**Migration, Career Trajectories and Austerity: A life course approach to examining the career pathways of individuals in low paid work**

Migration represents a significant change in the life course and career trajectories of individuals. The process involves individuals in shaping their career trajectories within new national and local labour markets, opportunity structures and cultural norms in destination countries. The position of migrants in advanced industrialised countries, including the UK, the country in which this study is based, needs to be framed within the context of major restructuring of the labour market throughout the EU, following post-Fordist production. These changes have contributed to widening social and economic inequalities, new flexibility demands and precarity (Keskinen et al., 2016).

We draw on Archer's (2007) approach to structure and agency, which views these concepts as analytically distinct, rather than as part of a duality as proposed by Giddens (1984). We also draw on a life course approach to examine the role of human agency and subjective meaning in the shaping of individual life stories by context. As part of this approach, each life story is used to provide insights into how individuals make sense of the links between the past and the present, and plan for the future.

The empirical study on which this paper is based consisted of in-depth qualitative case studies of nine large organisations in the public, voluntary and private sectors in Scotland and England, each of which involved interviews with managers and low paid workers. Interview accounts of 34 migrant workers (17 of whom are from EU countries and 17 from non-EU countries) were used to purposefully identify a selection of narratives that represent diverse individual career trajectories that involve migration and low paid work. Individual life stories are used as ‘cases’ to explore multi-faceted aspects of related phenomena, in this case, migration and career pathways. These individual case studies draw on individuals’ own interpretation of their current employment viewed within the context of their wider life projects, including in their country of origin and of (temporary) settlement.

Our findings reveal the variety of ways in which the experience of migration intersects with gender, ethnicity and age as individuals continually negotiate their careers as part of a wider life project. The routes to finding, sustaining and building on work that will help them to do this are complex. Individuals face a number of barriers, including lack of training, line manager support for progression and clear career pathways for individuals in low paid work. We conclude that although human agency is revealed in the efforts of individuals to negotiate complex opportunity structures both within work and wider life projects, this is constrained through a combination of factors in the labour market that interact with, and influence informal organisational cultures.

**References**

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