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**MIGRATION AS A CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEM  
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THEORETICAL  
SCIENTIFIC CONSIDERATIONS AND RESEARCH  
EXPLORATION**

**MIGRACJA JAKO WSPÓŁCZESNY PROBLEM SPOŁECZNY  
W PERSPEKTYWIE TEORETYCZNYCH  
ROZWAŻAŃ NAUKOWYCH  
I EKSPLOKACJI BADAWCZYCH**

**Abstract**

The article aims to present the attitude of the Polish society towards the phenomenon of migration, including the issue of approving people differing from Poland in terms of culture and ethnicity. The author outlines the phenomenon, characterises specificity of the country as one that is ethnically homogenous, indicates Poles' migratory experience and the society's acceptance of migratory trips, mainly for gainful employment. Finally, the author indicates what Poles' standpoints are towards foreigners. This is illustrated with official statistical data and own surveys.

**Key words:** migrations, acceptance, tolerance, society, social policy.

**Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie postawy polskiego społeczeństwa wobec zjawiska migracji, w tym kwestii akceptacji ludzi różniących się pod względem kulturowym i etnicznym od Polaków. Autorka opisuje zjawisko, charakteryzuje specyfikę kraju jako jednorodnego etnicznie, przedstawia doświadczenia migracyjne Polaków i nastawienie społeczeństwa wobec podróży migracyjnych, w szczególności w celach pracy zarobkowej. W końcowej części pracy autorka ilustruje, na podstawie oficjalnych danych statystycznych oraz własnych badań, jakie jest odniesienie Polaków do cudzoziemców.

**Słowa kluczowe:** migracje, akceptacja, tolerancja, społeczeństwo, polityka społeczna.

**Processes of migration and social policy**

Modern migratory movements fall outside any traditional definitions. They do not always fall into a classic definition of migration as a relatively permanent change of the place of residence for a period of time longer than three months or

for purposes other than tourism<sup>1</sup>. The term of migration is really diversified. There are many factors conditioning migratory movements and many definitions which diversify types of migration in terms of their duration, the main purpose of migration, and reasons for decisions to migrate. Migrations belong to social phenomena which more frequently than others depend on changes in demographic, political, and economic conditions. Therefore, a closer look should be taken at factors conditioning migration processes. These seem to be conditioned mainly by a country's level of economic development. A certain correlation is noticed between emigrations and immigrations. Most often, conditions not conducive to emigrations are those that favour immigration. They include a high economic level, a large number of workplaces, a low unemployment rate; they are conducive to immigration, and the population of the country does not undertake emigration<sup>2</sup>. Culture, namely migration traditions in a given area, also plays an important role.

The process of migrations is a fact, and therefore states conduct broadly defined migratory policies. "The migratory policy is a comprehensive system of indications as well as legal and institutional regulations affecting the development of the volume, structure and directions of migratory processes, taking into consideration demographic, social and economic situation, as well as any applicable international standards and bilateral agreements"<sup>3</sup>. Each country conducts a migratory policy, and it is interesting to identify the priorities and directions of development of the Polish migratory policy. Poland is mainly an emigration country, which has been experiencing a negative balance of foreign migrations for many years. The priority of the Polish migratory policy should be to transform Poland into a state attractive for immigrants, especially from the East. It is important for the state to create good conditions for various specialists and experts who come to Poland. As part of obtaining highly qualified workforce, the state also comes up with pro-family incentives for highly qualified specialists, for example enabling employment for a spouse. In addition, Polish universities promote themselves to attract foreigners, a potential group of future highly qualified specialists. It is very difficult to bring emigrants to Poland and at the same time protect the domestic market against a collapse. Thus, the policy must be mainly preventive. Issuing work permits is the most evident form of the policy protecting the domestic market against an inflow of job applicants. Another important problem is illegal employment of emigrants who come to the country. There should be more controls to prevent it, and this is why the country conducts the policy of a controlled inflow.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Firlit-Fesnak, *Migracje międzynarodowe a modernizacja systemu politycznego i społecznego*, Wyd. UW, Warszawa 2008, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> J. Zurawska, *Dylematy polityki migracyjnej Polski*, „Prace Migracyjne” 2005, no. 58: 11–33, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

Movements of large populations called migrations are perceived by the authorities and the society in various ways. On the one hand, a conflictual character of that process emerges, for example an increase in ethnic problems, multiculturalism, and emergence of the secondary sector of the labour market, discrimination or pathologies. On the other hand, there are benefits and a functional connection between immigration masses and the needs of the inflow countries.

### **Migrations of Poles after accession to the European Union**

Important events in the history of migrations included accession of Poland to the European Union on 1 May 2004 and signing the Schengen Treaty. After extending the European Union, possibilities of migration and relocation were facilitated to a great extent. Institutional barriers which had blocked possibilities of taking up employment abroad legally disappeared after 1 May 2004<sup>4</sup>. It was back in May 2004 that owing to the decision taken by the first three countries of the fifteen (Ireland, Sweden, and Great Britain), for the first time in the modern history, Poles became free to look for employment and settle abroad. Accession to the European Union, in fact, changed the scale and geography of migrations of a large part of new member countries. At the same time, new greater possibilities to travel and study abroad appeared, which is significant mainly for the youth. After 2004, directions of the Polish emigration changed. "The country attracting immigrants the most was not Germany anymore, but Great Britain. The United States, constituting the second destination in the world for Polish emigrants before 2004, fell to the fifth place after 2004. The US was replaced by Germany, Ireland, and Italy, respectively. As legal emigration of Poles to the USA decreased (from 2001), illegal emigration grew. New research, however, indicates a collapse of the myth of America as a country of settlement migration, and not only due to political changes and immigration restrictions, but also because of the low dollar exchange rate and opening European Union markets"<sup>5</sup>.

After 2004, it became easier to earn a living abroad, performing work legally and in accordance with one's qualifications. One of the most spectacular cases in the post-accession period is undoubtedly Poles' migration to Great Britain. In 2002, around 24,000 Polish citizens lived in Great Britain. The number grew to 209,000 in 2006 and to nearly 410,000 in 2007<sup>6</sup>. The data clearly indicate that the countries which opened their labour markets for migrants from new member countries gained the largest group of migrants from Poland. Reasons for such

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<sup>4</sup> G. Firlit-Fesnak, *Migracje międzynarodowe a modernizacja systemu...*, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> A. Mazurkiewicz, *Zarys historii emigracji z ziem polskich*, Gdynia 2012, p. 21, [http://www.gdynia.pl/g2/2012\\_06/55767\\_fileot.pdf](http://www.gdynia.pl/g2/2012_06/55767_fileot.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> P. Kaczmarczyk, *Poakcesyjne migracje Polaków – próba bilansu*. „Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny” 2010, no. 4, 5–36, p. 9.

numerous migration from Poland include mainly the demographic situation, high unemployment rate, failure to adjust the education system to the labour market, and differences in salaries between Poland and countries of Western Europe<sup>7</sup>.

### **Poles attitude to foreigners in the light of statistical studies**

Poland is a country with a small number of people of foreign descent, especially in comparison with other countries of the European Union. Data of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development suggest that people born abroad were 1.8% of the population of Poland in 2005, which is the lowest value in the European Union. Globalisation processes greatly affect migrations of societies. Over the last decade, Europe has faced some serious changes. Accession of new countries to the European Union, mass emigration from European countries after introducing the Schengen Treaty and opening borders, as well as the economic crisis in Western Europe and immigrants in Poland have been turning points in the migration policy and have changed attitudes to migrants<sup>8</sup>.

Poles' attitudes to foreigners are very diverse, due to the fact that the way of perceiving and treating foreigners is a complex phenomenon which depends on many factors. Relationships with a person of foreign descent depend on mental characteristics, i.e. the level of acceptance for racial and cultural differences as well as views on benefits or disadvantages of confronting various cultures<sup>9</sup>.

According to research, from the perspective of the balance of benefits from immigration, the result of Poland is good. Poles are in the fifth place among the countries of the European Union. The worst, however, is the balance of economic benefits from taking in immigrants. This assessment of benefits should translate into foreigners being welcome in our country. However, the level of acceptance for immigrants does differ and depends on where the foreigners come from and to which ethnic group they belong. Poles clearly tend to accept and consent more immigrants from the European Union than an immigrant who is racially and continentally different. The Polish society is relatively open for foreigners, but they are set certain requirements and selected according to some criteria. Research indicates four common selection criteria: education in Christian tradition, white skin colour, property, and professional qualifications. Around one fourth of adult Poles know a foreigner living in Poland. Noticeably, residents of major cities more frequently know people who are culturally and racially different than ones living in medium or minor cities. In Poland, the most foreigners are Ukrainians and Belarussians, more rarely Germans. Arrivals of

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<sup>7</sup> A. Mazurkiewicz, *Zarys historii emigracji...*, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> M. Wenzel, *Stosunek do obcokrajowców w Polsce*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2009, p. 1, <http://www.isp.org.pl/files/7735258070251767001254129661.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

citizens of the countries of the European Union and residents of the United States of America are perceived by Poles well, whereas presence of people who are different ethnically, as well as residents of poor countries – badly. Most positive aspects are perceived by Poles when people from developed Western countries and the Czech Republic, and to a lower extent people from Lithuania, come to stay in Poland. When citizens of the countries of the former USSR, excluding Lithuanians, Vietnamese, Turkish, Arabs, as well as people from African countries come to Poland it is perceived by Poles rather negatively. In the case of Ukrainians, who are the most numerous group of foreigners in Poland, negative feelings prevail.

Declared acceptance for foreigners on the domestic labour market is common and is systematically growing. An overwhelming majority (86%) of adult Poles think foreigners should be allowed to take up work in Poland, and half of the respondents would like to enable them to work in any profession. Objection to employing foreigners is expressed by every tenth respondent. Acquaintance with foreigners increases their acceptance on the Polish labour market. Respondents knowing a citizen of another country living in Poland mostly think that people from abroad should be allowed to take up any work. Survey participants knowing a Belarussian, a Russian or a Ukrainian living in Poland, slightly more often than respondents not knowing any foreigners, share a conviction of usefulness of work of the visitors from the East for the Polish economy, they also more often benefit personally<sup>10</sup>.

In authors opinion the reasons can be found in history. Even though Poles were often forced to leave their country, be it for political or economic reasons, emigrants in Poland were rare, and those who came immediately assimilated with the local society. Aversion to Russians is a symptom of the influence zone of the USSR in the post-war times, and the lack of trust in other cultures comes from the lack of experience, assimilation, and willingness to co-operate.

In conclusion: Poles are characterised by uncertainty in relation to foreigners, and if it necessary to take them in, then it is only after meeting a series of conditions and according to thoroughly selected criteria. Acceptance for foreigners is conditional and limited. In employee relationships, Poles are sympathetic only if foreigners are to carry out work which Polish employees do not want. In the society, the most common is the conviction that foreigners are useful for the economy, but not necessarily for employees. Limited openness to visitors from the East is also linked to prejudices. Other research shows that there is still considerable aversion to Belarussians, Russians and Ukrainians, which, however, systematically drops<sup>11</sup>. The reasons are historical. Poland has always been an ethnically homogenous country, so we have not got accustomed to foreign nationalities in our country. After the war, we faced migrations and, after power

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

was seized by the socialist party, there was no time to build any tolerance for other cultures or build foundations of civil society. Taking into consideration multiculturalism of countries nowadays, Poles face a difficult task of opening to foreigners and building their own tolerance.

According to statistics of the Office for Foreigners, the number of visitors from other countries settling and seeking employment in Poland is increasing from year to year. A foreigner who wants to settle in Poland for a longer period of time applies for a residence card. According to the Statistical Newsletter of the Office for Foreigners, at the end of December 2014 more than 175,000 foreigners had valid residence cards, and the entry into force of the new Foreigners Act significantly affected an increase in immigration to Poland; in 2014, 42,500 temporary residence permits were issued, which was by 10% more than in the previous year. However, those documents are most numerous applied for and received by citizens of Ukraine.

### Students' opinions regarding foreigners. Based on own research

In January 2016, the author of the article conducted a survey among 2<sup>nd</sup> level part-time university students in the field of Administration, specialisation: Organisation of Social Work and Resocialisation at the University of Law and Public Administration (WSPiA) in Rzeszów, which aimed to find out opinions of students, whose professions make it possible for them to encounter social problems of the Polish society and who are sensitive to the occurrence of phenomena such as homelessness, poverty, and safety, regarding the taking in of refugees from various parts of the world in Poland and acceptance for that phenomenon.

The university has its seat in Rzeszów, the capital city of Podkarpacie, one of major areas in Poland, a country with rich migration history. 109 women and 7 men participated in the research, with the average age of respondents of 24.5 years. The survey participants more often lived in the countryside (62 of the respondents) than in the city (54 of the respondents). In order to obtain precise replies, the survey questionnaire included abridged definitions of some terms:

- tolerance (from Lat. verb *tolerare* – “endure”, “bear”, “endure”) – in colloquial speech and in social sciences, a social and personal attitude characterised by respect for views, behaviours and traits of other people, as well as themselves (<https://sjp.pwn.pl>).
- acceptance (from Lat. *acceptatio*) – acknowledging something, approving, confirming something, reconciling to something which cannot be changed, deeming features of someone's conduct consistent with expectations<sup>12</sup>.

Respondents were asked whether they would accept an emigrant in their closest environment, from what country and in what connection: family, profes-

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<sup>12</sup> <http://sjp.pwn.pl/>

sional, school environment, their neighbour environment. In addition, they were asked to write a few sentences expressing their opinions on taking in refugees in our country in the current geopolitical situation.

Opinions on refugees and the possibility of taking them into Poland are very divided: only 15 respondents expressed a definitely negative opinions when it comes to taking in refugees in Poland and justified their opinions; only 2 survey participants remarked that they are for taking in emigrants in Poland and did not indicate any negative aspects of that phenomenon. The other respondents indicate advantages and disadvantages of migration and taking in refugees in Poland, however they are for taking in refugees after refugees meet some (many) requirements and after the authorities meet some organisational and legal conditions.

When it comes to the first question asked about a migrant's country of origin, six countries/areas were mentioned in the students' replies: Ukraine, followed by Syria, then Africa, England, Ireland, Germany, Italy, and others. Most respondents indicate that they would be willing to see emigrants from Ukraine, England and Ireland, Germany, Italy, and Spain. Only one respondent indicated in her reply that she accepts an emigrant from Syria, and three persons pointed out that they do not mind emigrants from Africa.

Most survey participants would be reluctant to accept an emigrant in their family, unless it is further family, however there are also opinions approving of relationships with emigrants. The survey participants accept the presence of emigrants in schools, in professional relationships, however an emigrant in neighbourhood would be accepted less often.

In reply to the question whether on emigration another culture or an emigrant should be tolerated in their environment, most survey participants share an opinion that everyone has the right to change their place of stay, and while abroad respect is needed for a foreign culture.

There were many interesting answers to the last question, both for and against taking in refugees in Poland. Respondents expressed their opinions on administrative issues regarding taking in refugees, legal conditions and indicated social issues. Out of all the survey participants, only 15 persons were against taking refugees in Poland, whereas the remaining respondents think that refugees can be taken into Poland, but after meeting a number of conditions. The most frequent conditions posed for emigrants-refugees is: sex (women), age (youth and children), willingness to work, accepting our culture and customs, adopting our faith. The questionnaires do not contain even one unambiguous answer which would indicate willingness to take in refugees without any conditions. It is worth noticing that respondents have critical attitudes to emigrants who want to earn money and ones who count on state social help, and kinder attitudes to persons who need help in relation to the war taking place (in Syria).

Two utterances did not directly relate to the problem of refugees from Syria to Europe and Poland, but also indicated the problem of emigrants from Ukraine

and the issue of repatriation. A 27-year-old female said as follows: “refugees from Ukraine should be helped for many reasons. One of them is the affinity to Poles, neighbourly relations and cultural similarity”. Another respondent indicated a problem of repatriation and people deported to Siberia: “I would take in Poles from Russia and Siberia, because their grandfathers and fathers took part in fighting for our country’s freedom”.

In order to illustrate better what respondents think about taking in emigrants by Poland, it is worth quoting a few replies. In negative utterances, the survey participants bring up the issue of Poland’s economic situation. “Poland is not a wealthy country and we cannot afford to help others, as we do not have ourselves many means, and there are many social needs”. The survey participants also indicated the bad situation in the labour market in Poland, because “many citizens of our country have a problem with employment and maintaining their family, and taking in refugees will not improve the situation.” Many utterances point out that Poland is not prepared to take in migrants. A 38-year old female remarks. “Our country is not prepared for it, some actions are not well thought out”. Many people express their concern over cultural differences between Poles and Syrians. “A cultural and religious combination constitutes major problems, it can lead to riots and rebellions in the state”. A definite majority are afraid about their safety and see differences in terms of outlook and culture. “The best solution would be not to take in refugees in our country, due to the inability to adapt to our culture and learn a language as well as the question of faith”. Many respondents support this with an example of the situation in Germany, evidencing lack of adaptation and conflicts. A twenty-four year old female student points out that “taking into consideration the situation in Germany, I am very afraid about my own safety and safety of my close ones”. She also emphasizes the fact that her family live in Germany and belong to the group of economic migrants after accession of Poland to the UE. Respondents are offended by the fact that refugees live at the expense of the state, which is related to obstacles for citizens, bad economic situation and economic burden. “Many refugees are young men, who can fight for their country and wellbeing for their families, but they would rather escape and live off other people”. This kind of approach to the situation results in many survey participants putting forward a postulate of taking in women with children: “If it was necessary, I would be for taking in women with children”.

Utterances approving taking in refugees in Poland include the most positive reply of a thirty-nine year old female resident of the city: “I think each person deserves help irrespective of their faith or descent”. Most positive replies are hedged with some conditions of acceptance. A 23-year-old female student writes, “I am for taking in emigrants, but first we should check who we let in our country, they cannot be anyone related to terrorists and mafia”. Again, the student’s utterance brings up the issue of safety. To confirm it is worth to quote one more

utterance of a 22-year-old female from Domaradz: “It is very important to help others, but it is even more important to ensure Poles’ safety, it is important to be cautious when taking in refugees”. Another issue when taking in refugees is limitation regarding their sex and age: “Personally, I think that the Polish state should thoroughly check refugees before taking them in, and first take in women with children, and not men counting on benefits on which they will be making a living”. Subsequent conditions of taking in refugees appearing in the replies regard taking up employment by refugees. “Taking in refugees should be conditioned by the obligation of taking up employment or a short period of stay”. Many people have positive attitude to taking refugees, but only in the situation when their life and health are at stake and when there are reasons to emigrate from their country. “Refugees should be taken in if their life is at risk on condition of social acceptance and if they conduct themselves well and bear penal responsibility for any unacceptable social behaviours”. To confirm this position, a reply of a 29-year-old resident of Strzyżów can be quoted: “I think refugees should be taken in if they leave their country in order to save their lives, provided that they are checked, it would be best to provide protection for women with children and the elderly”. A quite extreme view was expressed by a 22-year-old female respondent writing that she would condition taking in refugees on adopting the catholic faith. Some utterances share that view. In the opinion of the author of the study, it is very controversial from the point of view of the freedom of faith.

## Conclusions

The problem regarding the taking in of refugees is the condition of the Polish society and its resistance; according to the publication of the latest Social Diagnosis 2015<sup>13</sup>, the research conducted by Polish scientists since 1990s according to the same methodology the level of the social capital in Poland is at a lower level than in the all old EU countries. The indicator of social trust has slightly changed over time, but it remained at the level 2–3 times lower than the European Union average in the whole period from 1992 to 2015. Also, in the group of 15 European countries, Poles are the ones to most rarely believe in good intentions of other people. Only 24 percent Poles in comparison with 76 percent of Danes believe that other people try to be honest with them. *The Diagnosis* shows how little Poles’ social and citizen experience is, which is gained by being active in organisations, participation in grass-roots social initiatives, social meetings, or volunteer service. As Poles associate so unwillingly, they rarely take actions for other people, organisations and own communities, they are reluctant to gather to decide something and then do it, then they do not have any opportu-

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<sup>13</sup> [www.diagnoza.com](http://www.diagnoza.com)

nities to learn organised social activity and acquire skills necessary to live in citizen society<sup>14</sup>, which could ensure safe life to visitors.

Over the last year, the world has faced a significant challenge of providing shelter and material help to many people, refugees from countries engulfed by war or simply very poor countries. At the same time, societies which are migrants' destinations have concerns over identity related to culture, religion and outlooks. Are migrations safe for ethnically and culturally homogenous societies? Many people ask this important question, and finding the answer poses quite a big challenge.

There is a basic question whether Poland is prepared to take in refugees who will be directed to Poland through the European Union structures. Undoubtedly, when entering a community the country forced to respect laws and waive part of our sovereignty. That is why as members of the community Poland will be facing the dilemma of providing shelter to refugees, enabling them to use social funds and providing them with assistance, for which the country will receive additional European funds. Poland's Prime Minister's utterance is sufficient evidence that Poland is not ready to take in refugees. Poland does not have any ready social funds or places where they could wait through the difficult time.

Surveys and research conducted with the participation of Poles prove that Poles do not trust public authorities when it comes to the issue of migration and taking in refugees. Trust – according to the definition of the Polish language dictionary – is a conviction that a person or institution can be trusted, conviction that someone's words, information is true, and conviction that someone has some skills and can use them properly<sup>15</sup>. All three meanings of the term should be reflected in relationships between citizens and public authorities. Is Poland ready to take in refugees and will it ensure safety for its citizens? It is a fundamental question, and Poles are not convinced that it will. The fact that the people in power changed and no position was taken by church resulted in great divisions among Poles.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://sjp.pwn.pl/>

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