

The Dilemmas of Policy Towards Return Migration. The Case of Poland After the EU Accession

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The article introduces the theoretical approach to analysing return migration policy and discusses the main dilemmas of the state related to political reaction to returns of its nationals. The concept of reactive and active policy is presented, the first aiming at minimising the negative effects of returns, while the second focused on stimulating the return processes. The main drivers and determinants of the return policy effectiveness as well as the types, scope and scale of state activities addressed to returnees are also discussed in the article. The practice of state policy implementation is illustrated with the example of the particular case of Poland as a country which faced mass emigration after accession to the European Union and return migration in the recent years. The review of conceptual documents, the rationale for the state policy and the variety of activities implemented by the Polish government and other institutions are presented.

Keywords: return migration, state policy, Poland

Introduction

One of the basic rules describing and explaining migration processes says that *each main current of migration produces a compensating counter-current* (Ravenstein 1885). It means that the process of mass emigration is usually accompanied in time by return migration ('returns'), and furthermore, those countries which have experienced outflows of nationals should expect that at least some of them will return to the homeland in the near or more distant future. Both processes, mass emigration and mass returns, especially when occurring in a short period, could create a serious challenge for society, the labour market, and at the same time, for the state's policy. While emigration usually produces shortages in the labour market, returns are often accompanied by various reintegration problems. In both situations, policy-makers are forced to face the main dilemma of how to react to migration processes and how to reduce their possible negative effects.

This article focuses on the phenomenon of return migration and state policy dilemmas regarding the process, and its consequences from the point of view of the country of origin. It addresses a set of questions: If and how the state should react to the returns of its nationals? What are the main drivers of the state's reaction and what are the determinants and limits of the policy addressed to returnees? What are the possible and actual activities (legal, political and institutional) taken by the state in response to returns? Is the state's poli-

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cy able to exert a real impact on the scale and course of returns? And if not, why governments still make an effort to formulate and implement political actions addressed to returnees?

The hypothesis is that the state has a very limited capacity to control directly migration processes, which are determined first and foremost by the drivers originating from the economy and labour market. Nevertheless, governments apply a whole legal and institutional system addressed to potential emigrants (nationals who consider leaving the country), actual emigrants (nationals who already reside abroad and consider returning) and returnees (those who have already returned). The return migration policy includes a variety of actions, its main aim being to facilitate the return process and to assist in reintegration after arrival in the home country.

The article consists of several parts. The first introduces a conceptual approach to the phenomenon of return migration and the state's response to this process. There is a scarcity of theoretical reflection in the literature over state policy on returns of nationals; most of the publications present particular cases without or with a very limited general analytical approach. This challenge is taken up in this article. Human spatial mobility is a very dynamic and complex phenomenon which takes diversified forms and flows in the contemporary era of global movement. Although return migration is a worldwide observable fact, this text focuses on the European context in particular. It is not a simple task to define what return migration means nowadays, especially against the backdrop of the emerging international migration systems favouring the free movement of people and labour, the best example of which is the European Union. The unpredictable dynamics of contemporary migration processes is sustained by minimum formal barriers and cheap transportation costs. These all have made migration a multiple-stage process in which return to the homeland often occurs to be just a recurring temporary phase in the multi-stage process of mobility during which a person changes the country of residence and work many times. This 'fluidity' of the migration process determines difficulties in providing reliable analyses on returns due to inaccurate data.

The later part of the article presents some reflections over state policy towards return migration of nationals. Generally speaking, the state's policy towards return migration could take a more active or more passive form (to encourage nationals residing abroad to return and to stimulate that process or, on the other hand, to react *post factum*, after returns appear). The variety of possible actions as well as their determinants and limits are portrayed. The next section considers the main state's dilemmas over return processes. The following part reviews the theoretical approach using the particular case of Poland as a country which in a short time experienced mass emigration after accession to the European Union in 2004 and then return migration some years after as a result of the worldwide economic crisis. The returns were at the heart of the government's interest and some interesting activities were proposed and implemented at the national and regional level, with first conceptual documents, and later practical programs and actions.

The phenomenon of return migration as a challenge to state policy

There is a moderate amount of literature on return migration, and even less which examines the state's policy perspective (Cassarino 2004; Duszczuk 2007; Gosh 2000; Leschke, Galgoczi, Watt 2012). The main conceptual approaches explaining the return migration phenomenon focus mostly on the economic line of analyses related to the reason for return, the link between migration and development, and the impact on the country of origin. The most common theories include, among others, the disappointment theory (Herzog, Schottman 1982; King 1978), the circular migration theory (Zelinsky 1971), the target income theory (Borjas 1994; Hill 1987), the social network theory (Massey 1990), the neo-classical economic theory (Constant, Massey 2002) and transnationalism (Portes, Guarnizo, Landolt 1999).

Even to define return migration in the time of permanent mobility is a real challenge. A return becomes a fluid phase in the migration process, in some cases being permanent, while in others a temporary one. The common migration process often resembles a cycle of departures and returns following one another, especially when there are no legal or administrative obstacles such as visas or stay and work permits. High qualified migrants in particular declare their eagerness to emigrate again after return. It means that return migration is a complex phenomenon, difficult to conceptualise, measure, estimate or predict. The main drivers of the decision to emigrate or re-emigrate seem to be directly related to the life conditions and options available on the labour market at home and abroad (Athukorala 1990: 335-336). Today returnees constitute an extremely heterogeneous group of migrants diversified specifically by the length of their stay abroad, their migration experiences, legal status, motivation to return and resources possessed (Cassarino 2004: 270). Russell King (2000) claims that a few types of return migration could be distinguished: occasional, seasonal, temporary and permanent, according to the intention of returnees and the course of the return process.

Additional factors influencing returns lie in the political realm. The EU and many of immigration countries implement certain political and legal instruments to stimulate short-term (circular, contract) migration to fill the niches in the labour market and encourage only those migrants to come whose profile fits the national labour market demands. At the same time, destination countries try to protect themselves against settlement migration, which could be a social and economic burden in the long term. Therefore, migrants are expected to arrive in the time of prosperity to fill vacant posts, and return home in the time of an economic crisis and growing unemployment. In the latter case, destination countries stimulate returns of migrants to their homelands by using the scheme of the voluntary return program (managed by the International Organisation for Migration, IOM) and signing bilateral agreements and mobility partnerships with main source countries, enforced through media campaigns and civil society organisations (for example, the case of France, the UK, Germany or the Netherlands), but also through compulsory deportations to countries of origin (Gosh 2000). Return migration is thus an integral part of the constant mobility of people managed by national and international institutions.

In analysing the state's policy addressed to the nationals abroad (potential returnees) and those who have already returned, a key question remains: when and why return migration becomes a subject of the state's interest. It seems that the rationale for policy-makers' efforts to engage public resources in activities targeted at returning migrants are of direct and indirect origins. When returns are a perceptible phenomenon and as such turn out to be a subject of public (and very often also media) concern, political elites become interested in the issue as well. Also, once returns are recognised as a possible solution to particular problems, such as negative demography trends or shortages in the national labour force, encouraging migrants to return seems to be a reasonable reaction from the point of view of the state's interests. Return migration policy could be, therefore, examined from two different perspectives: 1) as a reaction in response to returns; and 2) as an action to stimulate returns. This distinction requires further investigation:

Ad. 1. A reactive state policy is implemented *post factum*, i.e. as a response to the already existing processes. Commonly, returns are a direct effect of an economic crisis in destination countries followed by growing unemployment, when migrants usually decide to return to live through the difficult time at home. In this case, the decision to return is made by migrants irrespectively of the state's reaction.

Ad. 2. An active state policy is executed *a priori*, i.e. to encourage nationals to return. When returns are recognised as a positive and desirable process (as a remedy for particular economic or social problems), then policy-makers act to stimulate migrants' decision to return and to facilitate the process of coming back to the home country.

The characteristics of return migration policy are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of return migration policy

	Policy in response to return migration (reactive)	Policy stimulating return migration (active)
Target group	Already returned migrants	Potential returnees
Rationale	To prevent problems with reintegration and minimise the negative effects of massive returns on the economy, labour market and society	To maximise the profits related to return migration (social, economical, demographical and financial capital of returnees)
Priority	To reduce the social tensions and costs related to return migration	To solve identified problems (such as negative demographic trends or labour force shortages)
Aim	To reintegrate returnees into the society and labour market	To encourage to return and to facilitate the return process
Place	Country of origin	Country of residence and country of origin
Phase	After return	Before return and/or at the time of return

Source: own elaboration, based on Lesińska (2010): 9.

The indirect purpose which explains the interest of policy-makers in return migration is related to the fundamental rationale behind all political actions: the determination to gain political support. Politicians are aware that the diaspora can be an influential political entity. Nationals residing abroad and their families (often left behind in the home country) become the object of attention of policy-makers representing all parties in the political scene, as any other group with voting rights, especially if it is numerous, influential and, moreover, a matter of public and media interest. This is precisely the case of nationals abroad and their families in the time of mass migration processes.

Within the agenda of return migration policy there are many possible activities which could be designed and implemented in practice to make the return easier for migrants. According to the phase of the return process, the state's actions addressed to returnees could be divided into three main groups: to promote the decision, to facilitate the process and to reintegrate after return. Among them, encouraging migrants to return seems to be the most challenging task for policy-makers. Moreover, state programs and activities targeted at migrants to persuade them to make the decision to return and to facilitate its execution could be shaped in various forms: from the basic ones (such as information campaigns, counselling, legal assistance, and provision of self-employment and investment opportunities), to more complex, including economic incentives and tax abolition.

Return migration policy – the types, scope and scale of state's activities

There is a variety of possible activities implemented by the state within the return migration policy agenda. The most common actions addressed to return migrants are grouped and discussed below.

1. Information policy and promotion activities

An active information policy is of fundamental significance. The main aim is to provide all necessary information regarding the relevant administrative procedures and formalities (which returnees should fulfil before leaving the country of residence and soon after arrival in their homeland), legal issues (such as transfer of social benefits or recognition of diplomas), opportunities for employment and self-employment, children's education, useful addresses and links to the state institutions and non-governmental organisations. Information campaigns are usually organised in close cooperation with media, on the Internet (using dedicated

websites), and through direct events held in places abroad with high concentration of emigrants' population. An example of a community-wide large-scale information campaign is the one initiated by the Polish government (see below). Also part of an information policy are activities aiming at creation of a positive image of the country of origin as a good place to return to, to live and work in, a place worth coming back to, where returnees are warmly welcome. Another very important measure is to propagate positive narratives about the return process as a success story and rational decision rather than a failure.

2. Employment of returnees

One of the main fears related to massive returns is their potential negative influence on economy, and the level of unemployment in particular. The most unfavourable behaviour of returnees, from the point of view of the state's interest, is to register as unemployed after return and be an immediate burden for the social welfare system. The basic objective of return migration policy is, therefore, to encourage migrants to find a proper workplace as soon as possible, even before return. An active employment policy is directly addressed not only to returnees, but also to potential employers. In Ireland, the government's priority in the time of mass returns was to employ the returning Irish immediately after their return to minimise the risk of increase in the unemployed stock. To that end, a system of additional incentives for employers was established to encourage them to create new workplaces specifically for returnees.

3. Trainings and counselling

The common action is to provide a system of trainings and counselling designed to make the reintegration process easier for returnees. The main aim is to prepare them to perform in the labour market, to promote self-employment, to have them learn how to create a business plan and acquire skills in financial management and, in consequence, to encourage them to establish their own businesses, which is the optimal solution from the state's economy perspective. Counselling is provided by help desks (usually in the cities or provincial centres) to match the skills and experience of returnees with the jobs available in the country.

4. Other economic incentives

The economic component of the state's policy towards returnees, besides the facilities already mentioned above (professional trainings and workplaces), could also include credit lending and tax abolition. Both are designed to stimulate economic activities and improve returnees' access to entrepreneurial development opportunities by providing additional financial resources, preferably to foster the setting up and running of own businesses or investment.

5. Institutional structure

Sometimes a special institutional body dedicated to dealing with the issue of return migration is set up within the public administration structure to coordinate all public activities addressing the return process. In most cases, it is established as a unit within the already existing public bodies, usually as a working group, task force or a separate department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

In practice, the scope of return migration policy depends on many factors, such as the institutional and financial resources available. The level of centralisation or decentralisation of the administration and decision-making system also plays an important role. The case studies (e.g. in Ireland) show that migrants usually return to the same regions and cities they left, which seems to be a reasonable decision in order to reduce the risk related to return. This fact determines the relevance of the local and regional level as a crucial element to effective implementation of public activities addressed to return migrants. There are many examples of local initiatives, especially in federal countries with strong position of the regions, such as Spain. In that country a return migrant certificate was applied, which is an interesting illustration of an individual, not collective approach to returnees (Lesińska, Nestorowicz 2010).

Factors determining the effectiveness of return migration policy

As it was noted above, due to its fluidity and dynamics return migration is a phenomenon which is difficult to monitor, estimate or predict. The unpredictability of return migration also defines the ability of policy-makers to influence that process and to manage its scale and course. Evaluation of return migration policy is particularly demanding. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some key factors determining its effectiveness. The list presented in Table 2 is definitely not an exhaustive one. The factors summarised below are divided into two groups: the dependent and independent from the state.

Table 2. Factors influencing the effectiveness of return migration policy

Factors dependent on the state	Factors independent from the state
Ties of diaspora (nationals residing abroad) to their homeland	Economic and political situation abroad (e.g. global financial crisis)
Network of the state's institutions and state-supported organisations abroad	Rationality of migrants' decision to return
Information and media policy	Emigrants' eagerness to take advantage of supportive return programs
Efficient and operative official legal and administrative system	
Available financial resources ensured in the budget to implement in practice the activities planned in the return migration policy agenda	

Source: own elaboration.

The state has a powerful influence on several key factors determining the effectiveness of return migration policy. Among them are ties with diaspora. It is a well-known fact that one of the most important reasons for returning are family relations and links with the mother country, thus the state's policy towards sustaining a positive image of the homeland among nationals living abroad could influence their decision to return. The network of public institutions (such as consulates and cultural institutions) as well as various organisations supported (e.g. financially) by the state of origin (such as migrants' media and associations, schools and cultural centres) could effectively support these efforts by promoting the national culture and language, spreading information related to the political and economic situation and, if necessary, facilitating the return process. Such an institutional network is at the same time a useful channel of communication with nationals abroad. It is of crucial importance to circulate any information about the state's policy effectively among diaspora, and simultaneously indirectly influence the decision to return.

Any political initiative will be ineffective without an operative legal and administrative system, as well as financial resources available. Some countries, such as Ireland and Spain, while implementing their return migration policies, established special institutional bodies to manage that issue. It is also worth noting that the state's policy has a key impact on economic growth and stability. Through public subsidies and investments, the state supports, even if to a limited extent, the process of development in some sectors of the economy, which translates into creating new jobs and increasing wages, and that is the most powerful factor pulling migrants to return.

Among the factors independent from the state which influence return migration are the condition of economy and labour market of destination countries. Migrants' behaviour is also autonomous and even if the decision to return is sometimes irrational (taken impulsively) and the return is not prepared for in advance, it

remains in the migrant's sole discretion to take advantage or not of the supportive return programs offered in the home country.

Moreover, to formulate an effective policy, the crucial factor is reliable and thorough information on the characteristics of the expected return flows. Assessing or predicting such a dynamic social process as migration is particularly difficult for the reasons already mentioned. As a result, the policy guidelines formulated by decision-makers with respect to return migration are often based on incomplete data, including unreliable forecasting and media speculations, which has an obvious negative impact on their practical implementation.

Main dilemmas of the state regarding return migration

The evaluation of the short- and long-term effects of mass emigration flows on the sending country is a problematic task. There are many positive consequences of nationals' outflows, such as a decrease in the rate of unemployment,¹ alleviation of social and economic tensions, remittances which stimulate consumption and investments (see: de Haas 2010; Okólski 2012). Emigration is even presented as a key factor (or even a necessary one) to complete the modernisation process (Layard, Krugman, Dornbusch 1992). On the other hand, mass emigration often has an adverse effect on economy and society. It is usually young, educated and enterprising persons, and high qualified specialists who emigrate, which causes negative changes in the labour force structure and severe shortages in some sectors of the economy. In particular, mass emigration affects a long-term decline of the population and its age structure (by shrinking the working age cohort), which has especially negative impact on aging societies.

As with emigration, the estimation of the benefits and costs of return migration is likewise difficult. Generally, sending countries implement a policy to stimulate three crucial processes to maximise the benefits from emigration: remittances, investments and returns (e.g. the case of India, see: Sahay 2007). Return migration could mitigate the negative process of brain drain (the outflow of the highly educated and professionals), which is usually a key issue for developing countries (Gosh 2000; Olesen 2002).

To formulate an appropriate political response to return migration, some fundamental questions should be considered: What determinates returns? To what extent do they result from independent factors such as global recession? Are returns desirable from the point of view of the state's interests? Should return migration be actively supported and facilitated, and if yes – what should be the scope of the state's policy addressed to returnees? A serious reflection over these questions allows to make a fundamental decision on the state's position towards return migration and, in consequence, to initiate or not any further actions, e.g. decide about the scale and character of the actions addressed to potential and/or real return migrants; allocate appropriate financial resources in the state's budget; and engage certain public bodies.

One of the main dilemmas of policy-makers over return migration is related to the question when returns are profitable for the state's economy and society. Returns of specialists and those who acquired a particular capital abroad (such as financial resources, social skills, professional qualifications, personal networks, and entrepreneurship) seem to be most beneficial.² Those groups are usually able to easily reintegrate in the labour market and social life after return and, moreover, to contribute to the general state's prosperity. Optimally, the returnees become an added value where a) new professional experience and competences were acquired during the migrants' stay abroad; b) the acquired expertise and skills meet the requirements of employers in the domestic labour market; and c) migrants are able to utilise their new professional abilities after return (Stahl 1982: 887-889). If any of these conditions is not fulfilled, there is no guarantee that return migrants will bring an expected asset to the state's economy.

Moreover, not all return processes are perceived by the state as a desirable phenomenon. Some countries actively encourage and even try to manage labourers' outflows by establishing special institutional systems

to coordinate foreign employment programs. This is especially noticeable for developing countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, India, and Egypt (Gosh 2000, Massey 1999). The governments sign bilateral agreements with destination countries, organise networks of work agencies and implement recruitment programs under their direct or indirect control. Those countries usually face overpopulation, surplus of workforce, growing unemployment and possible social tensions resulting in a difficult socio-economic situation. In addition, they rely on the positive effect of remittances on households, local communities and the national economy as a whole.

State policy towards return migration. The case of Poland after 2004

As a result of joining the EU and opening labour markets by some of the member states, a massive outflow of Poles took place after 2004. The number of Poles staying abroad reached a peak in 2007 and was estimated at 2.3 million (6.6 per cent of the total population) (Fihel 2011: 25). The size of that wave was surprising for all, including the policy-makers, society and even experts. The subsequent outbreak of the worldwide economic crisis and continuing decline in the global economy made some of the Polish migrants decide to return to the home country. The return flows have been noticeable since 2008; however, it is difficult to estimate the exact scale due to scan data, and lack of information whether such returns are temporary or permanent. Some studies based on the LFS (Labour Force Survey) report the number of 580 000 returnees in the second quarter of 2008 (Anacka, Fihel 2012: 148). The 2011 national census should bring more accurate and reliable data on this issue. Over the last years, several research projects have been undertaken on return migration of Poles, exploring the profile of Polish migrants and their impact on the economy and society of both sending and destination countries (see: Anacka, Fihel 2012; Grabowska-Lusińska 2010; Iglicka 2009; Centrum Doradztwa Strategicznego 2010; 2011a; 2011b).

Poland has a rich history as an emigration country (Kołodziej 1982; Pilch 1984). Mass outflows of nationals were characteristic of the contemporary history of Poland, especially of the interwar period (1918-1939). The state's policy at the time encouraged Poles to emigrate rather than to return home (Kicingier 2005; Wrzesiński 1975). However, it must be stressed here that there is a long-lasting tradition of repatriation schemes for Polish nationals and individuals of Polish origin which are sponsored by and operate strictly to the rules implemented by the state authorities; there were several waves of repatriation from the early years after the Second World War, through the 1990s till today. It means that the Polish state has an experience in stimulating and facilitating return flows, however, the ones just mentioned are very specific and, therefore, difficult to compare with the returns of post-accession migrants taking place in the recent years.

The first reaction of the Polish government to the post-accession migration appeared already in 2006. It was the *Closer to work, closer to Poland* program announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and directly addressed to the Polish labour migrants abroad and those who just planned to emigrate. This document marked a significant change in the state's policy towards Poles abroad as adopted to date, previously the focus being on the Polish diaspora as such. The aim of the program was *to increase the assistance to the growing labour migration of Poles* by providing easier access to the Polish consulates, the number of which was significantly increased in the new destination countries. Moreover, a wide information campaign was arranged to build understanding of the work conditions and employment procedures applicable in destination countries (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2007a). The overall purpose was *to protect Polish citizens against dangers and threats related to the often unprepared labour emigration*. To sum up, the program focused on providing institutional support to 'inexperienced' Poles emigrating for work. The return migration was not yet an issue of the policy-makers' interest.

The situation changed just a year after, when the post-accession emigration occurred to be a large-scale phenomenon and the first negative effects of the massive outflow of workers became noticeable in the Polish economy. As a response, in 2007 returns started to appear in the governmental documents as an important issue which requires the state's reaction (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych 2007b). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy proclaimed *The Return Program*, its conceptual framework and planned activities being very ambitious and assuming close cooperation between the major administrative bodies (Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej 2007). In the introduction to the conceptual note presenting *The Return Program*, attention was paid to the fact that labour shortages in some sectors of the economy were already evident and that employers were forced to search for foreigners as a substitute labour force. Prospective demography problems as a result of mass emigration were also raised. All these negative phenomena were presented as a rationale for the state's involvement. Moreover, the argument continued, *considering that emigrants are in large part young people, one can assume that passive observation of the ongoing processes could lead, in the nearest years, to a serious demographic crisis and labour market collapse* (Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej 2007). The main objective of the Program was portrayed as to create the best conditions for return for those who left Poland for economic reasons.

Among the actions mentioned in the Program, the most challenging ones were assigned to the Ministry of Finance: to introduce an income tax relief for people running a sole proprietorship business (so-called tax holidays), and to reduce the social insurance and pension contribution rate (only individuals who stayed abroad for at least a year would be entitled to all those privileges over a period of two years after return). Other important activities were allocated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: to improve the image of Poland among Polish emigrants, and to promote entrepreneurship and sole proprietorship; and to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy: to establish an information service on the economic situation and available job opportunities in Poland, to start a special website dedicated to emigrants, to organise job fairs in London and Dublin as the most popular destinations of the post-accession emigration of Poles, and to prepare (together with the Central Statistical Office) an analysis of the Polish labour market, with special attention to the most valuable professional groups, and depending on the analysis final conclusion, to set up an incentive program to encourage the most wanted specialists to return. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Higher Education were also mentioned in the Program as the institutions responsible for actions related to the development of e-learning systems in schools and universities across Poland as well as expansion of the network of Polish schools abroad. In practice, parliamentary elections resulting in the change of parties in the government prevented this impressive list of activities from finally being implemented.

Despite the political turbulence, the return migration remained a priority for the new government and, at the beginning of 2008, a new independent body was appointed: the Inter-ministry Working Group on Return Migration. Its aim was to formulate conceptual foundations and practical guidelines for the state's policy. The document produced by the Group indicated the following key presumptions: 1) returns are an inevitable consequence of mass emigration; and 2) the main aim of the state policy is not to influence individual migrants' decisions to return, but to provide them with a tool enabling to make a rational choice. It was also underlined that the general rationale for the state's policy was not to stimulate return migration but rather to facilitate the process of returning to Poland (through reintegration into the national labour market in particular) (Fiałkowska, Szczepański 2012; Szczepański 2010; 2011). The practical guidelines for the return migration policy consisted of a list of activities sorted in six packages (only the first five were implemented in practice):

1. To establish special services addressed to returnees, such as online services (dedicated websites, job consulting centres, investment and business advisory centres); to distribute *Powrotnik (The Returner)*, a unique guidebook for returning migrants (see also point 5 below).
2. To remove barriers for returning Poles, including by introducing the Tax Abolition Act in order to avoid double taxation; offering tax credits and investment allowances; facilitating the recognition of diplomas and qualifications acquired abroad; and making the acquisition or restoration of Polish citizenship easier. Enacted in 2008, the Tax Abolition Act provided for remission of unpaid income tax for Poles working abroad in 2002-2007. By 2010, only 57 000 people took advantage of that opportunity.
3. To roll out activities addressed to individual return migrants and their families, such as facilitating the children's reintegration into the educational system after return. The legal regulation ensuring additional lessons for returning children came into force in 2010. The instrument confers the right to minimum two and no more than five hours of the Polish language (or other subject) course a week provided in the school where the child is registered. This kind of assistance is offered free of charge for a maximum of 12 months on parent's request, with the final decision to organise such additional courses being at the discretion of the school manager.
4. To roll out activities addressed to the public administration bodies, including trainings for civil servants employed in the institutions responsible for contacts with the returnees, such as the local and regional labour offices.³
5. To roll out activities related to information and promotion. In 2008, a governmental campaign titled *Have you got a PPlan to return?* was inaugurated; its central aim was to provide potential and actual returnees with all necessary information to facilitate their return and later reintegration into the labour market and society. As part of the effort, a special manual for returnees (*Powrotnik – The Returner*) was distributed among Poles abroad via the network of consulates and Polish organisations (50 000 printed copies and available online). An official website (www.powroty.gov.pl) was established with the main objective to provide full information about the most relevant issues for returnees regarding taxes, the social security and social benefit system, education of children, starting own business, recognition of diplomas and many others. In 2011, the website was incorporated as an integral part of the special service called *Green Line*, set up by the Polish Public Employment Service as an official online information and consultation centre for individuals searching for a job and employers in Poland (powroty.zielonalinia.gov.pl). The website allows its users to submit any question online and receive a reliable official response within 14 days. Analysing the Q&A forum, this particular service seems to be especially useful and popular among returnees. From 2008, nearly 800 000 visits were recorded, and only in 2011 the website was visited by 350 000 people and 1 200 questions were asked (Sejm 2012).
6. To engage with specific target groups such as highly skilled professionals (e.g. medical personnel), students, and second generation migrants.

Independently from the governmental program, many other activities were implemented by state institutions and also by non-governmental bodies at the regional and local level. In the Opolskie region (one of the most severely affected by emigration), the program called *Opolskie – here I stay* was implemented and financed by the regional government. Emigrants, but first of all residents of Opolskie: graduates, the unemployed and other inhabitants were the target groups. Programs and initiatives addressed to return migrants and potential emigrants were initiated by the Warsaw Municipality, Polish organisations abroad, and business companies to mention just a few (the detailed list and description in: Fiałkowska, Szczepański 2012).

To conclude, with reference to the conceptual approach presented in the first part of the article, the return migration policy in Poland could be described as rather a reactive one. Although the first conceptual documents perceived returns of nationals as an antidote to the possible economic and demographic problems, and discussed a more active involvement of the state in encouraging Poles to return, when massive returns became inevitable due to the economic crisis in destination countries, the government's attitude to the issue changed. Finally, the rationale for the return policy was not to stimulate returns but to facilitate the process as it happens. The governmental programs and activities were implemented in practice as a response to returns, and the key objective was to prevent any possible problems with migrants' reintegration after return.

The state's activities put on the political agenda took place both abroad (with the intensive support of consulates and Polish organisations), and within the country, also at the regional and local level. Moreover, the Internet was widely used as a tool for communication with actual and potential return migrants and for spreading relevant information, which proved to be an overall effective approach. It is difficult to estimate its efficiency, but undoubtedly the state's policy towards returns may be evaluated positively as well-planned and consistent, relatively quickly implemented, and appropriate to the returns' scale and impact.

What should also be stressed here, an important driver of the policy-makers' interest in return migration was the fact that it was extensively covered by media and became an issue of serious concern for the public opinion. After 2004, Poles living abroad emerged as a separate target group in the platforms and election manifestos of political parties and in the electoral campaigns. Emigration, considered as the situation faced by Polish citizens abroad and by their families (very often left behind), and the impact of mass outflows on Poland's society and economy came to prominence in political struggles (Lesińska 2012). In the pre-election period, the leaders of the political parties and presidential candidates regularly visited cities abroad with a high concentration of Poles. In the 2007 and 2010 elections, the number of people who voted abroad was several times higher than in the previous years. Although votes from abroad have a symbolic impact on the overall results, the electoral activity of Poles abroad received much publicity, making it to the top news stories in the national media, which showed pictures of long queues of Poles waiting for hours in front of consulates to vote. Not surprisingly, support of Polish migrants is one of the priorities for policy-makers, and return programs may be considered part of the never-ending political struggle for voter support.

Conclusions

The return migration is an important, but surprisingly often neglected component of the migration process. It is a very complex phenomenon with a high level of unpredictability of its scale, course and duration. Additionally, the concept of return is shifting, which is particularly visible in the case of the EU migration space with free movement of people and labour, where return is a recurring phase in a multi-stage mobility process during which a migrating person is changing the country of residence in search for better work and life options. As a result, the state's policy towards returnees is especially challenging. Moreover, it is a difficult task for policy-makers to estimate the balance of costs and benefits of nationals' returns and decide about setting up a policy dedicated exclusively to returnees, its character and scope. The efficiency of the policy depends on many various factors, some of them fully or partially independent from the state, such as an economic crisis in destination countries or migrants' eagerness to take advantage of supportive return programs.

The state's policy addressed to returnees consists of many various activities. Most of them are focused on the labour market to minimise the reintegration problems and to avoid any possible increase of unemployment. The scope and scale of the state's activity depend on many factors. The first is how returns are perceived by decision-makers; return migration could be considered a desirable and wanted process in the situation of economic development and labour demands; it could also be seen as an inevitable process in the

time of economic recession when migrants return to live through the troubled times at home. The second is the state's capacity and availability of the institutional and financial resources necessary for the effective implementation of the state's policy in practice. The third is the impact of the expectations of the public and interest groups (such as employers), who are often the crucial source of pressure on policy-makers to encourage and support return migrants.

In practice then, the influence of state programs and actions targeted at returnees is rather of a supportive character. Nevertheless, although there is no clear evidence to fully confirm this hypothesis, it seems that state activities could play some role in turning 'willingness to return' into a 'decision to return'. While the state's policy may have a limited impact on the individual's decision to emigrate or to return, it has a potential to win migrants' political support, which is the basic aim of any government. It is also worth remembering when analysing the drivers of any return policy that for political elites all migrants (no matter if they stay abroad or return home) as well as their families are first and foremost prospective voters, which explains why migration and migrants attract the interest of policy-makers, especially in the time of elections.

The main dilemmas of the state facing return migration is well illustrated by the case of Poland. In the few years after 2004, the country saw first mass emigration to the EU countries following the accession, and later returns prompted by the worldwide economic crisis on the one hand, and a relatively good condition of the Polish economy on the other. As a response to that situation, numerous various activities were implemented at the national, regional and local level aimed at facilitating the return process and focused on reintegration into the labour market and educational system (in the case of children). The most important activity concentrated on an information campaign on the administrative and legal issues inherent to the return process. The institutional network engaged in the implementation of the return migration policy was also impressive: from state institutions and a special inter-ministry body at governmental level to municipalities and non-governmental organisations and private business companies.

Notes

¹ However, the correlation between mass emigration and decrease in the unemployment rate is not a universal one. P. Kaczmarczyk (2012) argues that for Poland the post-accession emigration wave had a very little impact on the registered number of unemployed.

² There is no doubt that the return of highly skilled and specialist workforce is profitable for employers and economy as a whole, but it also generates increasing competition and a possible decrease in level of wages within a particular professional group.

³ State agencies responsible for that action included the Centre of Human Resources Development (*Centrum Rozwoju Zasobów Ludzkich*, a public institution subordinated to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). A series of trainings for around 600 people were held in 2008-2011 (*Centrum Rozwoju Zasobów Ludzkich* 2011).

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