

*'I would go back to Poland and then
what?'* Migrant Stories in Post-Celtic
Tiger Ireland

Employment and the Crisis: Work, Migration,
Unemployment
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Dr Elaine Moriarty and Dr Torben Krings

Overview

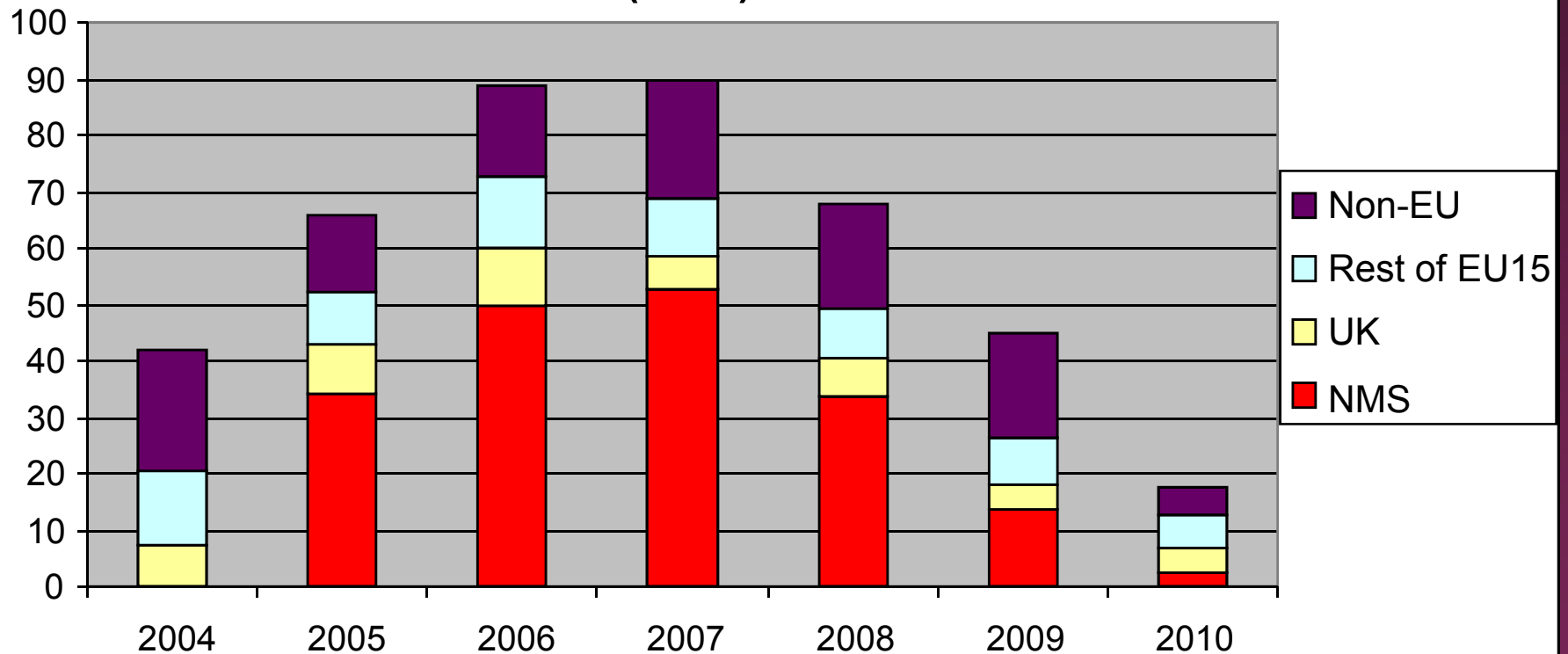
- | Migrant Careers and Aspirations – A Research Agenda
- | Researching micro level experiences of the recession
- | Migrant workers in a recession – precarious turn from boom to bust
- | NMS nationals as ‘free movers’

Migrant Careers and Aspirations

- | Qualitative Panel Study (QPS) (repeated semi-structured interviews with panel of 22 Polish migrants every 4 months over 24 months)
- | Participants in various occupational positions ranging from general operatives to managerial positions in 4 sectors: construction, hospitality, software and financial services
- | Workplace Studies (40 interviews with employers, HR managers, recruitment agencies in 4 sectors)

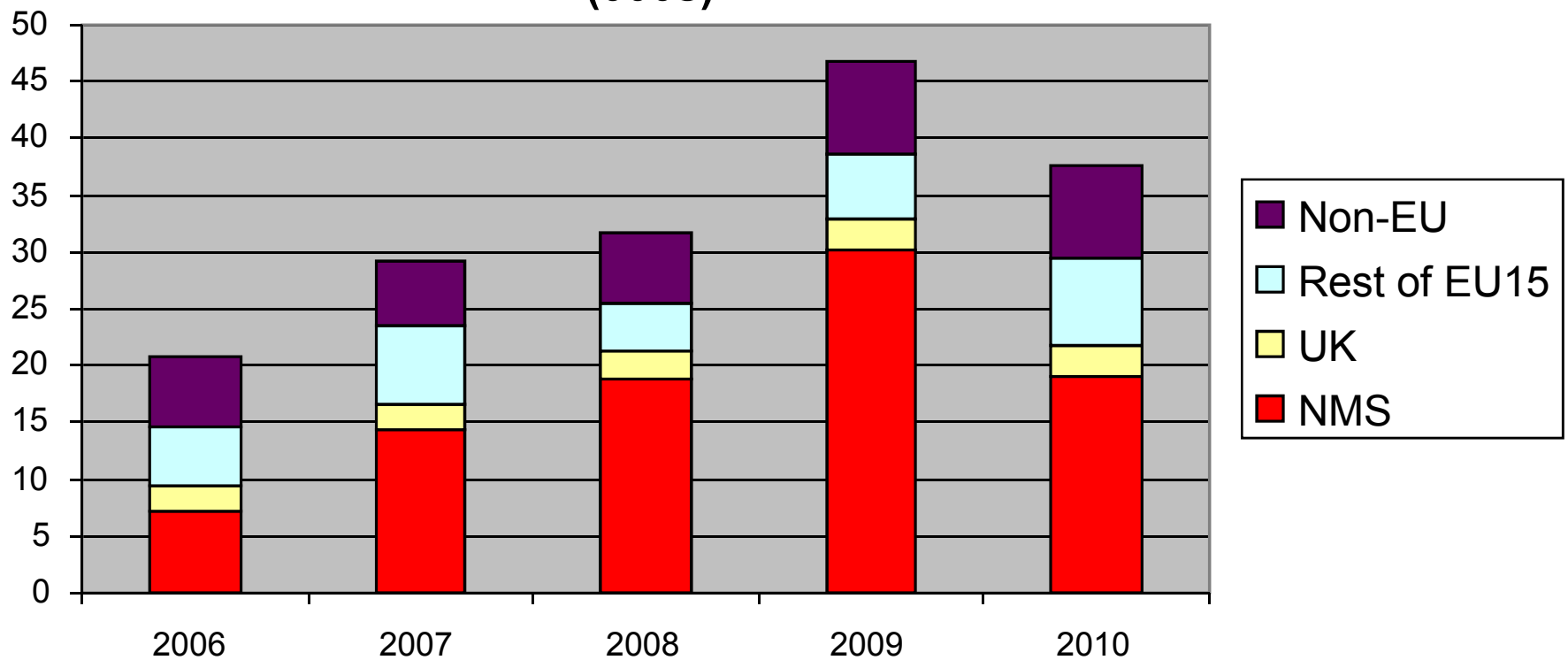
Immigration flows decline...

Chart 1: Estimated Immigration by Nationality (2004-2010)
(000s)



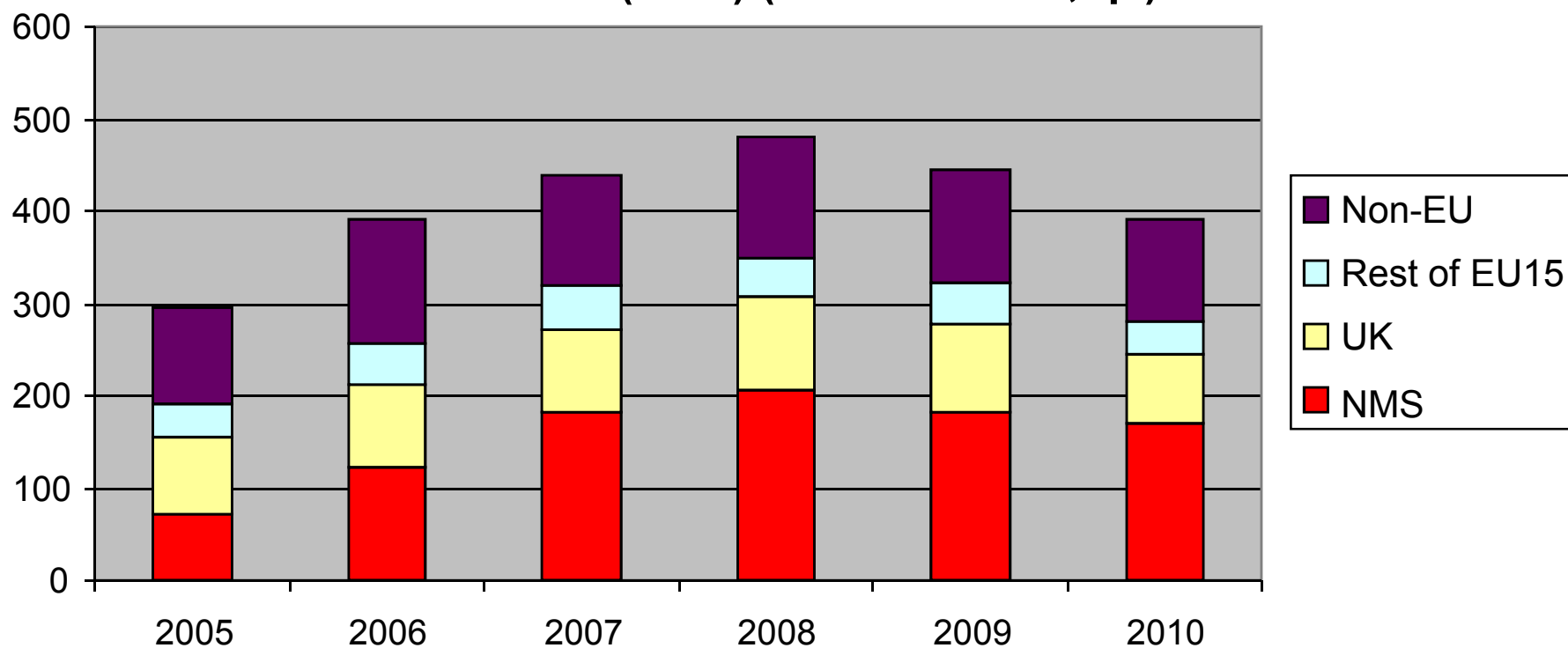
Emigration flows increase...

Chart 2: Estimated Emigration by Nationality (2006-2010)
(000s)



But not everybody is going home...

Chart 3: Estimated Migration Stocks (2005-2010)
(000s) (Source QNHS, q2)



Migrant workers in a recession

- | As shown, so far only limited evidence of migrant outflows
- | This is reflected in our QPS where only 6 have left Ireland, mainly for Poland, Canada, Belgium
- | Most participants across sectors reported
 - » an intensification of work
 - » longer working hours
 - » extension of work duties
- | They also reported employers
 - » favouring a 'return of the Irish'
 - » use of 'flexible' contracts'
 - » use of redundancy options supported by the state

Greater sense of insecurity

'I feel good in this job [as a Restaurant Floor Manager]. The cooperation with people that I work with is excellent. The atmosphere at work is simply great. I feel like I'm at home here...I think that I would be still satisfied working here in a few years time' (W1).

'There is a bit of a different attitude towards work. Everybody is more afraid...a time of waiting that something will happen...They [restaurant owner and manager] are not sure what's going to happen tomorrow' (W3).

'Well, the tension [at work] is kind of stronger. You know, people earn less and so on...In fact I am thinking about looking for something else...At the moment this company is a sinking ship' (W6).

(Lukas, 29, Hospitality)

Holding on to their jobs

'I am delighted. I really like my job... (W1)

'I have to kind of hold on to my current position. Over here I am ..the last person to be fired in case something happens... these people who came last, they are first to loose the job. So it is safer to stay'(W1)

'..a lot of people in the office lost their jobs...When we saw each other last time ...they fired the first guy. Then they fired one more girl and then the secretary and then two more guys..So in general there were 6 people who left our office..out of 12' (W2)

'Four people left in the meantime...there are two people left and we are both part time. And the boss...I have to answer the phone, be a secretary, and it really p.... me off' (W3)

(Natalia, 29, Architect)

Deteriorating work conditions

They are trying to get more and more out of us...Before [the recession] we had a norm of installing 50 plates per day. And now it is 70 per day...If you are asking too many questions...then he [the boss] will simply tell you that you are the fixer and you will get fired (W4)

8 English guys came... And he hired 8 of them and they are putting together 6 panels per day. And there is six of us and they demand 10 panels per day from us (W5)

You know, he cannot humiliate me like that...I would end up going to a doctor. Because seriously, I had those moments [when I thought] that I would go to a psychiatrist, because I couldn't cope here. I was actually taking anti-anxiety pills (W5)

eye

(Wiktor, 31, Construction)

The Irish are back...

The main housekeeping manager is an Irish woman and she said with a big smile: 'Welcome back, we now have Irish people back at work'. So I think that ...now they want to hire Irish people rather than foreign people...That now the Irish are kind of even going to the housekeeping, whatever, just to have a job (Iza, Waitress/Cleaner, W5)

I think that it [making foreigners redundant] is a general policy in Ireland right now. It is the same when it comes to hiring now. They hire Irish people in the first place (Maciek, Architect, W5)

Irish employers might have a different view...

Some of the migrant workers, obviously they are better than the Irish, their attitude is better...now the market is tighter...when there is a downturn, it is the people who are the hard workers, the more talented people are the ones that you hold on to...(HR Manager, Construction)

'intentional unpredictability'

It was a reduction of a position, I got, you know, a redundancy payment... And, to be honest with you, they did me a favour. Because at this stage... that job was simply devastating my mental health. And you know, the whole daily routine, you know, Monday to Friday..boom, boom, boom... And now [on social welfare]... It's wonderful (W5)

In the end I will have 1200 Euros per month from social welfare...so why... would I look for a job... Listen, I was working like a dog for 7 years without any holidays... maybe in a new year I will look for something, I don't know, maybe I will think about moving somewhere else... I will see. I will see. So far it's cool. We sit with Mike and we do the music, you know, we are recording a demo...

(Maciek, 34, Architect)

Brokers of knowledge communities

‘channel of tacit knowledge transactions’ (Williams, 2007: 29)

They knew me a little bit because I was doing some translations for them. And when they started to look at Polish projects then they needed that kind of help... Those first steps like... Like how the construction contracts look like in Poland, meaning that... In general it is about the financial estimations... I mean about a general assessment of the rules of contracts (Oskar, Engineer, W5)

Channel of tacit knowledge transactions

I resigned, which caused a lot of surprise in the bank, that you would leave such a fantastic position [laughing] (W6)

Carefree I'd say. It was ... an easy life, ... I got a fantastic job very easily, there was always enough money, I didn't have any serious problems. I remember it as, well, long holiday (W6)

But there are more soft aspects, like getting used to being among people of big finances, and so on, probably I will be able to use more of these, because we will need contacts like that (...) and there are plans to run a 'road-show' in Dublin and London and look for investors. So I will use these for sure (W6)

(Filip, 28, Financial Services)

Conclusion

- Researching migration at micro level demonstrates a diverse set of experiences of the recession
- The recession has seen work conditions and security of employment diminish greatly
- However, as 'free movers' (Favell 2008), NMS migrants have more opportunities than previous generations of immigrants
- Polish migrants are more mobile across national borders and within national labour markets