

# “Life Experiences and Challenges of Polish 50+ Immigrants”

## Accessible Summary of Europa Equalities Board Research Project

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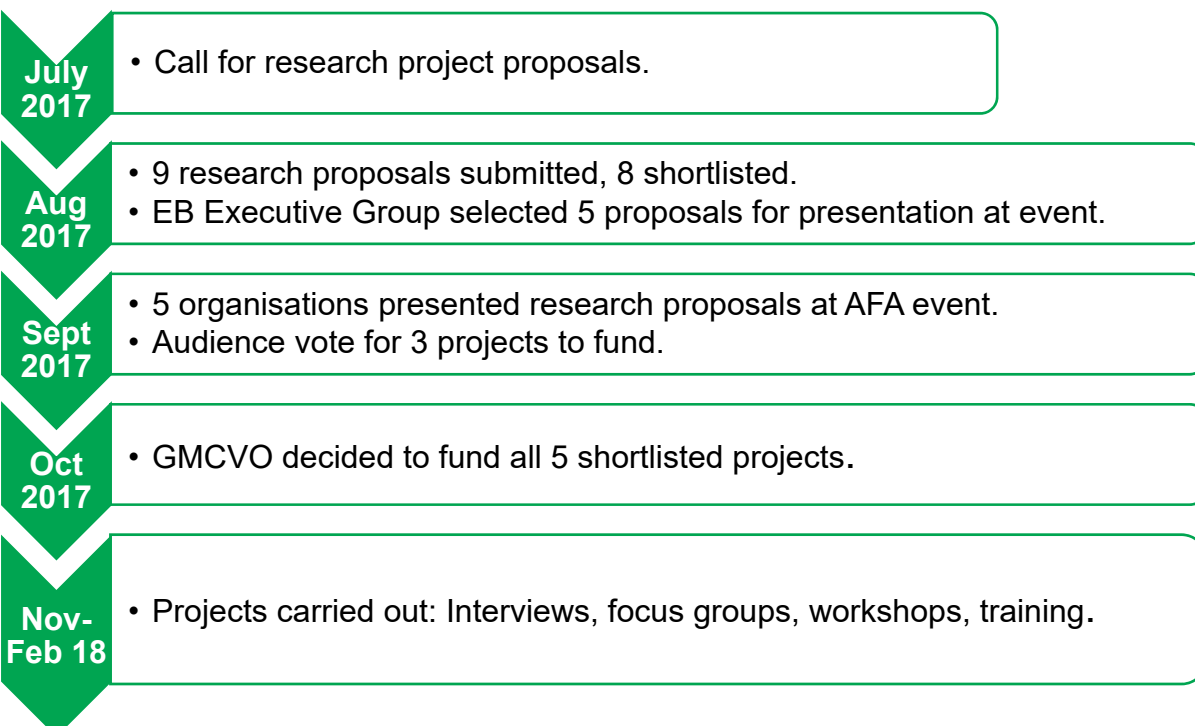
## Glossary / List of new terms

- AFA** = Ambition for Ageing  
= a new Greater Manchester programme that aims to make communities more age-friendly and improve older people's quality of life
- BAME** = Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic  
= anyone in the UK who does not identify as White British
- Brexit** = the process of leaving the European Union (EU)
- Commissioning**  
= choosing someone to do a special piece of work
- EB** = Equalities Board
- Equalities Research Co-ordinators** = the AFA staff who support the Equalities Board
- EU** = European Union, a group of 28 countries across Europe that make shared decisions about economic and social issues.
- Europaia**  
= An organization in Manchester that supports people from Eastern European countries.
- LDL** = Local Delivery Area: the areas around Greater Manchester where the Ambition for Ageing community development projects are working
- marginalised**  
= not noticed by the majority, or treated as if they are less important than the majority
- Resilience** = strength

## Background to the research projects & timeline

In 2017 the Equalities Research Co-ordinators visited the LDLs and noticed that there were gaps in how well the projects were reaching people from Black and minority ethnic (BAME) and other very marginalised communities.

AFA gave £1,500 each for research by community-based organisations into issues that they wanted to understand better. The Equalities Board held a commissioning process to decide which research project ideas should get funding.



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## Europaia community research project

### What did Europaia want to find out?

Europaia carried out a research project to find out more about the life experiences, of older Polish people in Greater Manchester who were born before 1968, and migrated to the UK after Poland joined the European Union (EU) in 2004.

The researchers also wanted to know more about the challenges these people have to deal with in their daily lives, and what makes them vulnerable to becoming socially isolated.

### What was the context for this research?

Older Polish people who came to the UK after Poland joined the EU have experienced a lot of social and historical changes during their lives. Many of them came to Britain to live with family members as unpaid carers, or because they had taken low-paid jobs here before they arrived.

The combination of these life experiences and growing older means that older Polish people in Manchester face complicated challenges in their daily lives. The research shows this has made them both vulnerable and resourceful.

### How did they do the research and what did they find out?

The research was carried out in three ways: the researchers interviewed people by telephone, and face to face at Polish community venues, they visited community spaces and wrote about how they are used by older Polish people, and they held three discussion groups at social events for older Polish people. The discussions were about: “Living and working in the UK”, “Transnational pensioners and the welfare state”, and general life experiences.

These are some highlights of what the research found out:

- Family is of primary importance to older Polish migrants in Manchester, and it was often the reason they came to the UK after 2004 – this means that daily life is “particularly challenging for single individuals without a local kin-support [family] network”.
- The people interviewed have strong personal resilience, and a strong sense of equality and social justice. This comes from their life experiences of living in Poland when it was called the Polish People’s Republic, then as it changed to current-day Poland.
- The community has 3 central challenges:
  - Communication in English – many of these people did not learn English at school. Others experience loss of their second language due to illness, dementia, or loss of speech.
  - Money issues – these include: low paid work; problems with housing costs, many of them are afraid of becoming homeless, and some of them have been homeless; feelings and beliefs about the best ways to deal with money that come from their historical experiences.
  - Physical and mental health problems – these lead to financial problems and increase social isolation and loneliness. They are made worse by not being able to speak English well so they cannot easily join patient support groups. The researchers say health services should provide Polish-language support and develop cultural awareness.

- These challenges are strengthened by:
  - Complex international legal, benefits, and pension laws, and difficulties to do with living in and moving between countries – such as difficulties with Brexit
  - Workers’ rights and employment protection, especially to do with employment agencies, anti-discrimination / hate crime measures
  - Difficulties using public transport – mainly due to language but also cost
  - Not having a healthy work-life balance, due to the type of work they are able to get – because of language skills, and because they were recruited into jobs before arriving in the UK

**“The older Polish people who were interviewed had strong personal resilience, and a strong sense of equality and social justice.”**

## Main conclusions

The researchers recommend improvements in 6 main areas:

- Legal, welfare and housing support – e.g. running Polish language legal and welfare advice sessions.
- Learning, language and urban mobility support – e.g. promoting life long learning to improve later life language skills.
- Health service improvements – e.g. creating Polish language support groups.
- More opportunities for social engagement, recreation, activity – e.g. creating a directory of cultural associations.
- Encouragement for political campaigning and storytelling – to give the community a voice with regard to Brexit, hate crime, and other issues.
- Urban infrastructures and networks – mapping and enabling collaboration of community centres and institutions working with Polish migrants over 50.

## What next?

Europa are currently seeking funding to translate this research findings summary into Polish, and to expand the findings of the research into a larger paper, in collaboration with an academic partner.

You can find out more about Europa at: <https://europa.org.uk/>

## Equalities Board next steps

### Sharing the research results

We aim to make the research results accessible to people who can use them to improve life for older people in their communities, and people who can use them to improve the work of Ambition for Ageing. All the full reports and accessible reports will be available to read on the Equalities Board website: <https://lgbt.foundation/ambition-for-ageing/publications>

### More community-based research

These projects showed that community-based research is an important way to find out about the needs of the most marginalised people. AFA will be funding more research like this later in 2018.