

Simon speaking to Bart via Zoom about his study on British migrants post Brexit

Simon: I'm here with Bart, and in these post-Brexit times which have been to some people perhaps a bit worrying, Bart's got an interesting project that he's involved in and I'll let, I'll let you introduce yourself, Bart and tell us what it is you're doing.

Bart: Right. Thank you. So, as you said I'm Bart and I'm a doctoral candidate at Sciences Po, Paris, in sociology, and at the moment what I am trying to study is how changing legal status affects migrants 'experiences within their home country. And I am particularly interested in the case of British migrants because they just went through one of the most colossal changes in their legal status for a generation. They went from being EU citizens with all of the rights that that implies to being third country nationals for the most part. And so British citizens had to make a very distinct choice after the Referendum of 2016. They either had to become citizens of the countries in which they lived, so if you lived in France you had to become a French citizen, or they had to participate in these special new visa processes in the case of France that's WARP and I'm really interested how that's affected peoples 'labour market outcomes, how it's affected their quality of health, their feelings of security and vulnerability and I try and explore that with a whole bunch of people through an interview-based methodology. So that's the project.

Simon: Right. It's fascinating and I became aware of it because I saw you posted on Facebook that you were looking for people to interview who had I guess problems, or who wanted to say something about what this whole process has meant to them and what interested me was to maybe find out from you, maybe some of the common themes that were coming up in your research, or maybe some of the uncommon things, the things that were happening that a lot of us maybe didn't have to think about. I am sure there are many British people living in France who went through the WARP application process, plain sailing, everything was fine and they just got their Carte de Sejour and everything was okay. But obviously your experience will be quite different from that, so maybe you could outline some of the things that have cropped up.

Bart: So I think one of the most common themes is that the WARP process is not in and of itself the hardest part of administratively integrating into France. WARP was reasonably well designed and so long as you lived in a department where the administration was well organised, it wasn't necessarily a problem. Actually, many of the problems come once you have finished WARP, once you have to get things like a social security number, that is when your life starts to become very complicated. And that's always been the case but the change for British people was that for years and years they have been able to get by without a lot of paperwork and suddenly they really



needed to get things like a Carte Vitale. And so I think it's not so much the getting a Visa that was the change for a lot of people, but it was rather all these extra administrative pieces of paper which they had never been asked for before and they suddenly had to comprehend. The second unexpected thing, just to get my bid out there, is that I was surprised by the number of people I have met who had the opportunity to apply for citizenship and haven't, and they have a variety of reasons for not wanting to do so. Some of which relate to their feelings of loyalty to Britain, some of which are more to do with tax, and it is always interesting to hear from them why they don't apply for citizenship. Because there are two things just to any listeners who may not know. There is getting your residence permit which gives you either five or ten years in France without having to do anything, and there is citizenship and many of the people who went through the process of getting their residence permit post-Brexit were in fact eligible for citizenship. A lot of them had been in the country for long enough and have worked here for long enough that they could have accessed citizenship but chose not to.

Simon: That's interesting, so what are the main reasons of people who live here and as you say, are entitled to apply for that? What are their main reasons for not doing that?

Bart: Well, I heard two main reasons. I think the first one which is much more common is that people are quite intimidated by the citizenship application process. In France there is this requirement that you should have assimilated into French society, that you should be able to speak French to a reasonably high standard, that you should know about French culture. You do hear occasionally horror stories about people being asked about French pop stars in their citizenship interview and I think some British people find that a slightly intimidating prospect and it was much easier just to go onto an online portal and say yes, I've lived here and worked here for X number of years. So that's reason number one. But reason number two, and I'm surprised by how often I come across this, is that people say, well, I don't really feel French, I don't feel a fundamental loyalty to France. I even, I one interviewee said to me that you know she had taken a personal oath to the Queen at some point in her career, and she felt it would be almost a betrayal of that oath to then ...

Simon: Okay.

Bart: ... go and become a French citizen. So it is partly about some bread and butter things like paperwork, but it's also about how people feel about the world.

Simon: Well, that is interesting. Let's look at some of the other points because obviously whilst we've got the right to live and work in France if we've settled here, we don't have the right anymore to work across the other member countries. Has that been something

that's come up with you in terms of people who are, you know maybe they're living in France but they used to work across the borders. Has that had an impact?

Bart: So, I think most people I've spoken to have lives which are fairly settled in France and so I haven't heard a huge amount of dissent about the fact they can't go and work outside the country. But I think people, especially people who've got five-year residency cards are sometimes very worried about leaving the country because if they leave for more than six months, even if it's not for work related purposes they lose their right to remain in France and so I think there is a big concern about that. But I think there's only a relatively small number of people who are really trans-national workers prior to the referendum. It's true there are some but I've encountered relatively few of those.

Simon: And so what other issues have cropped up that you, that have surprised you or that you hadn't thought about?

Bart: Oh, apart from that I think one of the things that's really interesting to be hearing is that the big feeling post the referendum amongst many people was that they lacked any kind of political representation. And I was surprised how often I you know I think in every interview someone has raised this as an issue because of course most people weren't allowed to vote if they've been living in France for more than 15 years. Ah, and so even though that's, I should say this is changing now with the Election Act of 2022, the British government is going to enfranchise the vast majority of British overseas nationals, um, but even so I think people still feel that they, they haven't got an MP per say, they didn't get a voice in the referendum and so they feel usually disenfranchised.

Simon: Right. And in terms of integrating into French society of course you can't, you can no longer sit on the, you know the local council.

Bart: Yes. Absolutely. And I think, I haven't encountered too many people who are directly involved in the local politics of their town, or village or city. But it is sometimes I think a sort of theoretical concern for a lot of British migrants. It's not that they are involved but it's the feeling that they now cannot be involved.

Simon: Yeah.

Bart: But again takes, especially since they can't vote in their own country which adds to this feeling of political disenfranchisement.

Simon: Okay. So um, what would be, what is the sort of outcome you're looking for in your research. What, what's going to happen with it, what are you going to do? How might it change or affect anything that is going on?

Bart: Well, I think like most researchers I have a very limited impact on policy makers so I don't want to build up anyone's hopes too high about my ability to influence change, but I hope we achieve really good things out of this project. The first is just documenting the experience of British migrants over the last two or three years because at the moment there is very little literature on what's happened to this group of people even though they've gone through this colossal change in their legal status. I think the second thing that would be really nice if we could get this far to achieve would be to give some of the activists 'evidence of the things they are saying. I think very often what happens is you have people who are advocating on behalf of the British diaspora, but they don't have a huge amount of research to back up what they're saying, even if what they are saying is absolutely true. So, we can do some good documentary work and we can help back up some of the people who are advocating for the British diaspora in France and Europe. Generally, I think that will be really positive.

Simon: Well, that's really, really good to know that there are people out there fighting, fighting in our corner. So, Bart thank you very much for joining us from Paris and for sharing that information with us. Thank you very much.

Bart: Thank you. It was a pleasure.