbabwean).*

Those who proactively searched for information did so from a wide variety of sources though, again, relatives and friends are the most common source – sometimes in the country of origin, sometimes from those already in the UK or who had been here and, for Brazilians, travel agents play an important role:

*My mother and brother were here. Our relatives told us to come here and apply for asylum... We wanted to know about the life here. When we were asking them how is life there, they told us (Dilan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I did speak to my brother a lot, but I didn't come to this country just for the financial side. I know the life style was better, because I spoke with my uncle (Cihan, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Before I came here, the travel agent... said... many times he'd tell me... when I got here, it was exactly how he said, I met people. Interviewer: Do they give you information about immigration, what you have to say at the airport? Celso: Exactly, all of that. Everything you can imagine that, that they can do for you to enter the UK, they do it (Celso, 28, M, Brazilian).*

However, there is also the impression that there is little evidence of detailed information being provided. Instead it is as if reassurance, or perhaps implicit consent, is being requested:

*... someone who had been in the UK... he was able to build a house back home. I heard of this and asked my dad to see if there's any way I could go. My dad then found the snakeheads and talked to them (Jessy Chang, F, 21, Chinese).*

*I think it's a lot through friends and family. Like I can come here and my aunt can tell me, you know, have you tried this? Have you tried that? (Taffi, M, 27, Zimbabwean)*



Regardless of the sources, the information is rarely collected in a systematic or careful way. There is little attempt to verify information. Much is selective and taken on trust, and the young migrant is often left in a confused state.

*There were about two or three people who had been here and returned, so they told me many things. In fact, it didn't help, it made things very confusing... but... The travel agents, we ask and they tell us, more or less what happens, what was happening (Eduardo, M, 23, Brazilian).*

Unexpectedly, the internet is cited very infrequently as an information source, although this may be because this was not a prompted question. Where it was used, it played a significant role:

*He [an agent] gave me 30% information, 70% I got from the internet. I got into those groups, whatever, London something on the internet, where people, like, backpackers, I went to the internet and searched these topics. At the time, there were loads of people coming here, so, like, whenever you got into these sites, like, it was 100% help [that you'd get], so, everything that I found out, before I came I already knew (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).*

## Being young as an incentive for migration

In this section, young people's narratives about their reasons for migration are explored to understand the ways in which being young contributed to their decision making. For most young people, aspirations for a better or safer life for themselves and/or their families was the main motivating factor in migration although, as we will see, this varied between and within country of origin groups.

For some young people, migration marks a rite of passage to a different role in their family and in society in general. While migration can bring independence and autonomy and, for some, alleviates the social pressures to comply with the expectations and customs of the country of origin, it also means responding to a new set of expectations and brings new economic responsibilities towards the family as Xiao Xue illustrates:

*I want to work here for a few years and earn some money first. I can't go home just yet. You'll lose face if you go home empty handed (Xiao Xue, 21, M, Chinese).*

The following examples illustrate different ways in which migration marks a transition to a different social role and becomes a crucial moment in the way interviewees define their social position, identity and aspirations.

Berenice left Brazil when she was only 17 years old and got married in the UK. Migration and marriage are intermingled and define a new stage of her life:

*I came here and got married. That's when I started to live as a married person, but sharing the house with other people... In Brazil, when I worked, for more that I worked, but always my mother is the one who was responsible for the water [bills], the electricity [bills], things like this, you know. But here, it's me, like, me and my husband, we have our responsibilities and it finished. We don't have that thing of spending money on superfluous things, things that I don't know (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

Pawlo and Zhu Chen are recent arrivals in the UK having been here for just over a year and just over two years respectively. Their stories show how migration can result in a new found independence as well as self-reliance.

*In Ukraine, young people in my age [are] not so independent, depend on somebody. Here... If I can provide for myself, means that I don't depend on someone. It's not like that back home. Because, even after graduating, the youth don't have a job that they can completely provide for them, not even basics; all the time they depend on parents (Pawlo, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

*Once you decide to come, life has to be tiring. Back in China you'd stay with your parents and if there's anything that makes you not happy about it, you can just go home. Here in the UK you can't just say, 'I'm not happy, I want to go home' (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

In other accounts, migration has opened up a new world of possibilities. Levko, a young Ukrainian who has been in the UK for around eight years, talks with optimism about how migration has changed his life:

*Since I was 14 years old, I can say that I lived without parents. Never asked mother or father for money... I don't know... I was brought up by the street. You know [how it is] like, young guys, racket, sort outs and all that... And, I'm very, very, very glad... Grateful to the Lord that I've got to England... I became really a workaholic. I have my own dream. I've changed very, very, very much. Touch wood, [changed] to the better side as far as I think. Everything lies ahead (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian).*

In general, those who came to the UK in their late 20s had more specific reasons for their migration, with migration acting as a functional step towards the realisation of concrete plans. Plans included learning a new skill, accumulating enough capital to set up a business in the country of origin, to secure a house for the family, or paying for the education of younger siblings. All in their late twenties, Brígido has been in the UK just over three years, Diana for seven months and Huadi Zhang for just over a year. Each one had very specific migration projects:

*If it were not for my objective [to pursue my career] I wouldn't have come, especially in the conditions of an illegal person (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian).*

*I went with the idea that I'd go, stay for a year, save money, return [to Brazil] and when I returned in a year's time, I'd be able to purchase in Brazil the things I want and make my plans come true (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

*My concern is how to let my relatives have a slightly better life; because my family back home is really very poor (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

Earning money, accumulating capital and gaining access to material goods otherwise out of reach are important motivations for many interviewees, although the 'better life' to which some young undocumented migrants aspire is not just about material goods and money. Material wealth is seen as a way of achieving freedom and autonomy, to grow as a person and realise one's potential. Both Semen and Dmytro came to the UK to earn money, but for both of them their rationale was more complex:

*I have the money now. I can afford to buy an ice cream or have a beer and not to think whether or not I will have something left for the next week. You see. In that aspect we were young people. We wanted to live, work and have simply a normal life. Not just existence, counting every kopiyyka [penny] but to feel yourself a free person (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

*Firstly, I wanted to earn and secondly, I wanted to see how everything is here, how does it look... Maybe there is a feeling that I have to prove something to myself or... Like, 'will I manage it?'... I am that sort of a person who sets targets for myself and tries to achieve (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

Conversely, young undocumented migrants who migrated in their early 20s or late teens were motivated less by concrete plans or objectives and more by the wish to take control over their lives.

When Halyna came to the UK she was only 18 years old. Since childhood she had dreamt of leaving Ukraine and exploring the world. When asked about her migration plans, she replied:

*They were not plans; it was just like, how can I say, youth's dreams, imaginations. It wasn't like an adventure. It was like... I don't know. Everyone plans their lives, everyone wants to their life in a certain way. You see your life and you go that direction... My plans were more to go and realise myself. Understanding myself. Just like I realised what I did about myself there by the time I become 18 years [old], what I've achieved by that age, let it be a senior school age and a university age, how I could see myself in a different country. Something like this (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

The following examples, as the previous ones, illustrate how abstract the motivations for migration can be, but also how open and ready young people can be to changing their plans once abroad, responding to what they find and their experiences. Both Fang Ping and Uliana came to the UK when they were 20 years old and express the positive aspects of leaving their country of origin:

*Going abroad is an opportunity to see a bit of things outside. You'd know what the outside world is like. Had you stay at home all your life, all you know is China. Don't you agree? But once you have gone abroad, you'll know that, 'Ah... actually the world is like this!' Don't you agree? So at the end of the day, it's good to have come here. You can see lots of things and experience more (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese).*

*I love to travel and that was what I wanted at that time. To earn some money? I can't say. I simply thought of re-paying what I borrowed. But after that, I thought that I stay for a year and will go home. Well, then it happened that I liked to be [here] (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

Among Kurdish and Zimbabwean interviewees, migration is not just a search for a better life; it is more often a search for a safer place away from ethnic discrimination, police violence and political oppression. For young Kurdish migrants, migration becomes also an opportunity for developing and expressing their Kurdish identity.

*Rather than looking for new life, my reason to come to this country is my life was in danger (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I can live here freely. I can live as I want. I can defend my Kurdishness. I am defending that here (Rojda, 22, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

There are two more observations to make in relation to migration decision-making and youth. First, in some cases participants recall the decision to migrate as one taken light-heartedly, without really thinking through all the implications of the decision or planning. Second, reflecting on this process, they express surprise and astonishment for how easily they made a choice and found themselves in a new

country. For example, Pat came to the UK when her brother asked her if she would look after his son while he and his wife studied. Pat only planned on staying a year and had left her boyfriend, who she thought she might marry, in Southern Africa. Seven years later she is still in the UK and is now married with a young family. Below, she describes the spontaneity of the decision to come to the UK:

*It was a surprise, he just asked me... do you want to go to the UK and I said when? And he said next week, and I said yes. So I had to apply for an emergency passport and he bought my ticket! It was just a quick journey, within a week everything was sorted (Pat, 27, F, Zimbabwean).*

Jiyan, as noted earlier, came to the UK after a marriage proposal from a distant relative. She describes her experience of an arranged marriage and reflects on her hasty decision in the following way:

*Because I was young, I didn't have many difficulties [in Turkey]. But I thought there is nothing that connects me to there and I suddenly accepted. Suddenly. I am still surprised (Jiyan, F, 23, Kurd from Turkey).*

## Being young as a 'reason' for undocumented migration

In this section the links between migration and being young are explored and it is evident that being young is sometimes a reason for initiating and enduring the experience of undocumented migration. Some of the interviewees had been in the UK for seven or more years and were able to take a more reflective view of their experiences and their impacts.

*I don't know. I was so young, I think I didn't worry about the consequences. I thought, 'I'll do it and see what happens'. And it was ok (Bernardo, 26, M, Brazilian).*

*I'm 23... I don't have any worries. I know there are people who stay here illegally and still work in good places... They are not watching me now; CCTV is not watching me from above with a camera, [they are not saying] 'Cihan is illegal, let's catch him' (Cihan, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

As much as undocumented migration can be related to being young, the realisation that time is rapidly passing led to some young undocumented migrants reconsidering their migration plans. However, it is not always possible to find alternative solutions and, especially for migrants who have stayed undocumented, there is a growing sense of frustration about trying to regain control over their lives and develop according to their changing needs.

Semen is from Ukraine. He came to London eight years ago, aged 20. He feels he has achieved his initial migration goals. After years of hard work, he has bought a flat in Ukraine and, at the same time, has enjoyed living in the 'best capital of Europe'; but now, approaching 30, he feels unable to move on and this is pushing him to reconsider his stay in the UK:

*I saw a completely different world. I used to work 16–17 hours [a day]. I had power and energy. I was younger. I simply didn't want to go home. I didn't want to return but work and save money. It was different for me then... Now it is really the time to decide [what to do]. Time flies fast. I am 28. It is about the time to decide where to be and how, and [to think about] family (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

Interestingly, Semen explains how at the beginning, the risk of being caught by the police and forced to return to Ukraine caused him greater distress and anxiety than now because he feels he has already achieved a lot and is ready to move on. In his narrative there is a clear sense of undocumented migration as something with a time limit.

*Many young people dream to come here even just as a tourist... but I live and work in this city. I've earned a bit... I am satisfied but the minus is that I have no papers. You want more, move forward, move on, to achieve something but without them [papers] – it's no way... I plan to stay for another year and then I will see what the situation is, maybe even going home (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

Of course for some young undocumented migrants, especially those from Zimbabwe and Kurdistan, return at this point is not feasible, while for those who have incurred large debts to make their journey, repaying these debts also means remaining in the UK to work and that is crucial to their objectives. It is in this way that the motivation for migration and the strategies used intersect with attitudes about return.

For young people, the transition to the next stage of their life requires a degree of permanence and security that can be achieved only with a change of status, either by getting leave to remain in the UK or going back to their country of origin. This sense of undocumented migration as a transitory experience is summed up by Custódia, who arrived in the UK from Brazil with her girlfriend less than a year ago. For Custódia, buying a ticket to London and getting a visa for the first few months, as well as overstaying her visa, is relatively unproblematic, and being undocumented was not really an issue at the beginning:

*This thing, 'I'll be an illegal (migrant)'. I knew that's what I was going to do... In relation to documents, how I am going to work and etc, I never thought about it. I think that who comes here doesn't think about these things because they work anyway. Wherever there are Brazilians, you can say that there is [work] (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

However, after a few months, undocumentedness is no longer an abstract and distant concept. Instead, it permeated all aspects of Custódia's daily life and this realisation made her rethink her situation:

*If I don't get regularised and they let me stay, I'll leave in five years time. At the end of five years, I'll go back. Interviewer: Are you planning to stay for five years? Custódia: Yes, for five years. I: How did you come up with this number of years? C: Because I'll be 30. I: So? C: Because I'll be 30. I: Why is it important? C: Because I want to rest then (laughs) (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

Others express similar feelings about migration and age, since being undocumented does not allow them to grow beyond a certain point. Instead, it confines them in terms of their economic and social niche. For some, it is a suitable or acceptable temporary option, but it is not a long-term option, although Uliana had been in the UK for nine years at the time of the interview and had worked mainly as a cleaner during those years:

*Your young years passing by and you are like in that capsule, you see. You can't realise yourself fully. If you have some skills, opportunities or talents, anything that you can demonstrate... if you are a good worker or a craftsman, anything that you can use and give some benefits to this society, you can't 'open' it*

*because you are in this capsule. You are locked in because you are afraid. You are afraid to say a word about yourself. That's how it really is (Natalia, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

*To work as a cleaner is not a profession. I'm still young. Cleaning your whole life is not interesting for me. If I liked it in the past, earning some money... Now I basically have everything. But I don't have what I want. There is always something missing (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown the importance of country of origin in determining young people's motivations for migration and their choice of the UK as their migration destination. While some have come to the UK for an adventure or to join friends and/or family members, for others there was either a strong economic imperative, or they wanted to escape political or ethnic persecution. Levels of autonomy varied among young people in terms of their decisions to migrate. Although most had decided for themselves or in conjunction with close relatives, the minority of those who came as teenagers appear not to have had any say in their migration.

Very little was known about the UK before arrival and sometimes what was 'known' was not accurate. In some ways, this reflects the circumstances of the migration; but in others ways, it is the element of youth, potential opportunities and the possibilities of adventure that enables this approach to migration. For some, being a migrant (albeit undocumented) has resulted in new freedom and a sense of independence. For others a feeling of safety and security emerges, although the impact of being undocumented, as later chapters illustrate, places new and different insecurities into the lives of young undocumented migrants. The reality of life in the UK as an undocumented migrant and the passing of years can result in reflections among young people, some positive and some negative. Some see the need to return to their country of origin, after a period of time or at a certain age, while others (as we shall see later in the report) talk of wasted lives. The next chapter explores the reality of people's everyday lives in the UK as an undocumented migrant.

## Case study: Eduardo

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Eduardo, a 23 year old Brazilian, has lived in the UK for four and a half years. He originally came to join his (undocumented) girlfriend. Various members of his family are here or have been here. For example, his mother, also undocumented, came after he did, and his brothers have since returned to Brazil. Similarly, various members of his girlfriend's family have come and gone. The families provide an important social and domestic support network. Eduardo's initial months were very hard:

*Then I kept telling myself: 'No you have to stay'... and I stayed and things started to improve ... I only stayed because of her [his ex-girlfriend], because she gave me support also a friend... if it depended on me I'd have gone back.*

He was working a 13-hour day in a pizza restaurant kitchen for six, sometimes seven days a week, earning about £340. Now, his employment is less stressful: he has two part-time jobs over five days, earning about £240. Housing has been problematic too, and he has lived in seven different places.

Eduardo and his partner had a child but they are now separated. Their break up and subsequent care arrangements have been stressful: his partner threatened to report him to the immigration authorities if he did not pay 'alimony'. Being undocumented, he was powerless to prevent her returning to Brazil with his son, although she has since returned to the UK on a student visa. His mother provided the emotional support to get him through these heart-breaking times. He now looks after his son for two weekends a month and provides financial support for him.

However, with the stresses induced by his first job, a bad housing situation and his personal life behind him, he is settled here. He gives the impression of youthful optimism through a relatively relaxed and agreeable life style. He moves in and out of work, gets paid in cash so does not need a bank account, spends freely, has no health issues posing the problem of finding a GP, and he is not worried that he has spent his savings. He frequently talks of enjoying life here:

*But now... I love this place, I love it... because... you have, you can do whatever you want. Here people have the financial means.*

Eduardo has enough money 'to have some fun sometimes... it's possible to enjoy life'. He goes to clubs with a Brazilian friend and Italian friends from the pizza restaurant. He admits his English is poor and a barrier to progress. Like many in his position, he reassures himself that he will:

*... leave it for later, next month I am going to plan better, then next month arrives and I've got something else on my mind and cancel school.*

He came with the ambition, 'to stay, save... make money, have a flat, have some things'. Now he wants to get documented, while recognising that with all his new experiences, it would be hard to return and resettle in Brazil.



# the everyday life of young undocumented migrants



## Introduction

Focusing on the day-to-day reality of living without documents and on early stages and experiences soon after arrival, this chapter explores the complex interplay between being young and being undocumented in the UK. The interplay manifests itself in different ways in the lives of the interviewees, shaping their identity and how they settle. Many of the struggles which young undocumented migrants face are common to other marginalised social groups in the UK. However, this chapter shows how being undocumented is an all-encompassing experience which produces distinctive and unique forms of marginality. In general, issues of gender, country of origin and place of residence don't seem to be differentiating variables, although social networks do play a crucial role in the first few months of settlement, as well as subsequently (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

The discussion is articulated around a number of key themes. It commences with significant and practical day-to-day impacts on the lives of migrants from first arrival through to issues such as 'enforced' mobility and accommodation, before progressing to perceptions and more general experiential and reflective matters. In the last section, the chapter considers what young undocumented migrants like and dislike about living in the UK.

The narratives demonstrate the means by which young undocumented people navigate their way through considerable uncertainty and the manner in which their status structures key aspects of their lives making them transitory and insecure. Later chapters elaborate and explore these characteristics in more detail. Here, the objective is to establish some of the key parameters of structure and autonomy which can determine longer term processes of adjustment and coping strategies, which are elaborated in Chapter 6.

## Confronting the reality

The immediate impact of arriving in the UK, and the priorities of finding one's feet and suitable accommodation (considered in subsequent sections) confront young undocumented migrants on their arrival. For some, this relates to their irregular entry into the UK and their immediate lack of status. As Serhado, a Kurd from Turkey, put it, '... I came here and I faced the reality' (28, M).

For the vast majority of migrants, the instant of arrival was a desperate experience, '... all lies. They told us their lies. Nothing same as told' (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey) or '... completely untrue' (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey). 'There was nothing true in the information given by him to me' (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey). Kurds do indeed seem most extreme in their stark and unqualified negative reactions. Though others, such as Daniel from Brazil, poignantly reflected that, '... the wonderful things are left at the airport when you get on the airplane' (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).

This sense of betrayal is compounded by isolation, fear, the lack of escape, and the suppression of emotions and anxieties that would be naturally expressed in a familiar environment. These feelings are prevalent in many of the narratives. Zhu Chen and Fang Ping offer two examples:

*I didn't like it when I first came. When I first came... I came with several other girls... I used to be homesick and often when I became homesick, I'd cry. It continued like this for months. I didn't even feel like eating... I used to cry when I was having my dinner (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese).*

*Back in China, anything that makes you not happy about it, you can just go home. Here in the UK you can't just say, 'I'm not happy, I wanna go home' (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

Uliana, in particular, captures the way in which a sequence of sensations left her in a desolate state:

*We went there, in Hackney. 'Beautiful' area. When I first saw it... Autumn. Those leaves. And all that rubbish. Windy. I felt so disgusted. I thought 'Oh my God, is it London?' And then, we went into this house and there were so many people. I just sat there at the end of a bed. [laughs] I thought, 'You are in trouble'... I had that feeling that I was there alone, that no one wouldn't even move a finger to simply help you (Uliana, F, 29, Ukrainian).*

Shock is a frequent reaction, notably when expectations or assumptions don't meet reality. The following quotes from Ray, who arrived in the UK aged 13, and Jiyan, in relation to the asylum system, show the discrepancies between expectation and reality:

*To be honest I was shocked... I came here thinking Oh! London such a great place. Well it wasn't a great place (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

*I came here, I saw how refugee things work and I had a shock and I am still in shock (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

The experience of arrival, sometimes contingent on exactly how young undocumented migrants arrived, can have a protracted effect. Five years after she arrived, Avashin still reflects on her first few days:

*I was in the truck with the 5 other people... I didn't know where to go or nothing so the first couple days I stayed at one of their houses, and after that I have just been staying around, each person would send me to a different place and it just goes on... I look back at the past 5 years, I think to myself... how did it happen? (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

Almost without exception, illusions are shattered. This is a more prevalent reaction among female migrants, and is illustrated in the following reflections:

*I wasn't aware of how much we create such a big illusion in Brazil. The people who are there say, 'Go to England...' the number of people (who tell you), 'Come, it's wonderful here, come'. I'm one of them. You have to come, then they'll taste the same as you and they will see how England is hard (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian).*

*I didn't believe [what I was told], just like everyone else in Ukraine. We live in some sort of illusion (Victoria, F, 24, Ukrainian).*

Disillusionment continues for some migrants. After seven months in the UK, Diana is now working as a cleaner. At home, she worked for an engineering company. She now feels that:

*This magical thing of being in London, being in England, it's gone. I don't feel like getting to know it. I don't have anybody to share (this experience) with (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

But alongside these narratives of despair and shock, the young migrants also show resilience. This resilience is partly, though not necessarily, time-related, and seems as much dependent on personality traits, acquiring basic language skills and luck in finding work. Both Lesya and Tatiana reveal how they had to dig into their personal resources to cope with the shock and isolation:

*Well, at the very beginning, I thought, Oh, God, why did I come? Why did I come? No job. Must pay for everything. Children are in the other end of the world... Then, I went to work... Later I felt very good. I was much better (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

*You are afraid of everything, you are afraid to move. But... With time. I learned a bit of English so I could find a job myself and not to beg please give me any job. I realised that I have to get [things] myself because no one will bring it to you on the plate (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian).*

Sipiwe, who has been in the UK for five and a half years and was a hospital doctor prior to migration, expresses how it has taken years for her to feel that she understands enough in the UK to be able to cope with everyday life:

*I think I had a lot of misconceptions and I also find that... for me to understand how the system works here, it has taken me all this time to really get to grips how things work! (Sipiwe, 31, F, Zimbabwean)*

## Social networks and settlement

For the majority of migrants, the pressure to find accommodation and work to pay bills is all pervading. An important key to the initial settlement process is the role of relations and/or co-national intermediaries.

Some of these networks are helpful in smoothing the way into accommodation or the workplace. But those providing support are often little better placed than those arriving and also need assistance. Thus, young undocumented migrants are reluctant to outstay their welcome. The following examples illustrate these opposing opportunities and stresses:

*When I first came, I would normally spend my time with friends who had come earlier. They have relatives here. I stayed with them. It was OK to stay with them then (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese).*

*I survived through the assistance of friends, but it was very difficult for me and it was difficult for other people to look after me as well without any contribution from myself (Trish, 25, F, Zimbabwean).*

Basic survival and an introverted lifestyle characterise the early days, but this is conditioned partly by the form of social networks. Chinese migrants tend to lead isolated lives, although the experience of isolation is not confined to them. Nevertheless, Fu Chenming expresses how his social networks operated at a minimal level, offering little help in adjusting to reality.

*I stayed with a friend during that week... who picked me up when I came here. During that week I just stayed home; I normally ate instant noodles, bread... I asked the friend to get me some instant noodles and things like that... I cooked the meals for myself... It's a foreign country for me... And I'm afraid to go out... You can't communicate with people (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

Others struggled with the powerlessness produced by their undocumented status, vulnerable to both officialdom and their own networks. Firat, for example, was caught between both the immigration authorities on the one hand and possible betrayal by a family friend on the other:

*When I arrive here they took my ID from me... They told me that will release me now and then I need to make an application. They have explain to me that I need to find lawyer and other procedures... Smugglers had contact with my brother in law so I think they have informed him about my arrival date and time. The officials... They gave me some papers... Then we went to a lawyer. We have prepared a statement with lawyer. I gave them my statement. Then we have applied to Home Office then legal procedure has started. I got refusal at court (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Important as social networks were in facilitating settlement and adjustment, by contrast, many migrants found it difficult to engage with their communities or other support structures, and some lacked knowledge about them (see Chapter 5). This exposed them to early experiences of vulnerability and exploitation, as the quotes from Trish who arrived in the UK aged 20 as a school leaver and Zhu Chen who was 23 show.

*It was because I arrived and sought asylum at point of entry... it was because I lacked legal support and I was rushed through without that support. I never had a lawyer. There were no Zimbabwe community support groups, I did not know where to find people of my own community. The asylum interview was... handled in a very interrogative manner (Trish, 25, F, Zimbabwean).*

*They sent a person to pick us up at the airport... I stayed in the snakeheads place for two or three days and moved out to the place where my friend's friend stayed. I had to stay with her because she could not find accommodation for me immediately. She couldn't find accommodation for me so I had to stay with her for a little while... They [snakeheads] gave us support for the first two days. They said to us that if we needed further assistance from that point, we had to pay for it (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

Although some struggled because of their status and their mode of arrival, this was not always the case. Other young undocumented migrants benefited from sophisticated and efficient 'tour operator-like' machinery that brought them into the country and connected them with housing and employment, as Uliana describes.

*Everything was normal, with documents. We were met... She didn't say anything at all about where we were going. Then... she told the address where to take us to a taxi driver. They took us to... When we arrived, there was that house managed by a XXX [man]. It was like a hotel for those who came from Ukraine. It was their little business at that time. They [Ukrainians] were first taken there, stayed overnight, and straight away, in the morning, another taxi and taken to that farm (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

## Accommodation

Alongside the role of social networks in facilitating (or not) the early stages of settlement, accommodation is a major problem for young undocumented migrants. Three distinct sets of experiences emerge.

First, overcrowding, poor quality, small rooms, lack of communal space, high rents, tied accommodation (provided by their employer) and conflict with fellow tenants are familiar experiences. Dilan, who stayed with relatives on arrival, captures some of these attributes; initial dependency on co-nationals inevitably gives way to tensions and the need to move on:

*Yes, we stayed in their house when we first arrived. They are valuable for you... We are thankful to them [relatives] that they have opened their house for us. We stayed there about 5 months. But if you live in the same house there are some issues. You have to share rooms with these people. Although you love them still difficult. It's not best option to stay with them... In the end we said we should get our own place even it is a single room. When they put us in a hotel all of us stayed in the same room (Dilan, F, 23, Kurd from Turkey).*

Overcrowding is widespread amongst the respondents in the study. For some, these conditions persist, as the case of Guo Ming illustrates for those Chinese migrants, who live in tied accommodation often 'over the shop':

*I presently live in the [takeaway] shop. Three of us share a room (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese).*

*When we arrived in London, we lived in a place where there were eight people sharing two beds. This was the first week. The reason for that I think was that we didn't know anything about London (Victoria, 24, F, Ukrainian).*

Families with children found the poor housing conditions very distressing as Jiyan notes,

*Very small house. Have to deal with the mice and bugs... Because I have a daughter. Living in such a place is bad for my daughter (Jiyan, F, 23, Kurd from Turkey).*

A second theme is the different ways in which young undocumented migrants respond to these unsatisfactory conditions. Some are resigned to the structural forces which consign them to this situation; they tolerate poor housing through inertia or lack of choice, perhaps because they are a family group, or the housing is tied to their work which is the case among some young Chinese and Kurdish migrants. Others, predominantly the younger and single migrants or those in a relationship without children, move in and out of housing in the hope of alleviating some of the stresses of unsatisfactory housing, or of reducing rental payments. The search to improve housing partly explains the high level of mobility discussed below.

The third theme establishes that although housing conditions are a widespread problem for many young undocumented migrants, this is not always the case and for some, housing is not an issue. They may have settled into reasonable housing, sometimes by luck, or they realised that others live in far worse conditions. While it is difficult to generalise, the Brazilian migrants seem less negatively affected by poor accommodation, perhaps because, as we see in other parts of the study, less seems to depend on making a success of their migration or on the consequences

of failing and being repatriated. Overcoming the need for documentation may make the accommodation seem more comfortable than it is:

*There it was very nice because it was well organised. I visited my friends house... conditions where I was (were) much better (Antônio, 23, M, Brazilian).*

*It was God's hand, we met this person... who rented to us... he didn't ask for any documents... all is fine in this house (Custódia, F, 25, Brazilian).*

## Undocumentedness and everyday life

Being undocumented manifests itself in both obvious and unexpected ways in the daily lives of interviewees. These impacts are explored at a material and functional level. At the functional level, the participants described the many constraints on their day-to-day existence. Tracy, who has lived in the UK for two periods totalling 10 years, summarises the restrictions of being undocumented.

*I can't do anything without papers... Not having papers you can't go to school, you can't do anything, you're not allowed to do anything. You're not allowed to work (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

Barriers to education are a particularly significant constraint on the lives and the developmental aspirations of young undocumented migrants. This is a widespread experience, since pursuing education opportunities – notably access to higher education – is an aspiration which a number of young undocumented migrants identify (even if this is not a primary motivation for migration in the first place). Rojhan, who has lived in the UK for nine years, and whose ambitions for education have developed while he has been here, says:

*The biggest loss for me is education. I wanted to go to university but I could not (Rojhan 27, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Thwarted educational ambitions seem particularly keenly felt amongst Zimbabweans, and especially amongst young undocumented migrants, like Rojhan and Colin, who have lived in the UK for a number of years; the sense of a blocked opportunity presents itself much more forcefully. Colin, who has lived in the UK for six and a half years, arrived as a teenager and then developed an expectation of higher education. He clearly articulates his disempowerment and the feelings of exclusion compared to his 'documented' peers:

*I mean at first it didn't really affect me until after I completed my 'A' levels and I had to produce my documents to support my funding for university. I think that was when it really hit me, I mean about how bad the situation I was in really was. So I couldn't get into university – something that I knew I could easily get into. I mean from that point, I think that's when my life really changed. From that point – after leaving... after completing my 'A' Levels, know that [you] are capable of doing something and you can't do it. Sometimes you can lose hope and think what's the hope in this place? (Colin 23, M, Zimbabwean)*

Although these barriers are sometimes surmounted, the anticipation of trying to find a way into education provokes severe anxiety for the family as a whole, not just the individual, as the following account of Jiyan's fears for her daughter's educational prospects illustrates:

*How long can we carry on like that? ... Soon, our child's situation will also be discovered. She will not be able to go to school. How long can we live here? I mean it is such a difficult thing. It is a very bad thing. This affects our relations at home... For my daughter's future. Because perhaps she will not study. She can go now [to nursery], but perhaps in future she will not be able to go. My child will have to sit at home. That's a very bad thing (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

This narrative also reveals the importance of the inter-generational impacts of being undocumented.

Accessing basic services, such as health care, is another functional area where being undocumented is a constant concern. This is demonstrated in several ways. Most obvious is the fear of accessing medical care, unequivocally stated by both Fu Chenming and Ahmed:

*You can't see a doctor when you are unwell (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

*We cannot have a proper life here because we have not got enough financial sources. We have not got income. I got ill few times but I could not go to the doctor. Why? Because I have no documents. I cannot go. What cannot I do? I try to cure myself at home. Although I am a socialist and I do not believe in any religion, I am trying to get my health back by believing superficial ways. Why? Because I cannot even buy medicine. I cannot go to doctor what cannot I do? (Ahmed, M, 29, Kurd from Turkey).*

This fear and lack of resources causes migrants to suppress their illnesses or, in extreme situations, take risks. Mei Chen recounts the incident of a 40 year old undocumented man, the father of a friend, who was taken ill at a tube station. After doubts about lying down in case he drew attention to himself, he refused treatment, but the consequences and the impact on friends and family is very worrying.

*He is very ill. I feel [the situation for him] is very insecure (Mei Chen, F, 24, Chinese).*

Berenice, who has lived in the UK for four years, could not avoid seeking medical assistance. Her account mirrors that of other young undocumented migrants – on the one hand fearing the need to seek medical care but, on the other hand, usually finding that the medical duty of care overrides the need for documentary proof of eligibility.

*I've been in hospital, as emergency, so, they saw me quickly... they didn't ask me for my documents, thank God, but, everything, you know, it wasn't too serious, thank God. It was only a fever that wouldn't go away, so, like, we had to go (to hospital) (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

One particular pressure for parents with young children and pregnant women was access to health services. We found a range of experiences in part due to different practices among GPs. Some interviewees, such as Jiyan, did not encounter problems registering herself and her child with a GP, but her concerns were evident:

*There is not problem in term of bringing my child to GP. The chemist gives her medicines for free. I am afraid that there will be some problems about that. Because I am undocumented and I go to the doctor for free. There is no problem now, but there will be sometimes (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

In contrast Avashin (29, F, Kurd from Turkey) does not take her child to the doctor but instead relies on paracetamol and the advice of others with young children. Halyna's case demonstrates the stress of trying to access antenatal care, as well as the fear of authorities:

*The most difficult was when I became pregnant... I needed a GP and they wouldn't register me anywhere because I didn't have a visa in [my] passport... For me it was such desperation. Because I went from one GP [to another]... I didn't have an antenatal care. I had to go to private establishments to get an antenatal care because I was very worried, well, how... But it cost me. And again, I was angry. Knowing that I can receive free antenatal care, I had to pay big money. I don't have a lot and had to fork out on that. This was the most difficult for me. In relation to finding a GP and all those [registration] 'procedures' and those walks [from post to pillar]. That was for me the most difficult to manage. But on the other side... Well, how the most difficult? Because of the worries. First of all, you are carrying a child. You don't know. And what other fears I had that they frightened me that I'll have to pay. And that at the end, when the child will be born, an immigration officer will come to hospital. [They] frightened me with all those things like they will be asking for your status and this and that. They scared me a lot. Even that woman at GP's was trying to scare me saying that I have to be careful because, if I'm undocumented, an immigration officer can come to this, to hospital, asking you questions. That was frightening me a lot (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

Another dimension of the problem of medical assistance – not unique to undocumented migrants, but related more to their command of the English language – was the need to use intermediaries.

*I've been here, let's say, for 3 years and I've never really been to the doctor... the worst thing is that you have to find somebody to accompany you. That's what I find horrible (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian).*

Even if a medical diagnosis can be obtained, despite the fear this creates, the problems do not stop there. Fernando ironically describes how he had to conceal his lack of status when buying his drugs. Although costing more than the prescription charge, his lack of status and thus lack of an NI number meant that paying privately was the only option. He even apologised to the chemist, despite the hardship this must have caused:

*When I bought the medicine, at Boots, the staff told me, if I had the GP, I should try to get it, because... I'd pay £7 [i.e. prescription charge]. She asked me why I don't go to the GP and register... I told her that my GP was private. She said, 'Don't do this, it's too expensive'. Poor thing, she didn't know about my situation. I said, 'That's ok, it's not a problem' (Fernando, 27, M, Brazilian).*

Another functional area where being undocumented affects young undocumented migrants' daily lives is handling money. Whether or not the primary motive for migration is to earn money, their undocumented status means that by working illegally, young undocumented migrants have great difficulty when it comes to banking:

*You cannot even walk into a bank and open an account easily (Jamie, M, 30, Zimbabwean).*



*You try... to open bank accounts because that's one other thing as well, without an ID in this country you can't open a bank account... that's a basic thing that everyone needs a bank account. You can't always live on cash (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

Without a bank account there are barriers to other resources and needs. Brígido speaks for many when he says that:

*I go to the bank, when I try, like, to change my account, I can't. If I try to get a mobile phone, I can't. If I try to get [access to] the internet but internet like 3 [network provider], I can't (Brígido, M, 30, Brazilian).*

The problems of access to banking can also lead to exploitation and vulnerability; this will be explored in the next section. However, the migrant's narratives also provide ironic asides on daily life without papers:

*The only thing you can do in this country is get a bus pass. That's the only thing you can get without being asked for papers, that's all (Tanaka, 22, F, Zimbabwean).*

*Sometimes, when I want to buy myself a beer and I'm asked if I have any ID, it gets so funny for me because... I have... 29 years and they still ask me for ID. [laughs] That's when it gets funny (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

These penalties are also evident in other aspects of daily life. For example there are other limitations to mobility, particularly being unable to travel (see Chapter 5). What is significant about all these accounts is not just the practical barriers of being undocumented, but the awareness that this status signals profound and unwelcome impacts on their social responsibilities and obligations to their families. Thus, lying behind these practical constraints and limitations to everyday life are impossible moral dilemmas regarding the ability to cope with life events. This is brought home by a poignant narrative from Levko about his cousin:

*The most difficult was that you can't go and visit your loved ones. My cousin, his father has a cancer... he knew his father was about to die. He didn't have documents and he couldn't go to say 'goodbye', nothing. He was in tears for a couple of months [after that]. But, if it happens, it happens [silence] (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian).*

## Mobility

The degree to which mobility constitutes both the outcome and the continuity of their unrootedness is evident in many narratives of the daily lives of young undocumented migrants. The transitory nature of their lives is reflected in their paradoxical attitudes to, and experience of, mobility. On the one hand, their precarious status demands frequent geographical, occupational and residential mobility. Yet, on the other hand, vulnerability and fear of being caught create a sense of paranoia, imprisoning young undocumented migrants in their homes, or limiting them to minimal movement in their localities and very cautious use of public transport. Ironically, for Kurds from Turkey, this replicates the fear of being apprehended in their own countries which brought some of them to the UK in the first place. Avashin migrated due to fear of persecution and her account below reflects this:

*Yes, I do get scared that you might get caught by the immigration officers, sometimes I don't leave house of my friends. I just stay in all day. I use public transport, and if I get caught without a card, they may send me back home so I feel scared (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

The fear of being caught makes young undocumented migrants very cautious, particularly when using public transport. Some insight into the uncertainty that permeates their lives and the fear of being detected is captured in these contradictory accounts:

*... my friend was caught on the tube and now I avoid catching the tube. I've been travelling a lot by bus. I'm afraid, man. I don't want to put myself at risk (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian).*

*Some say you get caught, some say safer, but I hear and told that I should not get on the bus. Because they check very often. They raid buses very often (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*We hardly go out; the [authorities] in the UK are getting strict on [illegal migrants] these days. I don't want to take the risk to go out. I stay at home basically... Here... If you get lost, you won't be able to ask the police for help; you can't tell them what's happening (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

Among Brazilians, there is often a fear of apprehension, but they lack direct experience of persecution or repressive state apparatus. As a result, some migrants see it as a game which, when linked to the circumstances of their migration, has few direct consequences. This is expressed in Custódia's account below:

*... you have... er... it's a bit of fear, caution of going to certain places, for example, 'Ah, we are not going to the pub because the immigration, immigration, not immigration, the police usually goes there from time to time'. Or, 'I am not going to this pub because... er... the police... er... goes... er... has closed it down and will do it again'. So you end up, you have to get streetwise to know where, which places you go. The best places are the English ones, you know. (laughs) They never go there (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

Young undocumented migrants feel less safe in London compared to the other cities in the study, although the evidence is impressionistic. Yet, some are prepared to make a three-way trade-off between better work opportunities, greater vulnerability and higher living costs.

*There are more opportunities in London, even though it's a lot more dangerous... But there are more opportunities there. The downside is that in London you have to spend more; accommodation there is more expensive; travel expenses are more costly. Compared to London, things here [Birmingham] are cheaper (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

Poor accommodation was also a major factor in the mobility of young people as Brígido, a Brazilian, says, 'I've moved many times' (30, M). These narratives capture something of the crisis of housing mobility. Brígido and Carol have lived here for over three years and one year respectively.

*We arrived and lived with a couple... we moved – more because they moved they moved... and the landlord wanted the house. After I went to live with this Brazilian girl. Then I moved to a far place, in a building, God, such a strange building. It looked like a prison, whatever, such a place. Then I went to live with*

*all those people [seven.] Then I moved to another building with this couple, then they broke up and we left (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian).*

*... once we had problems with a flatmate... So we moved because I couldn't even look at her, so we moved. There are problems all the time. Like, I was the only one to tidy up the house. They didn't. So, there are these little clashes (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian).*

Personal circumstances can accentuate these dynamics, creating more instability and vulnerability in their lives. For example, Alice broke up the relationship with her boyfriend but she says:

*He used to follow me, to threaten me. I had to take a month holiday because, like, he'd go there all the time. I had to constantly hide because he'd wait for me (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian)*

Moving to find a job was mentioned most by young Chinese migrants such as Meixin He:

*I stayed in Manchester for a few months and then returned to London. I just felt that it was difficult to find work there, so I came back to London (Meixin He, 24, M, Chinese).*

For others, keeping one step ahead of immigration authorities necessitates being on the move.

*I was in Birmingham for over a year; and then I've come here for some months now. In February [when I was still in Birmingham] they [immigration authorities] began to round up people. They hadn't got me yet. But some of those that worked in the boss's other restaurant were arrested; the boss then quickly laid off all those who had no status working in the restaurant that I was in. That's why we got the sack. Then we came down to London and hired a room to stay and look for work (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

## Coping with changing political and economic and conditions

Young undocumented migrants are more susceptible to the impacts of changing economic and political conditions than the rest of society. But these dynamics play out in specific ways for them, given their precarious status in British society. Their narratives reveal three elements. First, the increasing intensity of immigration controls, secondly, the impact of the economic crisis and thirdly, perhaps reflecting the way in which the first two factors are playing themselves out through wider British society, is the increasing awareness of prejudice and the anti-immigrant political rhetoric. It is not surprising that, in general, those who have been here longer are more vocal about the tighter conditions they face.

Berenice, who has been in the UK for four years, summarises the way immigration controls have had an effect. Zhang Feimei, who has been in the UK for three and a half years, reflects on the changing attitudes towards undocumented migrant workers:

*Now it's each day more difficult as the law is much stricter, the conditions for staying... it's not accessible any longer, almost nothing is (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

*They are getting increasingly strict on illegal workers (Zhang Feimei, 24, F).*

The migrants also notice the way that the increasing restrictive control of work permits and the heavy financial penalties for employers caught using unauthorised labour are having an effect. After two years here Mei Chen says:

*It is difficult to find work now because the [authorities] are arresting illegal immigrants... the bosses are too afraid to employ people [without status] (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese).*

It is not just the increasing efficacy of the regulatory apparatus which affects young undocumented migrants; it is also the constantly changing legal and policy framework dealing with immigration. Cihan's case exemplifies this situation:

*There were a lot of new laws at that time... about asylum seekers, about students... about their status, their environment, work (Cihan, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

His claim for asylum had been rejected after a confusing and unsatisfactory legal process.

The field work was conducted in late 2008, which coincided with the intensifying impact of the global, economic recession. The narratives provide a snap shot of how declining economic prospects are affecting young undocumented migrants, and reveal their increasing anxieties. For those migrants who use their earnings for remittances, the falling value of the pound is a source of concern.

Both recent and longer term migrants detail the effects of their vulnerability to the volatility and uncertainty of the economic situation and, in particular, the significant devaluation of the British pound. For Custódia, who has been in the UK little more than four months and thus at the pivotal period when exchange rates plummeted, this has had a dramatic effect. She observed that:

*When I first arrived here it was 6:1 [Brazilian Reais: Sterling exchange rate]... so it was worth it... I don't send money to Brazil any longer [the rate is halved] (Custódia, 25, F).*

Fu Chenming and Fang Ping, who have both been here for about two years, make the same point:

*The UK economy is not so good... the exchange rate is 10Yuan [£1=10Yuan]... there were periods when the rates were 15Yuan or even 16Yuan (Fang Ping, 22,F).*

*It's a big difference compared to earlier. For £1000 now you would get 3000–4000Yuan less compared with... before (Fu Chenming, 22, M).*

Perhaps because of the need to pay snakeheads, perhaps because there is little in their lives except long hours of work, the significance of exchange rates in the daily lives of young Chinese migrants is very apparent. Reinforcing the concerns reflected in the last two quotations, Gao Zeng notes how he watches exchange rates closely:

*Today's rate is 10.35 (to £1 Sterling). I watch the rates every day. Today's rate is 10.35 if you send [through the bank]. Very low. When I first came it was 14, 15 or even higher (Gao Zeng, 24, M, Chinese).*

Young undocumented migrants are also acutely aware of changing labour market conditions: they have a clear understanding of how the combination of labour market dynamics are forcing down wage rates and, indeed, employment opportunities as a whole. Thus, some migrants are concerned that the labour market has become very competitive, with the introduction of new EU accession states. Others note how immigration controls are contributing to fewer job opportunities as employers, presumably fearing the high fines if prosecuted, become more reluctant to engage people without work permits. These views are reflected in a number of the narratives included. Cihan has been in the UK for five years, so he has seen the longer term impact of these changes, as indeed has Semen who has been here eight years. Even for Fu Chenming, who arrived less than two years ago, the volatility of the economic situation is already having an impact:

*Since Poland, Lithuania and the European countries become a member... Romania... since they have come to this country and starting to work it has changed a lot (Cihan, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*When we were on the farm... back then, everyone was 'no one', Poles, Lithuanians. It was... in 2001... before the union [i.e. the Accession, 2004]. They were saying they will stay [i.e. after the Accession] (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

*The wages were higher before. Now the wages are low because they are rounding up [illegal workers]. The wages are very low these days (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

The expansion of the EU has not adversely affected everyone. Ukrainians, for example, can pose as Polish people and find employment that way, as Dmytro does (see Chapter 4).

Finally the narratives give some evidence that the undocumented migrants are experiencing more hostility as the economic conditions become more severe. This also intensifies the anti-immigrant rhetoric.

*They are mocking immigrants. They oppress them so much (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

In conclusion, and reflecting on her exploitation in an increasingly saturated job market, Mei Chen poses an ironic question about her situation:

*Would the Brits be willing to run Chinese restaurants themselves? (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese).*

## Incidents and consequences of being undocumented

So far, this chapter has explored how young undocumented migrants cope with everyday life and get around the problems that this creates. This section will relate incidents which arise directly because of their undocumented position in society and explore how their undocumented status is used against them. Exploitation in the workplace, in accommodation, by money lenders and sexual exploitation all reflect the vulnerability which arises from their undocumented status. This exploitation can come from members of their own country-of-origin group, and even from those who are undocumented like themselves. The narratives frequently cite their lack of rights in being able to seek redress for exploitation. Without recourse to law or the police to remedy these injustices they are frustrated and often feel humiliated at not being able to retaliate, for fear that their illegal status will come to light.

Perhaps the most widespread form of exploitation occurs in the workplace (see Chapter 4). This can take many forms, including low pay, less pay than documented migrants, dismissal without wages, and coercion to work longer hours for little return. There is no redress for the former and refusal of the latter risks the threat of being reported. This is unlikely, of course, since the employer would also be exposed to severe fines, but the vulnerable migrant may not know this. Once locked into employment and dependency on an employer, there may be no alternative but to be coerced into acquiring false documents at an exorbitant price, or to receive misleading information, as in Zhu Chen's case:

*The manager said that... according to EU regulations, you would be allowed to work if you possess this card. But this card can only be arranged by the boss of the restaurant you are working for... you can either pay it yourself, or be paid by the restaurant, who will claim the money back by deducting your wages... The cost for this card... was something like £2,000 to £3,000. But they said that each card was valid only one year; and after one year you needed to reapply for another one (Zhu Chen, F, 25, Chinese).*

Only one interviewee, Tatiana, speaks of sexual exploitation. But Alice's experience of being stalked draws further attention to the particular vulnerabilities of young female migrants:

*There were many of us... He proposed me to do cleaning in his house. I thought that this was very good because he knows that I'm illegal... He pays well. He harassed me. He wanted me to sleep with him and... I simply... I simply... I didn't want to lose money but I felt I had to do it [refuse cleaning]. He simply blackmailed me. I know many girls who told me, they worked in that hotel too... How he solicited Lithuanian [girls/women]... so he will keep quiet [about their status] (Tatiana 22, F, Ukrainian).*

*My biggest problem has never been immigration or anything, it was always this [ex-] boyfriend of mine. Because I didn't have how to tell the police, how to do anything. He used to follow me, to threaten me... I had to constantly hide because he'd wait for me at the door (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian).*

The search for, and desperate conditions of, accommodation have been discussed earlier in this chapter; but renting accommodation constitutes another arena for widespread exploitation. The following narratives exemplify the most common experiences, including lost deposits and uncertainty, due to immigration status:

*She refused to give my deposit (back) because she knew I was Brazilian. She said she was going to the police... she asked for the copies of my documents. If I didn't give her a copy of my documents, she'd go to the police, then I felt desperate (Beatriz, 24, F, Brazilian).*

*For example, like, she's got 6 houses, she puts, she puts too many people in her houses... She also threatens people, like, it's not that she threatens of calling immigration. It's that situation where you depend on her... You end up being in her hands (Carol, 24, F, Zimbabwean).*

Renting accommodation also provides situations where scarce savings are at risk:

*It's very difficult to rent a house. Sometimes even to rent a room, people ask for documents... I've already lived in places where I've lost my deposit. Sometimes you have to give £200–£300 (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

Whatever the form of exploitation or criminal activity to which undocumented migrants are subjected, their situation means that they have no recourse to the police or due legal process and cannot take the law into their own hands, for fear of being apprehended. This accentuates their sense of powerlessness and vulnerability.

*Without residential status... say if you're robbed, you can't take the risk to report to the police. If you report it to the police, the police will eventually investigate you (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese).*

*They know you have DVDs, and if they want to rob you, you can't go to the police station anyway. So they do this to you repeatedly. You can't report to the police even if they rob you; and you'd be too scared to hit back even if you're hit (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*But then he didn't dare to report this incident to the police, because he knew full well that he had no status... I have heard of many of such stories (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese).*

The most disturbing narratives come from migrants who have lost friends and relatives, but because of their situation, they are unable to use formal channels to try to find them. A lengthy account from Guo Ming, who has been trying to find his missing wife since when he arrived in August 2007, although in detention himself for some of this time, is quite harrowing:

*My relatives and friends went to check at the nearby police stations, but were told that they held no one resembling my wife. Then I asked my relatives to submit a formal missing-person report... there was no news of my wife's whereabouts. I became even more worried. I tried to apply for special leave from the jail to find my wife but was not granted. Then I made a formal report to the Prison Authorities about my wife's disappearance... The police suspect that she is murdered. We don't know where she is right now. She has never appeared again after the trip to the man's house (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese).*

Mei Chen has also lost two friends whom she thinks were en route to Europe:

*A friend of mine who is my classmate in primary school... She and my brother's former classmate... Two young girls... attempted to smuggle themselves [to the UK]. But they never made it. They got lost somewhere on the way. It has been two years since they left home and there's no sign of them so far... If they had already arrived in the UK, the snakeheads [back home] would have demanded the [remaining] payment from their families... But there is no news about them whatsoever; and it has been two years ever since! No news at all (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese).*

## Getting some kind of status

Given the complexity of everyday life as an undocumented migrant, the question inevitably arises as to how their situations can be made more bearable. For some, there seems to be no alternative to remaining undocumented, or, out of fear, they refuse to reveal themselves to the appropriate authorities to access documentation. Others simply do not accept their undocumented status and have clear strategies to try to regularise their status. Thus, some migrants are caught up in the complexities of immigration law and procedures, by either trying to regularise their status, or as a result of a failure to establish their status, usually as asylum seekers. Wendy's account puts these complex issues in stark and simple terms:

*Interviewer: Do you intend to make asylum claim later? Wendy: No. I don't want to take the risk; and also I don't know how to go about it (Wendy Wang, 24, F, Chinese).*

Several of the narratives show how, with limited knowledge and extreme vulnerability, migrants are prone to either exploitation or fear. Kurdish migrants are desperate to get legal status to remain in the UK, and experience a number of difficulties:

*After I got refusal [of refugee status] I was released. Then a court date set up for the next month. I went to the court and I was not prepared. At the court I did not have documents as evidence. I also had a bad luck. A Turkish law firm was looking at my case and the interpreter attended the court as lawyer. His English was not so good (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Ciwan later found out that:

*This person [i.e. the lawyer] had done this to many people to get money and then he went back to Turkey... We could not do anything. He is Turkish and I am Kurdish. I did not think that he would done such thing... Imagine he was getting £500 per appeal petition... He got all the money and gone (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Even where an undocumented migrant seeks to regularise their situation it can be difficult to have any autonomy within the legal system:

*There were a lot of new laws at that time... about asylum seekers, about students... I went to my solicitor... he didn't do anything, he told me I could apply... when I applied I was supposed to get a application form but I did not receive it. I got reject, my lawyer said he was surprised that so I got rejected so quickly, then I signed a form and was given a court date. I went to court, the jury was fine, I thought everything went well... But I got rejected... they didn't ask me any questions, but it wasn't a fair rejection, they only asked me a few questions, my name and when I came here. The barrister spoke a little about me, he had no evidence in his hand (Cihan, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Kawa had a similar experience:

*I didn't get it [refugee status]. I went to camp twice, detention centre, prison. I went twice, 10,000 [pounds] I gave to the solicitor, I gave money... twice I have gone to prison, 10,000 maybe more... now everything is finished... there is no hope... my money... now I don't know what to do (Kawa, 25, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Sometimes the young undocumented migrants' sense of marginalisation simply leaves them without hope that the legal system will be of any use, and a feeling of resignation about their undocumented status. Tracy has been resident in the UK for two periods, totalling ten years:

*With other solicitors, they did not have a level of understanding and empathy. To them I was just another case, they really did not have that personal level of understanding or interest, because they did not understand where I was coming from (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

In terms of understanding the impact of the increasingly complex immigration controls and regulatory apparatus, Halyna got caught up with a language school and, either through misunderstanding or exploitation by the school, found herself undocumented when her student visa was invalidated:



*When I received refusal for my visa [extension], it all developed very stupid... there were a lot of those independent English language school setting up. I simply got into such a school where I... Simply I didn't know how that all system [works]... there was some problem in that school with the Home Office... I'm not very informed about it. But the point was that, during that period that school received some un-satisfaction from the Home Office, and I received a refusal. Simply unfair. Because I was a normal student... paid for the whole study. And, I got refused (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

Some migrants have lost money and savings – usually Chinese migrants – through corrupt means or simple theft. The fear of betrayal or blackmail and an end to the migration ‘project’ is ever present, notably for the Chinese and Kurdish migrants, although for different reasons. For the Chinese this is because the snakeheads would still want to be paid, even if the migrant was repatriated; for the Kurds the fear is not the loss of money but of persecution back home. Serhado implies the dire consequences for him if he tried to recover stolen money:

*We were staying in the same accommodation. When wages were given, she said [to the foreman] that 'she (the interviewee) was unwell with a painful leg and couldn't come to get. No problem, we stay in the same place, I can take it back to her'. She then took it. But never gave it to me afterwards (Yao Xiamin, 25, F, Chinese).*

*She went to gamble and gambled away all my money. Actually I had planned to send the money home that day... I had saved up nearly £2,000. She didn't tell me about it. She left there on a Sunday... but didn't let me know. I called but she didn't answer the phone. Later others told me that she was a gambler... with the exchange rate that time, would [send home] nearly 30,000Yuan (Gao Zeng, 24, F, Chinese).*

*Some people even losing their money in one second that they saved over the years. The person they leave the money with is not giving the money and you cannot take it back. You cannot argue or fight because he can spy you (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

To avoid these risks, some undocumented migrants resort to unofficial money transfer agencies and pay substantial commission because, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, they cannot hold legal bank accounts. Others prefer to use informal exchanges and transfer agencies, because they have had friends who have lost their money in bank accounts which were frozen by post 9/11 government controls on money laundering.

*You must have status to send money through a bank. So it's great if they [private bank] offer to help you send money whilst you have no status. If they want to charge a bit... you'd let them do it. It would be much better than they just take your money and run; in that case all you can do is blame yourself to be unlucky. You may want to take them to the court if you want to, but you can't even find them anywhere (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

## Likes and dislikes of living in the UK

Having considered many dimensions of coping with everyday life as an undocumented migrant, how do they reflect on their experiences and what does living, on the margins, in the UK mean to them?

Three factors determine the reactions and attitudes of young undocumented migrants to life in the UK. First, unsurprisingly, responses are conditioned by their lack of status and the constraints and stresses which this produces. Second, inevitably, comparisons are made with conditions back home, reflecting the often contrasting economic and social conditions in the countries of origin included in the research. Third, their attitudes are conditioned by the extent to which their ambitions and aspirations have been fulfilled or thwarted since coming to the UK.

What young undocumented migrants like or dislike about living in the UK covers a wide spectrum of factors. Thus, in comparison with the other aspects of their lives discussed in this research, it is much harder to discern more than an impressionistic picture. There are no obvious clusters of factors which can be generalised across the participants as a whole, or within particular categories of age, nationality or length of residence in the UK. Moreover, for virtually all the factors which emerge, what some young undocumented migrants appreciate, others will reject. This diversity applies within the same national groups: there is no firm evidence that particular national groups have consistent likes and dislikes. Exemplifying these polarities are the responses of two Kurds: whereas Semen (28, M), '... opened up a new world for myself', for Welat (23, M), '... there is something very depressing here, very depressing lifestyle'.

Given these caveats, it is possible to distinguish between the more prosaic likes and dislikes and the more substantive concerns for migrants. In the former category, the weather, the food, the quality of the environment, consumer society, the relative controls of the bureaucratic machinery in comparison with that at home, and the expense of living in the UK emerge from the narratives.

Substantive issues relate to lifestyle, values and attitudes, social and psychological wellbeing, the political environment and relationships with British people. In this context, and despite all the constraints, many young people appreciate the 'lifestyle', the opportunities for social life and for working; they comment favourably on the respect given to the individual in British society, the freedom of expression, religious freedom and the attention given to women's rights. Some of these factors reflect the social and political environments in their countries of origin and, perhaps, the more constraining attitudes towards youth in the societies from which they have come.

Alice from Brazil has been in the UK for three years and captures something of the ambivalence of many young undocumented migrants:

*My boyfriend finds it funny that I call my mom almost everyday... he is learning with me... how did he explain it? ... that I taught him to value family more... I don't know... I think that for me best is here... it's a bit complicated... going back [to Brazil] I am going to have to start everything again (Alice, F, 27, Brazilian).*

Berenice's likes and dislikes about social freedoms are more polarised:

*London is full of opportunities for you to study, to develop to, you know, do many things. But for the young people, I see many young people... many young girls drinking, smoking until late on the street. I see a lot of crime... I know many Brazilians that's only party, only party. It's party on Monday, a party on Tuesday (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

Equally, while some migrants fear being detected, not least because it echoes persecution at home, they equally appreciate the sense of political freedom – notably among Kurds – and the ‘fairness’ of British society. Ahmed’s seemingly contradictory narrative captures these perspectives:

*Here is everywhere CCTV. I get scared... In start thinking, look, here the state is watching us. I can't control this thought... There is no fear from the state here. Nobody wants to create a problem for each other. Everybody seems respectful in order to keep their social, political and cultural rights (Ahmed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

The friendliness of British people is widely reported, though in reality, as Chapter 5 reveals, there is little cross-community interaction. Zhu Chen speaks for many of the migrants on this point, although her final comment suggests disapproval, even though she herself was not working when the interview took place:

*... not... a big problem to make a friend with them, because they seem to be very friendly and open. Say if you just try to chat with them they'd spend half a day with you! My English is poor... But even if you just open your mouth, they start talking non-stop. You see, some of them seem so unoccupied, busy doing nothing (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

Countering these positive reactions, there are negative aspects and frustrations which come from not having papers: such as the lack of freedom and the lack of rights, which limits access to perceived opportunities. Thus, Alice who has been here for three years comments that:

*... the lack of freedom due to being an illegal... You know it keeps you from things which I believe are essential to human beings: go out... to travel around the country... you can't do it (Alice, F, 27, Brazilian).*

Some young undocumented migrants recognise that their lack of language skills are a major barrier to accessing the opportunities which living in the UK presents, as much as being undocumented. Comments on the prejudice and the, ‘double standards against us’, (Ahmed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey), together with experiences of racism are countered, on the one hand by other young undocumented migrants who comment favourably on the cosmopolitanism of British society and incidents of personal kindness – ‘... everyone was not just responsive... they really tried to help me’ (Sergiy 27, M, Ukrainian) – and, on the other hand, by some who express racist attitudes themselves.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the experiences of being young and undocumented in the UK, both in terms of general perceptions and reflections as well as the day-to-day realities. Initial encounters are important in the way they determine the longer term strategies for adjustment and coping. For example, lack of status immediately conditions the type of accommodation which is available, living in poverty, the social networks which can be used, and residential and occupational mobility, which is an endemic characteristic of the lives of many of the young undocumented migrants.

At the same time, the dimension of youth is represented by the resilience and capacity to adapt. This underpins many of the narratives, but also provides them with motivation and varying degrees of autonomy. These initial expressions of the way youth shapes the identity of undocumented migrants, through the experiences

of their everyday lives, is explored in more detail in later chapters, especially Chapters 5 and 6.

The analysis of likes and dislikes is significant in the way it reveals the paradoxes inherent in the uncertain status of migrants. On the one hand, young undocumented migrants reflect on their inevitable social exclusion and experiences of racism. Yet, they also acknowledge the relative social and political freedom of their lives, compared to the constraints they experienced at home – perhaps because of their youth, gender or political affiliations. Coping with these ambiguities is a constant challenge, further shaping identities within which security and insecurity are a source of constant tension.

## Case study: Kawa

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Kawa is a 25-year-old Kurdish man who has been living in the UK for seven years. All his immediate family are in Kurdistan, but he does not want to do military service for Turkey, and felt that the lack of freedom for Kurdish people meant that he had no choice but to leave. Before he came to the UK, he was studying welding at a vocational school and had expected to go to university. He used traffickers to make his journey, and eventually arrived by train from Paris, and claimed asylum at Waterloo. His asylum case has since been rejected, and he is now an undocumented migrant.

When Kawa arrived in the UK, he was 18 and wanted to study English but when his asylum claim was rejected he was unable to do this. Kawa has travelled around the UK, going wherever he can to find work. He does not feel tied to any one place because his immediate family are in Kurdistan and he does not have a partner, as he feels that his situation does not facilitate close personal relationships.

Kawa's work has been in the service and fast-food industry where he had a number of jobs. He currently works in a kebab shop, where he gets paid between £200 and £250 a week, depending on how many days he works. He doesn't pay rent or utility bills, and can eat at the shop so he is able to save money. He sends money to his family when they need it, but mostly saves. Kawa has little in the way of a social life, spending his time either at work or above the shop watching Kurdish TV. He prefers to stay in because it is, 'dangerous' and he feels, 'scared' going out. He describes his everyday life:

*I work at the kebab... I work six to seven days. I work all the time, I don't go out a lot... The shop owner has an upstairs where I live. I sit there, I watch television, we have a satellite. We watch Kurdish TV, other than that I don't go out a lot... At 12 we close the business, at 12 again we start work, from time to time we do cleaning. We clean it then we go upstairs to sleep and in the morning start work once again.*

Kawa is not happy in his job and would prefer to work in a hotel or a restaurant rather than a fast food shop. He has noticed that undocumented migrants from Kurdistan are clustered in a few industries.

*Kurds from Turkey work in kebab shops. To be honest a lot of my friends, Kurds from Iraq, work in building construction. They work in markets, off licences, that's what they do, they do au pair work, a lot of my friends do that, car wash, off licence.*

Undocumented migrants are paid less than others, but Kawa knows he has no choice over who he works for because of his lack of status. When asked about where employers ask for documents he says that English employers ask but '... Kurds, Turk, Chinese, they don't ask you know, they don't ask'.

Kawa feels that things have become a bit easier for him over the years in the UK, though he says, '... life is truly difficult'. His immediate hopes for the future revolve around his status. Regularising status is the thing that opens up opportunities:

*I want to be at least legal, I want to go to school, I want to work, I want to live here, I want a family.*

# employment and livelihoods



## Introduction

Among many young undocumented migrants, especially those from Brazil, China and Ukraine, working and saving money was the main motivation for migration, as Chapter 2 showed. It is possible to earn much more money in the UK, even as an undocumented migrant, than in their country of origin. As one young Brazilian woman, who had a number of cleaning jobs, noted:

*Most of the people who come here from Brazil... are coming to buy a house for their mother, a piece of land for their father, a car... You work, work, work. What I earn in 25 days there in Brazil, I make here, if I work without taking a day off, I make here in a week (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

Without access to welfare support, employment is crucial to survival for most young undocumented migrants, regardless of their motivation for migration. This chapter explores the working lives of young undocumented migrants, the impact of being undocumented on employment and the ways in which people find work without documents or valid documents, and survival strategies during periods of unemployment. Finally, the chapter considers people's spending and obligations to pay back debts or send remittances, and the impact of this on their lives.

## Experiences of employment<sup>5</sup>

At the time of the interviews, 20 young undocumented migrants were not working at all and an additional four were working very occasionally, as Tables 9 to 13 in Appendix 3 show. Among those not working or in occasional work, 16 were women, of which six had young children and three were pregnant. Table 1 shows the main characteristics of those working at the time of interviews.

**Table 1: Main characteristics by employment status, frequencies**

Base number 75

Characteristics	Working	Not working or working very occasionally	Total
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	19	16	35
Male	32	8	40
<b>Country of origin</b>			
Zimbabwe	7	9	16
Brazil	15	1	15
Turkey/Kurdistan	8	6	14
China	10	6	16
Ukraine	11	2	13
<b>Region</b>			
London	31	14	45
North West	14	1	15
West Midlands	6	9	15
<b>Age</b>			
18–24	23	11	34
25–31	28	13	41
<b>Length of time in the UK</b>			
3 years or less	27	6	33
More than 3 years	24	18	42

<sup>5</sup> Tables 9–13 in Appendix 3 show the current employment of young undocumented migrants in the UK and their jobs prior to leaving their country of origin.

Young people from Zimbabwe were least likely to be working, while Brazilians and Ukrainians were most likely to be working. More people in the West Midlands were out of work than elsewhere and a greater proportion of young people who had been in the UK for less than three years were working than those who had been in the UK for longer. Whether someone had a partner in the UK or not did not affect their propensity to be working, although, as we shall see later, these relationships provided invaluable support for those not working.

In terms of current and previous employment, there was clear evidence of sectoral clustering and little progression or change in terms of sectors and levels of employment among young people. Among Kurdish and Chinese interviewees, there was a strong propensity to work in co-ethnic businesses. Kurdish people worked in food outlets (kebab or restaurants), off licences or supermarkets. One example is Firat, a 30-year-old Kurdish man, who had been undocumented for three years once his asylum case was finally refused. Firat had been working in a Kurdish-owned supermarket for a year. He worked 12 hours a day, six days a week for a fixed wage of £200 a week. Before working in the supermarket, he had also worked in a kebab shop, earning £280 a week for six days work, but left as the Home Office had been carrying out raids in the area and he was scared. Firat had also worked in another Kurdish owned supermarket previously.

Chinese young people worked almost exclusively in co-ethnic businesses, the majority of which were catering businesses. Most worked as kitchen porters, cleaning, washing up and chopping. Fei Lin, for example, had been in the UK for two years and 10 months. He spent the first year in Leeds washing dishes in a restaurant, but when the Home Office started carrying out raids he left and moved to London where he knew there were more Chinese people, and therefore more chances of finding somewhere to stay and work. At the time of his interview, he was working as a kitchen porter, cleaning and washing up in a Chinese restaurant but, unlike the other young people in the study who were working 12 or more hours a day, he was working eight hours as business had declined and there was little demand.

Brazilians tended to work in cleaning, bars and shops and a few of the men had worked in construction. Carol, a 24-year-old woman who had been in the UK for one year and four months, worked three-to-four hours a day as a cleaner in a school. She had recently stopped working in a pub as a glass collector, where she had been employed for a year and two months, alongside her partner who was still working at the pub. There was also a tendency for Brazilians to have more than one job. Daniel, for example, worked in a pub restaurant and had a cleaning job.

Ukrainians were most likely to be working in construction or cleaning. There was a strong gender employment profile among Ukrainians, with men working in construction and on building sites, while women worked as cleaners, in restaurants, factories, hotels, in the care industry and as hairdressers. Fedia, a 20-year-old man living in Manchester, who had been in the UK for two years, was working on a construction site at the time of his interview. He worked for eight hours a day at an hourly rate of £10. Previously, he had worked on another construction site and in building restoration.

Zimbabweans showed more variation in terms of their employment sectors, with English language fluency being a key factor in this diversity. Jobs included cleaning, care work, warehouses and factories, a call centre, administration, a car mechanic, child minding and sales. For example, Sandra, who was 31 at the time of the interview, and had been in the UK for five and a half years, had young children and



did the occasional cleaning job for £5 an hour, though she had previously done care work.

The importance of English in terms of employment diversity was evident and also meant that Zimbabweans were not dependent in the same way as others on either co-ethnic employers or jobs where there is no premium on English, such as cleaning. Andrea, who was pregnant, but had worked previously as a cleaner notes:

*Speaking English you can get a better job. Otherwise, that's it, it's cleaning, it's washing up, this type of things (Andrea, 20, F, Brazilian).*

A young Brazilian woman, Alice, who was working in a shopping-centre restaurant and as a cleaner, describes the impact of English language on earning potential:

*I know so many illegal [people] here who earn so well... Everything because they speak English well and get jobs that pay well (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian).*

One Chinese young person, who was not working when interviewed but had previously worked as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant, talks about how a lack of English affected her opportunities:

*Apart from having no residential status, we don't speak English well, and we don't have any particular skills. That's why there's nothing we may do except restaurant jobs (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

The experience of working in businesses owned by people from the same country of origin was often not a positive one. The following quotes, the first from a Kurdish man working in an off licence, the second from a Chinese man working as a kitchen assistant and the third from a Kurdish man working in a co-ethnically owned supermarket, describe the disempowerment and exploitation that can arise from not having documents:

*The boss knows that you are undocumented and need to work, therefore he gets you to work more hours for less money. You cannot say anything because you have to work (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Work starts from 10.30am in the morning and finishes after 12pm midnight. Sometimes we finish work at 1 o'clock. You work non-stop. If you pause, he'd say that you're lazy; he shouts at you every day... he'd say that he pays you to work, and you're not doing the work for him! He'd then shout you. He'd say things like that, 'people like you who have no status... not many people, not many restaurants out there would dare to hire you; now that I hire you to work here, has meant that I'd already given you lots of respect. You should work harder and do a bit more for me' (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*You work 12 hours a day because you are undocumented and you have no voice. You cannot say anything. There a lot of unfairness but you cannot do anything about it. You cannot raise your voice against it. They crush you. I don't get paid based on number of hours I work but I get wages. I work six days a week 12 hours per day and get £200 per week. That's it... I feel like repressed. Then you say it will pass away. But it did not pass away for 3 years now. I feel like second-class citizen. Not even second, tenth maybe. I feel like slave once black people felt. We are contemporary slaves for example. We are the slaves of this age and illegal. We are like illegal slaves (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Young people describe how they lack choice, live in fear, are insecure, and vulnerable to sacking and other forms of exploitation, such as not being paid for work that had been carried out, or co-ethnic middle people taking a cut of wages. The following quotes illustrate these experiences:

*You sort of have to just take what you get and be content with it (Jamie, 30, M, Zimbabwean).*

*I work in a kebab shop for night shift... Because I cannot find work for morning shift. Nobody wants to give job to illegal immigrant for day shifts (Rojhan, 27, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Since the police raids, businesses in the restaurants have slumped. When business is poor, salaries will be low, too... Free meals are provided (Fei Lin, 20, M, Chinese).*

*... you work with constant fear that your work place might get raided... Even when you put the goods on shelf you just check around as you fear they may raid the shop. This is huge psychological pressure (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*... [if] they want to sack you, they just sack you. The boss just says to you that you will work till the end of the week and that's it (Wendy Wang, 24, F, Chinese).*

*We never feel secure. We may work today, but we won't know what will happen to us tomorrow (Lin Fei, 20, M, Chinese).*

*I've fallen a few times... this same guy offered me a job again. I asked for my money and he said 'Look, that money I didn't receive so I can't pay you'... we cannot complain, we have to accept it in silence (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian).*

*The foreman will take some money from what you get. Say if you get £245, he will take £35. This means that even though the boss is a British man, there is a Chinese person who is there to oversee the workers; this person will take some money from what you get (Meixin He, 24, M, Chinese).*

The disparity in terms of pay between documented and undocumented workers was especially evident in co-ethnic businesses, as the following quotes by a Chinese man working in a takeaway and a Kurdish man who was working in sales for a supermarket illustrate:

*I think for this kind of job in a takeaway shop, normally it should be paid £280, £290 or even up to £300 [a week]. Instead I got £210. He paid less because he said I had no residential status (Gao Zeng, 24, M, Chinese).*

*I know some people undocumented only getting £170 per week but another person with document gets £500–550 per week. There is huge gap as you can see but they can't do anything as they have no documents (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

The strain on young people is evident in their descriptions of fear and living a lie. One young Zimbabwean, Ray, who was working in corporate sales describes his experiences:

*There's always a fear, I'm always watching over my shoulder as to could I get caught working here? There's always a fear, could a phone call come through, could I get called to the office anytime now as to 'We've found something out'. 'You are not legitimate'... It puts a strain on the job and it doesn't necessarily become the platform that it is really and that is the platform to earn a lot of*

*money and be successful because that's hindered by the fact that I'm always watching over my shoulder... I have to assume the 'ultra ego'. You are this new character; you've got to have a story behind you as to why and how you ended up there, you can trip yourself up (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

## Finding jobs

The main strategies for finding work were social networks from the same country of origin and buying jobs. Not having papers impacts on job search strategies, limiting most people to the informal economy or, for some, the use of fake documents. Social networks, especially 'word of mouth' about job vacancies, were particularly important. The following quotes – from Fedia, a young Ukrainian who was working in construction; Victoria, a Ukrainian who was working as a chef; Carol, a Brazilian who was working as a cleaner in a school; and Wendy Wang, who was not working at the time of her interview but had worked in four different restaurants, even though she had been in the UK for less than two years – show the importance of social networks in job seeking and employment:

*My child's godfather found this job. He works on this job. Well. How do we look for jobs? Through people you know... other Ukrainians (Fedia, 29, M, Ukrainian).*

*Word for word, word for word, friend calls a friend. For example, if my friends know that there is a job somewhere they tell me, I try to tell someone else, call my mates and ask them if anyone is interested in that job. And that is how it spreads around. In that way you can practically end up helping people that you don't even know. Sometimes, you can find a person from another part of Ukraine that you would never in your life imagine meeting. And that's how it works (Victoria, 24, F, Ukrainian).*

*That was through a friend of someone who was my flatmate, then she was already a cleaner there. They needed more people; she asked me if I was interested, I said I was (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian).*

*Most of us rely on friends to find work. Say if someone sees a job advert somewhere, they'd tell a friend about it. Sometimes friends would tell you if they know of a vacancy somewhere. Or sometimes if someone leaves a job they have been doing, they'd ask their friend's friend to fill the vacancy. So it normally works like this (Wendy Wang, 24, F, Chinese).*

Knowledge of the local community networks and symbols are also important, as Amed describes:

*We are a feudal society. We go through these contacts. When you go somewhere you see sign like best kebab. We understand the place belong to the Kurds. We know what Indian, Pakistani or Chinese shops through their signs. We understand the Kurdish places through shop signs. We go inside and ask for job. If they don't have they may recommend some people. It goes like that (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

There is also evidence of people paying 'deposits' or buying jobs, as the following quotes from Augusto, who had bought a job in cleaning, and Victoria, who paid for a job in a hotel, illustrate:

*Well, my first job was that construction job and I didn't need to pay for it. But when this job finished and I went to London, I did buy a job. I did cleaning from 6–8 and I paid for it, you know. In this case, the deposit was kept by the guy and*

*one more week, so two weeks altogether. I started earning money in the third week (Augusto, 26, M, Brazilian).*

*I worked once in a hotel, I had to pay for the job. I worked for a month and I practically didn't earn anything at all because for two weeks I was working for 'deposit', and they paid fortnightly (Victoria, 24, F, Ukrainian).*

Guo Ming and Yan Jing had both worked in the restaurant sector and they describe the process and financial exchanges that can take place. The quote from Guo Ming also illustrates the importance of social networks among Chinese people, and reflects that the UK is a desirable migration destination among Chinese young people because of networks and job opportunities:

*Normally you don't have to pay if they are a close friend. But if they are just an ordinary friend, you may have to give them the first two weeks' wage as the fee for helping you find the job (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese).*

*Most Chinese just ask friends to find work. In the restaurants, it's the head-chef who decides who to hire. They will tell the workers that he is looking for someone, and these workers will tell their friends about the job and recommend them to the chef. When a person is hired, he will normally have to give the head-chef his first week's wage, which is normally one-hundred-and-something pounds (Yan Jing, 24, M, Chinese).*

## Impact of not having papers on work and job search

Not having papers affects both employment options and job search strategies. In terms of employment options, young people talk about the limited sectors of employment. This is evident in terms of the sectoral clustering among the young undocumented migrants interviewed, the ways in which the system creates exploitation including low pay, their lack of choice and being unable to use skills and fulfil potential. The following quotes illustrate the impact of not having papers on employment and demonstrate the dependency on co-ethnic employers for work. Moreover, Tatiana who was working as a cleaner alludes to the way in which being undocumented has a levelling affect, making pre-migration careers and education irrelevant in the undocumented context:

*The jobs which don't require documents are the ones where you work for Brazilians. I've had this experience, they pay you very low wages, they exploit you and fire you with no notice (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

*As an undocumented, you directly turn to the Turkish markets, Kurdish markets or restaurants. There is nothing else. There is nothing else that you can do. There are various places to work in, but you are excluded from all of them because you are undocumented. You can do nothing (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*There is a great effect. We cannot work legally. It also restricts us in terms of job opportunities because we are undocumented. In fact it does destroy our opportunities rather than restrict. Therefore it may force you to do wrong things. It forces you to work illegally (Necirwan, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*People come here illegally. Regardless of what professions they had [back] home, solicitor or what, and, they come here, they have no documents so they clean toilets too. Just like people who had no education [back] home. They clean*

*the same toilets. Here, I don't know. People without documents simply can't have other jobs here (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian).*

There is some variation by country of origin and gender. One Kurdish woman describes how it is harder for women than men from her community:

*Men can find work when they want even if it is illegal. I believe they are more free when compared to women. Women are not that free. If there is also a child, they are not free at all (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

Chinese people talk about gender roles in restaurants and takeaway shops, as the following quote from Zhu Chen, who was not working at the time of the interview but had worked previously as a waitress, illustrates:

*There's nothing else to do, apart from waiting at the table or working in the kitchen. But then they don't like hiring female workers to work in the kitchen (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

Using 'fake' documents or allowing others to make assumptions is a strategy used by some young people. For example, Ukrainians were able to use Polish documents, or pretend they were Polish, as the following quote from a young man working on a building site illustrates:

*Well, at my work, they don't know that I'm undocumented. Everyone is thinking that I'm European [EU] just like everyone (Pawlo, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

Colin, a young Zimbabwean who came to the UK as a teenager, was working as a finance assistant in an accounts department. After his 'A' levels, he had wanted to go to university and study pharmacy, and had even been offered a place at university, but was unable to take up the offer as he did not have the necessary documents. He is reasonably content and challenged in his job and the company he works for is even paying for him to study accountancy, though all this has been achieved by using fake documents.

*... they are unaware that I don't have any documentation because I produced fake documentation to get the job, so they are unaware that I am not allowed to work (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwean).*

Among young Zimbabweans who had come to the UK as children or teenagers, and were undocumented due to their parent or parents' status, the realisation that they were unable to get on with their lives in the way they had expected has had a severe impact on some. Natasha, who came to the UK aged 10, and Ray, who arrived aged 13, describe this experience:

*When I turned 16 and I wanted to get a job that's when I realised... I don't have an ID (Natasha, 18, F, Zimbabwean).*

*Got to 16... er... I think that was the first wake-up call. All the kids were talking about, 'Oh! I just got me NI card in the post'. Why didn't my NI card come through the post? ... because obviously I'm not in the system... and then since then it's just really unravelled. Really... er... ok this is the status! [you] need this thing called status. While before I was just living, going to school. I'm a young lad, I'm a young boy, I'm just going to school and doing what I'm doing. I never needed to know whether or not I had status. Then all of a sudden people were receiving their NI cards and I didn't receive mine (Ray, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

The raids on businesses employing undocumented migrants by UK Border Agency over the last few years have created an environment of fear among young people and greater opportunities for exploitation, due to the risks employers are taking. This has also resulted in less employment opportunities, reflected on in the following experiences:

*Because you have no status, you can only get such a low wage. Most people don't want to take the risk to hire people who have no status; so you have to take it whenever there is a job; you have no choice (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*They are also afraid of employing the undocumented now. Because the police might pop in to control. Even they are afraid. It officially excludes you (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*It's difficult for a worker, you are scared, you know, you have customers, but you get scared, who is those people? It could be immigration officer, a police, this is very difficult, and this is a problem (Kawa, 25, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*It is a problem because many people don't take you on because have already had visits from immigration, then they have to pay a fine and fire people (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

Some people have opted not to work because of their fear of being caught. Most of those who work were in jobs where papers were not asked for and there was movement out of jobs as soon as papers were requested. Theo, a young Zimbabwean who arrived in the UK aged 12, describes this fear, while the other examples describe the pattern of moving out of jobs when documents are requested, which in the case of Berenice meant losing money:

*I am scared. I can't take the risk of getting caught and the risk of them asking me where my papers... It's affected my life... It's affected everything, I can't do anything, I just sit and rot (Theo, 19, M, Zimbabwean).*

*Many times I went to work as a cleaner in companies to clean offices in the morning. I'd work for two weeks then after two weeks; they would tell me that the payment was done every two weeks. Then in two weeks they'd ask me for documents, then I wouldn't take any, then I'd lose, lose the two weeks of work (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

*In Southend I did work as a care assistant, but then I left because my status was getting questioned and I found that I could not produce what was being requested (Sipiwe, 30, F, Zimbabwean).*

*I've worked in a call centre before, it was down in the city centre, but I only worked it for a short while, because... er... eventually they were asking for my identity and immigration papers (Taffi, 27, M, Zimbabwean).*

Job search strategies and employment reflect the undocumented status of young people. For example, some take jobs where they know no questions will be asked, many rely on their social and community networks (as shown earlier) while others use false documents or other people's documents.

*Nowadays I clean houses... they don't ask for documents in the houses (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

*If you go for the manual jobs, they are not really strict. So I've noticed that over the years I've actually had to lower my ambition on what jobs I can get, and it seems to be worsening all the time (Taffi, 27, M, Zimbabwean).*

*I work in a pub. I basically work officially but under someone else's documents (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian).*

*I am here as a Pole. I have Polish documents and that's all. Since Poland is in the EU – no problem. I simply have good documents, made professionally (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

Around a third of the migrants interviewed were not working or working very occasionally at the time of the fieldwork. Although there is a great deal of labour market mobility, young undocumented migrants need to survive during periods of unemployment, which the next section examines.

## Surviving without work

Young undocumented migrants without work are without any source of income. The importance of friends and family in the UK, but also outside the UK, are vital for survival in-between jobs. Young people from all five groups relied on social and family networks for support while Ukrainians, Brazilians, Kurdish and a few Chinese people also used savings during periods of unemployment. Zimbabweans also obtained support and help from the church and church contacts, and reference was made to charities and community organisations. The pressure on young people, both to remain in work but also to live a very frugal life, is evident in the migrant narratives:

*Some friends were giving me £30–40 per month... I paid them back when I found job. I had to reduce my spending to pay them back. That's why I don't want to leave this job. It's really difficult for undocumented person to be jobless (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*We buy bread and make very cheap easy food. Or sometimes rice. If we cook rice there is no need for bread even. Bread gets expensive (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Well, basically, now I have some savings. Put aside just in case. It can happen. No one is insured against it. Will there be job or won't (Fedia, 29, M, Ukrainian).*

Wendy Wang, a young Chinese woman, had lost her job as a waitress in a restaurant, as business was bad. In the following quote, she describes the role of social networks in the job-search process, but also her survival strategies which again depend on these networks:

*I'm asking my friends to help me look for work. You have to take things step by step. They will help to ask around... Something may come up anytime. There are friends around. Whoever has got some news will pass it on to me. I then pay a visit to the restaurant. If both sides agree on the terms, I will start work... No work no income. You must borrow money from friends to keep things going... Normally I'd borrow an amount that allows me to clear the month's rent... I sometimes borrow some money from my friends to send home (Wendy Wang, 24, F, Chinese).*

As the quote from Wendy shows, some young people face the additional pressure of supporting family members in the country of origin or paying off debts to smugglers who brought them to the UK in the first place. Gao Zeng, who sells illegal DVDs on the street, also expresses his anxieties around work and dependency:

*I would panic if I had no work and stay idle. Because my family back home is dependent on me (Gao Zeng, 24, M, Chinese).*

The next section explores the spending of young people, as well as their transnational obligations and the impact of these on their spending and everyday lives.

## Spending and remittances

Two themes to emerge from the interviews are that young people are mostly spending their money on basics – rent, food, travel – rather than other items; and for some, very hard choices have to be made about spending:

*[I spend money on] my rent, my transport and my food, although sometimes I would really want to do shopping for myself. It was really difficult, but whenever I could, I would spare something like £20 and go to the cheapest shop (Kirsty, 22, F, Zimbabwean).*

*We cut down on eating and drinking so that we could pay our rent (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

*We don't have luxury life. What we do for example. We reduce our spending for food. Normally people would eat 3 times a day and go to pub but we don't do this. You eat once a day for example... How can you survive with £200 a week? But I am not documented and I had to survive with this money (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Chinese and Kurdish young people working in take-away shops or restaurants ate at work and, for many, the long hours of work also made it difficult to find the time to spend money. As one interviewee noted, '... you can't spend the money that you earn when you are working' (Welat, 23, M). Some Chinese young people also received clothes from their family in China, as it is cheaper than buying them in the UK. The following quotes illustrate these experiences:

*We usually eat at the places we work. We can't go out to eat. We want to eat out but we can't afford (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*They give you free meals and accommodation... We can save a bit of money out of this. Normally we don't need to buy a lot of things. In this way we can save a bit of money; and we don't go out much, which can help save money, too... Often we get things sent from home... because you'll get some of the things a lot cheaper in China than the UK (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

*You work seven days a week, you hardly have time to go out. Most of my clothes I wear are sent from China by my mother (Yao Xiaomin, 25, F, Chinese).*

Some of those with children spend their money on basics, but also on necessities and activities for their children. Among a small minority, there is an element of the young person wanting to go out and look good:



*Most of it is spent on going out and trying to look good, keep up with the trend. You know, you try and want to buy the clothes that make you look as good as everyone else. At my age you don't want to be the one left out in looking good... You want to look good because I think with looking good it also helps with confidence sometimes, it builds. You know it's easier when you look good to make friends than when you are uncomfortable and just thinking do I look good? ... er... when you look good you don't have to look around and think... 'Oh do I fit in?' (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwean).*

Spending is affected by a number of factors and obligations including remittances and paying back debts, but also personal aspirations, such as saving money to buy property or land. Those with children back home send money to support them. There is variation between groups in terms of transnational obligations and activities. Young Brazilian migrants – with the exception of three, who send money to support children – send money to Brazil to save and plan for their own futures. This includes saving to study, to buy land or a house. As Beatriz (24, F) states, 'I've bought a piece of land... and I'm paying for my [beautician] course'. Ukrainians also save money to invest in land and property in Ukraine. One young man explains that he sent 75% of his income to Ukraine to build a house and he feels no hardship:

*... it does not limit me even a bit because this is my aim. That is why I came here. I wish to finish quickly that house and simply earn some money and go back home... No one, parents or anybody forces me or says 'Oh, send the money we need to build the house' (Dmytro, 22 M, Ukrainian).*

Fedia (29, M, Ukrainian) explains how he sends money home because he is undocumented noting that, 'If we were here legally we would probably do something here with the money... we would think of our own place here'. Instead, he has bought a flat in Ukraine.

Some Ukrainians also send remittances to support family members, and this is also a pattern among Zimbabweans and Chinese young people. Zimbabweans send money to family members for basics – fuel, food, medicine and school fees. This creates an element of both obligation and hardship for some in terms of their daily lives in the UK:

*I feel responsible, because if I had been there I would be looking after them. The inflation is such that their pensions are eroded, whatever they had laid aside is worthless now... I feel quite bad to eat a lot and to think that my folks don't have any food... I've learnt to go to Tesco's, for instance, at a certain time and check out the reductions, or go to places where they sell meat for cheap, or I eat a lot of veggies, beans, [that are] cheap to buy, so I skimp on myself and put a little on the side for them (Sipiwe, 30, F, Zimbabwe).*

*It does affect me because sometimes at the end of the month, I would not remain with money for my daily living expenses because [I] will have sent money home, but at the same [I] don't have choice, because they will also be expecting [me] to send money because they are not working and things like that (Pat, 27, F, Zimbabwe).*

Some Chinese young people are not only supported family members, but are also paying back debts to the smuggling gangs, as Guo Ming describes:

*We spent lots of money for leaving the country to go abroad. Now we should do our best to send some money home to support the family... Each of us, for leaving the country, at least paid roughly 300,000RMB [roughly £20,000] (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese).*

*However low the wage may be, since I have arrived in a new place, I must face it. I have to eat, pay rents; and back home, my family may need my support. I need to send money home to support them... My wage is £180 a week. There are four weeks in a month so I get over £700 a month. I will send £700, and keep £50 (Fang Ping, 22, F, Chinese).*

Among Kurdish young people, there tends to more informal and irregular remittance activity, with people sending money occasionally, or when it is asked for rather than routinely.

## Conclusion

This chapter shows the limited sectors of employment, low pay and exploitation experienced by young undocumented migrants in the labour market. Many young people convey the sense of fear and uncertainty derived from their status and resultant vulnerability. The role of social networks both in terms of job-search strategies and support during periods of unemployment is an inevitable consequence of their status as undocumented migrants, who have no other means of survival. Transnational obligations vary between groups. For some, the pressure to work and send money affects their everyday lives, while for others it is part of their own personal migration objective, with migration seen as a short-term way of making better money before returning home. Lack of choice and uncertainty, however, run through all the interviews and testimonies.

Although not a dominant theme in the narratives on employment, the issue of racism emerges in a few of the interviews. This is summed up by Theo, who simply states that, 'If you are black, it's very hard to find a job' (19, M). Racism also emerges as an area affecting people's social and community networks, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## Case study: Berenice

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Berenice is 23 years old. She came to the UK from Brazil when she was 18. She had just married and wanted to start a new life with her husband. A vicar encouraged them to try their luck abroad:

*One of the vicars [from my home town] had been here with his daughters to preach. When he returned, he said [...], '... look, both of you should try to go to Europe to try a better life'.*

He also offered to arrange for them to be picked up at the airport. They borrowed the money for the tickets and the visa and they came straight to London. A travel agency had arranged the ticket for them and told them what to say to the border police. They got a tourist visa for six months as honeymooners. Their first accommodation was in the house of a presbytery. They were allowed to stay without paying rent until they had started to work. Through the church, Berenice also managed to get her first cleaning job. The first six months went quickly and they decided to overstay their visa. At the beginning it was very hard. Berenice didn't speak any English and felt very isolated. After two years, she felt she couldn't cope any longer with the life in the UK. She recalls how she used to, '... pack my suitcase about three times a month'.

Once they had saved enough money to repay the debt, the husband agreed to return to Brazil but he warned her, 'If we go back, you are going to be crying'. He was right. After six months in Brazil, she felt like there was not much to do for them there. The journey back took them to another European country, and from there to London. This time though, the immigration officer didn't let them in and refused them the visa. However, he allowed Berenice to sleep overnight in a hotel nearby the airport. The next morning they left the hotel and, instead of returning to the airport, they took a bus into town.

This was two years ago. Life has got easier and learning English has helped her to get better cleaning jobs and to build contacts, which help her to find more clients. Berenice's husband was eventually caught by the immigration police a month ago. They had talked many times about what to do if this happened:

*He gave his name straight away. That's what we had always discussed, if we had ever been stopped, we wouldn't lie because we, if something happens, we prefer to leave.*

When it was arranged for him to talk to an immigration officer, Berenice advised him to, 'Explain what is your life here nowadays'. So he did and the immigration officer didn't know what to do:

*He wanted to help but he didn't know what to do. So he said, 'I can't. Nowadays we don't give visas here anymore. You have to go to your country'.*

The Home Office is currently arranging their tickets to Brazil. They have been waiting for months, but at least they haven't been deported. She says:

*It was a miracle of God that we were not deported, that we are not being sent home in handcuffs, not being humiliated, things like that.*

A man and a woman are shown from the back, holding hands. They are standing against a light blue background. The woman is on the left, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The man is on the right, wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The text "social life and social and community networks" is overlaid in white on the image.

# social life and social and community networks

## Introduction

This chapter focuses on the social lives and social and community networks of young undocumented migrants in the UK. Three main areas are explored: first, the range of social activities they engage in and the places where they socialise; secondly, migrants' social relations and social networks, and the impact of being undocumented on the way they choose who and how to interact with people; and thirdly, the role of communities, community organisations, churches and other potential support agencies in the lives of young people. The analysis shows that having undocumented status mediates social and community relations. Country of origin, length of stay in the UK, life events, places of residence, as well as language skills, prove important factors in shaping young people's social networks.

## Social activities and where people socialise

This section explores social activities and the places where young undocumented migrants socialise. As shown in the previous chapter, the majority of young undocumented migrants are in low-wage employment, often working long hours. By the end of the day, as Eduardo, Daniel and Huadi Zhang explain, there is little or no time or energy to dedicate to social activities:

*I work in a company which makes books and newspapers, and I also work as a cleaner in the middle of the night. Well, basically these are my days, everyday, boom-boom-boom-boom (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian).*

*My day-to-day in England? Well, my name changed after I arrived here. I started to be called 'Work' and my surname is 'Overtime' (laughs) (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).*

*I work till midnight, well after midnight, until the boss goes... Life is just like this every day. I spend my time like this every single day (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

Moreover, the precariousness of the stay in the UK and debts, obligations and/or economic aspirations for migration drive some migrants to send most of their earnings home, leaving little money for leisure activities in the UK (see Chapter 4 for a discussion on spending and remittances). Celso offers a poignant example of the relationship between being undocumented and his livelihood strategy:

*I'm here illegally. For my safety, I became more reserved, keeping more to myself. It helped me to save more money because I couldn't go out. I thought, 'If I go out, the police stop me and deport me' (Celso, 28, M, Brazilian).*

Despite these constraints, most participants do have some limited time for a social life outside work. Window shopping, playing football or video games, surfing the internet, talking on the phone, visiting friends, having a barbeque, walking in a park, going to church or community organisations, going to the pub for a drink after work and sometimes to nightclubs are the most common social activities mentioned by our interviewees.

*I go to the library... after library I pick my child from nursery then we go to town, shopping... just window shopping then we come back home. Sometimes that's how we spend our day (Pat, 27, F, Zimbabwean).*

*I come to do sports with my friends. I go to the community centre, that is why I come here. I have a uncle in London. I go to my uncle, my uncle has children, I mean he has a family. My uncle's son, is my brother. They are like my family and when I visit them I feel that I am at home (Kawa, 25, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*We go to the dance, but very rarely. Last summer and once this summer. In Ukrainian club. Sometimes, Saturday or Sunday, I go to restaurant. [We] go out to a pub for a beer. Walking around London, around Westminster, go to London Eye and that's, actually, [it]. The evening has passed. How long do you get if you work whole day on Saturday and, what is left till the night? (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian).*

*I'd stroll around the streets in the area I stay and window shop... If I get a ticket, I'd go stroll in the [city centre]. And most of the time I'd go with [my] Chinese friends... because we can communicate easily (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

Young undocumented migrants do feel excluded from participating in certain activities due to their status, and travel is frequently given as an example:

*I think having no residential status does have impact on me. You want to go out but you are too afraid of being stopped [by police]; and without residential status you know that there are lots of things you simply can't do (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

*If you have the right to see the people you like, there are no problems [in being an illegal migrant]. That's the only problem I've got (Alice, 27, F, Brazilian).*

Being unable to travel freely also exposes undocumented migrants to their 'legal' peers, affecting the way they relate to others. Levko and Dilan came to the UK as teenagers – Levko was 16 and Dilan 14. They have active social lives and 'many friends'. Nevertheless, there are moments and situations when they feel different from their peers because of their status:

*If you think about it, many things would be different... I have friends... they all like, 'oh, we are going on holiday there, we are going on holiday here'. You can't even go to see something for two–three days. Where can you go? [You can] go nowhere (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian).*

*I cannot socialise as much as I would like to. I would like to travel more. I would like to see different places and countries. For example now we are coming to end of summer. People will get back from holiday and tell me where they have been to. They will ask where I have been to. I will tell them that I was here (Dilan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

Everyday activities like joining a gym or going clubbing can also become difficult, if not impossible.

*For an illegal person? There isn't anything. It's all closed. It's all blocked. You don't have access to absolutely anything. I... I joined a gym; I had to show false documents in the gym to join and run risks because you give a name (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian).*

*Sometimes there are these clubs where DJ's perform init, and they are kind of like famous DJ's init, and like, I can't go so don't really get to see them because I don't have an ID and I don't have money (Natasha, 18, F, Zimbabwean).*

Despite limitations and constraints due to the lack of status, some young undocumented migrants try to preserve their social life. Dilan and Rita provide valuable examples of how this can be achieved:

*I would like to go to cinema and theatre but I can rarely go. I love theatre and I am working with a volunteer theatre group now. At least I can watch some theatre in this way. We write and play our own plays (Dilan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Because I'm a girl a lot of money, not very many, but quite a lot goes on fashion. You're young, you want to look good. I think it's natural. And it should be like that. If you don't like yourself, no one will like you. So I'm not greedy when it comes to it (Rita, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

For Eduardo, buying goods and spending money is a way of enjoying his undocumented life; consumerism, in his experience, is a response to uncertainty about the future, an example of the 'enforced orientation to the present' discussed in Chapter 6.

*My plans were to make money, right, but she and I were both crazy, we used to spend everything, but, that's like this, I didn't save money because I didn't want really. I chose to enjoy life here. It's wrong, I know it's wrong but I don't know, I don't know about tomorrow... I enjoy, I enjoy life here, I've given up this idea of saving money (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian).*

A geography of undocumentedness would show cities full of no-go limited access areas and curfews and borders invisible to 'documented' people. Undocumented migrants soon learn to be cautious, to navigate through the city without being visible and to be streetwise:

*The fact that you have a bit of fear, caution of going to certain places. For example, 'Ah, we are not going to the pub because the immigration, not immigration, the police usually goes there from time to time'. Or, 'I am not going to this pub because the police goes has closed it down and will do it again'. So you end up, you have to get streetwise to know where, which places you go (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

The perception of risk and fear permeates many narratives and was explored in relation to mobility in Chapter 3. Fear is notable among Kurdish respondents and is linked to their migration circumstances and the situation in their country of origin. The following quotes from Serhado, Firat and Jiyan illustrate the fear felt by young Kurdish migrants:

*Even if you want to do sightseeing in the central London, you have that fear in you when you take underground (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I am not scared of my flatmates but of people on the street. I am scared that they will know I am illegal. I have fears in my work place. Because I work there undocumented, I am doing something illegal in a way (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Getting on the bus is difficult. There are often controls on the buses. Just in case, I don't go out much. Police are checking everywhere (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

The cause of this fear is due to a number of factors, most notably experiences of state persecution and violence by the police in the country of origin and previous negative experiences in the UK (see Chapter 6 for a discussion on anxiety and fear due to lack of documents).

The length of stay in the UK also plays a role as migrants seem to get used to their constraints and limitations, which become part of the way they interact with society and their place of residence. The time this process takes can vary, although among younger respondents it can take as little as a few months to adapt to the restrictions of status. Pawlo, who arrived in the UK 14 months ago, Brígido, who has been in England for 3 years and 3 months, and Semen, who has been in the UK for eight years, offer some insightful thoughts on the issue of adaptation (see Chapters 3 and 6 for a thorough discussion on mobility, coping strategies and undocumentedness):

*Simply... You so get used to this that sometimes it happens that I even forget that I'm undocumented. I now simply came to terms with that I simply can't go and that's all. I can't travel, I can't do this, I can't do other certain things. By now, I got so used to it. You fight, develop this immunity that we now, how they say, whatever stick was thrown in [our] wheels [barrier], we always find a way out... (Pawlo, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

*Life like this is very restrictive, very restrictive and you get used to it. I got used to it. It is not a problem any longer [to] live like this, you know. In my case, it's actually good. It means I have more time to dedicate to what I want. But not everybody is like me (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian).*

*Before, I was afraid. Well, afraid, I simply didn't want to go home. [...] Now, it is more or less normal. I assess the situation realistically, with experience. Past anxieties, emotions... to ruin your mentality because of all this... not necessary (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

In the UK, racism is an experience that impacts the lives of some of our young interviewees and differentiates experiences between and within the five country-of-origin groups. While Ukrainian migrants or white Brazilians can access nightclubs or gyms relatively easily, migrants from visible minorities, notably Zimbabweans and black Brazilians, encounter a different reality that affects their social life and perceptions of the UK:

*I have experienced racism here... it's not as open but you can tell how people react towards you and the fact that you are from a foreign country. People have sort of got this perception about you that you're a black person and you're like that (Jamie, 30, M, Zimbabwean).*

*I was humiliated many times because here, if you are not humiliated you are not in England. And, it's not by English people, most of the people who humiliate you are not English, they are immigrants, most of them are immigrants... You hear so many things that are not logical (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).*

Your skin colour is also perceived as making you more 'visible' to the police. Daniel arrived in England 8 months ago, and has already learned a few lessons on how to avoid unnecessary risk. Taking a taxi instead of a short walk home after a night out, in order to avoid the police, is one of the devices he mentions to overcome the issue of visibility:

*Sometimes it's possible for you to go on foot. Sometimes I'm here in the centre and I decide to go to a friend's house, sometimes I catch a taxi depending on how late it is, although I could go on foot. You are always worried (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).*



Inviting people home, visiting them in their houses, going to a church, a community centre or walking in a park, are considered safe places for social activities by most interviewees. These are situations and moments when most interviewees feel they are not different from the others, because of their status:

*[My status] does not affect me under this roof of association. But if I go out it does (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

There is another place where young undocumented migrants feel secure – the internet. Social networking sites (more often in their first language, rather than in English), Skype, emailing and instant messaging are important components of the daily life of several interviewees. For some, virtual social networking became familiar and important after they arrived in the UK:

*I am always in front of the computer. I have that kind of computer-mania. If there is no work, I would not leave the house. I wake up in the morning and directly turn on the computer (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I spend most of my pastime on the internet. When there is nothing else to do (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese)*

*My life here is on the computer. If I don't have it, I die (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

Among young undocumented migrants with families, social activities are planned around the family and, especially if there are children, most of the time goes on children's activities. Both Lesya and Augusto have their family in the UK. Lesya has been in England for five years and has three children and a husband to look after. Two of them go to school, while the younger one stays at home with her. Augusto has been in England for three years and lives with his wife and their son, who was born in the UK, while his older daughter lives in Brazil with his wife's parents.

*I can't have a free minute. My free minute is at midnight when they are all asleep. I make myself a tea and then, I can really sit down, to see something on the computer, watch TV. After, I get things ready for tomorrow: children's uniforms and all that (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

*On Sunday, the only day [I've got free], I have to go out with my wife because she doesn't work. We have a small boy, he, she, she is taking care of him, right. So on Sunday I try to please her, we go out, even if I don't rest, but I try to do something, right (Augusto, 26, M, Brazilian).*

## Family, friends and acquaintances

The issue of trust is central to the ways in which undocumented migrants develop and establish their social networks; family and friends represent an invaluable resource, especially during the early stages of one's life in the UK. While most Kurdish and Zimbabwean respondents could rely on the help of family members or friends on arrival, Brazilians and Ukrainians had less tangible contacts, if any, when they arrived.

In their responses, undocumented migrants flag up two main issues: on the one hand, the risk of being stigmatised or even reported to the police is real and cannot be overlooked; on the other, it is equally important to build a network of contacts and friends who can provide advice, support and help:

*I want to make more friends... because living in a foreign land, you can only rely on friends for support. You won't have anything else; you have to rely on friends (Yingying Cai, 27, F, Chinese).*

*If you meet people, you can't tell them much, you don't know if you can trust them or not. Sometimes, the few people, the few times I talked about it, I talked to people who don't have documents either, I joked, 'If you do something to me, I'll take you down with me. I know where you can be found' (laughs) (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

How migrants strike a balance between secrecy and support varies according to several factors and circumstances. Sometimes, the solution is to close oneself to the outside world in order to avoid risk or limit contacts to a superficial level. More often, migrants look for a middle way. It is in the search for this middle way that the decision on if, and how, to inform friends and acquaintances of the lack of documents becomes relevant. Kurdish respondents seem particularly cautious:

*[It doesn't affect me] because I hide it from everybody until now. Only my close friends know that I am undocumented (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Of course I do not tell them. You cannot say that because you get scared that they will spy you. Or you have the fear that their attitude might change towards you (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Language is arguably the main factor shaping migrants' social networks. In order to befriend someone, speaking a common language is essential – this may be one's first language, English or a third language; for example Ukrainian migrants might speak Russian and Brazilians might speak Spanish or Italian. Most participants point out that being able to communicate better in English would help them make friends outside of their linguistic community and build more solid relationships. Ciwan, who has been in the UK for five years and works in a co-ethnically owned supermarket, expresses his difficulties in trying to form friendships outside of his linguistic community:

*I have not got any British friend that I see or talk [to] constantly. There are people that I see sometimes on daily basis but [I] have no friends. There was somebody that I have met during the work and we have shared some conversation, even met sometimes, but it did not go further as I can't speak enough English and sometimes we cannot understand each other due to difficult accents. So they got bored and don't meet you much (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

In general, among Chinese respondents English proficiency is lower and this inevitably affects their chance to interact with speakers of other languages:

*I don't have any friends from other groups at all. How can I have friends from other groups? I don't even understand English, how could I have friends? All those I know are just like me. They are all like me, more or less (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*[I have some] British friends... but they are just ordinary friends... They are not real friends. You meet them when you do shopping, or when you sell DVD and things like that... When you meet them you say, 'Hello, Hello' and sometimes they say (in English), 'My friend, my friend' in the very polite way and something like that... (Yan Jing, 24, M, Chinese)*

*On the whole, our circles are small... Mostly we mingle with people from our country... Actually we mostly mingle with our relatives, friends or laoxiang (fellow village/country-people)... As to people from other groups, presently... first, we can't communicate really very effectively; secondly, we don't always share the same topics of conversation (Yao Xiamin, 25, F, Chinese).*

But speaking a common language per se is not enough to make friends. Sometimes, especially for newcomers, the problem is the lack of spaces of interaction, as Welat explains:

*[For] those who are here for one or two years, it's really difficult, because you don't have any common space with them [British people] and you can't speak the language either (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Other times, the problem is the (lack of) legal status itself, which affects migrants' interactions with others:

*For those who have status, their friends circle is much bigger. For people who have no status, like us, our friends are basically those who are like us, all those having no papers. Because we are in the same situation, it is easier when we chat about ourselves (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese).*

*With British friends you have to be someone else. You can't say to them, 'I'm depressed because of issues with my status' for example. You always have to be happy and perky all the time; [you] can't just be happy all of the time – it seems like extra work to me (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

The distance that exists between the migrant experience in the UK and that of British and other 'documented' people is a structural distance that makes dialogue impossible or extremely difficult. Most interviewees find support and friendship in their fellow nationals, towards whom they feel 'naturally' drawn:

*You do tend to find that people will end up shifting or making their own little community where you find that Zimbabwean people are with Zimbabwean people. [You know] you would rarely find that Zimbabweans are socializing with Europeans or something like that (Terry, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

However, for some, to build friendship with 'documented' people from their own country is equally difficult, as the difference of legal status makes their aspirations, plans and opportunities very different:

*Perhaps there is a difference between those who have some documents here... They have a different view of life, you know... They build their future plans about school, children, university, and things like that. But you can't plan those things. You plan, how they say, you live from day to day, let's put it like that (Natalia, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

An interesting example of this is also offered by Ciwan, who explains how difficult is for an undocumented person to marry someone documented from his or her community:

*Let's say if you like a Turkish or Kurdish girl here, I mean you genuinely like her and would like to marry her, and people knows that you are undocumented and she has the passport or residency. They would say that he does not like her genuinely and the only reason he wants to be with the girl is because of his status. I know a lot of people around me had same problem and they could not marry because of such problem (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Rojhan, a young man of 27, had in fact married an English woman and had been married for three years, though he is no longer with her. During that time, he experienced problems with her family and did not apply for naturalisation:

*I start having problems with her brothers. They knew that I did not have documents and they were telling me mean things when they see me somewhere. They were saying that I have married to their sister for the passport. I was working in Domino's that time and they came there to depreciate me front of my friends. They were telling me to leave their sister and told me to fuck off you dirty man, dirty Kurd or Turk. They were racist. They did not like foreigners. The sister was different. They did not even come to the wedding. So there has been some pressure from there as well on my decision to not to make such application. I did not want anybody to think that I am using somebody's status or abusing somebody feeling or trust and taking advantages (Rojhan, 27, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Meanwhile, some young people find forming relationships with a documented person from another country difficult:

*I have a girlfriend who is from Germany; I've been with her for two years. She does not want to have anything serious with me due to whom I am. She said it, she made it clear... I try to convince her, but the situation is more complicated than the pleasure I give her (Fernando, 27, M, Brazilian).*

Echoing the views on the distance between documented – including both migrants and British citizens – and undocumented people, Dmytro and Trish explain how much easier it is to be friends with someone who has gone through the experience of migration and being undocumented:

*All who I socialise with are all Ukrainians, all undocumented. Those who I socialise [with] at work – they are Russians, Lithuanians, Latvians or Romanians. They have also been, sometimes ago, illegal and they understand us (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

*I have too much baggage, my problems are too much... I want to associate with people who understand my plight... people who will be sensitive towards me when they see me behaving in a certain way. The British friends that I make do not understand so I end up being frustrated and the friendship becomes meaningless (Trish, 25, F, Zimbabwean).*

Secrets and lies are daily currency in the lives of undocumented migrants. Being forced to lie or to hide one's name and identity makes respondents feel 'uncomfortable', 'ashamed' and 'guilty'. Misleading friends and colleagues raises difficult ethical dilemmas for respondents.

Tanaka has concealed her status from her friends and feels that she has had to deceive herself and deny her self-worth in order to protect her lack of status:

*Especially when you are moving towards completing college, they'll be talking... 'oh I'm going Birmingham for my Uni, I'm going London, I'm going Leeds'... you keep quiet, but at times it pushes you to also lie and claim you are also going somewhere, like... er... 'I'm going [to] Luton for my Uni' (Tanaka, 22, F, Zimbabwean).*

Tanaka's concealment and self-denial compares to the way Colin philosophically contemplates, with remarkable candour, how his relationship with his friends affects his demeanour and his morality:

*People see you smile every day but they really don't see what you really go through. You try to force yourself. You know you live a life that is not true, a life full of lies, you make a lot of friends, but... the friends that you make... they trust you in everything but you can't really be who you really are because you are restricted by those things (lack of status) and it feels bad because one day if they do find out, you do not only lose a job, but you lose friends as well that you have made over the years because they think, '... but we trusted this person' all along... you have to lie about your identity just to survive for one more extra day... that is how it is (Colin 23, M, Zimbabwean).*

For others, this sense of alienation and social exclusion is expressed in dramatic and disturbing ways:

*Socially you see yourself [as] the lowest human being ever (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Interacting with people and building durable relationships becomes difficult. Interestingly, there seems to be no difference among newcomers, as the quotes from Diana and Sergiy, who both arrived less than a year ago, and long-term residents Uliana and Tracy, who have been in the UK respectively for 9 and 10 years, illustrate:

*It affects because we are not very open to each other, you know I am very reserved. I think a lot about answering many of the things I'm asked, like, it's not the same thing in relation to trust, to share things. We live well together, respect each other, are polite but you don't tell much (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

*You try not to tell things to someone, telling them less. It's all related (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian).*

*What are the first questions when you meet someone? How [are you] and what you do, and so on. And when you tell what you do... But they have more questions. And if you tell them that you are a student, then it is all clear. But if you are not a student, then you are 'doing' something. You tell that you are working at... Well, it's not always coming out nicely. Or you try to hide everything to make it look better (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

*The fact that I am undocumented means that I don't feel comfortable socialising because I am conscious of my status and I do not want people to know. I am not free to work as much as I would like, if I was I would be more confident. Being undocumented takes away from your confidence because you are limited in the things you want to do and the things that you can do (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

The lack of legal status can lead, ultimately, to the break-up of partnerships and friendships, as in the case of Amed who, confronted with a direct question regarding his legal status and unwilling to live in deception, could not see any alternative but to split up and cut all contacts with his girlfriend:

*One day my girlfriend came and said, 'Can I ask you a question?' I said, 'why?' She said she would like to know something. She asked me, 'Why we are fighting? What are our problems?' She asked me if it is the same with English and Irish conflict. She asked me my immigration status in this country. Then I think she realised that I am undocumented. Then I have finished the relationship with her, changed my mobile number (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

## Formal and informal support networks

*Here in England, you need other people (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).*

Daniel's concise statement captures the importance of social networks for migrants; it emphasises how being away from 'home' makes having a support network even more important.

This section focuses on the informal and formal support networks used by undocumented migrants. In all five country-of-origin groups, family and friends are not only the main points of reference in young undocumented migrants' social lives, but also the main source of advice and support:

*We talked, had a chat. [My friend] told me how to get a job here, to get accommodation, and everything (Celso, 28, M, Brazilian).*

*My brother helped me a lot. He allowed me to stay in his house, he also helped me to get a job, he will still help me if I need help in any sort of situation. I didn't come here and start from scratch, my brother was settled already so I was in a good position to start my life with his help (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

However, this can sometimes put a burden on family relations and friendships. In the interviews, we encountered several cases of conflict, separation and violence due, in part, to the circumstances of undocumented migration. Avashin, a single parent in a situation of extreme destitution, relies almost exclusively on fellow Kurds' for support. However, the feeling of 'being a burden' on other people causes great distress to her and her child:

*Nobody wants to see you. They perceive you as burden. No one wants to look after you (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

The interviews and testimonies showed that the longer young people are in the UK, the more established their social network became. For some, even a few months were enough to begin to feel at home in the UK, as in the case of Sergiy who arrived less than a year ago:

*I know a lot of people. Well, relatively a lot. I had almost no one when I first came here (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian).*

As well as the kind of support needed, the range and opportunities to access support varied according to the different stages of migration. First, the demography and geography of each community is important as they indicate the extent to which co-ethnic networks may exist. Secondly, the history of migration and settlement of the five communities affect access to support, not only in terms of length of stay, but also in relation to broader community relations and diversity of employment sectors. Thirdly, the existence of community organisations and faith groups which provide support and advice to undocumented migrants varied between the groups

and in the different localities. Often, where young undocumented migrants accessed community organisations, agencies and services, it was because family and friends had provided them with information.

For Brazilians and Ukrainians, there is little in the way of established communities and community-based organisations outside London. Even in London, there is a limited network of support. A sense of isolation is evident among some interviewees, and more so among women and younger migrants. This quote from Diana, who is living in London and has been in the UK for seven months, conveys this sense of self-sufficiency:

*I've created a skin to protect myself because, like, it's only me, if anything happens I have to deal with by myself. Nobody is going to help me, so I kind of grew this skin, closed myself down not to be affected, to avoid problems as much as possible (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian)*

There are long-established networks of Chinese community organisations in the three areas of study, as well as long standing Chinese communities in these areas. However, young undocumented migrants from China appear to have little or no contact with these community organisations, which are often led by Cantonese speakers:

*I don't like going there [Chinese community centres]. I didn't go to such places... I don't speak Cantonese. Why should I ask them for help? So far I don't need to ask them for anything. Also, I don't really know what they are doing there. I don't know anything about them (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese).*

For Zimbabwean and Kurdish migrants, there are well-established and active community organisations, although, for Kurdish migrants, these are only in London, reflecting the geographic clustering of this group. The network of Zimbabwean organisations is national, reflecting their geographic dispersal.

Community organisations seem to provide not only an important point of reference for some undocumented migrants, but also practical assistance:

*The Kurdish association had an agreement with a bank. According to the agreement, with your Turkish ID card you can open an account at that bank. They publicised that on the Telgraf newspaper [a Kurdish local newspaper]. Some people opened the account, some did not. Some believed in news, some did not. I was one of the first to open such account (Ciwan, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I live on help from well wishes and help from organisations like the Zimbabwe Association (Bob, 31, M, Zimbabwean).*

However, not everyone wants to use community-based organisations for fear of their status being revealed, or anxiety about spies in the community:

*I don't want to go community centres. You do not know who are there. It is dangerous to go to the Kurdish associations because these communities could be under surveillance. I know a lot of undocumented friends and they all think the same (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Community organisations tend to work with asylum seekers or refugees more than undocumented migrants, and the interviews showed that those undocumented migrants who had been through the asylum process were more likely to access these organisations than others. During the fieldwork, we met staff and volunteers

working in community organisations, large advocacy groups, drop in centres and night shelters. They provided insightful grass roots perspectives, not only on the situation of young undocumented migrants, but also on the scope of their involvement with this group of people and the kind of resources which would help to improve their relations. In relation to the activities and resources of the organisations that are supporting or are in contact with young undocumented migrants, interviewees pointed out that in order to support rejected asylum seekers, resources needed to be diverted from other projects. For those organisations that were heavily dependent on Home Office funding, this was not an option.

Another avenue for support accessed by some young undocumented migrants is faith groups. These are used more by Zimbabwean, Brazilian and Ukrainian young people than by Kurdish and Chinese interviewees. Church-funded organisations cater for many of the basic needs of undocumented migrants, offering shelter and food, as well as invaluable social and work contacts. Their moral credentials make them trustworthy for undocumented migrants. Lower running costs, a larger degree of autonomy from state funding, and the capacity to raise money independently are among the reasons that church-funded organisations are able to thrive. In the following quotes, David recalls the positive experience that his cousin had upon his arrival in the UK, and Tanaka explains how she met a lawyer at her church:

*When my cousin arrived, he arrived not knowing a single word in English, nothing, nothing, nothing. On his first Sunday here, he went to the church, because in Brazil he already attended it, he is a real church-goer, it's so much so that here he goes regularly. Then he went there, boy, on his first day there, on Sunday he went there. When the mass finished, the priest asked, 'Is there anybody here who needs work and needs help?' He [cousin] put his hand up. The priest said, 'Please come here. Talk to this man here'. The other man said, 'Look, do you need [help]? Fine, my restaurant need blah-blah-blah'. He got it. He went to the restaurant and it was the same restaurant where he found a job for me later. That's where everybody got a job for everybody else. That's how everything started (David, 29, M, Brazilian).*

*At my church there's a member who is a lawyers, he updates us on a lot of issues. I talked to him about my situation and he has told me advice and said, 'Do this'. I've been to the Mayor in Swindon and explained all my problem to him and the problems I'm facing with my education (Tanaka, 22, F, Zimbabwean).*

In each of the three regions there are also other organisations that work with migrants. Legal assistance is one of the main support needs of undocumented migrants, but advocacy and 'mainstream' non-governmental organisations do not appear to play a significant role for them. Some migrants come from countries where these kinds of organisations either do not exist, or have a different role, and so the migrants do not understand the kind of help these organisations may be able to provide. Young undocumented migrants, especially more recent arrivals and those who have not been through the asylum system, are less familiar with the role of non-governmental organisations and how they can support or assist them. The following quote captures this confusion:

*I've heard about a place in town where they give free immigration advice. I've never actually been there, but I really wanted to go there. I think that's the only place I've heard of and I think that's the only place I'd turn to for advice at the*



*moment. I think they are voluntary, I forgotten... what are they called? But sometimes they recommend them on the home office papers, I don't know what they are called, I've forgotten (Taffi, 27, M, Zimbabwean).*

In localities where there aren't many community organisations, or they are not involved in assisting undocumented migrants, church-based organisations seem to play a more central role for migrants, particularly for Ukrainians and Brazilians.

The interviews show how churches offer not only spiritual guidance and relief from the moral dilemmas of their situation, but also a safe haven for migrants who, for once, do not feel different or discriminated against because of their legal status.

*Those who are documented, they don't even have something to talk [to you]. Ukrainians who are documented, I know few; they think 'why shall I talk to you?' There is no common language, but in church, nothing, absolutely nothing [like this] (Lesya, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

Moreover, the churches facilitate the settlement of newcomers by offering a safe environment to meet new people, make new friends, to find a job, and sometimes provide financial assistance.

*It's good to go to church. That's what keeps me going... what gives me strength is God (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

*We are always with the church group, like, now in the summer, we go to the park, have games, you know, there's football. We always go to the restaurants too (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

Evangelical churches, in particular, seem to provide young undocumented migrants with the kind of targeted assistance they cannot obtain from other more mainstream churches. They are often organised by nationality or language, and this makes them more accessible to people with limited knowledge of English.

*It's a Zimbabwean church that is based in Slough, so there isn't [any British person], because it's in my language, so I wouldn't expect to see anyone else there (Kirsty, 22, F, Zimbabwean).*

There were differences in terms of attendance and participation among different communities. While there is no difference between the attendance of men and women among Brazilians and Ukrainians, Zimbabwean women are more likely to be attending church than their male counterparts. Among Zimbabweans, the community bonding role of churches, which help to foster and consolidate friendship networks, is important.

*I think it's mainly African people from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria and there are a few people from the UK, maybe you could count them, maybe five or less and mostly black, with one or two white people and Caribbean, but it's mostly African people from Southern Africa like Zimbabwe and South Africa (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwean).*

Among Chinese and Ukrainian migrants, it is mainly more recent arrivals that go to church. At church, they access free English classes, informal job opportunities, accommodation and financial support in case of emergency.

*When I first came, in London... They told me that the church... the church people would come and would give you... give you [help]... They can speak Chinese... The Brits from the church. They (church people) say that you can go there and*

*learn English and also learn Chinese... You teach them Chinese; they teach you English. When I was in London I did go on a few occasions (Gao Zeng, 24, M, Chinese).*

Kurdish respondents do not participate in organised religion but make more use of community groups and associations that are clustered in certain parts of London.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the social lives and social networks of young undocumented migrants in the UK. The range of social activities that young undocumented migrants engage in is the result of a continuous negotiation between their needs and aspirations, and the constraints they face due to their lack of status. These constraints affect young undocumented migrants differently, as they are the result of the intersection between their lack of status and their gender, country of origin, and ethnic group, as well as their experiences. English language is also a factor that influences interactions with people from different countries of origin. The focus on space and mobility enabled us to draw a map of safe, accessible or forbidden places – a geography of ‘undocumentedness’ – in which young undocumented migrants develop their social lives.

The issue of trust is central in the creation of social networks among young undocumented migrants. While family and friends are crucial in the lives of our interviewees, these relationships are not without tension, because a lack of status can disempower migrants, which leaves them dependent on others.

Being undocumented can, and does, impact social relations in several ways. Interviewees often mention the difficulty of liaising with others, especially if documented, and the burden of the secrets and lies on which they have to rely to protect themselves.

Finally, we have explored the role of different community and faith groups in the lives of young undocumented migrants. The size and settlement patterns among the five groups affect the extent to which community and faith-based groups existed. Even when they are present, not all young people elect to use these types of more formalised support organisations, preferring instead to remain hidden and separate.

## Case study: Levko

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Levko came to the UK alone when he was only 16 years old; he is now 24. He escaped to save himself from a likely arrest – ‘I was a bad boy’, he says – and left his sweetheart behind. They were from two different worlds, ‘... like Romeo and Juliette. I was from the mafia and my girlfriend was the daughter of the chief of the traffic police’. After eight years in the UK, he still thinks of her and how to bring her to London, but the lack of papers makes the dream impossible. He doesn’t want her to think he is ‘a pirate’. Levko became an adult in the UK and his life went through significant changes after leaving his juvenile friends behind.

Levko has learned his trade here, working hard and making mistakes. He is a painter and decorator, and he likes his job, especially when he is asked to restore old frames, floors and stairs. ‘It’s like giving a new life to every millimetre you did’. It is a good job, but if he was documented, he could easily be paid double his £65-a-day wage.

At the beginning, most of Levko’s salary went in remittances, he lived on ‘bread and water’ and bought a one bedroom flat in Ukraine after less than two years. But, then he began to go out a little and spend more money on himself:

*I don’t want to save on my life and on my health. I don’t wish to live with eight people in one room. I want to live by myself, enjoy life. I wish to live, not just exist.*

The distance from his family is a heavy burden on Levko. He hasn’t been back home for seven years. He left as a teenager and now he feels he is a different person.

*What kills me really, that for seven years you haven’t seen your dear ones. I have changed a lot, hugely. I very very much want simply to go and see... who, where and how...*

Sometimes, even for an energetic young man, being undocumented becomes too much to bear:

*Twice I had a time that I simply didn’t want to live anymore... you feel that you are nobody. I didn’t want to be alive.*

Levko explains how he has often thought of going to the Home Office in Croydon, and shouting, ‘I’m tired of this, do what you like of me’ without thinking of the consequences.

Now he feels that, at 24, it is time for him to be more focused and to fulfil his many ambitions.

*I have a problem that I want to do everything in life. Try everything, do everything.*

He dreams of a career in music as a DJ or a sound engineer. For now, he plays music for his friends, and thinks that the UK is a place of great opportunities for those with ideas and zeal, ‘... if only I had the papers’.

feelings, adjustments,  
coping strategies  
and aspirations



## Introduction

What is it like to be undocumented? How do young undocumented migrants feel about it? What do they make of their experiences in the UK? These questions define the focus of this chapter. Building on previous chapters, which have explored the impact of being undocumented in different contexts, here we explore the feelings, aspirations, adjustments and coping strategies of young undocumented migrants, and look at how issues of gender, country of origin and life events intersect in shaping migrants' experiences and responses.

This chapter explores these topics in four interrelated sections which address, respectively: how being undocumented invades personal and emotional space; if, how and to what extent migrants adapt and adjust to their lack of status through time; how being undocumented affects their vision of the future; and, finally, what migrants have learned from their experiences in the UK and if, on the whole, the experience has been worth it.

## Undocumentedness – invading personal and emotional space

Participants in the study reserved some of their most detailed and distressing interview and testimony responses to describe their feelings about being undocumented. The three poignant statements below suggest something of the sense of unfulfilled lives, and possibly failure, which young undocumented migrants have experienced as their dreams and ambitions are left unrealised. They have had to confront situations which offer little, if any, hope of escape.

*I police myself a lot because of my conditions (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian).*

*Being undocumented in this country means that you don't exist (Rojhan, M, 27, Kurd from Turkey).*

*Once you are illegal... You can't do anything. It's all empty (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Interviewees give graphic accounts of their experiences. Of all the metaphors used to describe their situation, the Kafkaesque image of prison pervades:

*It's just living in a prison... It's like living in a prison... (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*It feels like a room with no air (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwean).*

But alongside the lack of freedom, other common responses are a lack of self-worth and feelings of betrayal and, as discussed in the last chapter, fear of being visible to the authorities, lack of trust in others and disempowerment.

Beyond the distress and frustration caused by these day-to-day constraints, being undocumented invades and permeates the personal and emotional space of young undocumented migrants in profound and often disturbing ways. As a result, many respondents powerfully internalise their feelings about living on the margins. This, 'internal fear' as Rita (29, F, Ukrainian) puts it, and the fact that, 'you never know about tomorrow' (Augusto, 26, M, Brazilian), further compounds their distress and alienation. The impacts on their psycho-social wellbeing are displayed in a variety of ways and settings. It is clear that being undocumented is always on their mind:

*The most difficult part of being undocumented is the lack of freedom, the hiding, the constantly looking over your shoulder, the lack of peace of mind to just be free... every day when I wake up and am going to work, I keep thinking is this the day that I am going to be asked. Everyday you have no peace of mind ever, your mind is always working, what if this or that and you just have to keep praying every time that you leave the house basically (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

The most obvious evidence of the way personal and emotional space is invaded comes from the fear of detection and the way this accentuates the precariousness of their situation. The four accounts below describe this acute sense of vulnerability:

*Life is very, I can say, well, how, it's constantly tense... every day [you are] afraid that someone knocks at the door. Just a police car passes by and you already think that it's after you (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian).*

*You know [you] can't safely build up something before someone knock on your door and takes it all away and says, 'Hey, you're working without documents' (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*When you see the police, you get stressed (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*... it affects everything, because nothing is certain. Maybe now I go home now, ten minutes later, the police will stop me and catch me. After an hour they will bring me to the airport, everything tied, your arms and legs... The most difficult thing is not sleeping in peace. Even while going in bed, I am not comfortable. I think like, 'what will I do if the bell rings?' I sometimes think of sleeping with my clothes. Take my stuff, put it next to my bed and sleep like that just in case... That disturbs me a lot (Jiyan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

In Jiyan's case, the fear of detection lies as much in the consequences of detection for her family, notably the future for her daughter, as the process of being apprehended itself. Some Chinese migrants articulate similar anxieties where apprehension and deportation would have incalculable consequences in terms of repaying smugglers. Whereas Huadi Zhang is all too familiar with the fears and guilt of his obligations to family back home, if the whole migratory enterprise were to come to a sudden end, Zhu Chen displays a more relaxed attitude.

*What if the police get you? That's why I am always worried about this and that. At the end of the day, we have no status. We have a guilty conscience. We have a guilty conscience. We owe lots of debts back home (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

*At the end of the day, I have a home [in China]. I'd go home if I can't stay on, my parents and relatives are there for me (Zhu Chen, 25, F, Chinese).*

While fear is a constant source of anxiety, only Berenice (23, F, Brazilian) out of those interviewed has actually witnessed a police raid which meant she had to leave a house in the middle of the night. To make matters worse, she had to leave money behind. Custódia worked in a hotel which was inspected the day of her interview for this research. Although this was only a health and safety inspection, her fear is palpable:

*My legs didn't want to move. You want to run but there's nowhere to go... My luck was that they [the inspectors] didn't ask to meet the staff (Custódia 25, F, Brazilian).*

Carol had a friend whose wife is pregnant. She says:

*[He] was drinking and driving. The police caught him... the Immigration was called... three days later, put him on a plane and sent him back [to Brazil] (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian).*

Given these fears of detection, many young undocumented migrants internalise their anxiety by taking great care in the way they develop their lives and livelihoods. Semen summarises this sense of controlled exposure.

*Illegal life is an alert. The more you want to be [here] the more careful you have to be (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

A common response to these fears is not to go out, or to minimise mobility, social encounters and to avoid public transport, as Chapters 3 and 5 showed. Not surprisingly, the fear of detection, as Jiyan's narrative above demonstrates, is more acute among those who had to escape persecution or don't wish to return to the situation in their country of origin. For Rojan, who has previously been arrested and imprisoned for four months for his political activities, the fear of the police in the UK resonates with the memories of police detention in Turkey:

*There is a burden on our shoulders all the time. We have fear inside us all the time. When we were in Turkey, we had the same fear when we see the police. We had the fear that he would beat us... Now... here... when we see the police we say, 'Ohhh my god, police! ... The police here does not hate me because of my language, colour. He only looks for me because I am undocumented. We get scared because of this (Rojhan, 27, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Rojan explains how his fears affect his everyday life despite being here for nine years:

*I wake up around 4am in the morning. Home Office people usually goes to houses around 4am, 5am, 6am. I wake up early in the morning and can't sleep (Rojhan 27, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

The fear of detection invades the work setting as well as life in public spaces, as Chapters 3 and 4 showed. The counterpart to fear of detection is fear of betrayal, and a wariness of being able to trust all but the closest friends.

Whether friends can be trusted or not can engender much more distressing consequences for some young undocumented migrants – self-deception, denial, interrogation of one's morality, and, ultimately, a loss of self-respect and self-worth (see Chapter 5). Trish expresses these feelings:

*It impacts on my self-esteem as a person and my ability to participate... this issue of not having papers makes me feel as though I am not human (Trish, 25, F, Zimbabwean).*

Vulnerability and self-denial can also take another perverse turn. A number of undocumented migrants reflect on the criminalisation of their identity and the implied self-alienation which their status suggests.

*The most difficult one is that [you] get criminalised after you try to make ends meet because you are forced to commit a crime. You are forced to get forged documents in order to get a job and pay for the rent... You know I have been undocumented because of certain policies... I think being undocumented is not through my fault, it is through the UK government policy (Bob, 31, M, Zimbabwean).*

Here, Bob recognises, albeit with regret, the inevitable double bind he has had to confront. He blames this on the government. Others also reject the way they are criminalised and some forcefully resist what they see as an imposed identity.

*Well, for me it's hard. It's hard because of... I don't mind to work hard but it would've been easy morally to not feel yourself like some kind of a criminal. Because you do feel yourself like a criminal... You feel constrained (Rita, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

*The fact that my lack of status makes me an 'illegal immigrant', it makes me sound like a criminal who is doing bad things. All I want is to be allowed to have a life. I haven't done anything wrong, I haven't hurt anyone, I don't steal, I don't break the law, yet I am labelled an 'illegal' immigrant (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

Beatriz voices her sense of injustice towards the criminalisation of migrants, and recalls how Brazil has welcomed migrants and refugees in the past:

*Brazil welcomed many Italians, people from Russia, with open doors during the war and everything. Now that the Brazilians are trying to adventure out, travel, immigrate, they find all doors closed, all the barriers, all the difficulties, all the prejudice (Beatriz, 24, F, Brazilian).*

Bob articulates his view that forging an identity is not a criminal activity, but the only way to survive social exclusion and the real criminals who exploit the undocumented:

*... you associate with the right people in terms of making an identity [getting documents]... and they wonder why these people are making money off these people. You know, that in itself causes crime isn't it, [you] having to get an identity... you try and use that to find a job, you try and use that to open bank accounts... you are left in a position where you either do that, or you starve or you commit crime because for example, if you are not a legal entity how do you put bread on the table? (Bob, 31, M, Zimbabwean).*

Augusto does not accept the criminalisation of his status:

*I am not doing anything illegal except for not being myself. I am not causing trouble to anybody (Augusto, 26, M, Brazilian).*



By contrast, other young undocumented migrants express their alienation in terms of the injustice of their position in society, and their lack of freedom compared to their peers. Some of the extracts have already intimated these feelings.

*You are limited in the sense that you cannot get the job that you want... you cannot even walk into a bank and open an account easily. There always has to be some other way of trying to do things and so it is frustrating because those are simple things that anyone should be able to do (Jamie, 30, M, Zimbabwean).*

*Technically [it] isn't [that] I am a criminal, I am illegal, and I am a criminal. It's not nice you know having that title, 'illegal', because it makes it sound as if you are some sort of bad person, when you are not. It's just the situation that you have found yourself in, unfortunately. It's beyond my control now (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

## Adjustment and adaptation: life courses and changing circumstances

In a variety of different ways young undocumented migrants adapt and adjust to their lack of legal status. Inevitably, there are contradictory accounts within each respondent's perceptions. Although, for the most part, the narratives do not give the impression of failure, they show how being undocumented presents enormous personal and material challenges. Success, failure, disappointment, aspiration, adaptation, uncertainty and the 'here and there' existence are all interwoven in complex ways. Significantly, none of the young undocumented migrants are completely unfulfilled by their experiences. Despite the problems of their transient state, they still have aspirations and ambitions which transcend the pressures of everyday life and their uncertain status. Others found that life in the UK has simply grown on them and they enjoy living here with no pretensions about the future.

### Coping and adjusting

Halyna has lived in the UK for eight years now. She speaks about her contradictory circumstances, and her capacity to adapt to the constraints of her situation:

*Then I said, 'No I want to be there [London] a bit more, want to be there, I like it so'... Simply... You so get used to this that sometimes it happens that I even forget that I'm undocumented. I now simply came to terms with that I simply can't go and that's all. I can't travel, I can't do this, I can't do other certain things. By now, I got so used to it. You fight, develop this immunity that we now, how they say, whatever stick was thrown in [our] wheels [barrier], we always find a way out and pull it out (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

Celso and Eduardo have been in the UK for three and four-and-a-half years respectively. Both speak of the stressful process of adjustment and of drawing on their own resilience and relying on the experience of others from their own communities.

*[At the beginning] I was close to suffering from depression. I think it didn't happen because I was working. I was very strong. I asked God to give me strength to overcome this difficult moment. I think it was the six-month period. I think that in any country, any place, any person had this period of six months [when it's difficult to adapt] (Celso, 28, M, Brazilian).*

*At the time when I was feeling like that, there was a friend of mine who had the same job and made the pizza at the time. He told me to be patient because he had gone through all of that and that it was part of my experience but that I'd be okay (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian).*

Although it might be a generalisation, our narratives show that the Brazilian migrants seem to have the firmest sense of optimism. However, in some cases, ambitious plans have had to be sacrificed, mainly because of financial pressures. Brígido, who has been in the UK a little over three years, and Custódia who has only been here four months, sum up this attitude:

Although generalising from the narratives, it is amongst the Brazilian migrants that the firmest sense of optimism can be detected – although even here, plans often have had to be sacrificed because of financial pressures. Brígido, who has been in the UK a little over three years, and Custódia, who has only been here four months, sum up this attitude:

*My plan was to come... see what was possible (Brígido, 30, M, Brazilian).*

*When you think, wow, you think things can get better, man, each day. I think that's what happened to me. Today it can get better. Tomorrow it can get better (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

One coping strategy is to shrug off any resistance to the challenge presented by their undocumented status.

*I feel myself very relaxed. Despite that I'm illegally, have no rights here, I believe that every person has their rights, legally or illegally. It doesn't depend on status. Every person has some rights. And voice and right and... It's always been like that and it'll always be (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

The establishment of community support structures, notably the embedding of community-based organisations and faith groups, clearly plays its part:

*It happened 4 years ago, you know. Now things are very different. I, I even think that nowadays it's possible to find people who are more willing to help, maybe, with the bunch of things we see in the life of the migrants (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

Faith provides support for some of the migrants, as the quotes by Daniel, who has been in the UK for eight months, and Terry, who has been in the UK for over three and a half years, show. Family responsibilities may dominate, almost to the point of despair in the case of Avashin, but also provide support.

*Faith is the basis; faith is the basis of everything. For me, God is essential in anyone's life. God and health (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).*

*Honestly I was just at home and mostly depressed. It was a really difficult time and... err... the truth about it that I had a survival guide. I'm a Christian and I really had to work with the Bible and praying, that really helps a lot (Terry, M, 21, Zimbabwean).*

*I mean my only will to live is my child. Because of her, I find the strength to stand up this life (Avashin, F, 29, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I am maintaining regular links with my immediate family at home, I think that is what keeps me sane (Trish, F, 25, Zimbabwean).*

Many young undocumented migrants reveal how the process of adjustment and adaptation poses complex challenges to their identity and how their everyday life is constrained by their lack of status.

*I simply want to live like other people (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

*All I want is something real, something with my own name on it, finger print everything and that way I will feel more comfortable and I will even work more harder (Kirsty, 22, F, Zimbabwean).*

*You get damaged as long as you are undocumented. It has huge impact on your life (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*We don't have [documents] but we try to behave in the best way as possible (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

The uncertain status of the young undocumented migrants impacts on their psychological wellbeing and personal behaviour, with increasingly dysfunctional coping strategies.

*I watch TV to discharge as well. I know that I am talking to myself and I am talking to the TV. I know one thing in psychiatry well, which is person get discharge if they talk. I talk to the TV if there is nobody in room. I ask questions and give answers as if a mutual conversation. I know this is the first step to insanity. I am aware of that. We try to diverse our energy in this way in order to avoid any sudden explosion... My drinking culture was not so frequent but now I drink arose. By drinking I am benumbing myself. In order to sleep I drink alcohol or drink milk and yogurt drink (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

In general, the fear of return affects the lives of Zimbabwean, Chinese, Kurdish migrants, underpinning narratives which are less optimistic and suggesting a greater sense of anxiety about their situation.

It seems that the process of establishing oneself is becoming more difficult. The sense of freedom of earlier years is now curtailed by the increasing investigation and detection of undocumented immigrants. Andrea, who has been in the UK for a year and a half, and Diana, who has been here for just seven months, show their perceptions of a rapidly changing environment of surveillance.

*It was much easier in the past. We could go out. There was more freedom. It wasn't as difficult as it is today. We used to go out. There wasn't this thing of going out and the police stopping you, this and that... but now it is very difficult. In the past, it was much better (Andrea, 20, F, Brazilian).*

*My plans haven't changed. The situations have changed and have become more difficult, but [my plans] haven't changed (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

### Adaptation – strategies and challenges

Young undocumented migrants adopt a variety of mechanisms and strategies to support the longer term adaptation to their lack of status, while pursuing their life courses. Some of the participants cope in a pragmatic way – such as Fernando – while others need to have clear goals, even when recognising that their status makes this process a form of self-deception – such as Diana who has been in the UK for seven months.

*Learn to change things [the difficulties] into fun, adventure, right. If you take it too seriously, it's not worth it, but you have to take things with a pinch of salt. Be worth it, it's not, but I stay here, right, until things get better or worse. Now, my hope is that things don't get worse. I actually think that they are going to get worse or get better. They are not going to stay the way they are (Fernando, 27, M, Brazilian).*

*I need to have an objective. I need to have an aim, something to keep me here, even if it's an illusion you know, something that I have in mind to make [my experience] less painful, so, like, I go to the library, spend a long time there, don't feel like leaving (Diana, 28, F, Brazilian).*

Overall, four themes dominate the way young undocumented migrants reflect on their circumstances and underpin their longer term strategies to adapt and develop their aspirations: getting documented; wanting to stay; adapting to changing social situations and personal aspirations, including the sense of life moving on; and feeling trapped.

The desire to regularise status is the most frequently stated objective of young undocumented migrants. Most obviously, this is to remove the insecurity in their lives and to unblock the barriers to their future development. Pawlo, who has been here one year, offers a candid assessment of his situation without papers but perhaps he, and many other undocumented migrants, will find it hard to leave.

*Plans changed in that respect that I would like to live here but as documented and achieve what I want. But it [the lack of status] ruins all this, gets on the way. If it's not going to happen, I wouldn't like to live here for long, undocumented (Pawlo, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

Others live in stasis, like Dilan, hoping that things might change.

*My family... told me that I am very emotional person and I would find it hard to cope with the life there. Then I have met few people here who told me that I should wait bit longer and there might be amnesty. If I go back I have no chance of coming back as well. Then I started thinking about all these issues... then decided to stay (Dilan, 23, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

The motivations to get documented are varied. Some want to settle, as we shall see below. But others want to regularise their status to be able to save more in order to invest back home – a strong theme among Brazilian migrants in particular, exemplified by Carol who has been here a little over a year:

*The aim is to stay three years to open a business [back home]... [but] everything has changed, I only think about these documents (Carol, 24, F, Brazilian).*

For others, there is a strong feeling that their life chances and aspirations are blocked without documents.

*I mean they live this life without documents, yes, they only have that minimum. Some are happy with that... They measure their life level by how much their wages are. I... I'm not satisfied by that. I want to develop as an individual... But it's only possible if you have documents. Perhaps I think, yes, I ask how it's possible to legalise in this country so that you can live here and develop (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian).*

*We can't move forward. We want to resolve immigration status and go ahead with plans that we have (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

*I would do a lot of things if I had documents. Maybe I had family and child or finished study. If you documented I would plan other things and you would plan other when you are undocumented. If I had documents I would plan to study but now I do not have such thing in mind but I think about how can I get permission to stay here, should I do arranged marriage or open a new case (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Botan's reflections on what he would do if he had documentation leads to a second theme which underscores the adaptation process for some, but by no means all, of the respondents. In short, becoming documented underpins the desire to settle in the UK. The narratives suggest that this was not the motivation for coming, as the evidence in Chapter 2 made clear. Rather, the impression is that living in the UK has changed the aspirations of the migrants as they adapt and find new opportunities and goals. At the same time, changing personal and domestic circumstances, discussed below, often provide a strong additional motivation. This is process of transition. Beatriz's account illustrates how, with the course of time and changing life events, her stay has now extended to over four years. Celso and Semen intimate something of the inevitability, rather than the proactive choice, of wanting to stay in the UK, but also the transience of their lives here.

*But I stayed here. I didn't plan to stay here for long. I started to postpone my return. I hated it here, I hated it... I forced myself... to want to be here because of him (ex-boyfriend)... then after the second year... I started to like it here. I started to search for information... about citizenship... I always believed that sooner or later I'd regularise my situation, via legal means... and I stayed, stayed, time went by and I'm here until today (Beatriz 24, F, Brazilian).*

*Nowadays I like it here. Nowadays I tell everybody that I don't want to leave, I really don't. And the money isn't the most important thing (Celso, 28, M, Brazilian).*

*At the beginning I came to earn but with the time I... of course I wanted to go back home but I would postpone [departure] again and again... then, I didn't want... let's do another year... but now I simply want to live here like other people (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

Changing social and domestic circumstances play a significant role in motives and aspirations for adapting. These conditions constitute an important decision point in the lives of young undocumented migrants. It is another dimension of the period and process of transition – of leaving one's home and identity, but also building a new home. Often it is children – left behind or newly born in the UK – which produce critical points of transition. Augusto from Brazil has been in the UK for three years with his wife. As noted earlier, they left a daughter behind, but they now have a newborn son in the UK. Originally, he was intent on staying five years and then going back to university in Brazil.

*I can cope but my daughter is growing up, she is demanding us. Sometimes money isn't everything (Augusto, 26, M, Brazilian).*

Conversely, some migrants feel that life is catching up and realise that marrying and settling down without documents is all but impossible. This period of transition, and the impression that life as an undocumented young migrant is a rite of passage nearing completion, is clearly summarised by Semen:

*Now it is really the time to decide [what to do]. Time flies fast. Now I am 28. It is about the time to decide where to be and how, and [to think about] family. Back then, it was only 'full [steam] ahead'. Only forward, overstaying... Well, I don't regret that I stayed. Because I spent my best years in the best capital in Europe. I didn't have needs, feelings of isolation. I simply lived a normal life throughout my young years, a good life (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

Some migrants reflect on life back home, and find that the prospect of return is no longer attractive in comparison with life changes in the UK. Comparing family life here with family life with his peers in Brazil, Eduardo expresses these dilemmas:

*Of course... if I go back, it's not going to be the same because their [friends] lives are different, you know... So, I know it's not going to be the same. One of the things that keep me here is this... I've already got roots here... If I go back, I'm going to be by myself because they already have their lives, their families, so, what am I going to do in Brazil? My son is here. There is no reason for me to go back (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian).*

Another way in which conditions back home prompt a period of transition comes when migrants reflect on wider economic and political circumstances.

*Well, I came here, [I] thought year or two. To stay until all that [problems in Ukraine] get closed. Earn a bit for the beginning, you know. Then, [it] sucked you in. I simply was... scared to go [to Ukraine]. I simply didn't feel like [going back]. Constantly hearing about how the life is there. Simply, you know, it gets frightening. I've not been there for so many years (Levko, 24, M, Ukrainian).*

Educational aspirations constitute another element of this transition stage. Here, the lack of documentation becomes most pressing when young undocumented migrants seek to access higher education.

*No my plans haven't changed, I just keep hoping for the best otherwise my plans haven't changed... Because even for this year I had put in my application for university and obviously clearing has come and gone and rejected me (Suku, 30, F, Zimbabwean).*

A fourth manifestation of how life events are changed by the experience of coping and adaptation is articulated by some respondents who feel their aspirations are unattainable, or that they feel trapped. Either they are locked into a treadmill of earning money or their lives are blocked through lack of documentation as well as fear of return. Botan and Natalia summarise the grip exerted by the need to earn money to survive, while Antônio and Welat exemplify the way in which personal interrogation can come to dominate the lives of the migrants. To a large extent, they are all victims of circumstances out of their control.

*I had a different thing in my mind. I did not want to start working and making money immediately. It was difficult to get the money I borrowed... and send it [home]. My real intension was to study. That did not happen (Botan, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I planned that I'll really earn something quickly and I'll go back home. But because that money are not so easy to get here, all those dreams now are gone. (Natalia, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

*How is it possible to make any plans? What can you do? You don't know what tomorrow brings (Antônio, 23, M, Brazilian).*

Welat, whose application for refugee status has been refused, expresses the sense of desolation at unfulfilled aspirations and a wasted life.

*This has stolen my two years. I was in the college two years ago at this time. I mean it was supposed to finish this year. My two years have gone, and the other two years will also be wasted. In total this makes four years. I lost four years (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Reflections on a 'failed project' bring some young undocumented migrants full circle:

*I was planning to live here freely. I could do something and have further education. I would get advanced in professions. I would live in better environment in better conditions. But after coming here and facing these consequences, I am really looking for my days in Turkey. We do not even dream here (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

## Making (and not making) plans for the future

Although none of the participants in this study had previously been deported from the UK, all of them mentioned some kind of fear of deportation as a central feature of their everyday lives. Many knew of friends, acquaintances or family members who had been deported or were awaiting deportation. It is the possibility of being arrested and deported at any time that shapes their daily routine and their aspirations for the future. Taffi, despite her nine years in the UK, explains how she still feels vulnerable and why:

*I feel vulnerable, because... err... you just don't know what will happen tomorrow, or you just don't know how it's gonna pan out in the end. You don't know if you are going to end up getting your papers or if it's never going to happen (Taffi, 27, F, Zimbabwean).*

One of the several dimensions in which being undocumented is revealed in the everyday lives of migrants is through the uncertainties arising from the possibility of deportation and detention. However, fear of deportation does not affect everyone in the same way, due to their differing reasons for migration (See earlier in this chapter and Chapter 2),

In this section, we explore dreams for the future and how they are affected by a lack of documents. A reluctance to make long and medium-term plans is evident in the narratives of our research participants, who directly relate the impossibility of talking about the future to the condition of being undocumented:

*I have no status, how can I talk about the future? (Fei Lin, 20, M, Chinese).*

*My plans can't change anything (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

*I really don't have hopes while being illegal (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

*When you don't have papers like me, it sort of makes all those little dreams that [you] had before become blurred. [You] sort of lose hope and you say to yourself, 'Ok, now this hasn't gone the way it was supposed to go, how long am I going to be sitting at home?' As optimistic as you may try to be, the fact is that you'll be going nowhere and it's a very painful existence (Terry, 21, M, Zimbabwean).*

Making plans for the future is a crucial part of being young. 'The right to dream', as one of our interviewees put it, or the possibility of imagining and planning the future seem to be denied to young undocumented migrants. Rather than concrete plans, we focused on migrants' feelings about the future and on the impact of being undocumented on their hopes and ambitions. We also looked at migrants' attempts to reclaim at least part of that unmet promise, and explored everyday epiphanies of the 'enforced orientation to the present' (De Genova 2002):

*Right now my aim is just to succeed and do things in the shortest possible time [... ] which means taking in more work and trying to do a lot more than any other normal person would do (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwe).*

*I try to make the most of each day, like, what I can because there are many things that are not [available] because of this situation (Berenice, 23, F, Brazilian).*

Thinking about the future does not make much sense to most of our interviewees. Making concrete long or even medium-term plans is difficult, if not impossible, given their circumstances. Life is precarious and full of uncertainty, so any plans can be swept away. Tracy and Serhado's accounts offer vivid illustrations of the feeling of uncertainty that is entrenched in the lives of undocumented migrants, while Halyna talks about her optimism after living in the UK for over eight years.

*Every day is a day of uncertainty because you could just be walking down the street and you could be taken from the street or taken from work by the immigration. [You] are always looking over your shoulder, so my hope for the future is that I don't have to keep on living this lie I'm living (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

*I cannot do anything because I do not know what will happen. For example, I talk to you now, after this I will go to work and I do not know what will happen to me on the way. Maybe they will arrest me on the bus and send [me] back. I cannot make decisions about the future but I have dreams (Serhado, 28, M, Kurd from Turkey).*



*Just as I dreamed to get here, I dream to realise myself [here]. I still have this optimism that'll achieve something, that I'll have an opportunity to legalise [myself] here and get somewhere here, to fulfil my dream (Halyna, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

But, for some, dreaming is seen as a counterproductive activity as it creates and nurtures aspirations that cannot be fulfilled.

*Every day you see your life in danger. Actually, it's not your life. Every day you see your dreams in danger, everything you dreamed of (Custódia, 25, F, Brazilian).*

*I am not in the situation to dream, because there is nothing to dream about. Because there is nothing you can do much... Having future plans like marrying, children depend on the money to afford these. You need to be legal in order to do this. If I am not legal, how can I have hopes? ... I don't even have the right to dream now (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

## Assessing the experience

In this section, we explore how migrants assess and evaluate their experience in the UK. Their responses are discussed in two main subsections, in which we look respectively into what they think they have learned from the experience and if, all considered, it was worthwhile.

### Lessons learned

After eight years in the UK, Semen has some very practical lessons to offer to those who want to live longer in this country:

*If you want to live longer in this country, don't cruise streets while drunk. Avoid... well, walking at night when you are drunk or look for trouble. Don't shoplift in supermarkets and don't avoid transport fairs. This is I am saying like safety measures. Don't drive under the influence (Semen, 28, M, Ukrainian).*

Surviving as an undocumented migrant in the UK is not easy. Being able to stand on one's feet is essential, as a number of respondents pointed out. For Cihan, the biggest lesson he has learned is expressed in his sense of personal independence:

*I can stand on my feet, achieving something. [...] It taught me not to give the strings to anyone, you need to hold on to them, focus on your work (Cihan, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Achieving independence and learning to rely on no one but yourself are themes that resonate, especially among female respondents.

*You are your own boss here. That no one have the right to 'point' you and blame that you shouldn't have done this or that. But [here] it's not like at home, you are always told. Here you chose yourself, you making your choice (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian).*

*Here's the time the child cries and the mother doesn't see it (laughs) Andrea, 20, F, Brazilian).*

Independence for some migrants is not a choice, but a necessity, as their experience as undocumented migrants has taught them not to trust other people:

*I've learned not to be too trusting, to make decisions for myself. Not to sort of wait on others to do certain things and not to be bullied into doing certain things, because I think I was a bit gullible (Suku, 30, F, Zimbabwean).*

*I learned to walk with my own legs, don't depend on anybody. Everything here, it's a physical world, where people only want to take advantage of you, you have to be careful with people. Nobody helps nobody, I learned this. (Fernando, 27, M, Brazilian).*

Our interviewees felt that they had learned many lessons, making them more mature, wiser, humbler and stronger. Experiencing hardship, exclusion and racism can be a shock, but can also make one 'ready for any type of problem in life' (Brigido, 30, M, Brazilian), giving you 'skills for surviving in difficult circumstances' (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese). Serhado (28, M, Kurd from Turkey) offers a powerful image, stating that in the UK, 'you get like steel'. Daniel and Huadi Zhang feel they have learned a tough lesson – that as undocumented migrants, they have no rights and the only way to survive is to learn to keep your head down and be 'humble':

*Here you learn to be humble, something that in Brazil you are not obliged to do and don't do. Here you hear things and look down (Daniel, 28, M, Brazilian).*

*When they're shouting you have to put up with it. You'd tell yourself to be careful next time. Try to work harder and talk less. Try to lower your head and focus on work. Try to work non-stop, and then they will not keep on shouting (Huadi Zhang, 29, M, Chinese).*

For some interviewees, life in the UK means experiencing poverty and getting to know 'the other side':

*It was good for me to get to know the other side – having to do cleaning, having to clean everything, so I learned to value these things. If I had to go back to Brazil and I had no opportunities or possibilities, I would do it. But being there, I'd complain about the government, this and that, all those things and would not do it. Now, I would (Beatriz, 24, F, Brazilian).*

To process of learning to value things has, in some accounts, an anti-consumerist edge – Diana (28, F, Brazilian) states that she has '... learned not to be materialistic about things'. However, money is like an obsession for some undocumented migrants who cannot have a life in the UK because of their status:

*Here people see only the money. If they were here legally, they would know that there is a life, not just money... But they know only money and they would drive their own brother or a sister to hysteria. They could report you for money. In London, money is the most important for us (Tatiana, 22, F, Ukrainian).*

Chinese interviewees offer more practical and disenchanting responses to questions about lessons learned. Wendy Wang and Fu Chenming, for example, have learned:

*Nothing in particular. I've just learned how to be a waitress. I've not learned much otherwise (Wendy Wang, 24, F, Chinese).*

*All you have learned may be how to 'daza'... the miscellaneous duties like cleaning and so on... There are not many talking to you there... Each day you just see the same few faces (Fu Chenming, 22, M, Chinese).*

Uliana's advice offers an optimistic end to this section and reminds us how individual autonomy plays a crucial role in shaping migrant experiences, despite the structural constraints placed on them by their lack of documentation.

*I always tell everyone that you simply shouldn't be afraid. You always have to ask, listen, knock on the door, and they will open. That's what I think. Otherwise, if you are afraid all your life because you don't have anything, you won't get anywhere at all (Uliana, 29, F, Ukrainian).*

### Was it worthwhile?

The life stories collected in this research offer a complex and varied picture of the everyday lives of young undocumented migrants in the UK – experiences of hardship, racism and exploitation, as well as psychological pressure and insecurity, are shared to a different extent by all participants. It seems, therefore, reasonable to ask if it has all been worth it and if, with the knowledge gathered in the UK, they would embark on such a daunting and challenging experience again. Most interviewees answer this question affirmatively and offered reasons. In this section we explore their responses and reasons.

Among Brazilians, the majority respond affirmatively. Eduardo feels he belongs here, and for him the question has a straightforward answer: 'of course it is worth it' (Eduardo, 23, M, Brazilian). Bernardo and David echo Eduardo. Bernardo explains that 'illegality' offered him the only way for him to stay here and he has no regrets:

*I don't regret having stayed here all this time at all, even as an illegal because it was the only way, the only option I had, unless I had returned to Brazil without having achieved anything (Bernardo, 26, M, Brazilian).*

David feels he is achieving his migration objective and therefore the experience is worth it:

*My reason is mainly financial. I'm not here for any other reasons. Surely, it's worth it. It's so much so that if there's somebody from Brazil asking me about coming: 'If I come as a tourist, (should) I stay illegally?' I will say, 'You should. Come and stay illegally' (David, 29, M, Brazilian).*

Overall, Kurdish migrants do not regret the decision to migrate to the UK, despite the hardship, because of the situation they have left behind and the freedom they have gained.

*Not really. But our country is not something worth to live in as well. We had no protection for our life. At least I got my right to life here (Firat, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

*I might have struggled for five years but even thinking about go back home scares me (Avashin, 29, F, Kurd from Turkey).*

Kawa's response is particularly interesting, because it shows how an undocumented migrant goes through different stages. Kawa has been in Britain for seven years now, and following an initial period of disorientation, he has finally learned how to cope with his trials and tribulations.

*Life is very difficult, I mean I came here, there was no one, I didn't know the language, but I say now I am happy. I don't have regrets, but it has been a long time. At the beginning when I came here it was very difficult, at that time I regretted. I had stress, psychological problems, I experienced all of them. They caught me, Home Office made life not so easy for me but that is gone now, that is gone (Kawa, 25, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Being able to survive and cope becomes, for some migrants, a source of pride. It reinforces, somehow, a sense of the 'epic'. A number of interviewees mention their intention to write an autobiography of their experience:

*I have so many things written down, so many notes, that I might write a book. There won't be so many people who will conquer as much as I have. I've been here for five years, three more, it'll be eight years, so I might write a book after eight years (David, 29, M, Brazilian).*

*Sometimes I write these things down. I have electronic book on the net. I try to be discharge with these kinds of things. I am trying to find something about these things and write them down and saved them on my electronic book (Amed, 29, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

A sense of an 'epic' journey also emerges in Necirwan's account, as he explains why his experience was successful:

*I think I have been successful. I have resisted. Maybe it's illegal but I worked and stayed in this country. These might be crime. I managed to stand on my own feet. I have limited my life, but I managed to resist in this country and I continue to do so. Regardless social and financial limitation of the situation I continue to live this life. I hope that in one day this will be sorted (Necirwan, 30, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

On the contrary, for Welat the balance between what he has gained and what he has lost tips towards the side of loss:

*Who can bring those years back? If this state gave you residence or citizenship, would this bring back those four years? I mean if I were to go to Turkish state and spend my one year in the army, then I could have saved my three years (Welat, 23, M, Kurd from Turkey).*

Ukrainian migrants, overall, regard their experience in positive terms – among some of them, there is a clear sense of achievement and of migration as an important stage of transition in their life:

*It was a major plus, a major plus. Because you started by yourself and you achieve and achieve. Even to step over that language barrier. You step over, you saw a bit of that. Your worldview is completely different now. It's worth it (Natalia, 26, F, Ukrainian).*

*Those who came here and can survive in these conditions will actually become a proper person in the future (Dmytro, 22, M, Ukrainian).*

*It's a new level in my life. I think that I'm making a step. This life and this tempo, it's harder. But I have to make these steps higher if I want to achieve something in my life. And, when it's harder, right, I feel that I progress. [...] You should hold on to your dream regardless different circumstances, when it's hard or when it's easy. You have to go towards your aim. You have to build it from little cells, from little bricks. And something will grow. You should never give up. You have to follow your dream. (Sergiy, 27, M, Ukrainian).*

Like Kawa earlier, Fedia shows how, after the initial uncertainty, once migrants begin to settle and to build social networks, their assessment of the experience can change:

*Now it's worth it. Currently. Because now you earn more money and now you have family and a child. It was worth it. Before, [I] came here, little money, earned a little, just for food and the rent, and like that. But now. It's all worth it. Definitely. I think that every person that is doing something, striving, have some plans, is worth it (Fedia, 29, M, Ukrainian).*

Levko shares a similar level of motivation to that of other Ukrainians in the study. However, having been in the UK for eight years now, he has come to the conclusion that being undocumented means that he can't achieve as much as he would like to, and feels like time is passing him by:

*I really want to achieve in my life, to become something. The biggest thought that eats away at you is that you simply losing your time. That simply years will pass and that's it (Levko, 23, M, Ukrainian).*

Levko's sense of wasting time is also shared by Tracy from Zimbabwe, whose poignant description casts some light on what it actually means to live as an undocumented migrant:

*Our whole lives are consumed by visas and getting a stay and getting documented. And it's stuff that when we were back home we never discussed or even thought about, so it just makes you more appreciative of the fact that maybe there's a lot of other people who have been going through the same things for years, and I was just oblivious to their suffering because it didn't affect me in any way (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).*

Among Zimbabwean migrants, positive and negative views are more balanced. The following quotes illustrate these two opposing positions. Theo, who has been in the UK since he was 13, feels the experience was not worth it:

*It's just a drag, it's long, it's too much of fuss to be a British Citizen and they don't even treat!... err... even if you do get it, they won't even treat you the same because you're still black (Theo, 19, M, Zimbabwean).*

Kirsty has been in the UK since she was a teenager and has grown up here:

*I came when I was 15 and this is like a home for me already. I don't have anybody back home that I can call my relative or that I can call a family. [...] I've been in Britain for quite a long time and I just really wish I could be here forever because I've grown up here (Kirsty, 22, F, Zimbabwean).*

The measure of the success for most Chinese interviewees is their ability to earn money:

*It's very tiring, but I think it's worthwhile. At least I earn money by offering my labour. I didn't earn the money doing nothing. I earn money with both of my hands, I earn money with my labour. So every time I get my wage, it's also my happiest moment (Yao Xiaomin, 25, F, Chinese).*

*Yes, I have actually thought of this question. After coming here I thought: had I been able to earn 5,000Yuan (£350) a month, I'd rather stay in China, instead of coming here (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese).*

The brief dialogue that follows reveals mixed motivations and, together with the previous quote, offers some insight into the kind of dilemmas being undocumented carries.

*Interviewer: Do you regret coming here? Mei Chen: I don't actually regret it. No. I: So over the two years in the UK, you don't feel regret, and on the whole you still feel that it's worthwhile coming here? MC: But I do think I have wasted a lot. I: You mean you've wasted time? MC: Firstly, I have not done lots of work yet. I have spent most of my time on the internet. Secondly, I have not done a lot of study either. Compared to many of my friends in China, I feel that I am lagging behind. [...] No feeling of achievement. I still feel that I haven't made any progress. I think I even have slipped back. I: You also said that although it had been hard on you, you still felt it was worth coming to the UK? MC: Yes. I have travelled half the globe (Mei Chen, 24, F, Chinese).*

Finally, the words from Guo Ming below, who came to the UK when he was already in his late twenties, reveal a sense of futility:

*I don't think it's worthwhile. But I'm powerless to do anything about it (Guo Ming, 30, M, Chinese).*

## Conclusion

Living a life where planning for the future is almost impossible leaves young undocumented migrants anchored in the present and coping with a condition of extreme precariousness, as well as dealing with the stigma of 'illegality'. Learning to be invisible to the 'gaze' of the state and society are all part of the experience and everyday lives of undocumented migrants in the UK.

Earlier chapters have shown how young undocumented migrants try to sustain and develop 'normal' lives and livelihoods, situated in a context which is constrained by their lack of documentation. Going beyond these accounts, this chapter has sought to define and illustrate the 'condition' of being undocumented, from their own words and experiences. What becomes evident is their double life, led constantly on the margins.

Being undocumented and marginalised shapes migrants' identity. For some, it comes close to crushing their spirit, and yet there is resilience as well. Suku, for example, had been in and out of detention for almost a year, but has now been in the UK for more than eight years.

The sense of a loss of hope and of a life frozen in time is also captured in Colin's account of his life being, '... like you are in a limbo' (Colin, 23, M, Zimbabwean), and by Tracy who says, 'Unless my papers get sorted... I am just stuck' (Tracy, 29, F, Zimbabwean).

Living as an undocumented migrant can lead to denial, to oneself as well as to others, as we have seen. But it is impossible to escape the stigma of being undocumented and the dehumanising experience that accompanies this denial.

In this chapter, we have explored migrants' dreams for the future and how they are affected by their lack of documents. The reluctance to make long and medium-term plans is evident in the narratives of our research participants, who directly relate the impossibility of talking about the future to being undocumented. Finally, we have discussed how migrants evaluate their experiences in the UK and the lessons they have learned. The question we ask is a straightforward one: all considered, was it worth it? Positive responses outnumber negative ones, although the reasons vary among the different national and ethnic groups.

conclusions





## Introduction

What does it mean to be young and undocumented in the UK at the start of the 21st century? This report offers an answer, or several answers, to this question. Built around the voices of 75 migrants from five different countries (Brazil, China, Kurds from Turkey, Ukraine and Zimbabwe), with different experiences and expectations, the report moves between the uniqueness of the individual experience and the search for patterns and commonalities across migrants' accounts of their everyday lives and experiences. One commonality that emerges from the data relates strongly to country of origin. Where people come from not only affects their motivations for migration, but also in turn impacts their aspirations and fears, including those surrounding work and deportation. English language skills, ethnicity, age and life events, including whether or not they have children, permeate their experiences. Gender has particular relevance in terms of the gendered nature of work and childcare responsibilities, but also for some groups – most notably among Kurdish young people – in terms of opportunities.

## Summary of the main findings

Motives for migration for many young people, especially those from Ukraine and China and, to a lesser extent, Brazil, are economic, although the debts incurred by Chinese young people in order to migrate create pressure that is not evident among Brazilians and Ukrainians. Kurds from Turkey and Zimbabweans are, for the most part, not in a position to return home and their fear and anxiety surrounding detection and deportation is a strong feature of their narratives and has a significant impact on their decision making.

For undocumented migrants, work is key to survival. It is essential to repay the debts incurred in order to migrate and, for some, it enables them to fulfil their obligations to family members who rely on remittances in their country of origin. Young undocumented migrants work, with the exception of a few, in unregulated sectors of the economy. Low pay, long and unsocial hours, exploitation and vulnerability characterise their employment. Lack of English language fluency and, among some, lack of basic English impacts on the kind of work open to them. Reliance on social networks to find work also limits opportunities and, among some groups, there is a pattern of working in co-ethnically owned businesses. For those not working, social networks provide crucial subsistence support and informal reciprocal arrangements. The importance of informal social networks, mostly from the same country of origin, ethnic or linguistic group was a dominant feature in the lives of young people, though a minority preferred to be isolated due to fears of spies and infiltrators. The report shows how migrants' lives are suspended in limbo, deprived of the right to think about the future, in a permanent condition of uncertainty, which impacts on their perception of the self and identity. However, migration is also a formative experience – a rite of passage to adulthood, a transition to a new stage of life, and a character-forging experience.

In the narratives which compose this report, we see migrants struggle to make sense of the ambiguities and contradictions of living in the UK – a country with much wealth and opportunity, but also racism and social exclusion. We see them attempting to regain control over their futures and fulfil ambitions and dreams, despite the constraints and limitations of their lack of status. The intersection between their lack of status and their gender, country of origin, life events, migratory projects and current circumstances provides a grid for exploring and analysing migrant narratives.

The voices presented in this report compose a story of everyday resistance, adjustment, adaptation and resilience in today's UK. They offer a portrait of a group of young people navigating through the economic downturn, widespread anti-migrant rhetoric, and the government's 'tough touch' approach.

Their narratives show how young undocumented migrants skilfully develop a range of coping strategies to deal with these complex uncertainties and their changing aspirations. From subterfuge and concealment (often at great cost to their sense of self-worth and emotional and moral wellbeing) to bold and often risky lifestyles, to giving up jobs without pay when employers start asking for documents, all young undocumented migrants find ways of coping with their lives in the UK.

'Undocumentedness' is an all-encompassing phenomena, touching many areas of the lives of migrants – social, economic, personal and religious – as the report illustrates in detail.

In Chapter 2, we show how people's motivations for migration are a crucial variable for understanding migrants' experiences in the UK, and provide a means of empathising with their situation, and their assessment of their experiences and aspirations for the future. Youth, we argue, is one the factors behind the decision to migrate. Youth also contributes to, and shapes, the circumstances of migration and the characteristics of migration projects.

The migrants' arrival and settlement in the UK is discussed in Chapter 3, where we emphasise the role of social networks from the same country-of-origin group in the early stage of settlement. The analysis of the interplay between day-to-day realities and migrants' reflections on their experiences enable us to explore the impact of length of stay on migrants' understanding of their migratory experiences. Once again, youth emerges as an important factor in the resilience and capacity to adapt that underpins many of the narratives; it also provides them with motivation and varying degrees of autonomy.

Employment and livelihood strategies are the main focuses of Chapter 4. There are three emerging themes: a lack of choice and uncertainty ran through all the interviews and testimonies; social networks as a vital resource for undocumented migrants, both in terms of job-search strategies and support during periods of unemployment; and economic obligations deriving from migration and their varied impacts on the everyday lives of migrants. Issues of exploitation and racism also surfaced in several migrants' accounts.

Chapter 5 explored the social lives and social networks of young undocumented migrants in the UK. The issue of trust comes up in most accounts, both in relation to the fear of betrayal which inevitably make people diffident and cautious in their social interactions; and to the sense of guilt that affects their interactions with other people, to whom they cannot open up to completely. Trust also shapes migrants' relations to space and mobility. From the narratives, a map of safe, accessible and forbidden places – a geography of undocumentedness – emerged, whose shape varies in relation to different individual experiences and dwellings. We also explore the role of different community and faith groups in the lives of young undocumented migrants showing how the size and settlement patterns among the five groups affected the extent to which community and faith-based groups existed.

Finally, Chapter 6 offers an exploration of the impact of being undocumented on migrants' sense of self and identity, seeking to define and illustrate the 'condition' of being undocumented from the words and experiences of young undocumented migrants themselves. Living a life fixed in the present, coping with a condition of extreme precariousness and the fear attached to it, as well as dealing with the stigma of 'illegality' and learning to be invisible to the 'gaze' of the state and society are all part of the experience and everyday lives of undocumented migrants in the UK. The impact of their undocumented status on changing life events, which has underpinned the narratives in earlier chapters, is highlighted in this chapter in terms of their adaptation and adjustment strategies.

We explore migrants' dreams for the future, how they are affected by the lack of documents, and how they evaluate their experiences in the UK and the lessons they have learned. The question we ask is a straightforward one: all considered, was it worth it? As chapter 6 shows, responses to this question were mixed, although on the whole, most people are able to reflect on something positive about their experiences.

appendices



# Appendix 1: Methodology

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## Background

The research design was informed by a scoping study, based on three focus groups with stakeholders, carried out in London, the North West and the West Midlands in 2007. The focus groups provided the research team with insights into the different labour market characteristics and types of employment in each area, differences in community formation and support for undocumented migrants and different patterns of migration. It also provided a greater qualitative understanding of the experiences of young undocumented people by those who work with these groups and also enabled us to explore and develop concepts for the main qualitative study. This Appendix will report on our methodological approach and the fieldwork experience.

## Partner organisations and researchers with language skills

Key to all stages of the research was a collaborative approach between the university-based researchers, researchers with appropriate language fluency and partner organisations. Some of the networking and identification of potential partners was carried out as part of the scoping study, but at the start of the main study we still needed to expand, refine and prepare a database of organisations. The refined database proved extremely useful – for example in the dissemination of the call for researchers with first language skills of the country-of-origin groups, and more generally as a reliable and accurate reference tool for the research team. During this process, a number of visits and interviews with key informants and organisations that work with undocumented migrants were carried out in the West Midlands, the North West and London. While the main aim of these meetings was to identify potential partner organisations, this part of the fieldwork provided invaluable background information on undocumented migrants and their livelihoods in the three locations, and allowed us to test some of the working hypothesis which had emerged in the scoping study.

Five, already highly qualified, researchers – one from each of the five countries of origin – were recruited so that interviews could be carried out in first languages, if preferred or if necessary. The sensitivity of the research meant that the networks and the ‘insider’ status of the researchers was crucial for access. City University London Human Resources managed the recruitment and the process followed the university’s equal opportunities procedures. We received more than 140 applications for the five posts and shortlists, interviews and appointments were made according to the criteria specified in the job description. Once in post, the five researchers received two days of training that included information and issues relating to the research and potential interviewees such as working within sensitive contexts and the ethical issues involved with all aspects of the research. An initial meeting was held with community partners to discuss the specific nature of access and networks within different groups and regions. A draft of the topic guide was also discussed by researchers and partners, and refined prior to piloting.

## Pilot interviews, refining the topic guide and translations

Pilot interviews were carried out and transcribed by the researchers. A debriefing meeting was held after the pilot interviews to discuss the topic guide, the interview process and the main emergent themes – all of which informed the refinement of the research instrument. The university-based research team also held one-to-one meetings with each of the researchers to discuss their interviews and transcripts and the ways in which they might be developed for the main stage of the research.

Based on this meeting, the topic guide was refined and a further meeting was held with the field researchers and representatives from partner organisations. The research process and the refined topic guide were discussed, as well as some of the issues around the fieldwork including access, networks, cultural specificity and the translation of key concepts in the topic guide into community languages. Issues of capacity building were also discussed and will be detailed in Appendix 2.

## Research participants – key attributes

### Country of origin

The study set out to explore a range of different experiences among young undocumented migrants. Young people from five countries were included in the research: China, Kurds from Turkey, Brazil, Zimbabwe and Ukraine, in order to provide regional variations, differences in terms of the country of origin's development and, in the case of Zimbabwe, a country with former colonial links with the UK. The Turkish interviewees included migrants from a discriminated against Kurdish minority. Turkey, Zimbabwe and China have long histories of migration to Britain and established community networks, while migration from Brazil and Ukraine is more recent and thus there are fewer community networks which might help to shape migrants' experiences. The five countries of origin chosen allowed for an exploration of different initial migration routes and strategies, including student and work permit overstayers, those who had been through the asylum system and people who had paid smugglers to enter the UK clandestinely. All five countries include very-recent and less-recent migrants, which allowed for a better understanding of how experiences are shaped and choices are made by young people over time.

### Sites for the research

The research was multi-sited, with fieldwork taking place in London, the West Midlands and the North West. These locations include asylum dispersal areas, as well as areas with established minority ethnic communities, including members of the target population. While we had planned to interview people based in rural locations, we were unable to find young undocumented migrants living outside of urban centres and towns in the three regions of study.

### Fieldwork quotas

In order to interview young people who might potentially have had different experiences based on their social and demographic attributes, we devised an ideal type quota sheet.

**Table 2: Quota sheet**

Type of interview and Sex	Age	Region	Networking route
			<i>Outside London to include at least 4 interviews in</i>
			<i>Write note on how interviewees were accessed rural locations</i>
Testimony F	18–24	North West	
Testimony M	18–24	London	
Testimony F	25–30	Midlands	
Testimony M	25–30	Region of choice	
In-depth interviews F	18–24	London	
In-depth interviews M	18–24	London	
In-depth interviews F	18–24	North West	
In-depth interviews M	18–24	North West	
In-depth interviews F	18–24	Midlands	
In-depth interviews M	18–24	Midlands	
In-depth interviews F	25–30	London	
In-depth interviews M	25–30	London	
In-depth interviews F	25–30	North West	
In-depth interviews M	25–30	North West	
In-depth interviews F	25–30	Midlands	
In-depth interviews M	25–30	Midlands	

We were always aware that it might be difficult to meet the quotas, given the geographic and demographic variation between groups, and the issues of access. Ideally we wanted to interview 16 young people from each country of origin, spread between different age groups, by sex and by region. Although we anticipated a mixture of in-depth interviews and testimonies, in reality, nearly all the interviews were in fact detailed testimonies, with the majority lasting more than two hours and some more than three hours.

## Accessing participants

A number of strategies were used in order to access participants. Integral to the success of the project was the partnership of community organisations and the exploratory regional fieldwork carried out by members of the research team – including the researchers with language skills and the networks that the researchers with language skills had already in place or were able to establish. The five researchers with language skills were involved in all aspects of the research, including the planning meetings at the design stage, the development and piloting of the topic guide, and the extensive debriefing sessions during and at the end of the fieldwork.

As part of the project we developed partnerships with community based organisations, as well as contacts with other groups and organisations that work with young undocumented migrants in each of the three regions. The partner organisations also provided important insights into the communities they worked with, as well as their locality. Our partners also participated in and made important contributions to the research design and research planning meetings and, in some cases, provided a venue for the interviews to be conducted.

The community partners were instrumental in helping us to access interviewees and the researchers with language skills were also able to locate other potential interviewees through some of their contacts. We used a combination of non-probability and purposive sampling techniques. Non-probability sampling is used in situations where the research cannot or does not aim to sample the whole population. The hidden nature of undocumented migrants and their interest in remaining hidden means that there is no available sampling frame from which to draw a probability sample. Immigration status is especially relevant in the context of vulnerability (see for example Robinson 2002; Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005; Bloch 2007).

Snowball sampling is a type of non-probability sampling technique used to obtain respondents through referrals among people who share the same characteristic. It is often used when the focus of research is on a sensitive issue or the population is hidden. For this study, such an approach was especially useful because it provided an intermediary between the interviewer and the interviewee, who was able to act as a verifier or advocate for the project. An extract from the field notes of one of the researchers illustrates the importance of verification:

*I travelled on Friday, 1st August 2008 from London to Birmingham to get some contacts with Kurdish and Turkish communities in the Midlands. When I arrived at the Kurdish Association on Soho Hill Road, I found only a restaurant but no community centre. The restaurant owner told me that they have no proper Kurdish advice centres in Birmingham and recommended me to go to X neighbourhood to find 'penaberan Kurdistana Bakur – Kurdish refugees from Northern Kurdistan/Turkish Kurdistan'. He mentioned that there are several Kurdish off-licence shops in this multi-ethnic neighbourhood. I went there and talked to one of the shop workers – a Kurd from 'Kurdistana Rojhilat' (Iranian Kurdistan) – he told me that he does not know people from 'Kurdistana Bakur' but the off-licence owner knows all the Kurds from 'Kurdistana Bakur'. But the owner was not there.*

*I got the mobile phone number of the shop owner from his 10-year-old son and called him and explained the reason of my call. He told me that he does not know me, therefore he cannot help me. I started to talk to him in Kurdish and mentioned that I had worked in the Kurdish community centre in London. He asked me which city I am from and whether I know 'Ibrahim' (community organisational partner). I told him that Ibrahim is a friend of mine. Then he asked me if 'Ibrahim' can call him and confirm that he knows me. If 'Ibrahim' could call him then he will be able to help me. I called 'Ibrahim' and explained the complicated situation and asked for his help to call the shop owner. After 15 minutes, the shop owner called me back and stated that he found one female participant for our research and I can interview her tomorrow. Next day, he met me in the city centre and we went together to the flat where the undocumented 24 year old Kurdish female Rojda lives with her mother and father.*

The field researchers reported on many examples where these kinds of processes were vital to access. We did not want to rely on limited networks, but instead wanted to maximise diversity to ensure that the sample was as heterogeneous as possible, so we worked hard to ensure as many starting points as possible for the snowballing. The more starting points from which to snowball, the more likely that the sample will not share characteristics and experiences, and will better reflect the nature of the population from which the sample is being drawn.



## The sample and routes to interviewees

As noted earlier, the quota sheets were seen as an ideal and a flexible approach to the fieldwork and was necessary in order to reflect variations in community, region, gender, age and issues of access. Table 3 shows the regional profile of the final sample.

**Table 3: Regional profile of the sample**

	London	North West	West Midlands	Total
Ukrainian	10	3	0	13
Brazilian	10	6	0	16
Chinese	7	0	9	16
Zimbabwean	5	6	5	16
Turkish/Kurdish	10	2	2	14
Total left	44	14	17	75

While we had hoped for a more even distribution by region, it was very difficult to locate Turkish and Kurdish people outside London, due to the fact that the majority of migrants are clustered in a few areas of London. Accessing Brazilians outside London was difficult, due to the lack of community-based organisations. In Birmingham, there was one evangelical church with Brazilians in the congregation but access to the community – in spite of repeated efforts – proved impossible. In Manchester, there were two churches with Brazilian congregations and the researcher was able to access interviewees using snowball techniques through one initial contact. The Ukrainian community is another that proved to be much easier to make contacts with in London than elsewhere. The researchers with language skills found that people were very protective and even when they managed to access potential interviewees many did not want to participate in a formal interview. Among Chinese young undocumented migrants, the researcher found problems using community-based organisations, as young people fear the possibility of being sent home and do not take the risk of contacting organisations. The community-based organisations in the North West could not help in facilitating access and, although there is a large Chinese community in Manchester, the team was unable to build up the trust that might have enabled access to this group of young people. The result is an uneven spread for some countries of origin by region. Nevertheless, we did carry out enough interviews outside London to be able to interrogate the data for areas of diversity between regions and young people's relationship within their area of residence.

Tables 4 to 8 show the routes to successful interviews for each country-of-origin group by region.

**Table 4: Zimbabwean interviewees**

London	West Midlands	Manchester
MDC Central London	Pentecostal church	2 interviewees via Reach North West
Yarlswood Befriender Network	Faith group networks	2 interviewees via interviewers community contacts
2 interviewees via Zimbabwe Association	African Community Council for the Regions	Faith group networks
London Borough of Islington – Social Services	African Community Council for the Regions/Barnardo's	Zimbabwe Association
	African Community Council for the Regions/Red Cross	

**Table 5: Ukrainian interviewees**

London	West Midlands	Manchester
Snowballed through interviewer contact		2 self-selected after reading about the project on odnoklasniki.ru (social network internet service used by Ukrainians)
Through odnoklasniki.ru (social network internet service used by Ukrainians)		Through a church
Ukrainian Migrant Network		
Through student advisor at English language school		
Snowballed through Ukrainian Migrant Network users		
Snowballed through user of odnoklasniki.ru		
2 via interviewer snowballing		
Ukrainian Orthodox Church		
Through Praxis		

**Table 6: Chinese interviewees**

London	West Midlands	Manchester
Through contacts made by interviewer with restaurant worker	Snowballed through London interviewee	
Through contacts made by interviewer with restaurant worker	5 Snowballed through previous West Midlands interviewee and then each successful contact	
Through interviewer fieldwork in east London with DVD street sellers	2 interviewees through the Chinese Community Centre Birmingham	
4 interviewees snowballed through previous 3 in London	Through interviewee accessed via the Chinese Community Centre Birmingham	

**Table 7: Brazilian interviewees**

London	West Midlands	Manchester
3 interviewees through Brazilian Association of the UK (ABRAS)		Snowballed through Brazilian restaurant owner
Through Catholic priest		5 interviewees snowballed through contact given by Brazilian restaurant owner
Vicar from evangelical church's contact (North London)		
Vicar's wife from evangelical church (South London)		
ORKUT user (Brazilian chat room)		
2 interviewees snowballed through interviewer contacts		
Brazilian Association of Educational Projects in the UK (ABRIF)		

**Table 8: Kurdish interviewees**

London	West Midlands	North West
5 interviewees via Mala Gel-Halkevi – Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre	Snowballing through interviewer exploratory field trip to Birmingham	Snowballed through interviewer contacts
Snowballed from contact made at Kurdish Youth festival	Mala Gel-Halkevi – Kurdish and Turkish Community Centre	Kurdish Youth festival
3 interviewees via Kurdish Human Rights Project		
Kurdish Advice Centre		

The gender profile of the final sample was, on the whole, evenly distributed with 40 interviews carried out with men and 35 with women. Gender was skewed among Kurdish interviewees, with 10 interviews carried out with men and four with women. Accessing women in this group was very difficult – there was a great deal of fear and suspicion among this group in general and the most effective route was through community-based organisations, which women were much less likely to attend and participate in than men.

The final attribute that was included in the quota sheets was age. We were keen to have a mix of age ranges, so that we could examine the impact of age on experiences. In the final sample, 34 interviewees were aged between 18 and 34 and 41 were aged 25 and over. While we had set an age range of up to 30, two of the Zimbabwean interviewees were 31 at the time of the interview.

## The fieldwork experience

The fieldwork was challenging, as access was so difficult, given the nature of the research population and the sensitivity of the research. Participants were often initially suspicious about the research, so researchers needed to build trust and, in some cases, obtain verification through organisations, faith groups, personal contacts, and other interviewees, as noted earlier. Among some of the young Zimbabweans, who had come to Britain as teenagers, a parent would talk to the researcher and act as a gatekeeper for their child. Many young undocumented migrants are not open about their status and so often others within the same country-of-origin group were unaware of whom was undocumented, making snowballing more difficult. However, the kinds of jobs young people did were often a clue to their immigration status and, as Chapter 4 showed, there was clear evidence of sectoral clustering.

During the fieldwork, there were incidences of potential interviewees agreeing a time and location for the interview and failing to show up. There were also a few instances where an interview was started and then not concluded and, in some cases, interviews had to be interrupted because the interviewee became too emotional. Although all the interviews were recorded and transcribed, in a few cases interviewees asked for the tape recorder to be switched off when they were discussing something particularly personal or sensitive, or where it could potentially lead to them being identified. However, one fact that was evident in the fieldwork was that young people wanted to tell their stories and were pleased that someone was taking an interest. All interviewees were given a Tesco card for £30 and, for testimonies, £50. Some of the researchers noted that the money did not act as an incentive to participate, although for others it was. Regular contact was maintained by the university-based research team with the researchers and partner organisations during the fieldwork. In the case of the researchers with language skills, this included discussions about the fieldwork and quotas, and the continued development of new networks and access routes to potential interviewees, which was necessary as part of the flexible approach to the fieldwork. Two debriefing team meetings with researchers were held during the fieldwork, and a further one was held at the end of the fieldwork. These meetings proved useful in terms of thinking about quotas, the data itself, the specificities of each group and the fieldwork experience. The researchers kept field diaries and wrote interview notes for each interview carried out. These notes included the interview context, access and access route, the setting for the interview, key themes from the interview and a reflective note about the interview itself. These have proved useful in providing a greater understanding about the context of each interview and provided a record for the university-based research team.

The final stage of the collaboration with the researchers with first language skills of the young undocumented migrants included in the research, and our country of origin and community organisations, was to reflect on the report itself, discuss strategies for dissemination and to consider the implications of the findings in light of the priorities of Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Social Justice Programme.

## Appendix 2: Capacity building

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### Capacity building background

One of the key aims and stipulations of the research tender was that a strong capacity-building component was integrated into the project that worked on a number of different levels. During the course of the project, we have worked with young undocumented migrants, partner organisations and researchers. This appendix examines and documents the capacity-building activities undertaken.

### Building the capacity of young undocumented migrants

An important aim of Paul Hamlyn Foundation (PHF) Social Justice Programme in relation to their work with young undocumented migrants is, '... developing both the skills and capacity of individuals from these communities in the UK' ([www.phf.org.uk](http://www.phf.org.uk)). This research was commissioned to provide information from which PHF can develop its work in this area. However, ways of assisting young people during the actual research were incorporated into the design of the project through the distribution of signposting documents listing organisations that worked with or could help young undocumented migrants, as well as community specific organisations working with the five groups in each locality. While these documents provided information for young people, equally important and empowering was the notion that someone was interested in their lives and experiences, and that they were given the opportunity to relate their experiences and stories while being compensated financially for their time.

### Researchers with first language skills

Two days of training took place prior to the fieldwork. During the project, interviewers were able to build up community networks and new organisational links. Researchers were also invited to all the capacity-building workshops (see below) and to participate in training that they would find useful to develop their own skills. The researchers with language skills are all extremely highly qualified and experienced and, to date, none of them have specified any training that would build their capacity.

### Community organisations

Based on the needs identified by partner organisations, capacity-building workshops have been held at intervals throughout the project. Four of the workshops were held in Birmingham and one was held in London. Details of the five workshops are below:

Workshop 1: Working with interpreters and interpreting: Birmingham, October 2008, facilitated by Edward Maw, Refugee Council.

Workshop 2: Mentoring and community leadership: London, November 2008, facilitated by Zrinka Bralo, Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum.

Workshop 3: Counselling – Working with sensitive issues and vulnerable groups, Birmingham, January 2009, facilitated by Nick Luxmoore, King Alfred's, Oxford.

Workshop 4: Needs assessment and fund raising, Birmingham, February 2009, facilitated by Beth Crosland, Migrant and Refugees Community Forum.

Workshop 5: Community networking and partnerships, Birmingham, March 2009, facilitated by Mandy Wilson, Communities and Organisations: Growth and Support.

Workshops were attended by representatives from partner organisations, as well as other organisations that we had worked with or been in contact with during the course of the project. The aggregate attendance of the five workshops was 45 participants. Representatives of partner organisations were paid as consultants for their participation in capacity-building activities and for assisting with the fieldwork and attending meetings.

Representatives of partner organisations were also invited to attend an accredited MA module at City University, 'Approaches to social research'. This has been taken up by one partner.

## Other capacity building activities and outcomes

One of the most positive outcomes in terms of capacity building has been the facilitation and development of organisational networks between and within regions. The regular contact through meetings and workshops throughout the project has resulted in exploratory meetings outside of the project that have included the possibilities for collaborative work between groups. The project has therefore effectively facilitated the formation of strong networks between organisations at local and regional levels, making possible the dissemination of good practice, empowerment to participate in decision making, accessing resources and collaborative working.

A website has also been constructed to consolidate the involvement of partners, lodge materials from the capacity-building and training events, provide information about useful links and resources, disseminate research findings and enhance networking.

## Outcomes

It is anticipated that the capacity-building activities will have longer-term benefits for organisations and individuals, and will provide a platform from which PHF can build on its work in this area.

## Appendix 3: Profile of interviewees

**Table 9: Brazilians – profile and employment**

Name	Age	Region	Gender	Length of time in Britain	Here	There – last job
Brígido	30	London	Male	3 years and 3 months	Self-employed teacher	Student
Celso	28	London	Male	3 years	Restaurant as kitchen porter	Quality control officer for multi-national company (technician)
Berenice	23	London	Female	4 years	Cleaner	Book shop sales assistant
Custódia	25	London	Female	4 months	Hotel worker and cleaner in offices/houses	Driving instructor
Andrea	20	London	Female	1 year and 6 months	Not working (was cleaner, is now pregnant)	Came to UK as school leaver
Antônio	23	North West	Male	1 year and 4 months	Construction worker	Ice cream parlour worker
Carol	24	North West	Female	1 year and 4 months	School cleaner	Events and product promoter
Augusto	26	North West	Male	3 years	Motorcycle courier, pizza delivery	Security alarm systems
Beatriz	24	North West	Female	4 years	Shop sales assistant, bakery worker	Photographer
Bernardo	26	North West	Male	2 years	Bar work	Footballer
Fernando	27	London	Male	5 years	Window cleaner (self-employed)	Not working
Diana	28	London	Female	7 months	Restaurant cleaner	Engineering company worker
David	29	London	Male	5 years	Chef	Telecommunications, then unemployed
Daniel	28	North West	Male	8 months	Pub and restaurant staff, cleaner	Construction company worker (then went bankrupt)
Alice	27	North West	Female	3 years	Restaurant staff, shopping centre staff, cleaner	Running co-owned events company
Eduardo	23	London	Male	4 years and 7 months	Publisher worker, cleaner	Trainee at consumer rights organisation



**Table 10: Kurds from Turkey – profile and employment**

Name	Age	Region	Gender	Length of time in Britain	Here	There – last job
Ciwan	28	London	Male	5 years	Sales person for supermarket	Job not specified
Serahdo	28	London	Male	3 years	Off licence worker	Shoe shop sales person
Cihan	23	London	Male	5 years	Restaurant cook	Cook
Avashin	29	London	Female	5 years	Not working	Cultivated crops – subsistence
Welat	23	London	Male	5 years	Occasional Kurdish market worker	Student
Firat	30	London	Male	7 years	Supermarket worker	Student
Necirwan	30	London	Male	9 years	Off licence	Tailor
Botan	29	London	Male	8 years	Occasional kebab shop worker	Tobacco farmer
Rojhan	27	London	Male	9 years	Kebab shop worker	Student
Kawa	25	London	Male	7 years	Kebab shop worker	Student at vocational school – welding
Dilan	23	North West	Female	9 years	Private children's Maths and Sciences tutor	Came to UK at 14
Amed	29	West Midlands	Male	3 years	Not working	Textile shop owner
Rojda	22	West Midlands	Female	4 years	Not working	Student
Jiyan	23	London	Female	7 years	Not working	Student

**Table 11: Ukrainians – profile and employment**

Name	Age	Region	Gender	Length of time in Britain	Here	There – last job
Levko	24	London	Male	8 years	Builder	Chef
Semen	28	London	Male	8 years	Building site fixer	Not working
Lesya	29	London	Female	4 years	Not working	Nurse
Natalia	26	London	Female	3 years	Hairdresser	Hairdresser
Tatiana	22	London	Female	1 year and 3 months	Pub/houses/ offices cleaner	Taxi call dispatcher, student
Pawlo	22	North West	Male	1 year and 2 months	Building site fixer	Student
Margarita	29	North West	Female	3 years and 3 months	Warehouse packer	Pensions office worker
Fedia	29	North West	Male	2 years	Construction worker	Security
Sergiy	27	London	Male	7 months	Building site and pub worker	Made products from wood (hairbrushes, curtain hooks etc), qualified teacher
Halyna	26	London	Female	8 years	Not working	Student
Dmytro	22	London	Male	2 years	Building site worker	Student
Uliana	29	London	Female	9 years	Cleaner	Secretary
Victoria	24	London	Female	3 years	Chef	Student, restaurant work

**Table 12: Zimbabweans – profile and employment**

Name	Age	Region	Gender	Length of time in Britain	Here	There – last job
Bob	31	London	Male	5 years and 6 months	Not working	Tool maker
Jamie	30	North West	Male	7 years and 8 months	Mechanic	Mechanic fitter for car production
Sandra	31	London	Female	5 years and 6 months	Occasional cleaner, bar worker	Data capture
Sipiwe	30	North West	Female	6 years	Not working	Hospital doctor
Suku	30	London	Female	8 years and 6 months	Self-employed cleaner	Secretary
Taffi	27	West Midlands	Male	9 years	Not working	High school student
Tanaka	22	North West	Female	3 years	Carer	Student
Terry	21	North West	Male	3 years and 7 months	Removals worker	School student, footballer
Theo	19	West Midlands	Male	6 years and 6 months	Not working	School student
Trish	25	London	Female	5 years	Not working	About to become university student
Ray	21	North West	Male	8 years	Corporate sales	Came to UK at 13
Tracy	29	North West	Female	5 years and 7 months (total 10 years after earlier period in Britain)	Office administrator, agency care worker	Hotel worker
Kirsty	22	London	Female	8 years and 6 months (pregnant)	Hair braiding, agency worker	Came to UK 12/13
Natasha	18	West Midlands	Female	8 years	Not working	Came to UK aged 10
Pat	27	West Midlands	Female	7 years	Not working	School leaver
Colin	23	West Midlands	Male	6 years and 6 months	Finance assistant	School leaver

**Table 13: Chinese – profile and employment**

Name	Age	Region	Gender	Length of time in Britain	Here	There – last job
Wendy	24	London	Female	1 year and 10 months	Not working	Clothes seller in a shop
Mei Chen	22	West Midlands	Female	2 years and 2 months	Not working	Assistant secretary
Zhu Chen	25	West Midlands	Female	2 years and 2 months	Not working	Factory worker
Jessy Chang	21	London	Female	1 year and 10 months	Not working	Waitress
Fang Ping	22	West Midlands	Female	2 years	Kitchen assistant, Sunday market worker	Supermarket cashier
Fu Chenming	22	West Midlands	Male	1 year and 9 months	Kitchen assistant	Factory security guard
Gao Zeng	24	West Midlands	Male	2 years and 8 months	Kitchen assistant	Biscuit factory worker
Guo Ming	30	London	Male	2 years and 3 months	Illegal DVD copies salesman	Tyre service shop owner
Fei Lin	20	London	Male	1 year and 10 months	Kitchen assistant	Brick maker and trash collector
Meixin He	24	West Midlands	Male	6 years and 6 months	Not working	Cook
Xiao Xue	21	London	Male	2 years and 6 months	Illegal DVD copies salesman	School leaver
Jing Yan	24	London	Male	2 years and 6 months	Refurbishment builder	Vehicle repairman
Yao Xiamin	25	West Midlands	Female	1 year and 6 months	Restaurant dishwasher	Not working
Yingying Cai	27	West Midlands	Female	4 years and 1 month	Not working	Clothes seller
Huadi Zhang	29	West Midlands	Male	2 years and 1 month	Kitchen assistant	Refurbishment builder
Zhang Feimei	24	West Midlands	Female	3 years and 6 months	Takeaway worker, leafleting	Not working

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