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# Report on EU nationals' reaction and long-term consequences of the EU Referendum

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## Background

The EU membership referendum took place on 23rd June 2016<sup>01</sup>, with the majority of the polls carried out in the last week before the referendum indicating the Remain campaign's lead<sup>02</sup>. The referendum resulted in 51.9% of voters voting in favour of leaving the European Union, on a national turnout of 72%<sup>03</sup>. Following the referendum result, David Cameron announced<sup>04</sup> he would resign as the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. He was succeeded by Theresa May on 13 July<sup>05</sup>. The new Prime Minister refused<sup>06</sup> to guarantee the rights of the EU nationals in Britain, however claimed she was positive of a satisfactory outcome for both EU nationals in the UK and UK citizens in the EU. This caused a backlash<sup>07</sup> from all the major Remain supporters, as well as EU nationals themselves.

In light of these developments, Feniks Counselling, Personal Development and Support Services, a charitable organisation providing mental health support to Central Eastern European Community in Scotland, decided to examine the moods of EU nationals in the UK. The purpose of the study was to see how the result of the EU referendum influenced the well-being and plans of the Polish/EU nationals. In particular Feniks was interested in their emotional reactions, feeling of safety (on macro and micro level), feelings about the future and sense of control (or lack thereof).

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01. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160815143715/https://www.eureferendum.gov.uk/>

02. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion\\_polling\\_for\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom\\_European\\_Union\\_membership\\_referendum#2016](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_United_Kingdom_European_Union_membership_referendum#2016)

03. <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/electorate-and-count-information>

04. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/david-cameron-resigns-after-uk-votes-to-leave-european-union>

05. <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/07/13/europe/theresa-may-david-cameron-british-prime-minister/>

06. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/27/theresa-may-eu-citizens-rights-britons-abroad>

07. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/04/tory-backlash-as-theresa-may-fails-to-guarantee-eu-citizens-righ/>

The study is by no means representative. According to different sources there's between 2.8<sup>08</sup> and 3.3 million<sup>09</sup> EU nationals living in the UK: only 657 people took part in the survey, which equals 0.022% of the total group. Still this study should be analysed closely, as it presents patterns in responses that can help to understand the reaction of the EU nationals to the vote.

The conducted online survey was anonymous, circulated via social media (Twitter, Facebook) with support from various news outlets: New Europeans, The National (advertised in print on 27th Aug 2016), Third Force News and Emito.net (Polish community website).

The survey was conducted between 1st August and 13th September 2016. At the time the general feeling about the outcome of the referendum presented by the media was rather bleak<sup>10 11 12 13 14 15</sup>. With regards to EU nationals there were statements from different sides of the political scene<sup>16 17</sup> calling to immediately guarantee their right to stay in the UK, but the only official announcement from the government was made on 11th July<sup>18</sup> and read as follows: "There has been no change to the rights and status of EU nationals in the UK, and UK nationals in

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08. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-uk-leaves-the-eu-36745584>

09. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationality>

10. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-36953247>

11. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-eu-referendum-result-what-happens-next-economy-expert-john-van-reenen-lse-a7169541.html>

12. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36985175>

13. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37091464>

14. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/22/brexit-sparks-rush-for-new-zealand-as-emigration-inquiries-hit-record-high>

15. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/brexit-latest-new-mortgage-lending-figures-point-to-post-referendum-house-price-hit-a7216106.html>

16. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37105379>

17. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/chuka-umunna-launches-petition-to-guarantee-eu-migrants-right-to-remain-a7215966.html>

18. <http://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-the-status-of-eu-nationals-in-the-uk>

the EU, as a result of the referendum.” Theresa May hinted<sup>19</sup> before she took office that no rights for EU nationals will be guaranteed without reciprocal guarantees for the UK citizens living in the EU states. All the following communications from the Prime Minister confirmed this stance<sup>20</sup>.

Media also reported on growing level of xenophobic and racist attacks on UK residents considered foreign (not necessary from the EU countries)<sup>21 22 23 24</sup>, including cards reading “No More Polish Vermin” posted through letterboxes in Cambridgeshire, an arson attack on the Polish family in Plymouth and the killing of Arkadiusz Jóźwik in Harlow<sup>25</sup>.

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## The profile of the respondents

657 people in total took part in the study, of which 56% were women and 44% men. The youngest respondent was 17 and the oldest 75 years old, with the average age of respondents at 36 indicating young workers, possibly settled with young families, who might have not had the experience of working anywhere else but in the UK.

The majority of the respondents were Polish (61.5%) (due to survey being mostly circulated amongst the Polish community), followed by British (7.8%), Dutch (6.9%), German (4.9%), Italian (4.1%), Spanish (3.5%) and others (11.3%).

The respondents were based in different parts of the UK: 55.6% in Scotland, 42.3%

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19. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-refuses-to-rule-out-deportation-of-eu-nationals-living-in-uk-amid-fears-of-influx-of-a7117346.html>

20. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/06/theresa-may-faces-backlash-from-european-leaders-over-plans-to-c/>

21. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jun/27/sadiq-khan-muslim-council-britain-warning-of-post-brex-it-racism>

22. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/no-more-polish-vermin-cards-8285467>

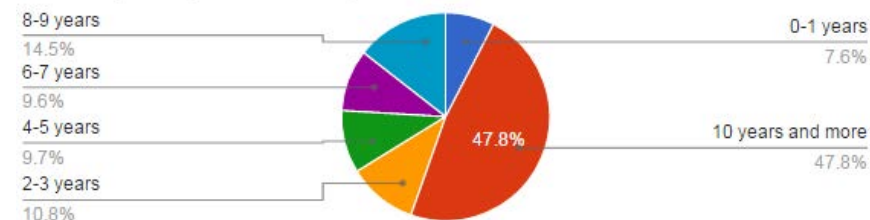
23. [http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/14734747.May\\_expresses\\_regret\\_to\\_Polish\\_PM\\_at\\_attacks\\_on\\_Poles\\_following\\_Brexit\\_vote/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/14734747.May_expresses_regret_to_Polish_PM_at_attacks_on_Poles_following_Brexit_vote/)

24. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit-latest-a7424396.html>

25. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/19/embassies-alleged-hate-crimes-since-brexit-vote>

in England, 0.8% in Northern Ireland, 0.6% in Wales and 1.4% in other parts, the majority (74%) of whom have lived in the UK for more than five years; with nearly 50% having lived in the UK for over ten years.

### How long have you been living in the UK?



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## Initial reaction to the referendum results

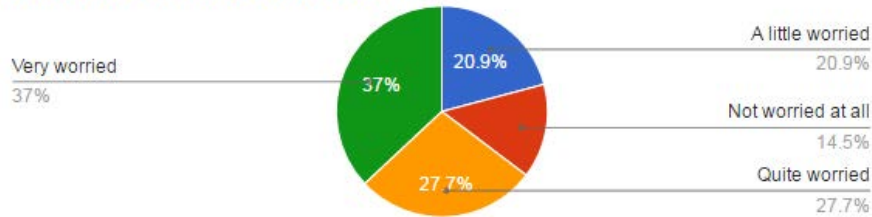
As mentioned before, the general consensus before the referendum as presented by the media was carefully pointing towards the majority casting their vote for ‘Remain’. On the morning after the referendum the feelings dominating the news outlets reports were that of a surprise at the result<sup>26</sup>. When asked about their initial feelings after the results were announced 27.5% of respondents were shocked, 19.3% sad, 15.4% angry, 13.5% anxious, 12.5% confused. About 6% claimed that they were happy. Other respondents were expressing feelings such as: excitement, some said that they were indifferent about the result or that they don’t know how they felt about it.

More than 70% were worried (to a greater or lesser extent) about what the consequences of Brexit would be. Around 15% were not worried at all about the results. On average women were more worried than men: 29.2% said they were quite worried and 40.4% said they were very worried (26.0% and 32.3% men, respectively), whereas 22.6% of men claimed they were a little worried and 19.1% not worried at all (19.7% and 10.7% women, respectively).

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26. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36618470>

**How worried, if at all, were you about your future in the UK when you heard the result of the referendum?**



British, Irish and Commonwealth citizens who live in the UK, along with Britons who have lived abroad for less than 15 years, were eligible to vote<sup>27</sup>, however citizens of EU countries living in the UK were not allowed to vote<sup>28</sup>. When asked to comment on the fact that EU citizens could not take part in the vote, 44.4% of the respondents thought that it was definitely unfair, 21.3% stated that it was probably unfair. Nearly 20% thought that it was quite fair, while 14.3% thought that it was definitely fair.

In the lead-up to 23th June, the referendum was a much-discussed topic and there were numerous media features, comments and debates available. More debates and initial forecasts followed the announcement of the results. The respondents in general showed their interest in the discussion about the referendum and the political debate that followed. When asked how much they followed politics after the referendum, ‘a great deal’ and ‘quite a lot’ were the assessments of 37.1% and 36.1% respectively. 17% rated their interest as ‘some’, 8.1% as ‘not very much’; and the minimal number admitted they haven’t followed the political debate afterwards at all. Both men and women responded in a similar way. Their comments show how disillusioned they were about the pre and post-referendum narrative: *European migrants have been used by politicians as a tool, it has not changed from referendum but now the effect is more visible. I am sure British [in reality] politicians would prefer to keep European immigrants in UK because they contribute to economy more than take from it (it is opposite with British citizens and non-European migrants).*

One of the respondents described his/her feelings after the referendum as follows: *My worst reaction to brexit was when 2 days after referendum two most asked questions on Google was:*

1. Will England still play in European Cup if they leave Eu?
2. What is Eu?

*I don’t know what kind of people was voting or is it to blame Government for the education for these individuals.*

Another one noted in hindsight: *I think that it’s good that you started this research two months after the referendum. My emotions were much stronger one/two weeks after the referendum, and they were all negative (I felt unwelcome, anxious, shocked ...) but then I realised (sic), that vast majority of people around me are as much disappointed as I am. It may sound like I’m too confident, but I am non concern about my future in the UK in terms of being granted with a proper status - I live in the UK for over 10 years, working and integrating with the community all that time, my life is established and quite successful, but I am concern about the economy. So even if I will have a chance to stay in the UK I may choose not to because of the economic factors. I also work in the charity and what I am concern about are the people, who are hardworking and trying best to make the ends met (sic) (we see them every day) - they are not lazy or careless, just don’t cope with all the challenges of present times...*

27. <http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/649517/EU-referendum-2016-Voting-Voters-Allowed-British-Irish-Commonwealth-Citizens-European>

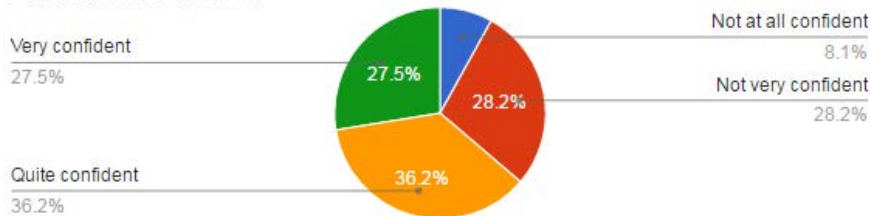
28. <http://fullfact.org/europe/who-can-vote-eu-referendum/>

## Follow-up responses to the vote results

Soon after the results had been announced the question of EU nationals rights to remain in the UK was raised. With government refusal to guarantee their rights, and the spike in xenophobic attacks that followed, the reactions of the EU nationals, both to the result and the government's stance, were examined. It's worth noting that at the same time, a number of politicians and public figures supported EU nationals' claim to be guaranteed the right to stay in the UK<sup>29 30</sup>.

The survey asked how confident the respondents were that they would be able to stay in the UK after Brexit, nearly 65% were certain or very confident about their right to stay. Over 30% did not feel too confident, or predicted that they would have to leave.

### How confident are you that you will be able to stay in the UK when Britain leaves the EU?



However, asked how confident they felt that the British government would work in the interest of EU citizens who chose to stay in UK, almost 80% were convinced the government would not protect their rights (42.5% not very confident; 36.5% not confident at all). Others were either unsure (5.3%), quite (11.4%) or very confident (4.3%) that the government would work in their best interest.

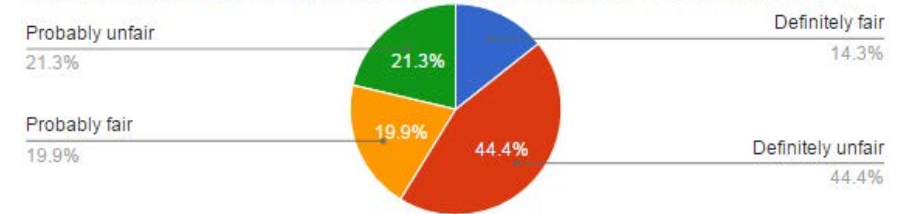
It's worth remembering that the respondents in general were politically aware,

29. <http://www.chuka.org.uk/article-eucitizens-060916>

30. <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/aug/17/nicola-sturgeon-brexit-referendum-eu-nationals-not-bargaining-chips>

with over 70% following the political debate 'a great deal' and 'quite a lot'. They also felt that it was unfair they were not allowed to take part in the referendum (44.4% definitely unfair, 21.3% probably unfair; nearly 20% quite fair; 14.3% definitely fair).

### Do you think it was fair or unfair that people who come from an EU country and live in the UK were not able to vote in the referendum on B...



## Shift in identity and perceived status

Asked to rate on the scale from 1 to 10 how much at home they felt in the UK 50% responded that it was between 8 and 10, more than 35% rated it between 4 to 7 and only 13% - between 1 and 3.

But some comments indicate that their sense of identity changed almost overnight. One of the participants wrote: *My perception changed in one day, from "I am European Citizen living in beautiful European city" to "I'm a stranger on a small island where it always rains."* Another said: *'I realised that I am European more than I am British'*

When asked to assess whether they felt less welcome in the UK after the referendum: 34.2% agreed and 23.3% strongly agreed, 12.9% did not agree at all and 8.5% strongly disagreed. 21% did not offer an opinion.

The participants were asked how safe they felt in the UK. More than half felt very safe (51.6%), over a quarter of respondents felt quite safe (35.6%), and others did not feel too safe or did not feel safe at all (around 13%).

Respondents were also asked whether their sense of security changed after the referendum. Interestingly more than 70% denied that results of the referendum

affected their sense of security at all, while the other 30% admitted they felt less safe after the referendum.

One respondent bitterly summarised the general feeling: *I have lived in the UK for over 30 years, married with an Englishman, I own my home etc. so I'm not worried I'll get 'kicked out'. I did feel sad for British people wanting to leave as I believe UK's exit is a great loss for the country (at least in the immediate future) and Europe.*

Some comments were quite dramatic: *I am terrified to live and work with English people, who do not want us here anymore and treat us as unwanted toys. Now I feel abused. Over decade ago England wanted [our numbers] here to increase, fix up economical situation, now the same people call us unwanted. What about consequences ? Our children were born here, studying here, they know English language better than Polish, we have got businesses and houses, mortgages, finances we are responsible for here. What is about us now ? We are very sorry for that what was happened. It has made destabilization in our lives.*

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## Sources of anxiety

The comments from the respondents indicate that the vote increased the feeling of worry and uncertainty. The reasons in the first instance might be twofold: if they decide to leave, they will worry about family separation and their children's future, if however they decide to stay, they will have to apply for residence permit/citizenship, which is a lengthy and expensive process.

Comments indicating concerns about families: *After living and working and studying for so many years in UK I would like to be sure that me and my family is not going to be forced to live (sic) this country. We got used to live here and it feels like home. The results of the referendum shocked us all and we feel very uncertain about our future. My greatest fear is not about myself, but about my family. My brother has not been here for that long and I do not know if he would be able to stay. I am scared of destroying my family and all our plans.*

Other comments indicated a frustration with the need to apply for citizenship sparked by the fear of having to leave: *I am still anxious about the future, because there is no clear message as to what will happen with EU citizens living in the*

*UK. Now we are here legally and can live, work and run a legitimate business without problems. But the politicians still haven't confirmed what will happen to all of us after Brexit actually happens.*

*I have been in England for 12 years now and after the results I will have to go and apply for extra paper work like permanent residency or British passport to stay in UK, and that is the only bad side about it.*

The reasons to worry also come from economic uncertainty: *loss of savings and fear of recession.* One of the participants commented: *Hi. I'm really heart broken, also I lost 15% of my savings and salary, so it's a significant difference now - I was planning to stay for a while but now I'm thinking of getting a job in other EU country. I'm a highly qualified programmer, so it's not a problem for me. The result is such a shame!*

Another one said: *I moved out my savings from UK right after the referendum result and changed my plans to move out of the country right after my PhD graduation. I thought that pound will keep sinking and it does.*

Some commented on the potential future implications: *I was shocked and angry at first, but I can also see the reasons why people voted for Brexit. I am worried the most about economic implications of Brexit and how it is going to affect the job market and prices of food, bills, holidays etc. In addition, I am concerned about the another independence referendum in Scotland which could potentially bring more chaos to already fragile system.*

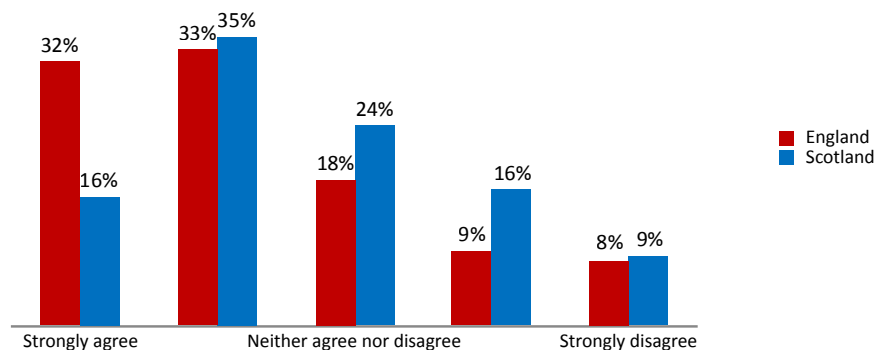
## Scotland vs England

When we compare the results of the survey with respect to where the respondents live, we can observe some interesting trends. Asked to rate how much at home they felt by average people felt more settled in Scotland (7.02 on the scale from 1 to 10) than in England (6.59 on the scale from 1 to 10). More than a half of those living in Scotland (57%) rated it between 8 and 10 as opposed to England (34%).

However, 32.1% of the participants who live in England strongly agreed they felt less welcome after the referendum, but only 16% of those, who live in Scotland.

90.6% participants from Scotland felt safe or very safe in the area they live in, compared with 82.9% in England. 17.1% of those living in England indicated they didn't feel very safe or not at all safe, but only 9.4% of those living in Scotland.

### I feel less welcome in the UK after the referendum



Comments seem to confirm that the general well-being and sense of being at home is higher among EU nationals living in Scotland:

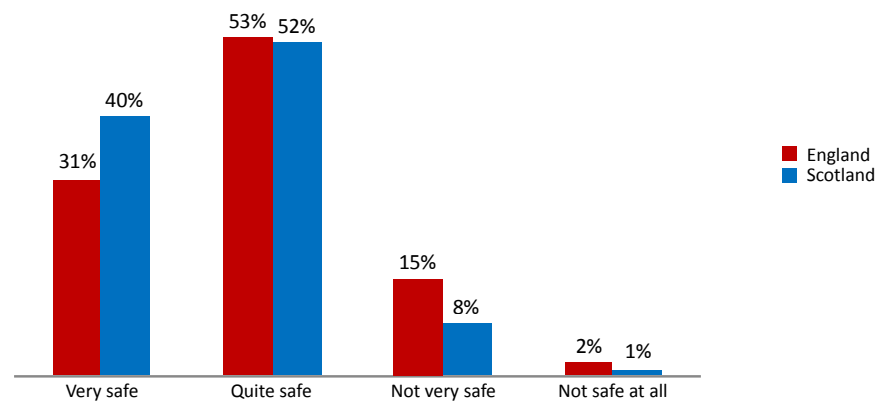
*Glad my family stays in Scotland as watching what bad was happening to minorities in England is very worrying. To be willing to contribute in the UK we need to feel safe. Shame for all British people who will no longer be EU nationals*

*- turns out we will still have a choice about future, they may not have it anymore.*

*I'm feeling quite good in Scotland but many of my friends told me that they feel not much welcoming that before the referendum.*

*Looking at Scotland all yellow on the referendum results map has made me feel that I am among like-minded people. I don't feel any difference in people's approach to me. Scotland feels a true home.*

### How safe do you feel in the area you live in?



## Their future: should they stay?

Some of the comments indicate that they might not want to stay in the UK in the future: *I used to feel Scotland was my home and I felt at home, now I feel much less welcome and therefore can't call this home, as home equals belonging and feeling safe. The referendum has made me and my partner decide to leave Scotland in 1 year time.*

*I moved out my savings from UK right after the referendum result and changed*



*my plans to move out of the country right after my PhD graduation.*

Another said: *Before the referendum I was quite happy here and thinking about a possible future here. Now I feel far away from home and thinking about moving somewhere else. I'm a high qualify professional and I have studied a Master and PhD in UK. I know probably I won't have any problem to stay but, now I don't know if I want to stay anymore.*

One of the respondents concluded: *After 20 years in this country I feel i was betrayed. I feel I have spent half of my life in a place where I wasn't welcome from the start. It is difficult to unravel 20 years of life, pack up and leave, but I will! I am selling my property and regretting i didn't do it last year when the market conditions were better.*

*I used to think I would stay here. I am sure one way or another I still would be able to, but I simply don't think of the UK as an attractive place to live anymore.*

A few however noticed positives: *It will give me more business and life opportunities.*

*One of the greatest benefits of Brexit, not only for UK but for a whole Europe is that it will postpone and hopefully cancel the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).*

*The EU is failing apart and I truly don't see any good reason why UK would like to stay in it.*

*I believe UK can create a strong and independent nation, in a model of Iceland or Norway, that governs entirely by itself without influences of an UNELECTED officials from Brussels.*

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## Conclusions

Concluding from the survey results it's fair to say that the results of the Brexit referendum have greatly impacted the well-being of the EU nationals living in the UK. Remarkably over 70% respondents were certain that they would be able to stay in the UK so we can safely assume their anxiety (also declared by 70% of the respondents) was not caused by fear that they would no longer be able to live in the UK.

Their concerns are more likely to be linked to their conviction that the government will not work in their best interest; lack of any decision-making power and feeling that their future situation is uncertain. It seems that the crucial consequence of the results of the referendum for the EU nationals living in the UK is feeling less welcome than before, which might be a direct result of the increase in hate crime incidents.

The source of anxiety is multidimensional: many EU nationals worry about their status, whether they will need to leave the country, even after many years living in the UK and having a right to apply for residency and citizenship. As the process of naturalisation is rather costly, it may particularly affect bigger families and influence their decision about remaining in the UK.

Some of the respondents feel betrayed, as EU citizens, on having to make this decision and feel forced to go through the application process.

Brexit is not just the question of staying or leaving. Once again EU citizens, in particular Poles, proved they were not just 'migrant workers', who go where the work is. They have been living here for more than ten years and made UK their home: bought houses, met spouses and raise their children in the UK. What is more, they were following the post-referendum developments with full attention, proving once again that they are involved and active members of the society they live in.

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## Acknowledgments

Feniks would like to thank workers and volunteers for design and distribution of the survey, and analysis of data. In particular: Magda Czarnecka, Barbara Wesołowska, Anna Marcinkiewicz - design, analysis and dissemination. And Paulina Szach for help in analysis.

Special thanks go to Katarzyna Kokowska for the write-up and research as well as Robert Motyka for design.

We are also grateful to Roger Casale and New Europeans for encouragement and help in distribution of the survey in England.



Feniks is a grass-root charitable organisation set-up in 2007 to support Central Eastern European community in Edinburgh and Scotland. We provide culturally sensitive psychological support (therapy, group therapy and self-development workshops), cultural awareness trainings and community development projects, such as Conversation Cafés and Mother and Toddler Group. We are trying to address health inequalities faced by CEE immigrants in Scotland and tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.

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