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— SPECIAL SECTION —

# Introduction: Migration and Mobility in the Context of Post-Communist Transition in Central and Eastern Europe (Part 2)

Agata Górny\*, Paweł Kaczmarczyk\*

Here we present the second part of the special section of the Central and Eastern European Migration Review entitled *Migration and Mobility in the Context of Post-Communist Transition in Central and Eastern Europe* (cf. Górny and Kaczmarczyk 2019). This focuses on intra-EU mobility from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to ‘old’ EU member countries following the EU enlargements in 2004 and 2006, they being among the many consequences of post-communist transition in the CEE region. Notwithstanding, contributions to this part of the special section elaborate not only on the specificities of emigration from the CEE region but also on its more universal characteristics, seeking to find a place for this research in the broadly understood discipline of migration studies.

Such an attempt is clearly visible in the article by **Paweł Kaczmarczyk** and **Douglas S. Massey**, *The Ethnosurvey Revisited: New Migrations, New Methodologies?* which is devoted to the applicability of the ethnosurvey method in various migratory contexts. The article examines methodological observations from a number of studies on emigration from Mexico to the US (initiated in the 1980s) and from Poland to various countries, the first of which was conducted already at the beginning of the 1990s – thus at the beginning of the post-communist transition – and continued until the mid-2010s. The authors claim that the ethnosurvey method proved to be very useful in building up an understanding of the complexities of migration as a social and economic process but feel that it should not be treated as a universal methodology for migration studies. Its strengths materialise, firstly, in exploratory studies, especially when the character of the migratory processes is not properly captured by the official data – be this due to deficiencies in these data or the novelty of processes underway. However, the method does not usually allow for national-level estimations of the size and composition of migration and is not fully effective in the case of migration which is weakly embedded in the social

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context of the sending areas, such as urban spaces, especially where highly skilled migration is concerned. Nevertheless, as is clearly evident in the article, the application of the ethnosurvey method in research on emigration from Poland at the time of post-communist transition was a milestone in the unravelling of its mechanisms – causes and consequences – although political leverage of the studies in question was not fully satisfactory (like the ethnosurveys completed in the context of Mexican–US migration). In both cases, linking two sides of the migration story through parallel sampling was a particularly promising – but at the same time also a challenging – aspect of the methodology.

A discussion on approaches allowing for a better understanding of processes embedded in emigration from the CEE region is continued in the article by **Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska** and **Jenny Phillimore**, *Superdiversity and Its Relevance for Central and Eastern European Migration Studies. The Case of Polish Migrants in the UK*. The article, analysing Polish migrants in the UK, demonstrates that the application of the concept of superdiversity to the case of CEE migrants allows researchers to highlight the intra-categorical diversity of migrant groups, to reconstruct the encounters of CEE migrants with superdiversity in the destination countries, to explore processes of adaptation to a superdiverse difference and to consider superdiversity as a resource in itself. The authors argue that superdiversity offers an alternative social paradigm to the nation-centric and static one based on the fixed groups categorisation. In this way, this contribution attempts to place studies on CEE migration in the broader conceptual and theoretical framework developed, originally, in the West European context (Vertovec 2007).

The article by **Polina Manolova**, *'Going to the West is my Last Chance to Get a Normal Life': Bulgarian Would-Be Migrants' Imaginings of Life in the UK*, focuses more on the specificities of emigration from the CEE region and, in particular, on the example of Bulgarians planning to settle in the UK. However, its claim of providing a more nuanced perspective on push and pull factors extending beyond purely economic aspects has a more universal theoretical relevance. The article examines future migrants' perceptions of Bulgaria as a state placed in a 'post-transitional' temporality with limited opportunities for individual progress and social and economic development. These perceptions are compared with prospective migrants' views on the UK as a country offering 'normality', in terms of everyday life and avenues for social advancement. The author thus identifies the specificities of post-communist transition reality operating as push factors in East–West intra-EU mobility. She argues that the ability of migrants to imagine a drastically different life in the UK, when compared to Bulgaria, has been the main impetus for emigration. This claim deserves further research both in relation to CEE migration and in other contexts.


The final contribution to the special section, by **Alexandra Voivozeanu** – *Precarious Posted Migration: The Case of Romanian Construction and Meat-Industry Workers in Germany* – also refers to a universal topic: the precariousness of posted workers. However, while analysing Romanian migration to Germany, it focuses on the peculiarities of such migration in the case of East–West intra-EU mobility and addresses the weight of the post-communist context in the country of origin. The author argues that Romanian workers accept the precarious working conditions and high levels of risk in posted employment in Germany and remain in such a state, due to the comparatively very low wages and the insecurity of work back in Romania. The article also demonstrates the varying degrees of precariousness in posted employment, claiming that these depend on the duration of the migration and the occupational engagement and on the practices of companies. In particular, workers employed on short-term contracts are in a more precarious situation than other posted workers. Overall, this article addresses a topic of high social (and recently also political) relevance in the context of East–West intra-EU mobility. It also relates to the practices and structures of the European labour market, alongside the active role of recruitment agencies in shaping labour migration to the EU, as discussed in the first part of the special section by Meszmann and Feduk (2019).

### Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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# The Ethnosurvey Revisited: New Migrations, New Methodologies?

Paweł Kaczmarczyk\*, Douglas S. Massey\*\*

*This article provides a detailed review of the ethnosurvey, a research methodology that has been widely applied to the study of migration for almost four decades. We focus on the application of ethnosurvey methods in Mexico and Poland, drawing on studies done in the former country since the early 1980s and, in the latter, since the early 1990s (including several post-2004 examples). The second case is particularly relevant for our analysis as it refers to a number of novel migration forms that have been identified in Central and Eastern Europe in the post-1989 transition period. Drawing on these studies, we consider the advantages and disadvantages of the ethnosurvey as a research tool for studying international migration. Its advantages include its multilevel design, blend of qualitative and quantitative methods, reliance on retrospective life histories and multisited data collection strategy. These features yield a rich database that has enabled researchers to capture circular, irregular, short-term and sequential movements. Its disadvantages primarily stem from its hybrid sampling strategy, which necessarily places limits on estimation and generalisability and on the technical challenges of parallel sampling in communities of both origin and destination. Here we argue that the ethnosurvey was never proposed and should not be taken as a universal methodology applicable in all circumstances. Rather it represents a specialised tool which, when correctly applied under the right conditions, can be extremely useful in revealing the social and economic mechanisms that underlie human mobility, thus yielding a fuller understanding of international migration's complex causes and diverse consequences in both sending and receiving societies.*

**Keywords:** migration research methodology; ethnosurvey; Latin American Migration Project; Polish migration

## Introduction

International migration has become a controversial topic in recent economic and sociological debates and a major concern of policymakers worldwide. Strong migration research is often lacking, however, owing to the methodological challenges inherent in studying human movements that cross national boundaries, span

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diverse cultures, embrace multiple languages, straddle political regimes and are recorded in different statistical systems. Migration is also difficult to measure because it entails moves of diverse duration, direction, documentation and circularity. As a result of these complexities, official data on international migration are often missing, unreliable and biased – conditions that only contribute to the controversy and polarisation apparent in both public and scholarly discussions of immigration. All of these issues are of critical importance in the case of Central and Eastern European countries, as emigration started to play a role there as early as the 1990s and the inflow of foreigners is still far less numerous than in the case of ‘traditional immigration countries’ or Southern European countries.

Over the years, researchers have sought to overcome these well-known data limitations, with varying degrees of success. One of the best-known attempts – and perhaps among the more successful – is the ethnosurvey methodology, first proposed by Massey (1987b) as a synergistic approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data in both sending and receiving societies (see also Massey 1993; Massey and Capoferro 2004). The methodology was first applied to the study of Mexico–US migration in a pilot study of four Mexican migrant communities during 1982 (see Massey, Alarcón, Durand and González 1987). The pilot provided a strong proof of concept that led to the foundation of the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) in 1987 which has, since then, annually completed ethnosurveys in communities throughout Mexico (see Durand and Massey 2004, 2019), as well as in Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, China and Africa (see also below).

Over the years, the ethnosurvey methodology has come to be very widely applied in migration research and *the purpose of this article is therefore to assess its advantages and disadvantages by comparing its performance in two particularly well-studied settings: Mexico and Poland*. These two cases are interesting not only because of their similarities (both experienced the shock of integration into global markets and a transition from net out-migration to net in-migration) but also because of their differences (the Mexican and US labour markets have been interconnected for more than a century, whereas Polish labour markets only began to integrate with those of Western Europe in the 1990s). A comparative analysis thus affords a systematic assessment of the ethnosurvey’s utility for studying different forms of mobility under varying migratory regimes and changing socio-economic backgrounds (Kaczmarczyk 2011; Massey, Kalter and Pren 2008).

In our review of the ethnosurvey’s application in Mexico and Poland, *we ask whether it still constitutes a useful methodology in migration studies today and what its value added is, compared to other methodologies*. Based on the empirical evidence, we argue that the ethnosurvey remains a powerful methodological tool even when other data sources potentially exist; however, its utility depends on the specific contexts in which it is applied, the research questions under investigation and the availability and quality of the alternative data sources. We believe, however, that the ethnosurvey methodology carries several advantages, compared to these other sources, owing to its ability to capture the wide variety of forms that human mobility takes in a manner that is well-grounded in theory (Massey 1999).

We begin by introducing the assumptions and components of the ethnosurvey and then move on to review the experiences of researchers who have analysed ethnosurvey data gathered in Mexico and Poland. After discussing the pros and cons of the methodology based on our assessment of the empirical evidence, we consider the ethnosurvey’s efficacy as a tool for studying migratory processes in the world today.

### **Origins and assumptions of the ethnosurvey**

The ethnosurvey explicitly conceptualises human migration as a complex social, economic and cultural process that unfolds across space and time in multiple contexts. According to Massey (1987b: 1498):

*Migration is a process, not an event. Unlike birth and death, which happen once and are bounded in space and time, migration involves at least two points on each dimension. Except on the margins, the definitions of life and death are self-evident and widely shared. However, the definition of a move relies on ambiguous concepts of settlement, residence, and place that are socially constructed and culturally variant. The situation is further complicated because moves may occur more than once, and may encompass a variety of origins and destinations.*

The ethnosurvey was developed to overcome well-known deficiencies in migration data in the early 1980s. It was offered not as a universal method to be applied in all cases but as a flexible tool that could capture the complexities of migration as they unfolded across time within specific social, economic and cultural contexts. It was put forth more as a supplement to than a replacement for other potential data sources. Although some scholars initially saw it simply as a way of gathering reliable data on the status of Mexican immigrants in the United States, from the start it was conceived as a multilateral effort intended to support analyses of migration from the viewpoints of both sending and receiving societies.

Instead of attempting to gather information from dispersed immigrant populations scattered throughout the receiving nation, the ethnosurvey began with intensive data collection efforts focused on specific sending communities, followed by parallel sampling in destination areas connected by social networks to those same communities. In this way, it represented a distinctively transnational view. Such a transnational methodology is not new, of course, but follows in a long tradition of mixed, multilevel, multidimensional research conducted in both sending and receiving communities (see Creswell 2003; Gamio 1930, 1933; Louis 1982; Miles and Huberman 1984; Taylor 1932; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918). The fundamental idea of the ethnosurvey is to combine ethnographic and survey methods in order to gather information at multiple moments in space and time, yielding an approach in which:

*qualitative and quantitative procedures complement one another and that, properly used, one's weaknesses become the other's strength, yielding a body of data with greater reliability and more internal validity than is possible to achieve using either method alone. Survey methods produce reliable quantitative data for statistical analysis, generalization, and replication... Anthropological studies, in contrast, capture the richness of life but sacrifice quantitative rigour (Massey 1987b: 1504).*

The importance of this blend of qualitative ethnographic methods with quantitative surveys is signaled by the term 'ethnosurvey'. On the one hand, surveys yield standardised data which offer an objective 'statistical picture' that allows for generalisation and ensures replicability. On the other hand, ethnographic fieldwork sheds light on the sociocultural origins and consequences of migration while providing a basis for in-depth analyses of social structures and cultural meanings as they play out in the lives of real people. A critical feature of the ethnosurvey has always been its synergistic and balanced approach to the use of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The ethnosurvey sought to overcome a perceived lack of knowledge about the microsocial processes involved in human migration in the early 1980s. It explicitly sought to gather information on the diverse forms in which human mobility is expressed, whether short- or long-term, temporary or permanent, circular or settled, documented or undocumented. Migration was conceptualised as a dynamic social process in which behaviours, motivations, statuses and intentions varied over time and were, in turn, affected by transformations that occurred in places of origin and destination and the global political economy.

The ultimate intent of the design was to link together the various components of the migration process as they unfolded in specific locations across time. Investigators sought to connect the departure context (household

and community characteristics) with the migration context (the social organisation of travel and border-crossing), the arrival context (living and working conditions at points of destination) and the return context (post-migration circumstances in the household and community). This approach demanded an extensive set of questions capable of generating data for a diverse array of social, economic, and demographic variables measured at different levels of analysis at multiple points in time.

Over the years, application of the ethnosurvey methodology has enabled analysts to undertake nuanced, timely and detailed analyses of the characteristics and behaviours of both undocumented and documented migrants and has supported a succession of sophisticated statistical analyses detailing the effects of changing policies based on large, reliable samples (Gentsch and Massey 2011; Massey and Capoferro 2004; Massey, Durand and Pren 2016; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey and Pren 2012; Massey and Sana 2005).

### **Foundations of the ethnosurvey methodology**

At the time of writing, the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) has been in existence for 32 years and has 5 129 registered data users. Its information currently comes from representative ethnosurveys carried out in 170 Mexican communities located in 24 Mexican states, along with surveys of out-migrants from those same communities in the United States. The database currently includes data on 176 696 individuals in 28 319 households. Although the semi-structured interview guide used by the MMP to gather information has changed over the years in minor ways to reflect shifting circumstances and policies in Mexico and the United States, the basic structure and organisation of the ethnosurvey has remained constant and rests on five basic epistemological foundations.

#### *Multimethod data collection*

A fundamental tenet of the ethnosurvey design is the gathering of both quantitative and qualitative data using a mixed-methods approach. Ethnographic research precedes survey work in order to gather basic information about the community, its history of migration and the specifics of its social organisation, economic structure and ethnic composition. During this time, project investigators also conduct a census of the community in order to compile a list of potential dwellings which will serve as a sampling frame. Information collected in the preliminary ethnographic phase is used to inform the later application of the ethnosurvey itself. Within each household, the head, spouse or some other knowledgeable informant is interviewed according to a semi-structured guide that is open to spontaneous remarks about the topic under consideration. Data from the interviews are, in turn, used to inform additional ethnographic work in the community once the survey phase has ended. The extended ethnographic presence of fieldworkers in the community generates familiarity and trust and thus to yield high response rates.

#### *Representative multisited sampling*

The original ethnosurvey adopted a blended sampling design that used different methods in a variety of contexts. Communities in Mexico were not randomly selected but purposively chosen in order to build demographic, social, economic, geographic and ethnic diversity into the sample over time. Within each community, respondent households were selected using simple random sampling. The household interviews quickly revealed the principal US destinations for migrants in each community; teams of interviewers were sent to these locations several months later to complete additional ethnosurveys among out-migrant households that had settled abroad. Unlike the community sample, however, the US sample was compiled using respondent-driven

sampling methods that began with names and contact information gathered from interviewees and informants in the Mexican community. Although this hybrid sample cannot be assumed to be representative, systematic comparisons have shown that the resulting data match information drawn from nationally representative surveys quite closely (Massey and Capoferro 2004; Massey and Zenteno 2000).

### *Multilevel data gathering*

The structure of the ethnosurvey lends itself to the compilation of information at multiple levels and, from the beginning of the MMP, individual- and household-level data have simultaneously been gathered. As the number of communities in the database expanded over time, community-level data also began to be compiled. Since migrants move between two different nations, national-level files were likewise added in order to chart trends in basic social, economic and demographic variables in the bi-national political economy. A multilevel approach to data gathering and analysis is consistent with theories that emphasise the importance of understanding the context within which migratory decisions are made (see Faist 2000; Fawcett 1989; Massey 1999; Stark and Bloom 1985). As a result, the MMP database has enabled the estimation of detailed multilevel, longitudinal models for purposes of policy analysis and hypothesis testing (Massey 1987c; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey *et al.* 2016).

### *Life history compilation*

Given the conceptualisation of migration as a longitudinal process that unfolds over individual life cycles and evolves historically within specific communities, a core feature of the ethnosurvey is the compilation of individual life histories, beginning with household heads in 1987 and with spouses being added in 1991. In addition, abbreviated migration histories are gathered for all individuals within each household by asking about their first and last international trips and the lifetime number of migrations. The life histories are then used to create person-year files that record events and traits for each respondent from birth to the survey date. The resulting life history files can be matched to historical data compiled at the community and national levels to enable the estimation of dynamic, multilevel analyses (see Massey, Durand and Pren 2015; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Palloni, Massey and Cebalos 2001).

### *Parallel sampling*

Since migration necessarily connects communities of origin and destination, it is obvious that a full assessment of any migration should gather data on people and circumstances at both locations. Because departure and return are selective processes, migrants interviewed only at the place of origin or location of destination will yield biased samples of their characteristics, motivations and behaviours. Data collected only at places of origin exclude households that have settled permanently abroad, whereas those gathered only at places of destination miss migrants who circulate back and forth. Communities also vary widely in the origins and extent of their participation in international migration as well as the nature of that participation (as sojourners, settlers, sporadic or recurrent migrants). Without parallel sampling at points of both origin and destination, this heterogeneity remains unobserved, making it difficult to capture the full complexity of international migration as it dynamically evolves over time in different locations.

### The ethnosurvey in Mexico

Mexican migration to the United States is unique in many ways. Much of the South-Western United States was once part of Mexico and only entered the US after 1848, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo suddenly rendered some 50 000 Mexicans ‘immigrants’, without anyone ever moving (Jaffe, Cullen and Boswell 1980). Since then, the two nations have been both connected and divided by a 3 000 kilometer border.

Significant cross-border migration began in the late-nineteenth century, when US investors financed the construction of Mexico’s railroads, connecting agricultural producers in Mexico directly to markets in the United States (Cardoso 1980). Mass migration dates back to 1907, when Japanese immigration to the US was curtailed and American employers began to recruit Mexicans as replacements (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). Mexican immigration rose thereafter and surged in the 1920s, only to be cut short after 1929 by the Great Depression and a mass deportation campaign (Hoffman 1974). Mexican labour migration was revived in 1942 by the Bracero Program, a temporary-worker programme that greatly expanded during the late 1950s to peak at around 450 000 entries per year (Massey *et al.* 2002).

The US Congress cancelled the Bracero Program at the end of 1964, however and, in early 1965, passed legislation to impose numerical limits on legal permanent immigration from Mexico and other countries in the Americas. With opportunities for legal entry curtailed, Mexicans continued migrating without authorisation (Massey and Pren 2012) and, from 1965 to 1985, a stable migration system based on the circulation of undocumented migrants evolved (Massey *et al.* 2002). During this time, estimates suggest that around 85 per cent of unauthorised entries were annually offset by departures (Massey and Singer 1995). This was the context within which the first ethnosurveys were conducted in four Mexican communities and their US destination areas during the winter of 1982 and summer of 1983 (Massey *et al.* 1987).

Although ‘illegal migration’ had become a divisive political and policy issue by the mid-1970s, few reliable facts and data then existed to inform the bitter public debate. During 1978, however, a doctoral student in anthropology, Joshua Reichert, had just returned to Princeton after a year of fieldwork in a rural Mexican village, where nearly three-quarters of the households depended on US migrant earnings for sustenance (Reichert 1981, 1982). Looking over Reichert’s field notes, Douglas Massey, then a postdoctoral fellow at Princeton, was impressed by the specificity and detail they contained on the serial movements of people – with both documented and undocumented status – back and forth between Mexico and the United States.

After raising money to have the migration data coded and entered into machine-readable form, the two scholars began a collaborative analysis. Their research quickly revealed that the quantified information provided a remarkably accurate and revealing account of the history, trends and patterns of Mexico–US migration (see Reichert and Massey 1979, 1980). Reichert ultimately went on to a different career but Massey became convinced that a blend of ethnographic and survey methods had the potential to provide a unique window on forms of migration that were not captured in other statistical systems. Upon being appointed to his first faculty position, he wrote a grant proposal to fund a pilot project which would test this vision.

The grant was ultimately funded and, in 1982, Massey began a long collaboration with anthropologist Jorge Durand – initially in concert with two other Mexican anthropologists – during which they would design, implement and analyse an ‘ethnosurvey’ of four Mexican communities – a traditional agrarian village, a commercial agricultural town, a small industrial city and a working-class neighbourhood in Mexico’s second largest metropolitan area – all located in West-Central Mexico, the historical heartland for migration to the United States.

The four communities were selected not because they were thought to contain a large number of US migrants but because they would represent different levels of urbanism and industrial development, though it turned out that migrants were indeed present at all four locations. The share of households containing ‘active

migrants' (those migrating within the previous two years) varied from just 9 per cent in the industrial city to 36 per cent in the commercial agricultural town; the share with inactive migrants (those who had migrated to the US more than two years before the survey date) ranged from 20 per cent in the metropolitan neighbourhood to 39 per cent in the commercial agricultural centre (Massey *et al.* 1987).

The end result of the pilot study was a monograph that laid out the design and philosophy of the ethnosurvey method, established the context for US migration in each community, traced each community's particular history of migration, described its current pattern of migration to the US, outlined the social organisation of migration from each place, documented the effects of US migration on household economies in the four settings, examined the socio-economic consequences of US migration in each community and described the process of social integration among both sojourner and settler migrants in the United States (see Massey *et al.* 1987).

The book and several associated articles (Massey 1985, 1986a, 1987c) documented the feasibility and utility of the ethnosurvey method and served as the basis for a grant proposal that proposed to undertake a longer-term collection of data using ethnosurvey methods. The specific aim was to create a database on Mexico–US migration that could be updated each year and be made freely available to researchers. This grant was also funded and, since 1987, the Mexican Migration Project has conducted annual ethnosurveys in selected Mexican communities in order to create a public-use database which, as already noted, currently contains information drawn from 170 different communities.

To conserve space, Table 1 does not list all 170 communities but, instead, summarises data from those sampled by Mexican state of origin (complete data on the full set of communities is available from the project website at <https://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/>). To date, the MMP has completed community ethnosurveys in 24 of Mexico's 32 states. The number of communities is notably large in five states (Guanajuato, Jalisco, Michoacan, San Luis Potosi and Zacatecas) which, together, constitute the historical heartland for migration to the United States, with migratory traditions that go back to the early-twentieth century (Durand and Massey 2003; Durand, Massey and Charvet 2000). However, newer sending states such as Puebla, Veracruz and Yucatan were added to the dataset as their inhabitants became active participants in migration to the United States.

As can be seen, the size of the Mexican communities ranges from small rural villages to large metropolitan areas; across states, the average year of the survey ranges from 1990 to 2014 with a mean of 2001. The average sample size in Mexico ranges between 124 and 209 households with a mean of 157 whereas, in the US, it ranges from 0 to 20 with a mean of around six households. In five of the states, the database contains no US sample at all, reflecting the cost and difficulty posed by parallel sampling, especially in recent years.

Across all 170 communities, the correlation between survey year and the number of US households sampled is  $-0.43$ . To some extent, the lack of US samples in recent years reflects the fact that several states lie in new sending regions – such as Hidalgo and Tabasco – which do not have well-established branch communities in the United States. Alternatively, they are in border states – Chihuahua and Nuevo Leon – which do not have strong traditions of US migration. Refusal rates in Mexican sending communities are generally low, however, ranging from 0.006 to 0.238, with a mean of just 0.062.

**Table 1. Basic information on the ethnosurveys completed in Mexico 1987–2018**

	Total communities sampled	Average				
		Mexican population	Survey year	Sample size	Refusal rate	US sample size
Aguascalientes	2	15 500	1998	125	0.012	4
Baja California	4	1 301 000	1998	151	0.061	8
Chihuahua	8	76 300	2001	156	0.238	0
Colima	3	4 700	1997	124	0.039	13
Durango	4	13 900	1999	164	0.006	15
Guanajuato	16	19 700	1995	165	0.056	12
Guerrero	4	199 500	1995	138	0.114	6
Hidalgo	2	18 000	2002	153	0.100	0
Jalisco	28	212 600	2000	176	0.089	7
Mexico	8	6 100	2009	161	0.072	0
Michoacán	10	93 400	1994	172	0.064	13
Morelos	9	21 400	2013	161	0.054	0
Nayarit	2	18 500	1990	200	0.020	20
Nuevo Leon	2	137 000	2001	176	0.012	0
Oaxaca	4	67 000	1996	150	0.043	5
Puebla	13	232 500	2009	165	0.047	7
Queretaro	8	2 300	2014	132	0.050	2
San Luis Potosi	12	68 700	1998	143	0.031	7
Sinaloa	3	4 300	1998	151	0.017	6
Tabasco	4	12 000	2013	163	0.035	0
Tlaxcala	3	6 700	2002	140	0.084	10
Veracruz	8	61 750	2004	136	0.113	3
Yucatán	6	9 700	2012	153	0.039	3
Zacatecas	7	28 400	1996	209	0.110	9

Source: Mexican Migration Project.

### The ethnosurvey in Poland

Poland, historically, has been a country of emigration. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, international migration played an important – and sometimes critical – role in Polish history. Additionally, various migration flows are clearly connected, as in the migration of Poles to Germany, driven by a few versions of the guestworker scheme (initiated already in the late-nineteenth century) and then ethnic ties – i.e. the mobility of so-called *Aussiedler* or ethnic Germans, i.e. Polish citizens able to prove their German origin (Kaczmarczyk 2005). Large migration outflows prevailed before the First World War and during the 1920s and 1930s but largely disappeared after 1945, owing to political restrictions imposed by the postwar communist regime. International migration began to increase again in the early 1970s, owing to the normalisation of relations between Poland and the Federal Republic of Germany and the liberalisation of controls on cross-border movements, before surging in the 1980s when an estimated 2.2 million persons migrated, constituting about 6 per cent of the total population (Kaczmarczyk 2005; Okólski 2012).

Contrary to commonly expressed fears (Layard, Blanchard, Dornbush and Krugman 1992), during the initial transition to a market economy in the 1990s the international mobility of Poles declined, rising only slightly at the end of the decade. Poland's population census indicated that around 0.8 million Polish citizens were outside the country in 2002, comprising around 1.8 per cent of the total population. Nonetheless, Poland at that time was still one of the most important migrant-sending countries in Europe – with significant numbers of migrants in Germany, Belgium, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as several Southern European countries. Importantly, many of the 'new' migrants were undocumented. The novelty of migration from Poland in the transition period related not only to its irregular or *quasi*-regular character but also, firstly, to its temporariness (which created serious statistical challenges, as we show below).

Poland's 2004 accession to the European Union was a turning point in Polish migration history. The early post-accession years saw a spectacular increase in the scale and dynamics of Poles' international migration which, in the EU context, compared only to the migration propensity of Romanians. In the peak year of 2007, the stock of expat Polish migrants was estimated to be around 2.3 million persons or about 6.6 per cent of the total Polish population. However, out-migration remained at relatively high levels despite the Europe-wide economic crisis of 2008 and, by 2017, Poland's Central Statistical Office estimated the stock of Poles abroad to be around 2.5 million persons (Kaczmarczyk 2018).

In contrast to previous outflows, the new Polish migrants tended to be young, male, work-oriented and relatively well-educated. Most were temporary migrants going to Anglophone countries such as Britain, which emerged as their principal destination in the post-accession period. Polish migrants, nonetheless, have a significant presence in most EU countries (Kaczmarczyk 2011; Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008; White, Grabowska, Kaczmarczyk and Slany 2018). As in previous decades, Polish immigration continued to be driven by disparities in earnings and employment, with geographic mobility facilitated by the emergence of migrant networks and the relaxation of the accession period's earlier transitional arrangements.

Owing to its transitory, transnational and temporary nature, recent migration from Poland and other Central and East European nations has been labelled 'liquid' or 'fluid' (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom 2010; Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009). Even though a majority of Polish migrants are permanent residents or long-term workers living in their countries of destination, they continue to be undercounted in official statistical systems, posing a serious challenge for migration scholars (Kaczmarczyk 2011).

Due to changes in legal regulations and the favourable cost–benefit ratio connected to international migration, the practice of temporary and circular migration has become ever more firmly established (Okólski 2012; Stola 1998). Unfortunately, neither the available data nor the theoretical typologies that existed in the early 1990s permitted a full assessment of this new reality and the inaccurate and ambiguous character of official data is what motivated the application of ethnosurvey methods in Poland at that time. In short, the main idea was to identify a methodology suitable for the assessment of new forms of migration in Poland (and in Central and Eastern Europe in general).

According to Iglicka, Jaźwińska and Okólski (1996) and Jaźwińska, Łukowski and Okólski (1997), investigators preferred, for a variety of epistemological reasons, the ethnosurvey as a means of gathering data. First, it allowed for the initiation of fieldwork without any real knowledge about Polish migration – information that did not yet exist. In addition, the ethnosurvey's flexible design could accommodate not only orthodox forms of migration but also the short-term circular movements that are typical during the early phases of global market integration (including massive petty trading). Moreover, the ethnosurvey was explicitly designed to include undocumented migrants – an important category after the introduction of the free visa regime between Poland and Western European countries (Stola 1998). Next, one of the major premises was that migration is deeply embedded socially; application of this methodology was meant to study not only migration but also its



context – i.e., socio-economic transition. Finally, the ethnosurvey allowed for the tracking of population movements within systems of migration that were rapidly creating new transnational social spaces (Billsborrow and Zlotnik 1995; Faist 2000; Pries 1996).

Given these advantages, investigators at the UN Economic Commission for Europe decided to use the ethnosurvey as the principal methodology for a study of migration not only from Poland but from Ukraine and Lithuania as well, though it was clear from the beginning that some modifications in design were necessary (see Mullan 1995). The most important adjustment pertained to parallel sampling. Contrary to the Mexican case, migration from Central and Eastern Europe during the early 1990s could hardly be described as bi-national. Rather than consisting of closely connected and well-established migrant communities in two specific countries, the Polish migration system was multilateral and there were not yet any established out-migrant communities at the points of destination, rendering fieldwork abroad of little value.

Investigators thus developed a tripartite design that was applied only at places of origin. The first phase involved *monographic research* – the gathering of information about each sample community from archival, documentary and statistical sources – in order to provide the foundation for a later monograph on each community and its history of participation in international migration. The second phase entailed the application of a *representative ethnosurvey* within each community in order to gather data on the size and scale of migration as well the specific behaviours and strategies of migrants – data that would enable the creation of new migration typologies.

The final phase of research was *ethnographic fieldwork*, done to compile qualitative data to support a more in-depth analysis of issues and patterns uncovered in the quantitative survey. Respondents were selected for in-depth qualitative interviews based on their responses to the survey as well through knowledge gleaned during participant observation. Although the possibility of gathering data abroad was left open as an option for additional fieldwork, it was rarely exercised.

In Poland, ethnosurveys were launched in 1994 by the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw and initially included four communities – two rural and two urban. Follow-up ethnosurveys were executed in 1996 in two additional urban communities (including Warsaw). Data collection resumed once again in 2007 and 2008, when the ethnosurvey was applied to eight additional communities containing both urban and rural residents, with a final community being surveyed in 2010.

Since the number of communities to be surveyed in Poland was initially quite small, police registers dating back to the 1980s were used to select places whose residents were actively engaged in international migration. Unlike the MMP, the Polish ethnosurvey gathered detailed data from all household members, not just household heads. Although each community was randomly sampled, the resulting sample was taken to be representative only of that area, with no broader claim to national representativeness. As in the MMP, however, the questionnaire allowed flexibility in the sequence of questions and modules and both migrant and non-migrant households were surveyed.

As shown in Table 2, the ethnosurvey database for Poland currently includes data from representative samples of 15 756 individuals in 5 204 households located in 15 communities and 10 regions (Kaczmarczyk, Anacka, Jaźwińska *et al.* 2011). It provides unique information on mobility and migration during Poland's transition period and has permitted the assessment of migratory forms that often escape official statistics. Importantly, applications of the ethnosurvey in Poland occurred throughout the transition period and into the post-accession years in order to capture changes in patterns and processes of migration over time.

**Table 2. Basic information on the ethnosurveys completed in Poland 1994–2010**

Community	Rural/urban status	Survey year	No. of persons	No. of households	% migrants
Łubniany	Rural	1994	676	198	49.5
Namysłów	Urban	1994	1 211	330	37.6
Mońki	Urban	1994	831	207	52.7
Perlejewo	Rural	1994	682	166	57.2
Warszawa	Urban	1996	4 546	1 753	14.9
Nowy Targ	Urban	1996	1 145	342	44.2
Biłgorajski	Both	2007	837	250	43.6
Koszaliński	Both	2008	572	252	14.3
Kozienicki	Both	2008	621	250	22.4
Lublin	Urban	2008	522	200	34.0
Moniecki	Both	2007	761	249	37.8
Słupecki	Both	2007	879	253	41.1
Starachowicki	Both	2007	780	252	31.0
Zgorzelecki	Both	2007	705	250	24.4
Sędziszowski	Both	2010	988	252	18.8
Małopolski					

Source: own elaboration based on Iglicka, Jaźwińska and Okólski (1996); Jaźwińska, Łukowski and Okólski (1997); Kaczmarczyk *et al.* (2011).

### Ethnosurveys at work: gains and challenges

In the first section, we described in detail the very origins of the ethnosurvey as applied to the Mexican migration to the US that resulted in the Mexican Migration Project. In the late 1990s, the MMP investigators themselves sought to build on their success in Mexico and launched the Latin American Migration Project, which applied ethnosurvey methods in other nations throughout the region. Beginning with Puerto Rico in 1998, the methodology was subsequently applied in the Dominican Republic and Paraguay in 1999, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Haiti in 2000, Peru in 2001, Guatemala in 2004, El Salvador in 2007, Colombia in 2008, Ecuador in 2012 and, most recently, in Uruguay during 2018.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989 and Eastern Europe began to integrate into Western markets in the early 1990s, international migration soon followed and, in 1994, the Economic Commission for Europe launched an initiative to apply ethnosurvey methods to document the incipient patterns and processes of movement in Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine (Frejka, Okólski and Sword 1998, 1999; Mullan 1995). As part of this effort, the Centre of Migration Research at the University of Warsaw undertook ethnosurveys in 1994 in four Polish communities (Jaźwińska and Okólski 1996) and followed these with two more in 1996, eight in 2007 and 2008 and a final one in 2010 (Kaczmarczyk *et al.* 2011).

The China International Migration Project was founded by a former research assistant on the MMP and began, in 2002, with a round of data collection modelled on the ethnosurvey in the Province of Fujian (Liang and Zhang 2004; Liang, Miao, Zhuang and Wenzhen 2008). The MAFE project (Migration between Africa and Europe) was established by a demographer who spent a postdoctoral semester observing the MMP. It adapted the ethnosurvey for multi-site comparative research in three African nations in 2005 (Senegal, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) as well as destinations in six European countries (France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Britain and the Netherlands). Like the MMP, it compiled cross-sectional and life-history data

at the individual, family and national levels (Beauchemin and González-Ferrer 2011). The most recent application of the ethnosurvey method came with the Bangladesh Environment and Migration Study which, in 2014, compiled retrospective employment and migration histories from more than 3 000 persons in nine villages located in that nation's south-western region (Donato, Carrico, Sisk and Piya 2016).

The ethnosurvey is only one of several methodologies potentially available to measure human migration (Billsborrow, Hugo, Oberai and Zlotnik 1997; Carletto, Brauw and Banerjee 2012; Vargas-Silva 2012). *Official registries* that record the arrival and departure of international migrants have been used effectively in a variety of studies (see Bauer and Zimmermann 1999; Hatton and Williamson 1998; Rotte and Vogler 2000). *Official surveys*, both cross-sectional (such as Eurostat's Labour Force Survey – see Dustmann and Frattini 2011; Fic, Holland, Paluchowski, Rincon-Aznar and Stokes 2011; Kahanec 2012) and longitudinal (such as the German Socioeconomic Panel – see Constant and Massey 2003) have also been employed to good effect, as have *dedicated non-governmental surveys* such as the World Bank's Living Standard Measurement Survey (see Azzari and Carletto 2009; Carletto, Davis and Stampini 2006) and the Chitwan Valley Family Study in Nepal (Bohra and Massey 2009). A variety of data derived from ethnographic fieldwork have also been deployed to study migration processes (see Carling 2008, 2012; Iosifides 2011; Vullnetari 2012).

Nonetheless, given the challenging realities of migration research, we argue that the ethnosurvey approach continues to offer *clear advantages* to migration researchers. In addition to allowing the initiation of data gathering without much prior knowledge, its multilevel, multimethod, time-sensitive approach is well-suited to capturing the context and complexities of international migration during a period of economic restructuring and market transition. Its flexible design is also able to capture the wide variety of forms by which human mobility is expressed, which range from short- to long-term moves, sojourning to settlement and documented to undocumented movements. These advantages were clearly demonstrated in studies of both Mexican and Polish migration. In the following part of this section, we thoroughly discuss both the benefits and the challenges of ethnosurveys completed in the two countries. Our aim is not to focus on technical aspects that have been discussed widely already (Beauchemin 2014; Kaczmarczyk and Salamońska 2018; Liu, Creighton, Riosmena and Baizan 2016; Massey and Capoferro 2004; Riosmena 2016) but, rather, on more general issues that allow for a better understanding of the main challenges for the methodology and its impact on the contemporary understanding of migration in both countries.

### *The case of Mexico*

The MMP was developed in part to counter extravagant claims about Mexican migration that had become commonplace in the US media since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> These allegations became part of a broader campaign of demonisation aimed at delegitimising Mexicans in particular and Latin Americans in general, a campaign which became known as the 'Latino Threat Narrative' (Chavez 2001, 2008). None of the numbers or allegations in the commissioner's statement were based on *empirical evidence*. In fact, over the next several decades, US migration researchers dedicated themselves to providing an evidentiary base for understanding the true realities of migration across the Mexico–US border with two goals: estimating the true size and characteristics of the undocumented population (see Wasem 2011) and explicating the character, causes and consequences of the annual inflow of migrants (Donato and Armenta 2011). Although the MMP had little to contribute in estimating the size and characteristics of the undocumented population, studies based on MMP data played *a major role in elucidating the social and economic processes underlying the annual movement of migrants back and forth across the border, both in documented and undocumented status* (Durand and Massey 2004, 2019).

A turning point in the history of Mexico–US migration was the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986, which launched what would prove to be a three-decade militarisation of the border while also conferring legal status on several million former undocumented migrants and criminalising the hiring of unauthorised workers (Massey, Durand and Malone 2002). Data compiled by the MMP were central in establishing the character and contours of Mexico–US migration before and after the IRCA. Data from the MMP's ethnosurveys revealed the nature of the migratory system that emerged after the cancellation of the Bracero Program and the imposition of numerical limits on legal immigration from Mexico.

The system of undocumented migration that emerged during the period 1965–1985 was heavily circular, with entries being substantially offset by return moves to yield net inflows that were much smaller than those commonly reported in the media (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey and Singer 1995; Singer and Massey 1998). Undocumented circulation was dynamically supported by migrant networks that steadily expanded to create migration-specific social capital that lowers the costs and risks of unauthorised border crossing (Massey 1986b, 1987c; Massey, Goldring and Durand 1994; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey and Zenteno 1999; Palloni *et al.* 2001; Phillips and Massey 2000). Despite the stigmatising and limiting effects of undocumented status, a lack of legal papers prior to 1986 carried no wage penalty in US labour markets once a migrant's social, economic and demographic characteristics were controlled for (Massey 1987).

Although Mexican migration was predominantly circular, *ethnosurvey* data nonetheless identified a *characteristic settlement process* by which migrants gradually built up time in the US across successive trips, acquired social and economic ties in destination areas and US-specific human capital and ultimately brought in family dependents (Massey 1985, 1986a; Massey and Espinosa 1997). Associated with settlement in the United States was a *legalisation process* in which migrants, over time, acquired social and economic ties to family members and employers in the United States who could act as sponsors for the formers' adjustment to permanent resident status, a process that was greatly affected by period-specific immigration policies such as the IRCA's amnesty programme (Cheong and Massey 2019; Massey and Malone 2003).

In sum, while undocumented migration was not without its costs and risks, ethnosurvey data clearly showed that, prior to 1986, the drawbacks were modest and Mexico–US migration constituted a relatively stable and benign system of transnational movement directed overwhelmingly to three states: California, Texas and Illinois. At these points of destination in these states, Mexican migrants evinced low rates of settlement and experienced few penalties for participation in US labour markets (Massey *et al.* 1987).

After the passage of the IRCA in 1986, these circumstances radically changed as increasingly restrictive immigration policies were enacted and ever greater amounts of money, personnel and materiel were allocated to immigration enforcement (Massey and Pren 2012).<sup>2</sup> The militarisation of the border profoundly disrupted the stability of the Mexico–US migration system by driving up the costs and risks of unauthorised crossing; the acceleration of deportations also made life increasingly difficult for migrants within the United States.

The counterproductive effects of these policies were clearly documented and broadcast to policymakers and the public but to little effect (see Massey 1998, 2003, 2007, 2013, 2017). In the wake of the IRCA's passage, the formerly benign migration system was transformed into something far more exploitative and dangerous. According to a causal analysis done using instrumental variable techniques, *US policies transformed the Mexico–US migration system in counterproductive ways* (see Massey *et al.* 2016).

The border was militarised in phases, beginning with the two busiest sectors in El Paso, Texas and San Diego, California, which had the effect of diverting the migratory flows around these two urbanised areas and into the more remote terrain of the Sonoran Desert and Arizona. The diversion of undocumented traffic away from California in particular which, prior to 1986, was by far the busiest crossing sector, not only permanently changed the geography of border crossing (Massey *et al.* 2002) but also reconfigured the geography of final

destinations, with the number of Mexican migrants going to California dropping from 63 per cent in 1990 to just 28 per cent in 2000 (Massey and Capoferro 2008; Riosmena and Massey 2012).

As a result of the diversion of migrant flows into more hostile and dangerous landscapes, *the costs and risks of unauthorised border crossing increased dramatically*, with crossing deaths rising from 147 in 1985 to peak at 492 in 2005, before dropping back to an average of 368 deaths per year thereafter and causing at least 8 927 migrants to lose their lives along the border between 1985 and 2018, while the cost of unauthorised entry jumped from \$854 in 1985 to \$7 000 in 2017 in constant 2016 US dollars (Massey 2018).

Paradoxically, however, the huge increase in border enforcement had little effect on the likelihood of apprehension at the border. In response to the rising enforcement effort, migrants invested in more sophisticated and better-prepared crossing guides and diverted their crossing routes away from sectors being reinforced by the Border Patrol (Massey, Durand and Pren 2014). Between 1970 and 2010, the probability of being apprehended during any crossing attempt varied from 0.20 to 0.40, with no particular trend; the likelihood of gaining entry to the US over a series of attempts remained near 100 per cent (Massey *et al.* 2016).

The militarisation thus had little effect in deterring Mexicans from initiating undocumented migration but the rising costs and risks of border crossing caused *migrants to minimise them by staying longer in the United States instead of returning home to Mexico*, only to face those costs and risks again in the future. As a result, rates of return migration fell sharply as the border militarised after 1986 (Massey 2015; Massey *et al.* 2015). With the likelihood of initiating undocumented migration to the United States remaining unchanged by border militarisation but with the probability of return migration falling sharply, the net volume of undocumented immigration increased and the rate of undocumented population growth accelerated during 1990s and early 2000s, with the population of undocumented residents climbing from around 2 million persons in 1988 to 12 million persons in 2008 (Massey 2018; Massey *et al.* 2014, 2016).

The criminalisation of undocumented hiring in 1986, when combined with a rising share of unauthorised workers in the labour force and a sharp increase in internal enforcement efforts, changed the structure of labour markets throughout the United States. Whereas, before 1986, undocumented migrants earned the same wages as those with documents, after this date *a significant earnings differential opened between documented and undocumented Mexican workers*, a gap that grew larger as the share of unauthorised migrants increased over time (Durand *et al.* 2016; Massey and Gentsch 2014; Phillips and Massey 1999).

The ethnosurvey's retrospective life histories show that the likelihood of undertaking a first undocumented trip from Mexico began to decline after 2000 owing to the earlier decline in Mexican fertility rates, which went from around seven children per woman *circa* the 1960s to around 2.1 children per woman in 2018. The decline in fertility towards the replacement level produced a rapid ageing of the Mexican population. From 1972 to 2010 the average age of those at risk of taking a first undocumented trip rose from 23 to 46 (Massey *et al.* 2016).

Although the volume of undocumented immigration to the US began to decline around 2000 because of population ageing, it came to a definitive end with the onset of the Great Recession in late 2007. Thereafter the likelihood of initiating undocumented migration fell almost to zero and the net flow turned negative. Since that date *the size of the undocumented Mexican population has steadily declined*, dropping by around 1.5 million persons from 2007 to 2016 (Passel and Cohn 2018).

In the end, studies from the MMP indicate that, from 1986 to 2017, the United States spent \$62 billion (\$2016 USD) in a vain attempt to curtail an undocumented flow that would have ceased of its own accord after 2000 because of Mexico's demographic transition. In the process, it transformed what had been a circular flow of workers going to three states into a settled population of families in 50 states, resulting in a deterioration of wages and working conditions on local labour markets, where unauthorised migrants were prevalent.

Although these findings became well-known to migration researchers, they were lost on policymakers in Washington, DC, who continued to pursue harsh policies of border enforcement and internal deportation despite the fact that net positive undocumented migration from Mexico ended in 2007 and that prior enforcement efforts had produced more, rather than fewer, undocumented settlers. In many ways, *the greatest failure of the MMP is the inability of its data and findings to penetrate the mindset of policymakers and opinion leaders in the United States.*

Aside from this moral failing, *the greatest methodological challenge* to the efficacy of the ethnosurvey in Mexico has been *a steady deterioration in the ability to undertake parallel sampling* as a core component of the MMP's design. Prior to 2000, the average US sample contained 11 households and only 20 per cent of the Mexican communities lacked a parallel sample in the United States. Since 2000, however, the average US sample size fell to just 2.6 households per community, with 85 per cent of all Mexican samples lacking a parallel US sample. This deficit is particularly troublesome given that undocumented migration has fallen to almost zero and interest increasingly centres on the 5.4 million undocumented Mexicans who continue to remain north of the border.

The principal reason for the deterioration of the parallel sample was *the rise in white nationalism and anti-Latino sentiment in the United States*, which has made individuals interviewed in Mexico much less willing to provide contact and other information about their family members in the United States and migrants living in the United States much less willing to accede to an interview about their migratory experiences. The rise of the Latino Threat Narrative in public discourse in the United States is well documented (Chavez 2001, 2008; Lee and Fiske 2006; Santa Ana 2002) and the key role of anti-Latino sentiment in motivating white opposition to immigration is well established (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015). At this point, the spread of populist white nationalist movements throughout Europe and the Americas may constitute the single greatest challenge for the use of parallel sampling as a core element of the ethnosurvey design (López-Alves and Johnson 2018).

### *The case of Poland*

The first attempts to apply ethnosurvey methods in Poland were undertaken specifically to overcome the fact that the official population registry (known by its Polish acronym SERP) ceased to exist in the late 1980s as the communist regime disintegrated. As a result, in the early 1990s reliable data on migration did not exist and few scholars had much expertise on the topic. Under these circumstances, the ethnosurvey proved to be *a very efficient research tool*, enabling early investigators to address issues such as migrant selectivity, documentation and how migration was linked to the rapidly changing social and economic context without much prior information. Indeed, the very structure of the ethnosurvey allowed for the identification of *migration complexity* as one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Polish situation.

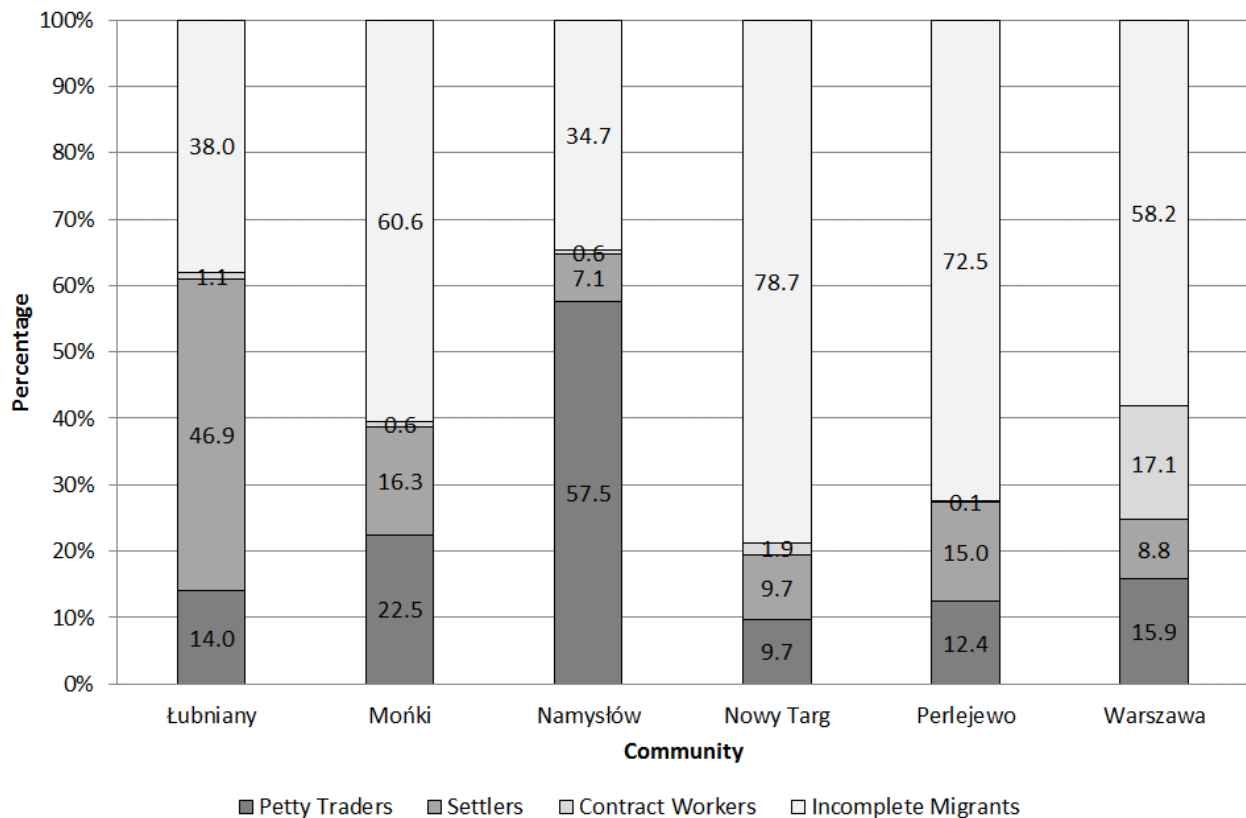
Since the mid-1990s, the availability of ethnosurvey data has allowed scholars to emphasise interdependencies between population mobility and the socio-economic transition from communism to capitalism (Jaźwińska and Okólski 2001; Kaczmarczyk 2005; Stola 1998). As a consequence, *studies on Polish migration have become an integral part of the broader field of research on recent economic development* (see Massey *et al.* 2008). In contrast to other approaches, the core idea of the ethnosurvey is to assess the behaviour both of individuals and the households within which they reside, consistent with theories positing the family as a key migration decision-making unit (e.g., Hammar, Brochman, Tamas and Faist 1997; Stark and Bloom 1985). This feature of the ethnosurvey enabled analysts to consider Polish migration using the latest theoretical frameworks and conceptual categories.

The ethnosurvey's household-based system of enumeration and data collection, which included absent as well as present household members, proved to be *very effective in capturing the diversity of mobility patterns*,

especially when analysed in combination with information gleaned qualitatively using ethnographic methods. The resulting data quickly revealed that the usual statistical methods developed to describe long-term and settled migration were not suitable for the analysis of population mobility during a time of social and economic transition. Using these data, Okólski (2001, 2012) was able to identify four types of migrants who were characteristic of Poland's transition period: petty traders, contract workers (legal temporary migrants working abroad), settlers and a distinctive category which he labelled 'incomplete migrants' – persons whose mobility was omitted in official statistics.

As shown in Figure 1, which displays the frequency of migrants across these four categories in the six communities surveyed in 1996, the relative number of settled migrants (those most probably captured in official data) tended to be low in most communities (16 per cent or less), with the exception of Łubniany (where the share was nearly 47 per cent). The large majority of migrants in most communities were either petty traders (in Namysłów) or incomplete migrants (in Mońki, Perlejewo, Nowy Targ and Warsaw). Most of these temporary, short-term migrants were undocumented and thus escaped registration in the formal statistical system.

**Figure 1. Typology of migrants identified in ethnosurveys completed in Poland, 1994–1996**



Source: Jazwińska and Okólski (2001).

In structural terms, the predominance of incomplete migrants and petty traders reflected the relative under-development of nations in Central and Eastern Europe at the time, especially their 'under-urbanisation' (Okólski 2012). Migrants then tended to be relatively unskilled and from peripheral regions of the country, with a low social status and a weak position on Polish labour markets (Kaczmarczyk 2013). The introduction of the concept of the incomplete migrant in order to capture these informal, short-term movers is one of *the principal*

*contributions of early research on migration from Poland.* Moreover, somehow contrary to the US case discussed above, this term started to be commonly used by policymakers and migration practitioners (Okólski 2012).

A comparison of data in the 2010 ethnosurvey of Sedziszow Malopolski (see Table 2) with Polish census data from the same region in 2011 found that the former recorded five times more incomplete migrants than the latter, allowing for a deeper analysis of Poland's migratory response to the market transition. During this time, migration was pursued more as a survival strategy than as one of income-maximisation or risk management. Including these incomplete migrants in the tally, the ethnosurvey found that 20 per cent of all respondents had at least some prior migratory experience – a figure that was 2.5 times that recorded in the census.

This difference reflects the very strict sampling procedures and the strong training of research team members, who were explicitly instructed to gather data on all household members, including those who were temporarily abroad (Kaczmarczyk *et al.* 2011). In this way, the ethnosurvey proved to be well-suited to capturing unorthodox forms of mobility that emerged before and during EU accession, when short-term circular moves constituted a significant share of all the mobility that occurred. Notwithstanding these positive aspects of the ethnosurvey, the methodology also carries certain weaknesses.

Although the relative merits of the ethnosurvey as a mixed-methods approach have been discussed extensively by Kaczmarczyk and Salamońska (2018), we focus here on two problematic features that are particularly demanding in the Polish context: its degree of representativeness and the challenges involved in parallel sampling.

A fundamental methodological challenge that migration researchers all face is that migration is a rare event, contrary to popular belief (Billsborrow *et al.* 1997). In the case of Poland, the country's EU accession led to an enormous increase in the scale of migration although, as a fraction of the total population, it never reached more than 5–7 per cent. Moreover, despite all the consternation about mass immigration worldwide, the share of people currently living outside their country of birth is only around 3.4 per cent.

Theoretically the best source of migration data short of a census is a probability survey whose representativeness and reliability can be precisely determined (McKenzie and Mistiaen 2009). Even in a traditional country of immigration such as the United States, the share of foreign-born residents is only around 15 per cent, meaning that a nationwide random sample of 1 000 respondents will yield only around 150 immigrants, on average, thus offering little statistical power. For detailed studies of immigrants, either much larger samples must be drawn or a more efficient sampling strategy must be implemented – but these options quickly drive up the costs and technical challenges.

Although nations that maintain an up-to-date population registry can, in theory, avoid these problems, registry data are sometimes unreliable because individuals and households often do not deregister before moving abroad, especially when they perceive their absence as temporary. At the same time, many arriving new immigrants may not register themselves, either because they are unfamiliar with the requirement to do so or because they have an irregular status and do not wish to reveal themselves to host-country authorities.

The quality of any sample inevitably rests on that of its sampling frame – the list of individuals, households or other units from which respondents are randomly selected. As just noted, however, migrants are often omitted from registries and are undercounted and frequently out of date in decennial censuses. In studies of migration, researchers rarely have access to a complete list of migrants from which a sample can be chosen and the lack of a reliable sampling frame requires them to turn to non-probability sampling methods where the likelihood of a unit's selection into the sample is unknown. The most common alternative non-random strategies are those that employ *chain referral methods*, in which certain respondents are asked to identify and provide contact information for people known to them who possess the characteristic of interest (e.g. being foreign-born). The simplest chain referral method is *snowball sampling* (that used by the MMP) whereby respondents

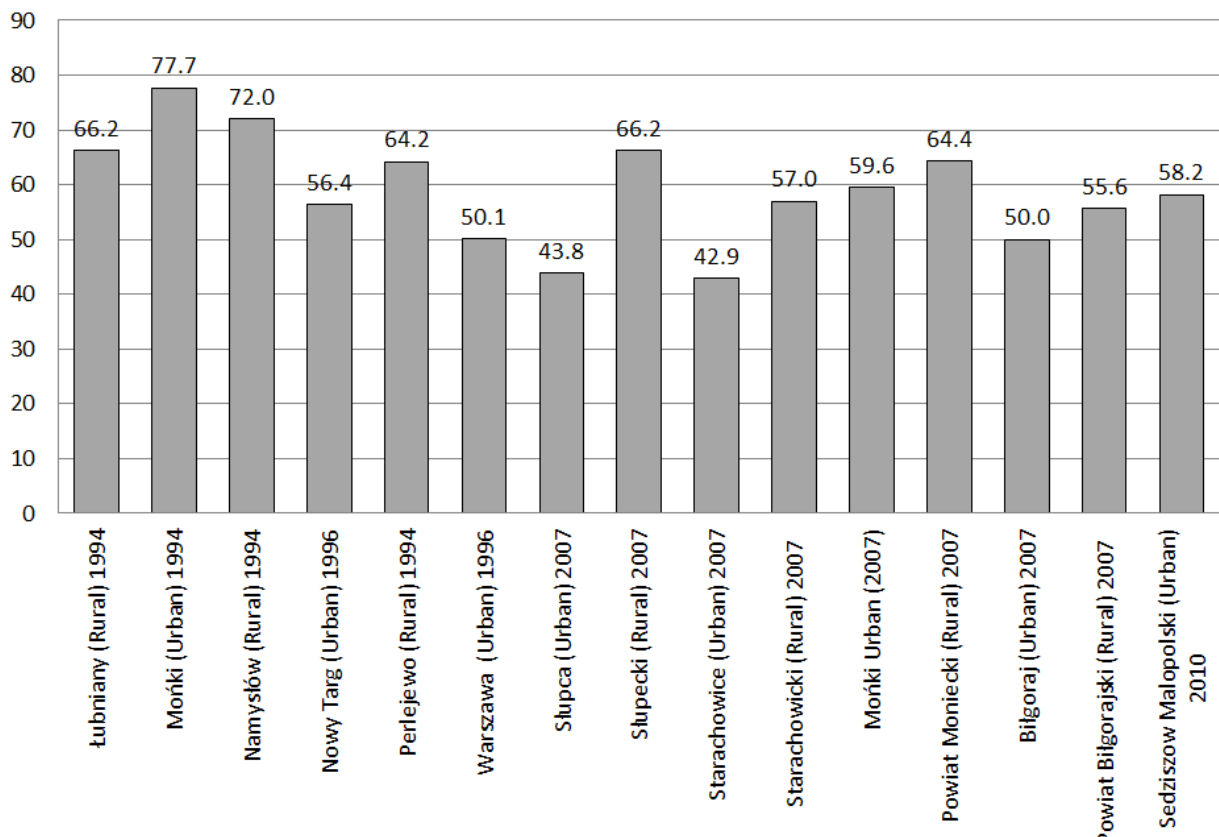


are simply asked to name others they know in the population of interest – people who are then tracked down and interviewed if at all possible.<sup>3</sup>

Against this background, the original ethnosurvey methodology in Mexico assumed a two-stage process for sampling communities in countries of origin. In the first stage, communities were non-randomly selected to capture the experience of migrants coming from different levels of urbanism in traditional regions of out-migration. In the second stage, investigators conducted a comprehensive census that listed all potential dwellings in each community in order to create a sampling frame from which households were randomly selected. Although this procedure worked well in Mexico, its application in Poland was more challenging since conducting a census of potential dwellings is costly in time and money and the efficiency of sampling is low in large cities.

With random sampling, representativeness depends on three conditions: (1) the completeness, reliability and validity of the sample frame, (2) the accuracy of the random sampling procedure and (3) the survey response rate. In Poland, the first two conditions are relatively easy to satisfy. Although, in Poland, existing lists potentially available as sampling frames tend to be inaccurate or outdated, these problems were overcome by taking an initial census of the survey area. Thereafter, the accuracy of the random sampling was assured by the careful administration and supervision of survey interviewers.

**Figure 2. Response rates for ethnosurveys completed in Poland, 1994–2010**



Source: Kaczmarczyk *et al.* (2011): 101.

The most serious problem in the Polish case was the response rate, as shown in Figure 2. In those communities surveyed during 1994–1996, the response rate ranged from a low of 50 per cent in Warsaw to a high of

78 per cent in Mońki, with an average of 64 per cent. The response rates were even lower among those communities surveyed during 2007–2010, which ranged from 44 per cent in Słupca to 66 per cent in Słupecki, with an average rate of just 55 per cent. Since the propensity to respond to a survey is always selective on both measured and unmeasured characteristics, the representativeness of the Polish data may be easily challenged given these non-response rates.

The issue of representatives was studied in an experiment done in conjunction with the 2010 ethnosurvey in Sędziszów Małopolski. Here the total sample was divided into two subsamples. In one of them, respondents were selected using simple random sampling whereas, in the other, they were selected non-randomly using a method known as *Adaptive Cluster Sampling* or ACS (see Thompson 1990; Thompson and Seber 1996; Turk and Borkowski 2005). With ACS, selection into the sample resembles a random walk except that movement between units selected into the sample is not random but conditional on some variable of interest, in this case prior experience as an international migrant.

ACS improves sampling efficiency whenever the respondents to be sampled are clustered, either socially or spatially. In Poland, international migrants tend to cluster spatially, living near one another in the same general neighbourhood (Kaczmarczyk *et al.* 2011). This clustering occurs because propinquity encourages the formation of interpersonal ties that create strong and geographically concentrated social networks (Faist 2000; Fawcett 1989). Given the spatial clustering of migrants, we can assume that, whenever a randomly selected household contains a migrant, others in the vicinity will also contain migrants. In the case of the ACS implemented in Sędziszów Małopolski, whenever a household contained a migrant, then other households in the neighbourhood were added to the sample until no further migrant households were encountered.<sup>4</sup>

Comparison of the random sample with the ACS sample carried out in Sędziszów Małopolski revealed that, while the random sample response rate was relatively high at 58 per cent and the measured characteristics were close to those observed in census data, persons with a low propensity for migration were over-represented in the survey while those with a high propensity were under-represented. As a result, the estimated share of migrants was 18.8 per cent in the random sample but as high as 29.3 per cent in the ACS sample.

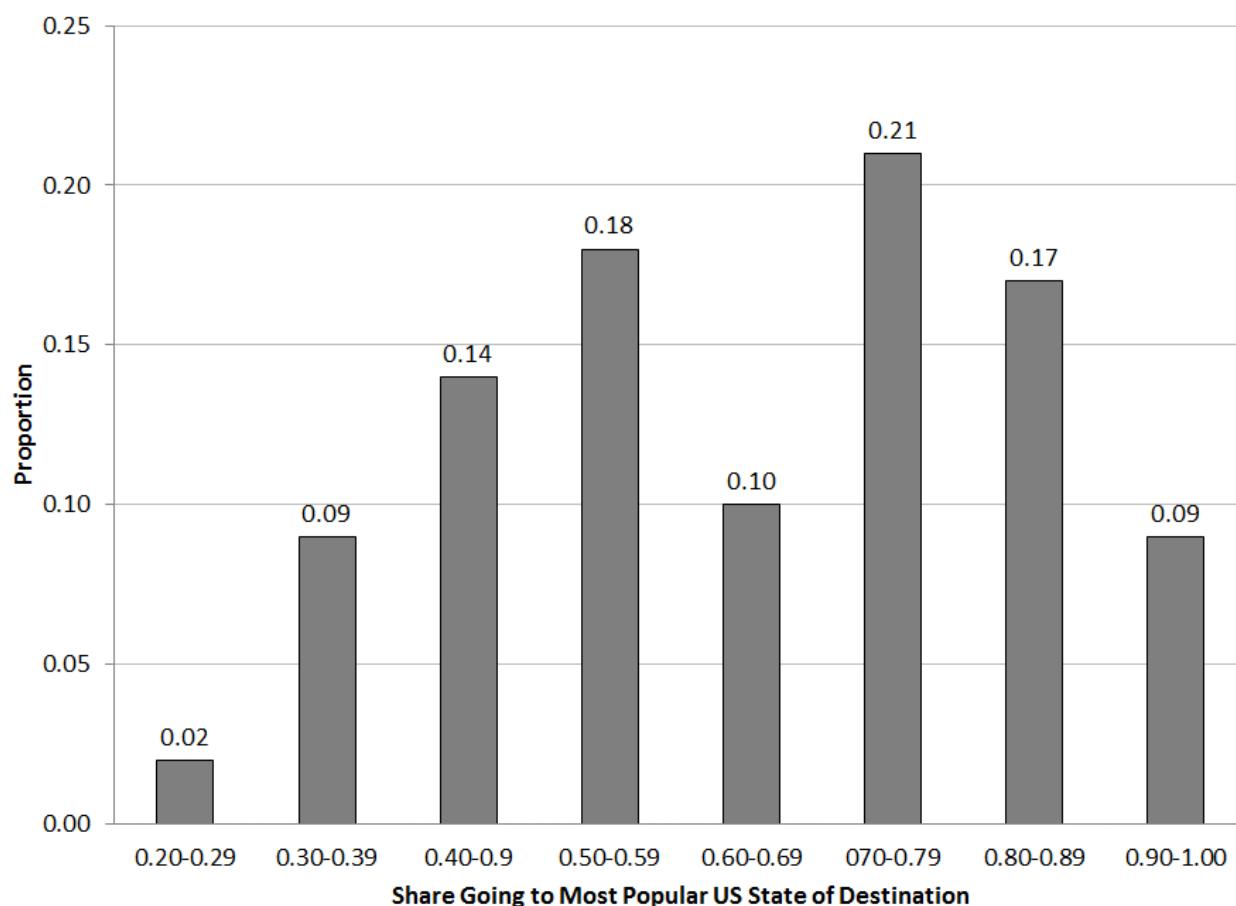
According to Thompson (1990), the efficiency of ACS compared to random sampling depends on the characteristics of the population under study and the design and costs of the study. In later work, Thompson (1997) proposed the use of ACS under conditions where: (1) the population is clustered (i.e., within-cluster variance constitutes a high share of total variance); (2) the population under study is rare; (3) the expected ACS sample is not much larger than the random sample; (4) the costs of observing units in clusters are lower than seeking them at random; (5) the costs of observing units lacking the desired condition (i.e. non-migrants) are lower than those of observing units who do not lack it (migrants); and (6) the condition for ACS sampling is easy to measure and observe.

These conditions were thoroughly tested in the Sędziszów Małopolski experiment. Monographic research revealed a significant tendency for migrant households to cluster (indeed, one of the new sections of the town was built mainly using migrant remittances), even though migration was a rare event in the wider community. The share of the randomly sampled observations in the total ACS sample increased by around 70 per cent compared to the base sample. The costs of both methods were similar and their migrant status remained unknown for only 2 per cent of the sample. The main difference was the estimated prevalence of migration – around 19 per cent in the random sample versus 29 per cent in the ACS sample (Kaczmarczyk *et al.* 2011). This promising outcome suggests that *ACS represents an efficient solution for studies of migrant-sending regions*.

As in Mexico, *parallel sampling proved to be the most challenging feature of the ethnosurvey's application in Poland*, though for very different reasons. Parallel sampling in Mexico was facilitated by the high concentration of Mexican migrants at particular destinations. According to the MMP, over 54 per cent of migrating

household heads went to California, followed by Texas (17 per cent) and Illinois (8 per cent) and almost a quarter headed to Los Angeles on their first trip abroad. Figure 3 shows the distribution of Mexican migrants, within each community, who went to that community's most popular state of destination.

**Figure 3. Distribution of communities in the MMP by the share of migrants going to the most popular US state of destination for each community**



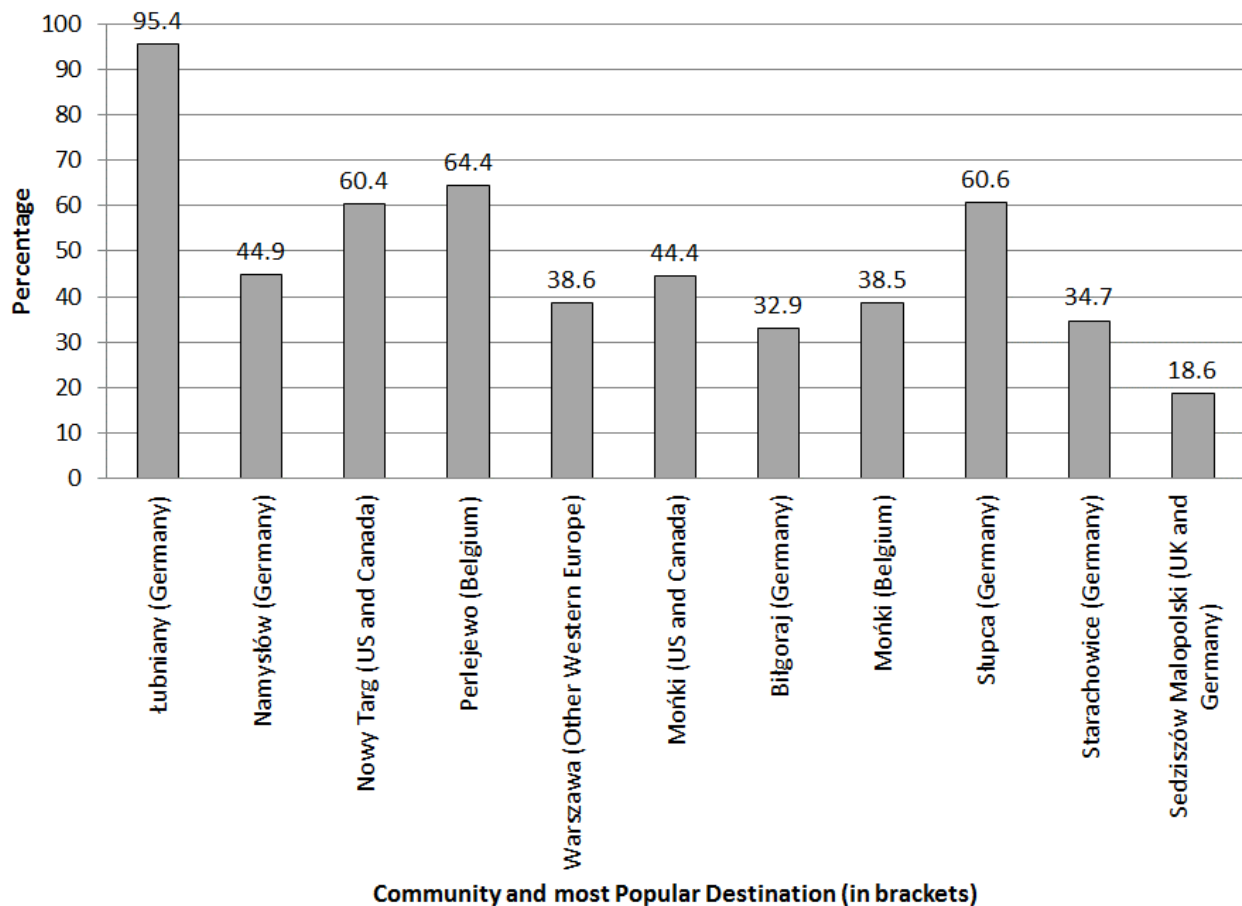
Source: Kaczmarczyk *et al.* (2011).

As can be seen, in 9 per cent of the communities, over 90 per cent of all US migrants went to the most popular destination state; in 17 per cent of the communities, 80–89 per cent of migrants went to the most popular state and, in 21 per cent, 70–79 per cent also did so. Totalling these three categories, we see that migrants in almost half (47 per cent) of the Mexican communities went to the most popular state of destination; adding the share of communities where 50–59 per cent and 60–69 per cent of migrants went to the most popular destination, the share of communities where at least half of all migrants went to the most popular destination was 75 per cent. With such high levels of migrant concentration in a common state of destination, the decision to follow migrant networks to particular points of destination for purposes of parallel sampling and additional ethnographic work is perfectly understandable, though Parrado, McQuiston and Flippen (2005) suggest that, within Mexican communities, US destinations have diversified in more recent years.

In contrast to the Mexican case, Polish migrants – particularly those in the post-accession period – are quite widely dispersed across global labour markets and *concentration rates* are generally much lower, even if we refer to target *countries* rather than target states or cities. Figure 4 displays the share of migrants going to the

most popular country of destination for each of the Polish communities. Out of the 11 communities sampled, only four display a concentration rate above 60 per cent. Indeed, the average rate is just 48.5 and seven communities have rates below 50 per cent.

**Figure 4. Share of migrants from a given community residing in the most important destination for that community, data for ethnosurveys completed in Poland, 1994–2010**



Source: Jaźwińska and Okólski (2001): 109; Napierała (2008): 187; Kaczmarczyk *et al.* (2011): 120.

In addition, the level of aggregation matters for the foreign data refers to concentration in *countries*, *not urban areas*. London is the only identifiable point of urban concentration across all the different countries. In recent Polish ethnosurveys, attempts have been made to identify linkages between specific origin and destination communities; these efforts proved unsuccessful in cities such as Glasgow, Limerick and Southampton. Indeed, in the case of Limerick and Glasgow, investigators found it easier to identify Polish regions that were *not* sending migrants than the opposite.

Nonetheless, fieldwork has shown that parallel sampling offers serious benefits, even if extremely difficult, time-consuming and costly. Specifically, it allows researchers to capture those migrants who moved away in whole households and are thus missed by ethnosurveys conducted in sending communities – probably the most serious bias in the Polish studies. In practical terms, the only efficient solution may be to start the process at the destination and then to identify the sending communities and households left back home, although neither the sending nor the receiving side of the migration process should be prioritised when choosing research sites.

Social media might also be used as a possible source of information on the location of out-migrants (Kaczmarczyk *et al.* 2011).

## Discussion and conclusion

The methodology of the ethnosurvey was developed in the early 1980s as a mixed-methods approach to studying Mexican migration to the United States but, since then, studies modelled on the ethnosurvey design have been conducted in Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Haiti, Peru, China, Guatemala, Senegal, Ghana, Congo, El Salvador, Colombia, Ecuador, Bangladesh and Uruguay. In all cases, the idea was similar: the methodology borrowed standardised data-gathering and structured sampling from social surveys and combined them with the ethnographic targeting of specific communities for participant observation and in-depth interviewing, together with an inventory of community circumstances.

The application of the ethnosurvey methodology in Mexico proved to be *very successful in capturing the complexities of Mexico–US migration over the years*. Data from the Mexican Migration Project have provided detailed information on how patterns and processes of Mexico–US migration have shifted over time in response to changing circumstances in both nations and as a result of US policy interventions at critical junctures. In academia, these data have been widely used to test hypotheses, build theories and provide substantive information about the causes, consequences and processes of international migration.

Although data from the MMP have been influential within academia, they have been *largely ignored by US policymakers, whose misplaced attempts at restriction and repression successively transformed a circular flow of documented workers into a circular flow of undocumented workers*, then into a large and growing population of undocumented settlers and, finally, into a mixed-status population of US citizen children with undocumented parents combined with a circular flow of documented but exploited workers. Whereas the gap between empirical evidence and policy action represents the principal moral failing of the MMP, *its principal methodological failing has been the steady erosion of parallel sampling as a structural feature of the ethnosurvey*. Ironically it was the obdurate resistance of policymakers to facts and evidence and their persistence in ever-more-punitive and repressive policies that produced this outcome. The rise of white nationalist sentiment in both the political and policy arena have undercut the ability of researchers to successfully continue the selection procedures and respondent-driven sampling methods that worked so well when compiling samples of settled US migrants in the 1980s.

With 14 communities studied thus far, Poland represents the largest and most important application of the ethnosurvey method outside of Mexico and the resulting data from the country have likewise been *very influential in academia*. They have proved very influential in informing academic debates about the causes, consequences and forms of out-migration from Poland and how these have evolved over the course of the country's social, economic and political transformation from an isolated command economy linked to the Soviet Union into a dynamic market economy which is part of the European Union and is linked to the global market economy.

As in the United States, while ethnosurvey data and facts gathered in Poland have made their mark academically, they *have largely been ignored or overlooked by policymakers in EU destination countries* such as Britain, Germany or the Netherlands, where 'Polish plumbers' came to symbolise the perceived excess of internal EU migrants which figured prominently in the Brexit vote and in the spread of nativist populism across other countries in Western Europe. Moreover, as in the case of the Mexican Migration Project, *the Polish data-gathering effort faltered, especially in the integration of parallel sampling into the ethnosurvey design*. During the early stages of Poland's migratory transition, this issue stemmed from the fact that, initially, there were few settled communities of Polish migrants in other countries. Later parallel sampling faltered because of the wide dispersal

of Polish migrants across countries and because the migrants' lack of concentration at specific points of destination raised technical problems that made parallel sampling difficult and costly.

In sum, despite the advantages offered by the ethnosurvey, its methodology nonetheless has clear *drawbacks and limitations*. First, its hybrid sampling design yields data whose representativeness is open to question. Although sampling within communities is random and therefore representative, the selection of host communities and the surveying of settled out-migrants in foreign branch communities are decidedly non-random. The use of random sampling within communities of origin does mean that, together, they yield a representative sample, even of migrants who were present at the time and place when fieldwork was done. This issue is more and more problematic considering other data sources that are capable of providing a less-biased picture of the scale and basic structural characteristics of migration – such as register data and big data.

The collection of retrospective life histories also introduces recall error into the data which, of course, increases the farther back in time one goes. Recall error is mitigated, though not eliminated, by the careful chronological compilation of personal histories using major life events as markers. Dates for events and circumstances are checked for internal consistency during the process of data entry and file construction. Although, in both Mexico and in Poland, labour histories have generally been found to be quite reliable, there are exceptions; these latter including year-to-year reports of earnings that have proven to be unreliable (and thus the MMP questionnaire consequently only collects this information for the first and last US trips as well as for the current or latest job in the origin community).

Finally, *parallel sampling presents serious logistical difficulties and practical challenges that affect response rates as well as data quality*. Unlike sending communities, where respondents are located within a limited, circumscribed area, migrants at places of destination tend to be more widely scattered even within a single town or city. Migrants also generally work long hours, leaving little free time and making it difficult to schedule interviews. Of course, also, those migrants who have an irregular status tend to be apprehensive, fearful and mistrusting of outsiders. As a result, the financial and temporal costs of interviewing are much greater in places of destination than in communities of origin and the sample sizes are correspondingly smaller – generally no more than around 10 per cent of the size of the original sample and yielding less-reliable data for samples that are already non-random. In addition, as expressions of nativist sentiment and anti-immigrant prejudice have risen over the decades, levels of respondent cooperation have dropped, reducing sample sizes even further and, in recent years, even precluding the collection of data altogether.

This comparative analysis of the ethnosurvey's performance in two countries makes it clear that *it does not constitute a universal methodology appropriate to all settings and applications*. It functions best when other reliable and valid sources of data on migration are not readily available or when existing knowledge about the nature and character of a given migratory flow is limited. It is not well-suited to making national-level estimates about the size and composition of a migrant population, nor does it work well in capturing the totality of migratory experiences in large towns and cities. In attempting to assess migration from these contexts, the MMP focuses data-gathering on one specific neighbourhood – usually one that is working-class or poor in composition. Finally, it cannot capture those forms of mobility that are weakly embedded in the social context or not strongly connected to sending communities – quite commonly the case for skilled and educated migrants. Nonetheless, the ethnosurvey remains quite useful for *building a complex understanding of the micro social and economic processes of migration and for assessing their relationship to specific social, geographic and temporal contexts at the individual, household and community levels*. As such, it can efficiently complement other methodologies aimed at the assessment of the scale and basic characteristics of migration, including those based on increasingly popular big data.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In 1976, for example, the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service published an article in *Reader's Digest* warning readers about a 'growing, silent invasion of illegal aliens' that 'now threatens to become a national disaster, with 8 million illegal aliens in the United States [and] at least 250 000 to 500 000 more arrive each year'. These migrants were 'milking the US taxpayer of \$13 billion annually', 'taking away jobs from legal residents', acquiring welfare benefits and public services' and 'avoiding taxes' (Chapman 1976: 188–189).

<sup>2</sup> In real terms, the budget of the US Border Patrol rose from \$330 million to \$3.6 billion from 1986 to 2016 (\$2016 USD) and the number of Border Patrol officers grew from around 3 700 to 19 800. The deportations of Mexicans from within the United States likewise grew from 11 000 in 1986 to peak at 309 000 in 2013 and the budget for internal enforcement increased 11 times (Massey 2018).

<sup>3</sup> More sophisticated than simple snowball sampling is *respondent driven sampling* (RDS), used to study difficult-to-reach populations, including immigrants (Gile and Handcock 2010; Heckathorn 1997, 2007). Another non-random method known as *intercept sampling* takes advantage of the fact that immigrants often cluster at certain locations at certain points in time – known as intercept points – which may then be listed and sampled (McKenzie and Mistiaen 2009).


<sup>4</sup> As this method oversamples migrant households and in order to generate unbiased estimates of population parameters, dedicated estimators must be applied (Brown 2003; Thompson 1990, 1997).

## Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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# Superdiversity and Its Relevance for Central and Eastern European Migration Studies. The Case of Polish Migrants in the UK

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*This article presents our key arguments about the usefulness of the concept of superdiversity for reimagining migration in European societies, based on the example of migration from Poland to the UK. We argue that, despite some criticism of ‘superdiversity’, this concept is beneficial to avoid over-simplifications related to ethno-nationalised homogeneity as the prevailing ascribed feature of Polish migrants, offering a helpful lens through which the complexities and fluidity of contemporary migrant populations and receiving societies may be investigated. Our main point is that such the reimagination might be commenced through applying the concept of superdiversity in research on migrants from Poland in Great Britain. The concept of superdiversity is also beneficial to understand complexities associated with the urban contexts in which migrants settle, their adaptation pathways as well as the intersectional factors shaping migrants’ lives and experiences.*

*Keywords: superdiversity; complexities; intersectionality; conviviality; Polish migrants in the UK*

## Introduction

This article outlines key arguments pertaining to the relevance of the concept of superdiversity for reimagining migration in European societies, focusing on the example of migration from Poland to the UK. We argue that, despite some criticism of ‘superdiversity’, the concept helps to avoid oversimplifications related to ethno-nationalised homogeneity as the prevailing ascribed feature of migrants, offering a useful lens through which we may think about the complexities and fluidity of contemporary migrant populations and receiving societies. Our key point is that such reimagination might be advanced through applying the concept of superdiversity to the analysis of migrants from Poland in Great Britain. The concept of superdiversity is also helpful to understand

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complexities of the urban contexts where migrants are settling and the intersectional factors which shape migrants experiences and adaptation pathways.

Although superdiversity provides us with an overarching framework, it is useful in our analysis to combine it with other concepts and approaches such as intersectionality, culture shock and conviviality and. The relevance of superdiversity will be discussed using selected examples from fieldwork which are used to illuminate what Vertovec (2007:1025) has described as the ‘diversification of diversity’. These diversifications include the intersectional factors shaping migrants’ lives, such as their capitals, migration motivations and life trajectories as well as complexities associated with the superdiverse urban contexts in which they settle. We also apply the concept of superdiversity to examine how Polish migrants react to and interact with diverse populations in the urban settings in which they live.

After this introduction, we discuss the concept of superdiversity – its applications, limitations and premises. We then explore how superdiversity can be applied when researching the movements of CEE migrants and the potential added value of using the notion. Following the methodological approach presented below, we use examples compiled from interviews and ethnographic observation to highlight the diversity which is evident within populations of UK-based Polish migrants, examining the multiple complexities which shape their choices, experiences and trajectories. The closing section discusses the problems and opportunities associated with using the concept of superdiversity in the context of the data presented both herein and beyond.

### **The notion of superdiversity: challenges and opportunities**

The concept of superdiversity was first introduced by Vertovec (2007: 1025) to describe the ‘transformative diversification of diversity’ and related demographic and socio-cultural complexities. Although, on the surface, superdiversity might be seen as a descriptive category aimed at capturing a changing demographic reality and new diversities brought about by new types of migration flows apparent in some diverse urban contexts, it can also be perceived as a new conceptual and policy approach with specific methodological implications. The emergence of superdiversity may be understood in the context of an increased sensitivity to issues of equality and any associated equality legislation (Vertovec 2011). Vertovec also argues that superdiversity can provide a new ‘narrative’ with the potential to replace the contested notion of multiculturalism (Vertovec 2007) and fill the current post-multicultural theoretical void (Fomina 2010). Superdiversity can be conceived as a conceptual framework that offers an opportunity to rethink contemporary society or even as an ontological, methodological and epistemological approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm, highlighting contemporary complexities and sensitising to issues of difference and equality (Goodson and Grzymala-Kazłowska 2017). Others consider superdiversity as an orientation to difference: a preparedness or even desire to live in places where difference is the norm (Blackledge *et al.* 2018; Pemberton and Phillimore 2018).

Based on a study of 325 texts from various disciplines, Vertovec (2019) presented a typology of how superdiversity can be understood, including using superdiversity as a contemporary synonym of diversity, a backdrop for the material analysed, a call for methodological reassessment, a way of talking about ethnicity in a more in-depth manner, a multidimensional reconfiguration of social forms, a call to move beyond ethnicity and a tool for drawing attention to new social complexities. Vertovec argues that the final type – focusing on new social patterns, forms and identities arising from migration-driven diversification – is perhaps the most driving reason for the scale of interest in the concept.

Superdiversity is not only used to acknowledge ethno-cultural difference but also moves beyond ethno-nationalism to capture wide-ranging complexities. Sigona (2014) stresses that superdiversity allows society to be seen as becoming increasingly ‘complex, composite, layered and unequal’. The difficulty of capturing this complexity in order to identify ‘what’ superdiversity looks like is one of the key problems underlying the

concept. Several scholars have tried to identify the different dimensions of diversity that underpin superdiversity but there is no agreement as to exactly what these might be. For example, Grillo (2015) differentiates aspects of superdiversity along four axes: (x) ethnicity; (y) socio-legal and political status; (z) socio-cultural diversity (e.g. related to language and religion) and (w) socio-economic statutes and opportunities. Alternatively, Pride (2015) proposes a multi-dimensional framework in which to examine five domains of superdiversity. The *individual dimension* involves personal characteristics such as date of birth, gender, country of origin, ethnicity and religious tradition, as well as sexuality, (dis)ability or human capital. The *migration domain* includes variables such as migration channel, migration status, time of arrival and intended length of stay. The *socio-economic domain* is comprised of variables such as education, occupation and income. The *space/place domain* refers to the features of a community, including its ethnic characteristics and institutions (e.g. related to faith), diversity within a group, the mobility of the migrant population and the levels of inequalities and deprivation. The *household domain* refers to the features and relationships within a household, such as the number of residents, the age structure and the languages used.

Although these frameworks constitute a useful starting point from which to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of superdiversity, they require further elaboration. In particular, more work is needed to connect the frameworks with the various forms of inequality given Hall's work, which clearly indicates that superdiversity is a product of what she terms 'a brutal migration milieu' (2017: 1566). Further, there is a need to link the concept of superdiversity to the notion of intersectionality coined by Crenshaw (1989) and to integrate the analysis of power and agency that has been so useful in the discussions around intersectionality.

The emergence of new levels and types of complexity are not only difficult to conceptualise but also require multi-faceted research approaches that acknowledge the diversity, mobility, transnationality and fluidity of populations as well as the multidimensionality of superdiversity (Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018). As Vertovec (2011) and Phillimore (2015b) argue, superdiversity also has profound implications for policy – which has often been developed based on notions of population homogeneity and sedentarism – instead implying the need to recognise movement and a multiplicity of positionalities and needs.

However, despite growing recognition of the opportunities and challenges associated with superdiversity at local, national and global levels, theory and method have not as yet been sufficiently advanced to address emergent complexities. Arguably, because of its theoretical and empirical complexity, superdiversity to date has mainly been researched from ethnographic and somewhat descriptive perspectives, with studies concentrating on interactions at the micro level in specific localities, with the focus on conviviality (which in fact has been researched since Illich 1973) and cosmopolitanism (e.g. Wise 2005), the lived realities of 'commonplace diversity' (Neal, Bennett, Jones, Cochrane and Mohan 2015) and the 'ethos of mixing' (Wessendorf 2013). In terms of scale, the emphasis has very much been on micro-spaces such as coffee shops, parks and organisations (see, for example, Blackledge *et al.* 2018), although more recent work has scaled up to the neighbourhood level (i.e. Phillimore, Brand, Bradby and Padilla 2019) or taken a national perspective, at least in consideration of migration rules (Meissner 2018).

In spite of its stimulating value and perhaps theoretical potential, superdiversity has evoked a number of criticisms. The concept is criticised for its vagueness, which leads to difficulties with its operationalisation. Critiques have questioned the novelty of superdiversity (Blommaert 2013), highlighting points in the past when superdiversity was in evidence (i.e. van de Laar and van der Schoor 2019) or its Global-North-centric approach (Ndhlovu 2016). Others have pointed to its descriptiveness resulting from ontology-driven research stressing the complexity and challenges of diversity classifications (Arnaut and Spotti 2014). Further criticisms have focused on its alleged overemphasis on cultural and localised difference at the expense of structural inequalities and politicised retreat from multiculturalism (Sepulveda, Syrett and Lyon 2011). According to Back (2015),



superdiversity fails to address racial issues, social conflicts and divisions, whereas the emphasis on ‘unprecedented levels of difference’ contributes to public anxiety, particularly over immigration.

As noted above, Hall (2017) urges that the notion of superdiversity be more explicitly linked (‘moored’) to the structures and relations of power and inequality. Berkeley (cited in Humphris 2015) claims that the way in which superdiversity has been translated into academic or policy debates may be counterproductive for challenging racial inequality because of its focus on fragmentation and promoting diversity rather than social justice. Demir (cited in Humphris 2015) points out that the superdiversity perspective lacks the crucial elements of theories of race, such as ‘recognition’ and ‘solidarity’, which help to acknowledge the identities and positionalities of deprived groups and to empower them. Although Vertovec’s iteration of superdiversity was intended to capture the intersection of various overlapping dimensions of difference, in practice many scholars using the concept continue to focus on ethno-cultural difference and the idea of more people coming from more places and going to more places. Work in social policy, however, does explicitly use superdiversity to identify the intersectional differences that impact on individuals’ experiences of, and access to, welfare. Phillimore (2015a, 2016) uses superdiversity to uncover the factors which shape migrants’ access to maternity services, focusing heavily on structural inequality and migration regimes and shifting the emphasis in this field from using culture to using structure in order to explain migrants’ low levels of access to maternity services. Elsewhere emphasis has been placed upon health (Lindenmeyer, Redwood, Griffith *et al.* 2016; Phillimore, Bradby, Doos, Padilla and Samerski 2018; Phillimore *et al.* 2019), housing and social work (Boccagni 2015).

Despite the above contestations, superdiversity is increasingly acknowledged as offering the potential to shift thinking beyond multiculturalism in order to present an ontological perspective and analytical lens with which to at least describe multiple differentiations. It enables the overcoming of binary categorisations and the ethno-nationalist groupism (Chernilo 2017) held responsible for reinforcing a perception of society and migrant populations as internally homogenous and externally bounded groups (Brubaker 2006). Regardless of an increasing awareness and acceptance of complexity and diversity as a reality and the recognition that factors beyond ethnicity and country of origin play an essential role in migrant settlement and adaptation, migration studies have continued to be dominated by an ethno-national focus. The essentialising of groups continues not only in policy terms but also in academic work, despite critiques of ethno-national approaches and methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002). The evidence of this impasse might be noticeable in the language of minority/majority, them/us and dominant/non-dominant binaries, as seen in the recent Casey Review in the UK (2016), which emphasised the expectation that migrants assimilate into what is constructed to be a coherent majority culture. Such expectations overlook the demographic reality in many European urban areas where there is no coherent majority culture and/or where populations are mobile and dynamic as well internally heterogeneous in terms of factors beyond ethnicity or country of origin.

The lens of superdiversity enables us, at the very least, to acknowledge the diversity of migrants and, as such, has the potential to enhance our knowledge of migrants from CEE countries who tend to be homogenised as ‘the Polish’ or even ‘the Eastern Europeans’, despite substantive multi-generation populations. Thus, we argue that superdiversity has much utility when thinking about CEE migration, helping to overcome the groupism and stereotyping and to capture contemporary complexities around how migrants respond, address and even utilise superdiverse realities. In our analysis we draw on McCall’s (2005) typology of three approaches to understanding multiple, intersecting and complex social relations and identities: 1) the *inter-categorical approach*, provisionally adopting existing categories to document relationships of inequality amongst groups and changing configurations of power; 2) the *intra-categorical approach*, one which examines the boundary-making and boundary-defining process, focusing on complexity within groups; and 3) the *anti-categorical perspective*, which deconstructs existing analytical categories as inadequate for a complex and fluid society. In

this paper we employ the latter two, not only to give insight into internal complexities but also to deconstruct the category of Polish migrants in the UK.

### **A methodological approach to superdiversity**

Goodson and Grzymala-Kazłowska (2017) argue that employing a superdiversity lens requires new methodological approaches which acknowledge diversity and the complexity of populations while sampling data and employing research techniques. As noted above, most studies to date have been qualitative and predominantly ethnographic in nature, aimed at uncovering the minutiae of everyday interactions. However, approaches are being developed that are capable of capturing the diversification of diversity and identifying some of the elements that make a difference both within and across ethno-national groups (see Phillimore *et al.* 2019). These include interviews and surveys and engage with sampling techniques such as Respondent Driven Sampling and Maximum Diversity Sampling. This paper uses data collected using such methods to demonstrate how a superdiversity lens can aid our understanding of CEE migrants and their experiences.

The *Social Anchoring in Superdiverse Transnational Social Spaces* or SAST project involved the undertaking of in-depth minimally structured individual interviews with 44 Polish post-accession migrants in the UK. Maximum variation sampling was used to ensure heterogeneity in the composition of the participants in terms of age, gender, faith, education levels, income and family situation. This form of comparison-focused sampling selects cases to compare and contrast in order to identify similarities and differences as well as the factors explaining them (Patton 1990). The shared aspects that emerged, despite the intersecting axes of difference, hold high levels of authenticity and validity since they are based on commonalities across highly diverse cases. The technique enables us to identify so-called intra-group variation – highlighting the factors that make a difference to the lived experiences of respondents who have resettled in the UK. Such factors frequently go beyond ethno-national identity or stereotypes.

The paper uses a combination of vignettes and short excerpts from the SAST project which support and enrich our analysis. These are taken from interviews in which the participants were asked about their life prior to migration, their movement to the UK, the beginning of their life in the UK, major changes over the years, their current situation and their plans for the future. Vignettes – defined by The Oxford and Cambridge Dictionaries as ‘a short piece of writing or acting that clearly shows what a particular person, situation, etc. is like’ and ‘a short piece of writing, music, acting, etc. that clearly expresses the typical characteristics of something or someone’ – are understood by us to be short descriptions of typical or exemplary cases (Ragin and Amoroso 2010). All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and translated from Polish to English where necessary. Data were coded in NVivo employing substantive (Kelle 2014) and theoretical coding (Thornberg and Charmaz 2014). The project received an approval from a relevant academic ethical review committee. The interviewees were identified via various channels in order to encourage maximum diversity – personal networks, various Polish and non-Polish organisations (such as schools, churches, socio-cultural and business associations, play groups and organisations working with the homeless) and advertisements in Polish shops and on the Internet. The participants were interviewed at the place of their choice after signing the informed consent form – which included information on anonymity and confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. They were offered a modest incentive to compensate for their time and travel costs.

The cases used herein were selected on the basis of their succinctness and relevance in order to demonstrate the diversity of Polish migrants, their adaption paths and their experiences of encountering superdiversity. Since the vignettes represent distinctive combinations of migrants’ features, they needed to be presented in a way that protects interviewees’ anonymity, which led us not only to changing their names and other details but also to not revealing certain of their characteristics. We do not claim that these vignettes comprehensively

encapsulate manifestations of superdiversity but offer them in order to shed light on some aspects of the diversity of Polish migrants and their responses to diversity. Our intention is to use the lens of superdiversity to highlight the potential of the concept for researching CEE migrants and migrations.

### **The context of the analysis**

The accession of Poland to the EU in 2004 and the subsequent unrestricted access of Polish migrants to the UK labour market led to an unprecedented movement of Polish nationals to Great Britain. As a result, according to the data from the British national census of 2011, migrants born in Poland represented 579 121 of all 7 505 010 usual residents born outside England and Wales (Office for National Statistics 2014). Notwithstanding the difficulty of measuring migration, the estimations of Poland's Central Statistical Office suggest that the number of Polish citizens staying in the UK for longer than three months reached 690 000 on 1 January 2008 (Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008). The growing population of Polish citizens in the UK was clearly evident in national datasets: 2010: 580 000; 2011: 625 000; 2013: 637 000; 2014: 642 000; 2015: 685 000; 2016: 720 000; and 2017: 788 000 (Central Statistical Office 2018).

The research used in this paper was conducted in one of the UK's largest cities where, according to the national census in England and Wales in 2011, Poles made up the most numerous migrant group (49 974) among residents who only held a non-UK passport. There has been the long history of Polish presence in the UK and the region, originating from at least the time of WWII, when Polish soldiers and exiles found their new home in the UK. The post-war Polish community was depicted as concentrated around the Polish church and characterised by its patriotism and self-perception as guardians of pre-war Polish traditions and the heritage of an independent Poland (Stachura 2004). Post-war Polish migrants have been portrayed as integrated in British society while maintaining a strong ethnic and Catholic identity. Since 2004, they have been joined by multitudinous post-accession Polish migrants who are depicted as keeping their distance from British society and developing and sustaining separate ethnic institutions – such as Polish schools, churches and cultural institutions – alongside Polish shops and services – i.e. beauty salons, medical centres, advice agencies, garages, restaurants and nightclubs.

For a long time there was a prevailing picture of Polish migrants as traditionalist, immersed in their own ethnicity and homogenous ethnic networks. In recent years, however, studies showing the different aspects of internal diversity have been published. For example, Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich (2006) investigated the relationship between class, migration and ethnicity, highlighting the differences between the various groups of post-accession Polish migrants in terms of the socio-economic characteristics and migration strategies exemplified by 'storks' – circular migrants found mostly in low paid jobs; 'hamsters' – migrants who treated migration as an one-off event during which, through undertaking low-paid jobs in the UK, to accumulate capital to use in Poland; 'searchers' – who were involved in different occupations but who shared a strategy of keeping all their options open and being flexible in considering further migration; and 'stayers' – migrants who intended to settle and who had strong social mobility aspirations. Ryan (2011) also demonstrated the variety of positionalities and experiences of Polish migrants, exploring different class and occupational positions (Ryan 2016) in her recent paper (Ryan 2018) and offering insights into the varied gender, age, family and occupational statuses of Polish migrants. Lopez- Rodriguez (2010) has also contributed to the scholarship on Polish migration by examining the relationship between class issues and the experiences of Polish migrants in the UK. Stella, Flynn and Gawlewicz (2018) and Szulc (2019) have moved beyond an approach which assumes heterosexual identities in a bid to highlight the experiences of Polish LGBT migrants. Despite this increasingly complex and nuanced insight into the diversity of Polish migrants, further exploration is needed. We argue that using a superdiverse lens enables us to not only depict internal differences but also highlight exceptions

and minorities while trying to de-construct group boundaries. As Rzepnikowska (2016) noted, the issue of the actual interaction of Polish migrants with a multicultural population has been largely overlooked, in spite of a few interesting examples of how Polish migrants encounter diversity (Valentine 2008) and redefine and re-visit their identities through the process of migration and encounters with ‘others’ (Ryan 2010). Our paper thus applies the superdiversity approach to highlight diversity, to investigate cases which might be used for deconstructing group imaginaries and boundaries and to explore reactions to, and interactions in, areas where Polish migrants encounter high levels of diversity.

### Uncovering intra-group diversity

This part of the paper presents a series of vignettes and other examples highlighting the characteristics, adaptation strategies and lifestyles that do not fit into prevailing representations of Polish migrants in the UK. The first case study presents Marek, a male professional migrant in his 30s with a middle-class family background, who reoriented his life from being focused on a professional career in Poland to one of self-employment and voluntary activity in his local community in the UK, accompanied by his immersion in a diverse neighbourhood and eventual conversion to Islam. Marek went to the UK to accompany his partner. Shortly after their arrival, when the challenges of adaptation increased, the pair split up, causing considerable emotional distress before Marek mobilised to adopt a more proactive attitude and reshape his life. Despite his fast progression in white-collar jobs in the UK thanks to his higher education qualifications and pre-migration work experience, Marek drew on his high cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and turned to self-employment to organise his professional life in a more flexible and creative way. This also led to changes in his lifestyle and improved his health.

At the same time, Marek began to engage in his neighbourhood and became involved in diverse local social networks, which he found truly rewarding. While planting flowers in front of his block of flats, he got to know his neighbours, eventually developing friendships across perceived ethno-national cleavages:

*I called our agency and asked if I could arrange it [a garden]. They said that it was fine. So I bought soil, flowers and began to do this. At the same time, a neighbour came, then a second and third and they started to help me. All of a sudden this changed into a party, because someone brought cake, rum. (...) A [Polish] friend asked when I felt like at home here? I said that when I was opening my office I had already known my all local community (...). There was nothing like this in Poland. When I come back home, my neighbour living downstairs, a Pakistani, frequently opens her door and talks to me. My Jamaican neighbour, when he sees me with my dog, brings some rum and we talk (UK09/m/3y).<sup>1</sup>*

Following his immersion in the diverse social environment of his neighbourhood, Marek developed a local sense of belonging, embracing local diversity. In the interview he revealed: ‘I feel here like at home thanks to people who are very open. I feel like at home, connected to this local community’ (UK09/m/3y).

Through learning from and engaging with Islam with one of his neighbours, Marek converted to this religion. He explained his choice of Islam as providing him clearer, stricter and more overarching guidelines in comparison to Catholicism and this gave him a feeling of security and stability.

*I have changed my denomination from Christianity to Islam – intentionally and recently. (...) I liked some of the life principles, most of all, some regulations which you can find in the Koran. They help to take control over life when it begins to be chaotic. (...) Over the years religion was in my life and it was not. It*

*is Islam that has come and knocked on my door – as I called it. When I converted to Islam, I realised that Islam is simply the update of Christianity* (UK09/m/3y).

Marek's trajectory began to look very different to that of a 'typical' Polish migrant.

Being strongly involved in the local community did not reduce Marek's strong attachment to the Polish language and culture, as he explained: 'Literature and history – this is in me all the time. I cultivate Polish values, those which I took from my home – Polish culture, history, language' (UK09/m/3y). This attachment to his Polish identity coexisted with Marek's efforts to obtain British citizenship, which he presented as a form of acknowledgement of his attachment to British society and its feature of diversity.

*This is very important to me in spite of the fact that I will be a Briton in terms of passport. (...) Especially in such a multicultural society as Great Britain, you can be a good Briton and a very good Pole* (UK09/m/3y).

Unlike the prevailing portrait of Polish migrants in the UK, Marek was not involved in extensive ethnic and family networks. Instead, in a short space of time, the intensive processes of his embedding in a diverse neighbourhood and growing sense of belonging to the local community could be observed. As such, Marek and the intersecting characteristics that matter to him – Polish and British, Muslim, professional and immersed in wide-ranging social networks – are almost superdiversity personified. The fluidity of his identity and characteristics also highlights the importance of taking a superdiversity perspective rather than an ethno-national approach to understanding the resettlement experiences of individuals usually categorised as part of a large group of migrants from and to one country.

Ilona, a professional in her 50s from a working-class family, also provides an example of an individual who might be viewed as atypical. Approaching a landmark birthday, she engaged with the challenge of migrating after finding a job in the UK commensurate with her occupation online. To her, migration was a way to escape her financial problems and a difficult marriage in Poland. In addition, her mobility was also a marker of her personality, expressed in the words: 'I like challenges and I am not afraid of anything' (UK41/w/4y). At first, Ilona was thinking that her stay would be temporary. It soon became clear that Ilona would resettle more permanently so she divorced her husband and was joined by her adult daughter. On holiday in Egypt, she met a Ghanaian man and began a long-distance relationship. While waiting to be reunited with her new partner, Ilona travelled to Ghana where she bought a house and a farm. Unlike Marek, despite her successful professional life, her strong economic position and her high cultural capital (in terms of both her education and her English language competence), Ilona felt lonely and alienated in the UK, having only a narrow circle of Polish acquaintances from her workplace. She sustained her strong Polish identity, missed Poland and felt out of the place: 'I have withdrawn so much from Poland. I miss it and I have an impression that my life here is not a normal life, that it is not my place' (UK41/w/4y).

Nevertheless Ilona did not contemplate return because her job gave her financial security and she worried that her mixed-race relationship would not be accepted in Poland. Ilona's wellbeing improved slightly when she was joined by her partner, which made her feel a bit more settled in the UK. In some ways, Ilona's longing for Poland might be viewed as typical but the combination of features – such as Ilona's age at migration, her motivations for migration, professional status and inter-racial relationship – mark Ilona as different to the typified Polish migrant.

Thirty-year-old Robert might be classified as being involved in a lifestyle migration which, according to Benson and Reilly (2016: 21):

*is not intended to identify, demarcate and define a particular group of migrants, but rather to provide an analytical framework for understanding some forms of migration and how these feature within identity-making, and moral considerations over how to live.*

Robert said that he always dreamed about escaping from the provincial life of his town: 'I completed my Masters studies...but I always wanted to migrate... life abroad always fascinated me (...). I hated work in the office because it was sitting at a desk, parochialism, provincialism, gossiping (...)' (UK28/m/5y).

Although not explicitly mentioned, his identification as homosexual might have been a contributing factor in his desire to move to the UK, despite him having an established life in Poland with a white-collar job and a supportive middle-class family.

Having high cultural capital in terms of education, English-language competence and a teaching qualification in the UK, Robert managed to become a teaching assistant. This career brought him high levels of job satisfaction and a remuneration with which he was happy; it also allowed time for travelling. After a period when he was involved in voluntary work, he changed his priorities, focusing on his interest in a healthy lifestyle and playing sport. Cooking and experimenting in the kitchen became his favourite pastimes in addition to spending time with friends (both Polish and other nationalities) and taking lessons in art and music. He also talked about enjoying fashion and redecorating his own house – the latter making him start thinking about the city he lived in as his 'home'. Although attached to his Polish heritage, Robert felt he was a citizen of the world and was open to intergroup friendship and being in a mixed relationship. His search for self-actualisation was a driving force which shaped his life and eventually his feelings of belonging.

Other priorities characterised Maria, a project officer in her 40s and a single woman with no children. Although she had been in the UK for 10 years, she did not feel attached to the neighbourhood where she rented a tiny apartment. Maria, like Robert, had a relatively wide and diverse network of Polish and non-Polish friends but was more engaged in voluntary work with wide-ranging communities across the city. Artistic activity played a vital role for her, enabling her to sustain her identity, enter into enriching social relations and express herself. She described herself in these words:

*I am a visual artist. When I try to describe this, usually it is easiest to say that I build spaces. (...) Such big installations often come out of this, so if I am attached to something material, these are elements of my installations which are now in a safe in the other end of the city. (...) I want people to be engaged, not only to watch and the majority of my projects have such sociological subtexts, but also cultural. Here in [name of the city] I have done a few of these projects, which look at different aspects of culture mixing and multiculturalism (UK13/w/10y).*

Despite her attachment to the Polish language and culture, at the same time – through art, mixing and voluntary work – Maria actively sought to resist Polish national identity. She felt that this was imposed on her when she was seen as a stranger and categorised as an Eastern European migrant while also distancing herself from Catholicism: 'I also started to realise that I am a Pole in England' (UK13/w/10y). Maria could not imagine herself returning to Poland because she did not accept the low levels of tolerance and diversity coupled with the rise of conservatism and nationalism in the country. Instead, she revealed her dream of moving to a different country where she could combine artistic and voluntary work, with one scenario being a move to Africa. Maria's involvement in the arts and engagement in diverse social networks and voluntary actions while living a single and independent life differentiated her from the stereotype of Polish migrants as being focused on families, ethnic networks, the Polish language and Polish identity.

### Encounters with superdiversity

Above, we see how the superdiversity lens enables us to move away from the homogenisation of Polish migrants and examine intra-group diversity. We might also look at superdiversity in the context of encounters with diversity, as in the work of Wise (2010) and Wessendorf (2013) and how these encounters are impacted on by migrants' capitals and positionalities as well as the localities where they take place.

The intensity and scale of diversity were to varying degrees experienced by the interviewees, which brings to mind Oberg's (1960) notion of cultural shock, defined as anxiety resulting from losing familiar signs and symbols, accompanied by feelings of misunderstanding and confusion. Similarly, Adler (1975) describes culture shock as a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual reinforcements from one's culture, to new cultural stimuli which have different meanings or no meaning and to the misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences.

A recurring motif among participants related to the unexpected scale of diversity in urban Britain. Aneta emphasised the intensive nature of British superdiversity in comparison to other European countries:

*There was such a nice feeling, because, before, I saw other places – Germany, Norway – so England surprised me a bit by its cultural diversity. For sure I had to get to know other cultures. It was a bit of a shock to me. In some places where I was it was perhaps not as clean in terms of the city. I could not understand why people did not look after their gardens in some places (UK12/w/8y).*

The encounter with superdiversity was frequently described as a shock – a situation to which interviewees needed to adapt, as illustrated by the following:

*And slowly I began to acclimatise, getting to know people, because, when I arrived, straight after three days I went to work. The job was arranged. So slowly I was getting used to all this – different races, all this (UK27/m/7y).*

Even if intriguing and a gateway to a new life, encounters with superdiversity generated feelings of anxiety. Particularly in the early stages after arrival, diversity was experienced as threatening and overwhelming, as Dorota's account demonstrates:

*A big city, better cars, despite coming from a city, I did not see all this [before]. I cannot get used to the fact that it is so dirty. I knew that there are different cultures, my husband prepared me for this. He told me not to stare too much because I would get hit. The first impression shocked me, because it is such a rich country and it is so dirty. Each neighbourhood is different – different cultures and differences on the streets (UK06/w/4y).*

Aneta and Dorota both of working-class background and from non-metropolitan areas pointed to the problematic urban environments associated by them with diverse impoverished and deprived neighbourhoods across the city. Irek, *expressis verbis*, contrasted the diversity he encountered in mixed areas with the ideal of wealthy white suburbs, disclosing his negative attitude towards otherness despite claiming that diversity is a value he wanted to teach his children:

*We try to show the kids a lot of England – so some trips here. It is also interesting to us. The experiences of different cultures. (...) We have nice memories from Southampton. We were there with the kids in a fun*

*park for our first two-day trip. We talk between us and laugh that in the future we will move and live there because there is so cool, white and clean. Maybe you do not know, I talk about [name of the city] – that this is a dirty city but it is not about unclean streets but the mix of cultures and nationalities (UK34/m/2y).*

Perceptions of diversity differ not only because of migrants' educational and social backgrounds but also according to whether the migrants originate from inner-city or rural areas. As Pemberton and Phillimore (2018) found Polish interviewees had varying perceptions about the same superdiverse neighbourhoods, with those from rural areas tending to describe places as dirty and others from Polish industrial cities perceiving them in a more positive way. This reinforces the point that ethno-national origins may be of less relevance than factors such as locality – the type of place from where individuals originate – which may constitute another aspect of superdiversity.

In addition to connecting diversity with a lack of order, diversity overwhelmed and scared some migrants, as explained by Joanna – a woman in her late 40s who felt harassed when men approached her:

*A daughter bought me a ticket. I flew by plane. What was my first impression? Simply a dirty country. I was terrified by the number of foreigners, Black, the most important. I realised that I became a racist here. I am totally horrified because they accost me. I am humble and I pretend that I cannot see and cannot hear it or smile sometimes so as not to be impolite. It irritated me so much but over time I became so indifferent that I do not mind it now (UK16/w/5y).*

Joanna admitted becoming racist in reaction to her feelings of anxiety, adding another dimension to the complexity of racism being framed as socially and culturally produced. Fox and Mogilnicka (2017) also argue that Polish migrants, like other Eastern Europeans in the UK, not only draw on pre-migration prejudices learned from culture and the media but also, to some extent, copy racist and racialising attitudes while directly experiencing diversity as something new to them – as a part of their adjustment practices and integration tactics.

Pawel noted that diversity has different faces and those encountered in deprived and transit areas can be particularly marked by conflicts, tensions and violence:

*I have experiences showing us emigrants in a negative way. I lived in one area where many Poles and other emigrants lived. It was an area where people worked in warehouses and were from the lowest [social] levels. Accommodation was cheap and one cannot pay much for renting it so people could afford it. It was very noisy, there were frequently visibly drunk people without any culture, throwing bottles, swearing, looking for problems and accosting people. So I decided that I had to move out of this place and I never want to live in such a place again (UK05/m/7y).*

On the other hand, diversity was also linked to a variety of opportunities, as the extracts below reveal:

*There are no opportunities [in Poland], whereas here [in the UK] there are opportunities (UK21/m/8y).*

*There are such opportunities but you only lack time a bit (UK12/w/8y).*

*In England, there is something like satiation of all this knowledge and these opportunities (UK13/w/10y).*

However, over time, after hitting 'a glass wall', migrants like Renata realised that opportunities are not equally distributed and accessible to everyone:



*I thought that this was a bigger city with greater threats but also greater opportunities. It turns out that there are barriers, as though someone had put a glass wall in front of me (UK17/w/2y).*

Darek, like Renata, pointed to the opportunities created by diversity – particularly regarding personal development – but he also connected diversity with the issue of safety:

*[his place of origin] is a quite colourful neighbourhood in terms of opportunities for development or something similar. It is not unsafe at all which is good – one can walk around at ease at any time of the day or night and be sure that nothing bad will happen. As it is well known, there are neighbourhoods where it is difficult to get out during the day (UK22/m/2y).*

The narratives set out above reveal that the levels of diversity encountered by the Polish migrants surprised them and constituted a challenge which they sought to address. Initial reactions to superdiversity constituted a combination of interest and excitement and anxiety and fear as well as the recognition of opportunities.

### **Adapting to superdiversity**

We can see from the above that superdiversity can be used not only to resist homogenising Polish migrants but also to understand processes of adaptation to a new environment. While focusing on how diversity is experienced, we can draw on Oberg's (1960) stages of cultural shock, which include, first, an interest and euphoria, then a crisis which may entail rejection of the different culture and regression in terms of focusing on one's own culture, followed by a period of negotiation and adjustment where migrants learn to cope with the new situation and finally by adaptation and recovery. Ways of experiencing diversity can be also analysed through changes over time – from an initial culture shock during the first encounters, as described in the previous section, through growing familiarity with everyday superdiversity and to developing certain attitudes towards it – such as rejecting superdiversity, accepting superdiversity but demarcating a line between the superdiverse environment and the migrants themselves, or immersing themselves in superdiversity and becoming part of superdiverse networks. After the initial encounter, the ways in which the participants adapted to superdiversity took various forms and had different implications which could be grouped under three themes: defence reactions, cognitive opening and conviviality.

Defensive reactions might be exemplified by the words of Hubert, who retreated into his version of Polish culture in order to reduce anxiety and secure himself and his children clear points of reference:

*Of course, all Polish culture is significant, important to me because England does not have any culture. Maintaining the Polish culture and Polish customs, all of which are linked to Polishness, by myself and my kids is important. The fact that I am in England does not mean that I cut off myself, that I do not want to be a Pole but any European. I still want to be a Pole because the Polish culture is very important to me (UK07/m/6y).*

Polish culture was constructed by Hubert in an essentialist way as homogenised, coherent, strong and opposed to a British culture so diverse that it lacks a strong and clear 'core'. The reconstruction of identity and ethnicity includes not only reproducing an idea of Polishness but also producing an idea of Britishness and otherness, with Polish migrants particularly contrasting themselves from those constructed as 'others' in racial and religious terms (e.g. 'Muslim migrants'). Hubert additionally contrasts his Polishness with a European identity to stress the strength and 'purity' of his Polish identity. Iga's words, below, also demonstrate how some migrants

not only embed themselves in Polish culture and identity but also actively distance themselves from an imagined British culture – even actively avoiding the building of close relations with non-Polish people even after several years in the UK: ‘I am constrained by the language but, even if I knew the language, it would probably be difficult for me to become friends with somebody from a different culture, with a different mindset’ (UK04/w/7y).

Adaptation to diversity was also linked to an evolution in identity and a sense of belonging and towards an understanding and acceptance of different lifestyles and beliefs. Bogdan (UK11/m/7y) highlighted: ‘I liked in England that there is a somewhat higher level of tolerance towards different matters’. Over time, exposure to diversity brought, for some respondents, a cognitive opening up and widened horizons. The interviewees became familiar with diversity and more open and tolerant. For example, Dorota recounts:

*For sure, I am not a racist because I know the English, Blacks. I have become more tolerant and open. I wish I could speak more English because I go to different playgroups. I try to talk to the extent of my English. I especially go [there] to learn English. (...) There are different [groups], Muslims and others depending on where you go. Once a week I went to a Polish group where I managed to enrol my daughter. (...) It is about contact with children, so that they could meet others (UK06/w/4y).*

Although Dorota presented herself as having become ‘more’ tolerant and open, her words still implied a degree of othering that might eventually be overcome by increased knowledge of and contact with ‘others’.

Playgroups and language classes gave migrants such as Monika an opportunity to meet people from different cultures, to transcend their own ethnicity and social networks and to learn new ways of thinking and scripts of behaviour, including how to interact with diversity:

*I have just started [English classes]. (...) We try to speak and this is a very diverse cultural and religious, language environment. (...) The atmosphere in the class is really cool. These cultural differences are not so visible, we treat each other equally and that’s all (UK10/w/1y).*

Intercultural exchanges at English classes are facilitated by the similarity of attendees’ situations in terms of adaptation challenges, the position of being strangers and language limitations, which give them a common ground, reduce power inequalities and, paradoxically, help in communication, as shown by Wessendorf (2015).

More insight into cognitive opening is provided by Agata, who reflected on various dimensions of the cultural learning she experienced:

*Many changes have occurred in my life – from basic ones, from learning English to acclimatisation, getting to know people and culture here. Until today this culture is being learnt because everybody is different, everybody believes in something different, everybody has different convictions (...) but it does not mean that we differ so much that this difference in language and culture can embroil people because each of us deals actually with the same problems in a foreign country. The same way that Hindus and other religions, we all deal with the same (UK39/w/8y).*

While Agata acknowledged the diversity of people and the processual character of cultural learning, she also expressed her conviction about the commonality of people’s challenges and concerns regardless of their cultural background and features. Agata explained her unpreparedness for dealing with diversity after coming from a post-war Polish society largely defined during the communist rule as homogenous and in contrast to external enemies. Agata indicated that family members who came to the UK earlier tried to ‘keep her in

a bubble' by using the imprinted patterns of rejecting 'otherness' and avoiding intergroup contacts but she resisted such attempts. However, she outlined the limits of the changes in herself which she was prepared to accept in order to retain her core values and identity:

*Simply I have a blockage – I do not want to change my life, my culture. I am good. I am open. I can get to know [other] cultures, sit at one table, pray, eat a meal together (...). But I bring them [children] up in the way I was brought up... I could have a relationship with an Englishman or any foreigner, but with somebody who will not exert pressure on me to change my culture and faith (UK39/w/8y).*

The importance of sticking to their own cultural norms and values was often discussed in the context of respondents' children. While Agata seemed to accept the possibility of the religious conversion of her children in the future, Aneta was concerned about the progressive values that her children are taught at school in the UK, particularly those presenting alternative values to the ideal of the heterosexual family. The prevalence of the traditional heteronormative family ideal among some Polish migrants in the UK and tensions with the alternative narratives and the growing diversity of family practices have been identified elsewhere (Botterill 2014). Thus, over time, shared characteristics such as newness and encounters with difference might override ethno-national identity, although these were often experienced with Polish identity in complex configurations of connection and belonging. While sticking to traditional cultural and religious values can be a strategy by which migrants can rebuild their sense of security in the context of diversity and fluidity (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018a), for some of them, such as Roman, their encounters with diversity resulted in distancing themselves from their cultural heritage, scripts and practices:

*I used to be religious – very religious, practising but now I am aware... knowing so much, reading about so many religions, hearing about religions, I simply stopped practising. I do not go to church despite the fact that I believe (UK28/m/4y).*

After Gilroy (2004) conviviality can be defined as a social pattern in which different groups dwell in close proximity when their racial, linguistic and religious differences do not lead to discontinuities of contact or unsolvable problems of communication and where there is a convivial culture of intermixture based on the ability to live together without being anxious or fearful about difference. Examples of conviviality and living with superdiversity surfaced when the migrants were talking about diversity at their workplaces, multinational rented houses and varied networks. For example, Anna, a young professional, revealed that, after the breakdown of her marriage, she shifted from Polish networks to diverse ones in a search for friends more oriented towards development and similar in terms of lifestyle:

*I have almost no Polish acquaintances and friends, maybe one or two people only. The majority are English or Pakistani or people from Latvia, Lithuania but Polish, only a handful of Poles and only acquaintances [not friends] (UK19/w/8y).*

Despite sporadic tension and intolerance in mixed areas of the city, any neighbourhood-level superdiversity experienced by our participants was largely perceived positively. Such positive feelings in places attracted individuals from diverse ethnic, religious and country-of-origin backgrounds, particularly in locations where place-making occurred around spaces where a common neighbourhood identity was emerging based around diversity, difference and/or newness (Pemberton and Phillimore 2018; Phillimore 2013). Some narratives demonstrated that, after a period of reorientation to difference, many positive experiences were recounted at

the local level, including examples of help received by the participants (e.g. offers of food sampling or inviting children to play together). Moving from encounters to the everyday acceptance of superdiversity could exemplify conviviality and ‘commonplace diversity’, when diversity becomes a daily practice, an ordinary part of social life and people mix in public and associational spaces (Wessendorf 2013), as well as a form of everyday conviviality providing the possibilities of openness (Gilroy 2004) and boundary crossing and interethnic solidarity (Karner and Parker 2011). Although most participants did not go so far as to become part of the superdiverse networks, instead experiencing rather shallow conviviality, exploring encounters with and adaptation to superdiversity highlights the variety and complexity of their reactions and defies the homogeneity often associated with the notion of ‘Polish migrant’. As Gawlewicz (2016) established, the encounters of Polish migrants with diverse urban populations result in a variety of changes in their attitudes towards difference which may involve more favourable and more prejudiced attitudes as well as – most probably – ‘complicated’ and ‘in-between’ responses.

### **Superdiversity as a resource**

Marek’s story illustrates his intensive lived experience of diversity in the neighbourhood but his testimony also shows his active engagement with and appreciation of diversity as a resource sometimes described as urban buzz or a diversity dividend, where population diversity has been shown to offer distinct advantages in urban areas (Syrett and Sepulveda 2011). Marek reflected:

*People – at each step I meet fantastic people. Every person brings something to life. Thanks to the fact that they are open, share a lot between themselves which one can derive from. British multi-culture is incredible. Starting from music because of such different styles of rhythm, where there are fantastic compilations of traditional Hindu music with a rap beat – it is something incredible. Culture as such which is around synchronises fantastically. Mentality based on social trust and truthfulness (UK09/m/3y).*

Maria, too, was actively attracted by superdiversity. She claimed that it gave her the freedom to be herself without being labelled:

*I think that it actually works for me in England. The fact that I am not particularly religious or do not define myself as religious in a certain way does not put any label on me. This does not exclude me from any religion and does not put any label on me and because there is such diversity around, people really understand it. Simply diversity causes people to have greater understanding of other cultures. They might be not interested in it but they have enough just from looking at least and they know that there are different things happening to others and not necessarily that their neighbour is very bad (UK13/w/10y).*

This quote illustrates the need for anti-groupist perspectives inherent to superdiversity to capture the complexities of migrants’ identities and positionalities, in line with McCall’s (2005) argument. Maria also disclosed that she is fascinated by cultural mixing, which has become the inspiration for her artistic activity – wherein she contemplates how cultures change and interact:

*Here in [name of the city] I have done a few such projects which are perspectives on different aspects of culture mixing and multiculturalism. (...) I am crazy about culture and culture mixing. It is very interesting because the longer you think, the more you become aware of what we are attached to, to what not. It is not*

*clear what is what. I really believe that cultural elements are attached to us like small ticks and they do not run away* (UK13/w/10y).

Kuba, too, expressed his admiration for superdiversity, while noting: ‘My curiosity about the world, especially in [name of the city] has increased, because there is such a large number of cultures. Here people speak 120 languages and this fascinates me’ (UK18/m/8y). Kuba’s engagement with superdiversity also formed the basis of his artistic activity:

*I took part in such an organisation bringing Polish artists here in [name of the city]. We organised a three-day arts festival, but this organisation was not closed to non-Poles. It was rather an organisation which cooperated with people from other cultures. At this festival (...) there were 10–15 different nationalities. We cooperated with the community of gays and lesbians. It all was open and mixed with local communities but disappeared. I take part in different stuff. In general I do not participate in any Polish projects but, rather, in international ones, apart from doing something with my closest friends but at that time this is done by Poles but not for Poles. (...) When somebody from Poland comes, it is fine, but rather all we did, we do and we will do, which is in my plans, it is not in Polish. This is aimed at residents here, at different cultures and religions but not at Poles* (UK18/m/8y).

In a similar vein, Pawel was involved in organising musical and artistic events in an attempt to bring various cultures and groups together. He saw this work as being his way of developing, expressing himself and socialising:

*We form a [music] collective and organise events. (...) My ideas are not only limited to music. I want to present our culture during the event I am the author of. Not only Polish, but from the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe. Why I do this? First of all, I like it but such actions bring closer nations, communities – Polish, English and all others, because there are many of them in England. I do not want that it is talked about us only on such negative occasions but also in the context of cultural events* (UK05/m/y5).

Superdiverse culture was a space where Pawel placed his anchors in the UK (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018b). These anchors focused on the English language he was learning, getting to know other cultures and people, personal development and acquiring new skills. He added to this: ‘What keeps me generally [in the UK] is the feeling of self-fulfilment. This is an anchor (...) these are such anchors: the feeling of self-fulfilment and setting new goals’ (UK05/m/y5), pointing to superdiversity as a resource for self-actualisation. Drawing on superdiversity as a resource was particularly visible in the case of migrants with higher levels of cultural capital and/or an interest in the arts.

## Conclusions

This paper uses the concept of superdiversity in four ways: to highlight the intra-categorical diversity of Polish migrants and eschew the stereotypical Polish migrant, to consider encounters with superdiverse populations and how they are experienced, to explore processes of adaptation to superdiverse difference and to think about superdiversity as a resource in itself. The vignettes and examples we have used are not intended to be generalisable but are used to illustrate the potential of superdiversity as a concept for undertaking research on CEE migration. In our paper we show how the superdiversity lens can be applied to CEE migrants using the example

of Polish migrants in the UK. This is particularly important in the context of substantial growth of the population of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe in the UK after 2004 who, however, are often perceived in an oversimplified and homogenous way in spite its diversities and complexities. Our examples show that many migrants, because of interpersonal characteristics, adaptation strategies and/or lifestyles, do not fit with what they themselves often perceive as the prevailing representations of Polish migrants in the UK. We also demonstrate that the superdiversity encountered by Polish migrants is often experienced, at least initially, as a challenge needing to be addressed. Initial reactions to superdiversity constituted the combination of interest and excitement, anxiety and fear but also the recognition of the variety of opportunities. Coming to terms with superdiversity took various forms and had different implications, ranging from defensive reactions to cognitive opening up and conviviality which might have its limits or might lead to full immersion into a superdiverse culture to the point that superdiversity was embraced, viewed as a resource or even as an integral part of individuals' identity. Some examples showed the simultaneous co-existence of a distinct Polish identity and being embedded in superdiversity while others indicated that a line was drawn between being Polish and those constructed as others.

The concept of superdiversity has enabled us to illustrate the heterogeneity of Polish migrants in the UK, questioning approaches which, with a few exceptions, often homogenise this population, with existing categorisations obscuring complexities and intersectionalities. As Vertovec (2015) argues, superdiversity can be used to move beyond ethno-nationalism and investigate increasingly blurred social categories and complex life trajectories. Our work aims at developing the increasingly complex and nuanced insights into the diversity of Polish migrants in the UK – visible, for instance, in the work of Ryan (2011, 2016, 2018). We argue that, through using the superdiverse lens, we can not only depict internal differences and highlight exceptions and minorities but try to de-construct group images and boundaries and show how identities and responses to encounters with superdiversity evolve over time. Superdiversity offers an alternative social paradigm of complexity and mobility to the limited nation-centric and static paradigm constrained by traditional fixed groups, categories and essentialist notions of cultures. These latter are pertinent to the study of migrants from Poland who are quite often bundled together in categories such as 'the Polish' and 'Eastern Europeans'.

In this paper we have used superdiversity as a heuristic device for uncovering the heterogeneity and fluidity inherent in the Polish migrant population and their encounters with difference in the UK and show how these encounters with diversity may result in culture shock, identity reinforcement or shifts and new ways of thinking or being. We highlight the relevance of the literature around conviviality in order to understand the experience and outcomes of the immigration of Polish migrants into superdiverse areas. Further research is required to explore the potential of superdiversity and its applicability to a broader range of CEE migrants (in terms of ethnic origin, type of migration and other socio-demographic characteristics) and in other places. These might include rural areas where, in some parts of Europe, CEE migrants have brought diversity into communities previously perceived as traditional and homogeneous. Research might also be used to shed new light on recent migration to CEE countries and those various migrants engaged in onward and circular migrations – as is increasingly the case in Brexit Britain.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> In the symbol UK09/m/3y, 'm' stands for male and '3y' for three years.

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# 'Going to the West Is My Last Chance to Get a Normal Life': Bulgarian Would-Be Migrants' Imaginings of Life in the UK

Polina Manolova\* 

*Bulgarian migration to the UK has gradually increased since the country's EU accession and the removal of barriers to free movement of labour across the EU. The sustained popularity of the UK amongst those dreaming for a fresh start through migration, despite the hostility faced by Bulgarian immigrants, poses a paradox that cannot be explained with the 'push–pull' and cost–benefit calculation models prevailing in migration research. This article proposes a more balanced understanding of migration motivations on the basis of would-be migrants' own perceptions. Drawing on biographical interviews with self-ascribed 'ordinary people' with long-term plans for settling in the UK, I shed light on individuals' imaginings and expectations of life after migration. Firstly, I analyse the notion of 'survival' through which my informants articulated frustrations with their precarious financial situation, their inferior social and symbolic positioning within society and their inability to partake in forms of consumption and lifestyle that would allow them to experience a sense of social advancement. I then explore would-be migrants' imaginings of life in the UK (and 'the West') which depict an idealised 'normality' of life, in which they conveyed longings for security and predictability of life, social justice and working-class dignity and respectability. These insights into people's disappointment, desperation and disillusionment with a precarious present help us to understand the continuous construction of an 'imaginary West' as an ideal 'elsewhere', in the search of which migrants are ready to undergo hardship and stigmatisation. By engaging with the existing debates in migration studies and literature on Bulgarian migration, this article exposes the deficiencies of economic reductionism, which presents migration decision-making as a conscious, rational and calculative act and, instead, demonstrates that, very often, people are led by dreams and idealisations that are reflective of their emotions and life-worlds.*

**Keywords:** migration motivations; imaginings; East–West migration; working-class; postsocialism

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## Introduction

The global phenomenon of an increasing number of people moving from global ‘peripheries’ to ‘core’ countries in the North/West (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014) is well-reflected in the large-scale post-1989 Bulgarian migration to Western Europe and North America. The end of 2012 marked a period of gradually increasing migration,<sup>1</sup> the direction of which, however, has shifted from the previously preferred Southern European migration destinations (such as Spain, Italy and Greece) towards the UK and Germany.<sup>2</sup> The lifting of the transitional labour-market restrictions for Bulgarian and Romanian citizens at the beginning of 2014 led to another relative upsurge in the number of newcomers to the UK, despite its intensity fully disproving the hysterical predictions circulating in the populist media and political discourses.<sup>3</sup> This change in migration patterns meant that, within a short period of time (from 2012 onwards), the UK has turned from being a country little known, remote and relatively unattractive to being one of the two most-preferred migration destinations for Bulgarian labour and educational migrants alike.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, in the past few years, in West European public discourse in general and in British discourse in particular, Bulgarian migrants have been constructed as ‘benefit tourists’ and ‘criminals’ – undesirable ‘others’ that present a threat to the established social order and the welfare provisions enjoyed by locals. Despite the status and rights formally gained through their European citizenship, structural violence and discrimination have continued to confine the majority of Bulgarian workers to exploitative jobs in the informal economy and to a precarious existence at the margins of British society (Manolova 2016, 2017a). Whilst the hardships faced by Bulgarians in ‘the West’ have received some attention in the Bulgarian and global media, as well as in the stories told by return migrants warning potential newcomers<sup>5</sup> – the number of Bulgarians who wish to embark on such journeys, settle, and make a fresh start in the UK, is not abating.<sup>6</sup> These recent trends point to a paradox of popularity despite hostility, exploitation and hardship – which cannot be properly explained through the economic reductionist approach dominating the field of migration studies.

This article aims to develop an understanding of migration that reflects migrants’ own perspectives. In order to reveal the meanings with which individuals imbue their migration projects, an inductive, ethnographic approach to data gathering and analysis is adopted. Individuals’ narratives of migration are approached through the imaginary as a conceptual tool that helps to analyse subjective motivations and expectations against the socio-economic, historical and political context in which they play out.

I utilise Alexey Yurchak’s (2006) concept of the ‘imaginary West’ in order to stress the intersection between subjective imaginations and wider imaginary constructs transpiring through the native notion of ‘the West’ (*Zapadar*) that my informants evoked in their pre-migration imaginings of life in the UK. By deconstructing the different aspects of the ‘imaginary West’ as they are subjectively appropriated by people in accordance with their socio-economic and symbolic position in Bulgarian society, I will demonstrate how a simplified economic logic is inadequate for fully understanding the subjective dimensions of the migration of a group of prospective Bulgarian migrants to the UK. Instead, I reveal how migration, understood as a ‘major event’ (Fielding 1992: 201) embedded within one’s biography, emerges as not only economic but also cultural process that is riddled with contradictory emotions, preoccupations, fears and aspirations.

I argue that engagement with the imaginary places and modes of existence, that to a great extent inform the migration aspirations of Bulgarians, enables us to conceive of migration as a strategy for accessing paths to social advancement which are unavailable at home. Instead of subscribing to a categorisation of migration as motivated either by economic or non-economic factors, I demonstrate the scope for complementarity between ideational and material perspectives that the focus on imaginings allows for. In this sense, rather than an effort to discard the intellectual contribution of economic models, this article tries to challenge its explanatory

monopoly by proposing a nuanced and complex account of migration motivations. As I will show, the ‘imaginary West’ is seen not only as a place where one can earn more money but also as a place offering a different mode of existence, where a ‘normal’ life, ‘dignified’ work and a sense of existential security are possible. The symbolic attraction of the ‘imaginary West’ further emerges in juxtaposition to the ‘abnormality’ of life in postsocialist Bulgaria, the disappointed ‘transitional’ hopes of my informants and the precluded possibilities they struggle with because of their marginal socio-economic and symbolic position. Furthermore, a focus on imaginary constructs and their subjective appropriations helps us to bridge the dichotomy between person-centred and macro-level explanations of migration models by demonstrating the entanglement between ‘individual biographies, trajectories and actions’ (Benson 2012: 1681) and wider socio-economic and cultural forces.

The article is based on interviews with prospective Bulgarian migrants taken from a larger dataset collected during a one-year period of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2014 in different localities in Bulgaria and the UK. During my initial exploration of the aspirations and expectations of prospective Bulgarian migrants with long-term settlement plans I encountered the frequent reproduction of well-established narratives of migration as a reaction to poverty and lacking economic opportunities; with time, however, a more nuanced and complex picture emerged that did not concur with economic modelling. Before engaging with my informants’ motivations for leaving the country and deconstructing their imaginings of ‘the West’ as a place offering some ‘normality’ of life, I begin by analysing the theoretical and methodological pitfalls which are characteristic of migration studies in general and Bulgarian migration research in particular. By drawing on the literature on the non-economic, ideational factors and particularly the role of imagination in migration decision-making, I put forward my argument that the reasons for migration can be better understood by inquiring into the meaning and intersubjective production of narratives of ‘economic’ migration. What follows is a brief overview of the methodological approach on which this project is based, the methods of data collection used and an insight into the demographic characteristics of my participants and their self-appointed class identity. I conclude by summarising the main findings and by demonstrating their theoretical and empirical significance in a context of an ever-growing global precarisation of migrants’ lives.

### **Challenging the hegemony of economic reductionism in explaining East–West migration**

The hegemonic paradigm of ‘push–pull’ economics that continues to inform the most influential theories of migration permeates disciplinary boundaries, reaching well beyond the field of neoclassical economics. Traditionally, migration has been conceptualised as a result of income differences between countries and has presupposed rational choice and economic maximisation as the main incentives guiding individual decision-making (see Borjas 1989). The uneven spatial distribution of labour and capital is said to leave some countries labour-scarce and capital-rich while, in others, the opposite ratio exists (Borjas 1989). By moving to regions where they can obtain higher remuneration for their labour, it was expected that migrants would eventually contribute to the equalisation of income inequalities and that population movements would come to a halt (see Harris and Todaro 1970). In this equation, individuals appear as rational decision-makers who decide to move after a careful cost–benefit assessment of the available regional and international economic opportunities. Such models have been harnessed to explain the motivation behind post-1989 Bulgarian and East European migration to the ‘Western world’. The devastating socio-economic effects of the rapid postsocialist market restructuring of the early 1990s have been identified as major ‘push’ factors of migration (Eade and Valkanova 2009; Guentcheva, Kabakchieva and Kolarski 2003; Kaneff and Pine 2011; Karamihova 2004; Maeva 2017). High unemployment and low incomes (Kovacheva 2014; Rangelova and Vladimirova 2004), the rolling back of

state services and diminished welfare support (Angelidou 2013; Deneva 2017), political instability (Karamihova 2004), impoverishment and indebtedness (Kovacheva 2014) have been put forward as macro-level determinants influencing migration motivations. On the 'pull' side, the more and better-paid employment opportunities and higher standard of living in Western countries, as well as the curtailing of border regimes and visa regulations, have all been proposed as factors attracting Bulgarians with short- and long-term aspirations for migration (Guentcheva *et al.* 2003). The overall picture that scholars have painted of migration as a strategy for economic survival has, to a great extent, been supported by surveys of migration attitudes and questionnaires for potential and current migrants who almost unanimously point out the search for better economic opportunities as the leading rationale for their undertakings (Bobeva 1994; Jekova 2006; Rangelova and Vladimirova 2004; Stanek 2009).<sup>7</sup>

While such scholarly engagements contribute by presenting a comprehensive outline of the structural predicaments and political regulations that propel and sustain the movement of labour power across national borders they tell us little about people's subjectivities and understandings of their migration projects. Moreover, research using mechanistic 'push-pull' models to analyse population movements falls short of explaining why migrants do not usually stem from those poorest sectors of the population that have undoubtedly been the most severely affected by market restructuring since 1989. The theoretical interpretations of such findings have fed into the scholarly production of normatively charged migrant categories which in Bulgarian context differentiate between the economic motivations of '*rabotnitsi*' (labourers), '*gastarbayteri*'<sup>8</sup> or '*gurbetchii*'<sup>9</sup> and the transnational mobilities of the 'highly skilled', 'intelligentsia' and 'new Bulgarians' (see Chavdarova 2006; Ditchiev 2008; Liakova 2008). Categorisations like these have uncritically endorsed the explanations of low-skilled Bulgarian migrants as that they had been 'chased out' by material poverty and attracted by a desire for increased earnings. The 'new type' of young, educated migrants (King 2002), on the other hand – those whose cultural predispositions and moral orientations supposedly position them in closer symbolic proximity to 'the West' – have been said to use migration in the enactment of their idealistic (as opposed to materialistic) desire to 'see the world', acquire new experiences and realise their potential (Liakova 2008; Stoilkova 2005). The production of such simplistic binaries is problematic for a number of reasons, one of them is the creation of a false division between economic and non-economic reasons on the basis of class distinctions between working-class people – presented as short-term migrants interested in quick money-making and, on the other hand, high-skilled middle class elites who are supposedly more suitable to be integrated in the international labour market and the cosmopolitan fabric of Western societies. By demonstrating the multifaceted claims conveyed in the emic notion of 'normality', through which my informants presented their hopes and expectations, I question the rigour of these binary categories.

Furthermore, researchers have been puzzled by the fact that many migrating Bulgarians leave behind relatively satisfactory standards of living and risk replacing prestigious and, in some cases, well-paid occupations, for low-skilled labour and life on the bottom layer of host societies (IOM 2001; Kabakchieva 2009; Karamihova 2004). Qualitative investigations that look beyond individual discursive scapes and offer in-depth engagement with practices and experiences have proven better suited to reveal the complexity and diversity of individual motivations for migration and have also managed to contextualise those in postsocialist economic, social and cultural realities (Kabakchieva 2009; Karamihova 2004; Maeva 2017; Stoilkova 2005). They demonstrate how migrants' motivations have been influenced by feelings of despair and disengagement with the socio-economic and political processes of the 'transition' (Maeva 2017; Stoilkova 2005), a sense of socio-economic deadlock and a lack of meaningful future perspectives (Angelidou 2013; Stoilkova 2005), as well as frustration with their devalued social status and desire to regain individual autonomy (Angelidou 2013; Kabakchieva 2009). Additionally, in her exploration of the trajectories of the first generation of post-1989 Bulgarian migrants in the US, Karamihova (2004) outlines a 'mythology of prosperity' which functions as

a guide for individuals' migration desires by sustaining often misleading ideas about the US as being a place offering an abundance of well-paid jobs, a high standard of living and material enrichment for all.

The reduction of migration to a rational cost–benefit calculation has been fervently criticised by human geographers and social anthropologists for it ignores the fact that people are also affective beings who entertain dreams and imaginings and that logic and rationality do not always and exclusively lead their decision-making. Fielding notes that, as a 'major event' (1992: 201), migration is always embedded in an individual's life stories and thus involves complex and often contradictory feelings, aspirations and personal attachments (see Graham 2000; Halfacree 2004; Halfacree and Boyle 1993). It is on this basis that the powerful role of collectively-shared imaginaries in determining why, where and when people move has been gradually gaining recognition in the work of scholars preoccupied with studying diverse types of human mobility – lifestyle migration, tourism, postcolonial migration, 'labour' and high-skilled mobility (see Belloni 2015; Benson 2012; Elliot 2012; Salazar 2011; Vigh 2009). Such studies have demonstrated the significance of expectations and aspirations in motivating migration decisions by revealing how the act of migration becomes a 'technology of imagination' (Vigh 2009: 105) through which people lay claim to a particular vision of a better and more fulfilling life. Salazar (2013), for instance, argues that people's determination to cross borders is connected to their ability to imagine other places and possible lives as being better than the ones currently experienced. It has been recognised that migrants often expect that, by settling in a particular 'elsewhere', they would be able to lead a life imagined as offering more fulfillment and meaning not only in terms of economic gain but also of general existential possibilities (see Benson 2012; Pajo 2007; Salazar 2013).

The exploration of the role of imagination in prompting and sustaining migration is usually attributed to the analytical framework proposed by Arjun Appadurai (1996). He explains the increased significance of imagination in social life as a result of the widespread use of electronic media in the last couple of decades. Imagination is understood as a social everyday practice in constant making, which reflects individuals' empowerment in bringing about change and forming solidarities. Contesting this 'empowering' role of the imagination in human life, Vigh (2009) demonstrates the process through which seductive collective imaginaries of a better life can also develop into a dystopic reality of migration which contradicts the initial visions of a 'promised land'. Taylor (2002), also preferring to speak of the social imaginary rather than imagination (referring to an individual quality) provides an explanation for its ambiguous workings by conceptualising it as a symbolic matrix that legitimises our practices and is reflected in our dispositions and actions. The imaginary therefore is collectively structured but also structures the collective (Taylor 2002). Of course, the role of the imaginary in informing individual action should not be overemphasised: people should not be seen as caught up in a rigid cognitive frame. As Gaonkar argues: '(...) one need not think of the social imaginary as a demiurge that sets itself to work behind the backs of the people. It can be reflexively interrogated and re-appropriated in a given context' (2002: 8).

This article is an effort to contribute to this existing but still rather faint interdisciplinary inquiry into the role of cultural imaginaries in influencing migration motivations.<sup>10</sup> It seeks to show how in-depth and sustained engagement with migrants' imaginings can yield a more nuanced picture of the contradictions and complexities that underlie the difficult choice between leaving and staying.

In order to provide this more complex and nuanced understanding of post-1989 Eastern European migration to the West – one that comes closer to individuals' own interpretations – we need to take into account not only processes of economic decline in the region but also the ideological shift that movement from state socialism to liberal democratic capitalism involved and, more specifically, the expectations and imaginings of a better future that this change gave rise to.



### Exploring the ‘imaginary West’ in Eastern Europe

The symbolic division of the world into communist East and capitalist West drawn by Cold War politics rested on an ideological confrontation between two different conceptions of modernity that left its mark on public perceptions and collective imaginations (Verdery 1996). In the official discourse and politics of socialist societies, ‘the West’ was constructed as an ultimate ideological enemy of the socialist order. However, certain aspects of ‘the West’ were regarded as positive, depending on the particular historical moment and context. The contradictory late Soviet policy towards Western cultural influence and commodities and the corresponding image of ‘the West’ in the popular imagination have been analysed by Alexey Yurchak (2006). He explains how one and the same cultural form – jazz, for instance – could be interpreted as a transmitter of bourgeois values and moral decay and as a symbol of internationalism and an expression of the creativity of the working classes at one and the same time (Yurchak 2006). Thus, the appropriation of Western cultural tastes, commodities and behaviours and the underlying desires and idealisations did not come into conflict with Soviet ideology but, in a certain way even strengthened it. According to Shiraev and Zubok (2000) the ‘choking hunger’ for Western modernity (with a specific focus on North America) in the socialist world throughout the 1980s was also a result of the ideological messages spread by American media outlets and their support for local dissidents’ anti-communist ideas. Pilkington, Omel’chenko, Flynn and Bildina (2002: 7) further assert how the restricted and biased information available to Soviet citizens contributed to the elevation of ‘the West’ to the symbol of a ‘normal (...) life’ and a civilisational standard.

With the collapse of state socialism, ‘the West’ turned from a utopian and geopolitically remote construct to an idealised benchmark defining the political, economic and cultural path of East European societies (Sampson 1998). According to Peshkopia (2010), people in postsocialist countries have fetishised Western capitalism in their attempts to approximate a utopian social order which is expected to ensure a happy and economically satisfying life for all. He recognises this mythologisation as resulting, firstly, from individuals’ desire to construct an ideological counterpart to the socialist order and, secondly, as rooted in the mystification of ‘the West’ following on from its demonisation and negation in official ideological discourse (Peshkopia 2010). He explains the mass support for capitalism and its political and normative order with postsocialist societies’ propensity for teleological thinking and way of relating to the future (*ibidem*). In this sense, while the Marxist conception of modernity became replaced by the Western capitalist one, the teleological understanding of the path towards modernity, development and progress remained the same.

In the Bulgarian case, as in that of other postsocialist countries in the region, the ‘imaginary West’ was the main trope around which the political project of the country’s democratic transformation revolved. The accession of Bulgaria to the European Union was seen as an important symbolic and material milestone in the transition towards ‘the West’ (Elchinova 2004; Ilieva 2010; Katsiakas 2011). ‘Catching up’ with Europe was seen as having the double function of bringing material prosperity and democratic values. At the same time, it was constructed as a continuation of the historical narratives of restoration of the ‘natural’ belonging of Bulgaria to the European family and an effort to free the country from its Ottoman legacy of backwardness and Orientalism. Thus, ‘the West’ regained its historical significance as a standard for political, economic and social development that required the dutiful adoption of European norms, ideas, policies and institutions. The harsh economic crisis, political instability and general sense of insecurity and deprivation that marked this ‘transition’ were usually framed in media and political discourse as the necessary price to pay for reaching capitalist prosperity (Katsiakas 2011).

The anthropological literature on postsocialist Eastern Europe has demonstrated the different ways in which people have attempted to appropriate ‘the West’ through practices of material and cultural consumption (Patino and Caldwell 2002; Rausing 2002), architecture and interior design (Fehérváry 2002; Hartman 2007), lifestyle

and cultural activities (Pilkington *et al.* 2002). In the Bulgarian context, the enchantment with fashion and accessories (Manrai, Lascu, Manrai and Babb 2001), the football craze and musical lyrics in Bulgaria in the 1990s (Buchanan 2002) and the appreciation of different lavish Western products (Creed 2002) were all interpreted as signs of Westernness and representations of desired but not always attainable cultural and symbolic capital.

Building on the above discussion of the nature of the imaginary and the specific function of ‘the West’ in postsocialist societies, I conceptualise the ‘imaginary West’ as a cultural schema that informs the way in which people make sense of their situation and the surrounding reality. Using the ‘imaginary West’ as a prism through which to study expectations and imaginings of life in the UK helps me to grasp the complex interplay between individual life-worlds, migration narratives and specific historic and material conditions. I understand the ‘imaginary West’ as a theoretical notion through which a more critical understanding of the emic concept of ‘the West’ and its characteristics can be advanced. I interpret ‘the West’ as denoting both the geographical region of Western Europe and a place offering possibilities for a more meaningful life and a better future. Thus, while I recognise the role of ‘the West’ as a utopian construct of collective longing, as it was mapped out in postsocialist scholarship, I have demonstrated how, by its careful deconstruction, we can see it as a repository of not only material longings but also of different moral concerns with questions of social organisation and the role and value of the individual in society.

## The study

The interview data on which this article is based are part of a larger, one-year, multi-sited ethnographic investigation (Marcus 1995) of Bulgarian would-be and current migrants in different localities in Bulgaria and the UK, conducted between 2013 and 2015. The article draws on biographical interviews and multiple informal conversations with 25 prospective migrants.<sup>11</sup>

The sample includes 15 males and 10 females, an imbalance that reflects the demographic gender characteristics of long-term Bulgarian migration in the period.<sup>12</sup> Five participants were in their mid- to late-20s, eight in their early- to mid-30s and 12 in their mid- to late-40s. Only two of the participants held university diplomas, five had specialised secondary-education diplomas and the remaining 18 had higher-education degrees. Four participants were self-employed in small family businesses, two self-defined as ‘voluntarily unemployed’ after the bankruptcy of their small-scale entrepreneurial projects, eight worked in state enterprises and institutions and the remaining eleven were employed in private companies in both low-skilled and skilled positions. Almost all of my informants relied on diverse informal activities and help from relatives to subsidise their monthly income.

Despite their diverse occupations and educational qualifications, all participants self-identified as ‘ordinary people’ (*obiknoveni hora*), a categorisation that denoted their perception that they lacked economic and social capital and had a diminished social status and restricted agency. Although the notion of ‘class’ was rarely explicitly referred to, the classification ‘ordinary’ was used to express a collective group belonging and was always constructed in opposition to those seen as ‘others’ – ‘those above’, ‘the rich’, ‘the big people’, ‘the educated’. This discursive process of drawing symbolic boundaries has been identified as a strategy for creating distance and building social identity and as an act of classification of others as similar to or different from oneself (Bourdieu 1984). The category of ‘ordinary people’ points to a class-based identification as it also alludes to the superimposed class categories of ‘ordinary people’ or ‘masses’ that were mobilised in pro-liberal narratives already in the early 1990s. They played a part in justifying the socio-economic and political misgivings of the market restructuring with the deficiencies of particular groups – workers, peasants, pensioners, the uneducated and minorities (see Buchowski 2006; Kideckel 2002; Lavergne 2010).

In this sense the definition of my informants as ‘working class’ refers not only to their income but also to the set of dispositions, beliefs, moralities, values and cultural practices on the basis of which they self-identify as ‘ordinary people’. I thus understand class as a lived category and a process in constant making (Thompson 1980) rather than a fixed, pre-existing social structure or professional and economic status. My aim is to provide insight into class as a subjective category by exploring how my informants’ perceptions of their class belonging relate to their lived experiences and, more importantly, to their motivations for migration and the imaginings they harbour about life in ‘the West’.

The wider study on which this article is based was focused on understanding what happens to the pre-migration expectations and aspirations of individuals once they begin their life in the UK. I decided that the best way to obtain such long-term insight is to engage with individuals with long-term plans for settling in the UK. At the time of my fieldwork, all informants were in the process of actively planning and organising their departures. As it was my intention to gain multiple perspectives, I adopted an ‘inclusive’ approach to participant sampling and recruited individuals of different backgrounds, ages, genders and occupations. The use of different recruitment channels and practices – including online forums, participant observation in a Bulgarian recruitment agency and snowballing initiated via family and friends’ networks – facilitated my encounters with a diverse group of participants with varying motivations, although it also served to introduce me to a disproportionate number of males and precluded access to so-called ‘highly mobile’ professionals (Amit 2007). The decision to base my fieldwork in Bulgaria’s two largest cities – Sofia and Plovdiv and their environs – was dictated by both strategic considerations and practical limitations. First of all, while I was interested in having a diverse set of informants coming from different urban and rural areas, I still needed to select a place that could serve as a ‘hub’ for my fieldwork. Secondly, scholars have noted that the profile and destinations of Bulgarian migrants are geographically determined and dependent on previously created networks (Guentcheva *et al.* 2003). The choice of these two cities allowed me to engage with a broad range of prospective migrants thanks to the high concentration of recruitment agencies there and their status as the most preferred destinations for internal migrants coming from different parts of the country. The practical reasons for my choice were related to the existing material resources, social networks and emotional support mechanisms in these two localities – all preconditions for a successful fieldwork experience.

In the next two sections, I present the diverse motivations that people shared with me and show how they imagined migration as a possible, and often the only, way to find new hope for a better, more dignified life.

### ‘Surviving’ in ‘post-transitional’ Bulgaria

At the start of my fieldwork, my curiosity about people’s reasons for migration frequently provoked irritation and seemingly straightforward responses like: ‘We are sick of living with little’, ‘We don’t want to count our pennies any more’ or ‘For money, what do you think?’. Such evocations were often contained in a ‘survival’ narrative that emphasised material deprivation, an inability to cover monthly subsistence costs and difficulties in ensuring household reproduction. Forty-one-year-old Andrey (all names are pseudonyms), the father of a baby daughter and owner of a recently bankrupt small family business, told me the following in his efforts to explain his decision to leave for the UK:

*When you meet your friends here, do you ask them how they live? Everyone will tell you that things are going from bad to worse. Especially, after the crisis [the global economic crisis of 2008–2009] [pause] we are back at square one. People are stuck and vegetate, (...) it is just a brutal fight for survival. (...) I am sick of having to choose between paying my electricity bill, or fixing my car, let’s say, and buying medicine for my daughter. I know that the majority of those around me are also caught in the same dilemma. No one*

*migrates because of a good life (ot hubavo); it is always for money (za pari); if you have enough, your life changes and you live well.*

Similarly, Elisaveta (43), an assistant in an accountants' office in Sofia and mother of a teenage son, evoked the financial instability with which her family had been struggling since the start of the 'reforms' as key to her desire to find employment in the UK. She also pointed to the devastating effects of the global economic crisis, which resulted in a severe decline in the family's living standard.

*There is never enough money in Bulgaria, at least not for people like us – I mean 'ordinary folk'. People always say: 'In the capital it is different, there are plenty of well-paid jobs'. This is hardly the case, look at me; for years on end I have been struggling to find a good job. There are always problems – either the pay is low for the amount of work you are supposed to put in, or they promise you good pay at the beginning but then sack you when you ask for it.*

With time, it became clear that, by straightforwardly asking the question about people's migration motivations, one could not expect to prompt an engaged discussion. On the contrary, my inquiries often provoked annoyance and confusion. The majority of my informants seemed so convinced by the ubiquity of the economic truth about migration that they found it impossible to entertain any alternative explanation when reflecting on their own or even other people's projects. With the advancement of my fieldwork, my strategy for engagement with would-be migrants changed and, instead of inquiring about their migration motivations themselves, I became more interested in knowing more about their individual biographies. Interestingly, the sharing of personal stories provoked my informants to reflect on their present condition, in a way that went way beyond the economic narratives expressed in our initial meetings or even stood in almost paradoxical contradiction to them. In the course of my fieldwork, the same informants started claiming that they had 'nothing to complain about', had 'everything they needed', and that there was 'nothing more one could wish for'. When we were once discussing the hardship in which many Bulgarians live, Andrey and his wife, for example, told me the following:

**Andrey:** *After all, we have nothing to complain about, Polina. We have everything that we need: a spacious apartment, very well furnished as well, with all electric appliances, new furniture.*

**Katya:** *Even a washing machine.*

**Andrey:** *We have a car, we even have a holiday house in the mountain, it is not big or anything, but we can go there in the summer.*

**Katya:** *Plus, my parents live in a village, we always have fresh fruits and vegetables, (...) they help us a lot, really.*

Similar assessments were put forward by young informants who had managed to achieve relative financial independence from an early age – even those living with their parents and relying on their support. Yavor (21) who, every time we met, expressed his conviction that young people were pushed to leave the country because they needed money, recognised the comfortable lifestyle that he and his girlfriend enjoyed thanks to their parents.

*Each of us has a house in the village where we live. At the moment, she [his girlfriend] rents out her house and we live in mine. We don't pay any bills; my father covers those. He has always supported me financially; after all, he is a father and it is only normal that he does so. He will even buy my plane ticket for the UK and will give me enough cash to last me a couple of months.*

Yavor enjoyed his job at a petrol station, where he received a 'good' salary and was treated well by his boss and colleagues. His girlfriend had recently been offered an office job for a salary which was 'very decent' for Bulgarian standards, but she declined it as she was determined to 'try her luck' in the UK. This is how Yavor explained their choice to forgo their current material securities in the quest for an uncertain but, in their eyes, promising future in 'the West':

*Staying here is just pointless, even if you have a good salary and all. I mean, one will always have enough to live on but never enough to afford more things. [Me: What kind of things?] Well, like going out with friends to pubs and bars, for example; we don't do this as much as we would like to at the moment. Or, let's say, going to the mall for shopping or watching a movie. We rarely do it.*

When talking about 'economic deprivation' and being in a 'survival mode', others also referred to not having enough disposable income for what was commonly referred to as 'extra' spending. The common complaint was that a great proportion of a person's salary was spent on covering constantly rising monthly bills and basic foodstuffs, leaving almost no disposable income for any 'luxury expenditure'. Holidays, trips abroad, branded clothing and accessories, new mobile phones and electronic gadgets, and engagement in different leisure activities were all perceived as status symbols that my informants simply could not afford. The urge to engage in such consumption practices was driven by a constant evaluation of their social position in relation to that of 'others' within the group, as well as those 'below' and 'above'. As Nina (35), a cleaner in a state company, explained: 'You think you have all you need but then you see that someone's got something newer and better, a nicer vacuum cleaner, let's say, and you think to yourself – "I should get one as well"'.

Many of the prospective migrants I spoke to relied on a combination of subsistence wages, informal sources of income and/or 'kinfare' support (Deneva 2017) to provide for their families and cover bank loans and consumer credits. For them the frequently evoked theme of 'survival' reflected a constant state of economic insecurity and the struggle to sustain precarious livelihoods. In many cases, however, economic improvement was not necessarily equated to a struggle for ensuring elementary physical wellbeing but related to an aspiration for the enactment of a particular lifestyle. In this sense, while perceiving themselves as 'flawed' consumers' (Bauman 2005: 3) within the local community, many of my respondents saw migration as a strategy for overcoming their socio-economic and symbolic marginality in a society that, according to them, celebrated the 'success' of an ambiguous politico-economic elite and prioritised the needs of a 'Western-minded' 'intellectual' class. For many of those caught in what Vigh (2009) calls the 'schism between the culturally expected and the socially possible' (*ibidem*: 96), the satisfaction of consumer aspirations is possible only through the accumulation of considerable debts, which puts additional pressure on household finances. In this sense, for my informants migration held the promise for ensuring their participation in consumption culture which they perceived as the expression of relative affluence and good life. In present Bulgarian realities of life, the only way of satisfying such consumer aspirations was the accumulation of considerable debts which brought about financial pressure. Therefore, I argue that the economic dimension contained in the notion of 'survival' should be interpreted not so much as an 'absolute' but as a 'relative' deprivation emerging out of the need to respond to material pressures imposed by a desired lifestyle and an effort to 'keep up with the Joneses'. In the literature dedicated to East–West migration the interpretation of the 'economic' dimension

behind the migration desire has rarely been tied to future migrants' drive to gain symbolic capital and improve their standing in the local community (or society in general). One exception is Erind Pajo's (2007) investigation of the reasons behind the 1990s mass migration of Albanians to Greece. He claims that the widely stated economic rationale for migration after the end of state socialism actually stood for a desire to achieve social advancement, the routes to which were largely unavailable in (post)socialist Albania. His informants, too, expressed the hope that the possession of particular objects (especially electronic goods of Western origin) would enable the achievement of a much-desired social distinction. In the Bulgarian case, the interpretation of migration as a quest for upward social mobility has been explored in relation to highly educated young Bulgarians (representatives of the socialist 'mass intelligentsia') (Stoilkova 2005) and highly skilled workers with prestigious professions (Kabakchieva 2009) who had experienced status devaluation as a result of the post-1989 transformation of economic and value regimes and who were unable to see any legitimate way for redressing their declining symbolic and economic capital.

In this light, the findings of this article offer an important contribution to the literature explaining Bulgarian and East European migration motivations by demonstrating that, for the poorly qualified and less-educated Bulgarian workers and struggling or bankrupted small-business owners, migration can also be guided by a desire to achieve social advancement. It has been demonstrated that, in many cases, working-class individuals have been the most greatly affected by postsocialist transformations in ways that led not only to their material impoverishment but also to their social and symbolic marginalisation (Kideckel 2004). My informants' sense of the diminished possibilities for upward social mobility was expressed in narratives of 'survival' and was related to the lack of social and cultural capital through which opportunities for personal and professional development could become available. My attention was constantly drawn to a publicly circulating mantra reproduced by would-be migrants as an explanation of their disadvantaged positioning: 'If you do not have connections you are no-one'. Many believed that success in Bulgarian society depended on having a 'good back' (*dobar grab*).<sup>13</sup> Another determinant of the inferior positioning of 'ordinary' people in socio-economic and symbolic terms was their devalued or insufficient cultural capital. Many of my middle-aged informants were affected by the well-documented devaluation of various forms of labour and the pertaining forms of cultural capital and professional experience since the end of socialism (see Kaneff and Pine 2011). Access to well-paid and symbolically valued positions in attractive sectors like IT, finance, telecommunication and transport depended to a large extent on a person's knowledge of foreign languages, Western cultures, computer skills and relevant educational credentials that my informants did not possess.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, 'ordinary people's references to 'survival', understood as a precarious existence, were also related to perceptions of their symbolically subordinate position in Bulgarian society. Already the commonly used self-identification 'ordinary' denoted a sense of marginality in comparison to 'oligarchs', 'businessmen' and 'the rich' in general, as well as to 'intellectual elites' and the 'middle classes'. David Kideckel (2004) claims that the subalternisation of workers and other suffering groups was not only a result of the dramatic socio-economic effects of post-1989 structural reforms but the simultaneously occurring symbolic manipulation of the dominant classes expressed in the dominant argument that attributes the failure of the 'transition' to the backwards mentality and market-inadequacy of the workers. With their social and symbolic capital devalued, 'the victims of the economic downturn' suffered not only 'high unemployment and underemployment, plummeting standards of living (...), and alienation of new standards of consumption' but [also] 'denigration or condescension from the wider society' (Kideckel 2004: 41).

The construction of migration as a strategy for overcoming socio-economic and symbolic stagnation and achieving social mobility should be mapped out against the general social critique of and disillusionment with the failed promises of the 'transitional' path of development of the country. For their socio-economic and symbolic entrapment, my informants blamed the inadequate or lacking movement of the Bulgarian state, which

they considered to be ‘stuck’ in a ‘post-transitional’ temporality. Many of my informants considered the ‘transition’ (*prehodat*) to be a grand scheme orchestrated by a small ‘old’ dressed as a ‘new’ oligarchic elite, one which fabricated mass promises while plundering state resources and people’s dignity. Others claimed that ‘transition’ has become a permanent feature of Bulgarian society and its end could only come with the demise of the country itself. Dimitar (40), a recently bankrupted furniture maker, believed that the ‘transition’ was occurring in a chaotic, non-linear manner:

*We take one step forward and two backwards, you know, like in the tango. There are periods in which things are going well, like from 2007 to 2009 – one could see a positive change, there was hope amongst us, the common folk. Then the crisis came, and we were again back where we started (...) we don’t have the solid [state] structures and the mechanisms in place to withstand ever minor fluctuations. Honestly, I have lost hope that, in my lifetime, I will see a change for good; our children will suffer even more than us – not even they will live to see any change.*

There was an overwhelming sense of confusion and despair in the narratives of my informants, who struggled to make sense of a socio-economic and political context which presented them with constant change while, at the same time, ensured that things always remained the same (see Kofti 2016). It became clear that, for those who believed that they had no other option left than migration, the promises produced at the beginning of the ‘change’ remained unsatisfied. This feeling was well-expressed in the painful conclusion drawn by Maria (47), the former owner of a small cosmetics studio:

*I feel cheated, I have to admit it, I don’t mean to complain or anything but they [the politicians] lied to us. I was one of those marching in the squares and jubilantly welcoming the ‘change’ in the 1990s, (...) we truly believed that this was a new beginning. It turned out that nothing really changed – maybe now we have a greater choice of goods and services, but we have no money to afford them. The only good thing about the transition is the opportunity to travel abroad.*

The determination with which those I spoke to were ready to embark on their journeys to the UK came from the exhaustion of their hopes for a better future in Bulgaria. The fear, desperation and disillusionment that I captured in this particular ethnographic moment is said to have been present ever since the start of the market changes (Creed 2011), but what made it particularly poignant for my informants was the realisation that ‘Things would never get better’. The financial crisis of 2008–2009, the effects of which my informants were still struggling with during my fieldwork, presented a fundamental turning point and a ‘last push’, prompting many to take the decision to settle in the UK.

With its focus on migrants’ imaginings of life in the UK, the next section demonstrates that, the lost faith in Bulgaria’s advancement was paralleled by an increasing hope that migration to ‘the West’ would enable the fulfilment of the hopes and dreams that the postsocialist ‘transition’ never delivered.

### **‘The West’ as ‘normality’**

The struggle for ‘survival’, which marked my informants’ lives in Bulgaria and which were, in many respects, perceived to be ‘abnormal’, was consistently juxtaposed with a desired state of ‘normal life’ (*normalen zhivot*). ‘Normality’, understood as a normative category of what life ‘should be like’, denoted my informants’ expectations and imaginations of what life in ‘the West’ (and the UK in particular) had to offer. ‘Normality’ was, in this sense, a desired state of being, always constructed in contrast to current life predicaments (Jansen 2015).

In what follows, I explore several aspects of the ‘normality’ that my informants projected into their new ‘Western’ futures – stability and predictability, social justice and working-class dignity.

In contrast to the despair and helplessness experienced in Bulgaria, my informants imagined their anticipated ‘normal’ lives in the UK as first and foremost offering a sense of security and basic trust in the way life works and reassurance that tomorrow will be more or less similar to today and yesterday. Such expectations were commonly related to ideas about strong regulations, discipline, rule of law and a strong state. Elisaveta, who was about to start an au-pair job in London, often praised the glorious historical past of the UK and the successful promotion of its own interests against EU regulations. As a contrast, she highlighted Bulgaria’s insignificance in international affairs and the country’s historical position of slavery-dependence:

*Britain has conquered the whole world, they have history, they have stable rulers, they have it all! It is an imperial state; half of the world are their relatives. Bulgarians, however, are a sick tribe in their genesis, we have been enslaved for such a long time, and we don’t get along with any of our neighbours.*

This victorious historical legacy was, in her eyes, the result of a deeply entrenched social order and rule of law, which she found to be virtually absent in Bulgaria, where life was chaotic and disorganised:

*Their [the British] life has not changed for centuries. They keep on following the same old model. Here it is the opposite, we live in constant change, and we have experienced several different regimes of government [stroeve] for a very short time. This isn’t normal by any means; people get confused and don’t know what to do anymore – they don’t have a model to follow.*

The socio-political order and stability evoked by my informants was expected to ensure a better ‘grasp’ of their present and ability to plan and positively imagine the future. This temporal dimension of order and stability was metaphorically expressed in the notion of a ‘boring life’ (*skuchen zhivot*). Such a life, which people imagined to be the norm in ‘the West’, was characterised by ordinariness and non-eventfulness, in which each passing day made life manageable and predictable, thus allowing a greater sense of control and security. Anguel (26), for example, a security guard in a big company, admitted how, when trying to keep himself awake during quiet and eventless nightshifts, he would sometimes imagine what the life of a young man of his age would look like in the UK:

*He goes to work in the morning, most likely to an office. Spends eight hours working, I mean disciplined work, no slacking off. Then he goes home to his family. Of course, he has a nice house and a car. Everyone has dinner in front of the telly. They are laughing while telling each other about how their day went. It all repeats again on the next day. Quite an ordinary life, when you think about it, almost boring [laughing].*

Tanya (36), a mother of two and an office assistant, elaborated further on this by describing the day-to-day routine that she expected for her life in the UK, which she admitted was not much different from what she was presently used to: ‘I don’t imagine something miraculous and grand to happen when I go there. I see myself going to work, coming back home, cooking for my family, and going to bed. This same thing repeats itself at least five, six days a week’. I asked her to explain what made this envisioned monotonous routine in the UK so desirable, when the same everyday in Bulgaria evoked a much-loathed sense of stagnation. She replied:

*The difference is that, in the UK, all of this has a purpose; you know why you are doing it, so to speak. Your daily efforts, no matter how mundane, add up and you know that you are building something; (...) you are*



*building a secure future, for yourself and, more importantly, for your children. In Bulgaria, the everyday strain is futile – you fight and fight just to fail in the end. Here, it all melts away into thin air!*

In this sense, the imagined boredom that ‘ordinary people’ seemed to long for was related to sameness and repetition – signs of the predictability and security of life. In contrast, the monotony of life in Bulgaria was characterised by pointlessness and despair, augmenting the feeling of a lack of collective and personal progression.

Another important feature of ‘normality’ with which ‘ordinary people’ associated life in the UK (and ‘the West’ in general) was related to ideas about social justice. Many of my informants believed that, by going to the UK, they would be able to achieve an average degree of economic independence and ensure a ‘decent’ life for themselves and their families. Such expectations were not based on purely materialistic logics, however, but on perceptions of the morally just principles on which the social and economic organisation of Western society was based. Underlying this assumption was the belief that, in the UK, even those at the bottom of the social ladder were able to ‘have enough’. Expectations of just rewards, the affordability of life and an effective welfare state were other aspects of the social justice which my informants expected to experience. They all become evident in Nina’s contemplation of life in Western Europe and in the UK in particular:

*In those countries, one is awarded for one’s hard labour, not for one’s connections [vrazki]. If you are honest and hard-working, you don’t need to worry about anything – you will always have enough. The state cares about its people by giving decent salaries and good welfare support – say, if you have a child or if you fall sick and cannot work for some time, you will receive enough to live well. Those who live off welfare support in the UK are much better off than those like myself in Bulgaria who work from dawn to dusk and still need to fear for their bread. In one word: if you work, you don’t need to worry, there will always be enough for you.*

According to my informants, the general affordability of life and the strong British pound were key factors ensuring a comfortable living for everyone. They always made sure to mention that their choice of the UK as a migration destination was partly determined by the fact that the UK was one of the few Western countries unaffected by the global economic crisis. For them, this attested to the almost unique strength of the British economy and was a measure of the high degree of Westernness which the country had to offer. The belief in the lower cost of living in the UK in comparison to Bulgaria was widespread among my informants and was even evoked in ‘expert’ media commentaries and popular discourse. This was deemed true not only in terms of the differences in living standards between the two countries but also when comparing basic consumer prices in relation to wages. Many shared the impression that the cost of some essential products in Bulgaria not only approximated Western prices but in many cases literally surpassed them. This was often assumed to be the case with the price of fuel, foodstuffs, clothing and utility bills. Blagovest (52), a worker in the state railways, found proof of this in the fact that many of his friends who worked in the UK were quick to take their families with them after finding employment, because the cost of living in the UK was supposedly the same or even lower than in Bulgaria:

*They always fill up the suitcases before coming here. They bring to their family and friends everything you can think of – clothes, shoes, phones, computers, even toiletries and food. They told me that food is so cheap that they can afford to go to the supermarket and fill the basket with foods they could never afford in Bulgaria – shrimps, caviar, all sorts of cheese – and all of this for, let’s say for 20–30 pounds; here, for 20–30 leva<sup>15</sup> one cannot buy more than the basics – bread, milk, salad and oil.*

While economic security and principles of social justice were seen to be basic features of Western society as my informants imagined it, these were also understood as achievements which had to be earned and well-deserved. According to their reasoning, it was their hard and dedicated labour that would turn them into respectable citizens of British society and would entitle them to the expected benefits of ‘normality’ – stability and predictability, just remuneration and general material well-being. Imaginings of ‘normality’ also expressed working-class aspirations for obtaining dignity in labour, meaning a fair wage, stable employment conditions, job security and, not least, a sense of respectability. The assessment of labour relations in moral terms was particularly important for my informants, given the humiliating treatment they received from employers, colleagues and society in general in Bulgaria and in light of the marginal status of their occupations.

This was illustrated in the way Nikolay (34), who was about to leave his job as a nurse in the Bulgarian state medical sector for the position of a carer in a British residential home, considered his new job to be more prestigious and dignified. This evaluation was not only related to the much higher monthly remuneration he was offered, but to the respect and recognition he expected to obtain. After his Skype interview he told me how impressed he was with the attitude of his British employer:

*(...) he was so nice to me, all the time trying to put me at ease and super polite, right? But wait, what really struck me was that he was really interested in knowing more about me. What do you make of all these questions – ‘What are your hobbies?’, ‘How do you plan to relax after work?’, ‘Do you like going out with friends?’. (...) He said it himself – the job is psychologically and physically challenging and one needs to regularly unwind and re-charge one’s batteries.*

The interview confirmed what Nikolay had already heard from his colleagues working in Germany, Britain and other Western European countries – ‘They value workers there, not only medical workers, but all those who earn a living through honest labour’. Nikolay did not underestimate the huge emotional and physical strain that the new job would bring. In fact, it was precisely the exceptional challenge that the occupation presented that he believed would bring him high degrees of respectability and appreciation in the eyes of the locals. Thus, paradoxically, he ascribed higher value to the care worker job in England than to the nursing position he was currently occupying in Bulgaria.

My informants often praised the dignified position which was supposedly conferred on all workers in ‘the West’, while at the same time expecting to occupy a subordinate labour-market position by virtue of their nationality. Would-be migrants recognised that the pay they would receive would be below the ‘normal’ payment enjoyed by native workers. They were also aware that they were more likely to engage in backbreaking and demeaning jobs shunned by the locals that they would have to perform in a highly hostile environment. Such expectations did not, however, come into conflict with visions of social justice and working-class respectability because they were seen as temporary arrangements that all newcomers had to go through. By proving one’s loyalty, determination and strong work ethic, a migrant would earn the recognition of the locals and progress to a more respectable and well-paid position, they thought.

The three main themes of ‘ordinary people’s’ conceptualisations of normality are also pertinent to some of the recent theoretical discussions on the emic meanings of ‘normality’ in the context of Eastern Europe and East–West migration motivation. In his investigation of yearnings for ‘normal lives’ in a post-Yugoslav apartment complex in Sarajevo, Stef Jansen (2015) analyses the relation between ‘normality’ and temporal horizons of ‘suspended modernity’ – his equivalent of the notion of ‘post-transitional’ time that I discussed in the previous section. Similar to the findings presented here, Jansen (2015) discovered that the disillusionment with

modernist promises of collective political hope do not result in a substantial re-organisation of people's temporal orientation. Instead, it is in the sustained longing for 'normal lives' – desired despite their impossibility – that Jansen discovered temporal preoccupations with trajectories of 'forward movement'.

Secondly, the most important aspects of 'normality' highlighted by my informants – security, predictability, social justice and dignified labour – stood in direct opposition to their unsatisfactory present. Thus, 'normality' can be understood as a normative category which stands in contrast to current life predicaments. In this respect, 'normality' does not reveal as much about actual realities in the UK (or in 'the West') as it presents a contrast to the currently experienced 'abnormality' and frustration with the failed 'transition' in Bulgaria. Previous studies focusing on explaining 'normality' in an Eastern European context similarly position the notion at the intersection between the existent 'is' and the desired 'ought', in which 'normality' emerges as a normative standard and future expectation (Greenberg 2011; Hartman 2007; Rabikowska 2010; Rausing 2002). In this sense, the UK as the ultimate embodiment of the West for my informants should not be interpreted so much as a result of some pre-existing historical interconnections and significance, but as the function of a utopian construct with shifting geographical coordinates. In other words, the observed attraction of the UK for Bulgarian would-be migrants was conditioned by practical as well as ideational considerations, the most important of which were the relative familiarity with the English language, the high value the British pound and the existing social networks. It is thus safe to assume that a change in the political and socio-economic parameters that make the UK a possible and promising destination, as well as, the disillusionment with its inability to meet pre-conceived expectations of normality can re-project 'normality' in other 'more advanced', 'better organised', and 'more open' locales in the imagined global order (see Manolova 2017b).

Thirdly, academic engagements with the construction of 'normality' as an aspirational state towards which migrants strive have emphasised the entanglement of emotional and material considerations which imbue the concept with simultaneous longings for economic well-being and personal development (Lulle and King 2015; Stella, Flynn and Gawlewicz 2017). The findings of this article add another dimension to understandings of normality by demonstrating the fundamental normative questions of social organisation and the role and value of the individual in society mapped out in prospective migrants' narratives. In this sense, the material expectations which were clearly present in expectations of a 'normal' life should not be interpreted as a narrowly economic rationale but should be seen as pertaining to the wider existential concerns that the notion of 'normality' clearly outlined – a predictable and secure existence, the just redistribution of material and social resources in society, dignity and respect.

Finally, my findings substantiate arguments about the inextricable relation between normality and 'the West' in the postsocialist social imaginary. 'The West' has been presupposed as a mainstay of the much-longed for 'normality' at the heart of the 'transitional' project. According to Korte (2010: n.p.), 'For many East Europeans Western Europe became synonymous with 'normality'.

In the above analysis, I have demonstrated how the emic notion of 'the West', which was frequently evoked by my informants in relation to migration expectations and aspirations, denotes both a specific geographical location – Western Europe (the UK in particular) and an imaginary place offering possibilities for a better ('normal') life. The fact that my informants, none of whom had ever travelled to Western Europe, were able to produce remarkably detailed and homogenous depictions of how life functions there demonstrates how their subjective imaginings are informed by widely circulating cultural constructs – 'global imaginaries' – which 'change the way in which people collectively envision the world and their own positionalities and mobilities within it' (Salazar 2011: 577). The notion of the 'imaginary West' (Yurchak 2006) through which the imaginary can be interpreted as a social rather than an individual quality helps to understand 'the West' as a benchmark for modernisation, progress and civilisation, playing a key role in the formation of Bulgarian national identity and collective consciousness. The reproduction of this idealised cultural construct has been

constantly carried out in historical narratives, political projects, media representations and public discourses. Recognising the significance of migrants' imaginaries in informing the individual motivations behind migration helps to understand migration as a project that is not necessarily guided by rational considerations and quantitative calculations. I have illustrated that individuals' considerations prior to migration are often guided by much more complex preoccupations than the simple desire to earn more money. On the one hand, they reflect a reaction to the devastating effects of the socio-economic and political processes of the past 25 years and the overwhelming disillusionment they brought and, on the other, the struggle to achieve social advancement and a sense of 'normality'.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have aimed to unpack the puzzle as to why a growing number of Bulgarians choose to leave for the UK despite the widely noted discriminatory policies, negative public perceptions and dismal working conditions that many newcomers endure. It is agreeable to understand migration movements as a response to global socio-economic inequalities and processes in which individuals are 'pushed' by negative factors such as unemployment or a low income, or 'pulled' by the prospect of better living standards elsewhere. Even migrants themselves often readily employ such economic narratives as common sense and socially acceptable justifications. I have, however, argued for the need to develop a more nuanced understanding of migration, which accounts for the interplay between economic and non-economic factors and which better reflects contradictory and multi-layered motivations. To enable such an understanding, I have focused on the significance of prospective migrants' imaginings about the UK and 'the West' more generally for the construction of a desirable post-migration reality.

In the narratives of a group of self-ascribed 'ordinary people' with plans for long-term settlement in the UK, migration emerged as the only available strategy for leaving behind an unsatisfactory present marked by despair, disillusionment and constant 'struggle for survival'. I have demonstrated how such common articulations of 'survival' denote severe economic decline and, when inquired into in more depth, disappointment with blocked pathways to social advancement. The inability of would-be migrants to partake in certain socially desirable consumption and lifestyle patterns impinged upon their feelings of self-worth and sharpened their sensitivity towards the asymmetries between themselves and those standing above them in society – 'the rich', 'the educated' and 'the successful'. Their lack of easily convertible forms of social and cultural capital (connections to powerholders, skills and qualifications – e.g. foreign language and IT skills) that were seen as prerequisites for obtaining lucrative employment augmented these 'ordinary people's' feelings of socio-economic and symbolic marginalisation. At the same time, I have explained their feelings of stagnation and disillusionment with the future through their perception of the Bulgarian state as placed in a 'post-transitional' temporality, where further progress in social and economic development seems unlikely if not impossible. It is this suspended hope for collective movement forward that turned migration into an individualised strategy through which my informants tried to realise their aspirations for upward social mobility.

In the second part of the article I have presented my informants' imaginings of life in the UK and 'the West' in general and thus demonstrated how, when discussing plans for leaving the country, future migrants very often point not only to the unsatisfactory experiences of life they want to leave behind but to positive imaginings of existing alternatives available in distant places. Thus, they juxtaposed Bulgaria which, in their eyes, was marked by despair, stagnation and dwindling opportunities, to the prosperity and progress available in a place like the UK. This ability to imagine a drastically different reality was their main impetus for migration (cf. Benson 2012; Salazar 2013). It was through the notion of 'normality' that has been in high circulation in

postsocialist societies that my informants articulated their expectations for a better life. Perceptions of ‘normality’ encompassed different ideational and material concerns – i) a sense of stability and order that makes life predictable and controllable; ii) a basic level of social and moral justice, which implies a dignified life for every individual regardless of their identity, belonging or connections; and iii) a dignified status of labour, especially for workers of the classic professions who, in contrast to the predatory exploitation in the ‘wild’ Bulgarian capitalism, were imagined to receive appropriate salaries that allowed them to make a living and have a respected position within society. I have demonstrated how the emic notion of ‘normality’ foregrounds a normative perspective as it always represents a desired but unattainable state of being that denotes existential concerns with the nature of society and the position of the individual within it. I have taken my informants’ ability to produce a homogenous positive vision of the West as a place offering a ‘normality’ of life as an indication of the way in which subjective and class imaginations are influenced by powerful ‘global imaginaries’ (Salazar 2011: 577) which create idealisations which defy rationality and factual knowledge.

This article shows how prospective migrants’ imaginings and understandings do not always fit into a rational actor framework and how the economic component which is undoubtedly present in working-class migration is lived out and conceptualised in a way that is very different from dominant economic theories. Directions for further research that can contribute to unpacking the puzzle of why an increasing number of people from global peripheries migrate in advanced industrial countries should focus on revealing migrants’ realities in their countries of choice. How can we explain the fact that, in many cases, even when migrants’ dreams crumble in the face of deepening social inequalities and insecurity, many are still able to sustain hope for a better future? We need to look empirically at whether and how migration actually makes economic sense given the substantial investment that such a move requires and the lower-than-average income that migrants are able to generate.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See National Statistical Institute: [https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/result.jsf?x\\_2=72](https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/result.jsf?x_2=72) (accessed : 12 March 2017); Eurostat: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00177&plugin=1> (accessed : 12 March 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Note that the increased interest in Germany is not to be taken as a new migration trend; the country has been a ‘classic’ destination for Bulgarians ever since the beginning of the post-1989 intense out-migration. Bobeva (2017), Maeva (2017) and Kovacheva (2014) report on the increased migration rates towards Germany and the UK.

<sup>3</sup> There exists no precise estimation of the number of Bulgarian newcomers to the UK. The Office for National Statistics in the UK reports a threefold increase in the number of National Insurance Number (NINo) applications at the end of 2014. This figure should not be taken as an exact estimate of the number of newly arrived migrants as it also includes applications from existing migrants and does not account for undocumented workers. This indication of an increased presence of Bulgarian short- and long-term migrants in the UK is substantiated by my own fieldwork observations from the end of 2012 to 2015 in London and Birmingham. Estimates by the Annual Population Survey of the Bulgarian-born population in the UK demonstrate a 30 per cent increase in the number of Bulgarian residents from 2014 to 2016. Online: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationality> (accessed: 21 February 2018).

<sup>4</sup> See Maeva (2017). Data from the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute from 2014/2015 have demonstrated that the UK was the most-favoured educational destination for Bulgarian students (cited in Bobeva 2017).

<sup>5</sup> On the proliferation of TV shows and programmes (after 2007) depicting the life of Bulgarian immigrants in the EU and warning of possible pitfalls, see Balabanova and Balch (2010) and Kabakchieva (2009).

<sup>6</sup> National Statistical Institute. While it is too early to predict the effect of a possible Brexit on migrants' attitudes, a provisional estimation shows an increase in A2 arrivals to the UK in the year following the Brexit referendum: see <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/migrationstatisticsquarterlyreportprovisionallongterminternationalmigrationlatestestimates> (accessed: 21 February 2018). This estimate is based on a survey of international passengers which only provides an indicative measure of migration flows.

<sup>7</sup> Scholars of Bulgarian migration have regularly relied on studies of potential migration because of the lack of comprehensive research on migration motivations (Guentcheva *et al.* 2003).

<sup>8</sup> From the German term *Gastarbeiter* (guestworker), which is usually used to denote temporary migrant workers who arrived in West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>9</sup> Stemming from *gurbet* – a traditional form of seasonal and temporary labour mobility in the Balkans.

<sup>10</sup> Such explorations are missing from East–West migration research, with the exception of Nicola Mai's (2001) study of Albanian migrants to Italy in the early 1990s and their articulations of utopian images of life in the West.

<sup>11</sup> The majority of participants were interviewed on multiple occasions with interviews/conversations lasting between one and five hours.

<sup>12</sup> [https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/result.jsf?x\\_2=120](https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/result.jsf?x_2=120) (accessed: 21 February 2018).

<sup>13</sup> A 'back' of some sort was seen as vital for the successful completion of all sorts of activities – seeking medical treatment, finding a place in a kindergarten, paying taxes or buying a car. 'Good back' mostly referred to informal connections to economic and political powerholders who could provide access to well-paid employment or lucrative business opportunities.

<sup>14</sup> Because of the dismal pay they offered and their exploitative nature, many small-scale business occupations and different forms of formal employment were perceived as unattractive. Voluntary withdrawal from the labour market was a common strategy that emerged from my informants' unwillingness to take on jobs offering inadequate payment and low prestige. Instead, many preferred to engage in informal entrepreneurial occupations which provided more autonomy and flexibility despite not offering any legal and social protections. Others, turned to state employment which despite its low pay, ensured some security, a better disposal of a person's time and long leaves of absence (used for temporary labour mobility).

<sup>15</sup> At the time of my fieldwork (2013–2014) 1 GBP equaled 2.45 BGN (commonly referred to as 'lev(a)' in Bulgarian).

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No conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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# Precarious Posted Migration: The Case of Romanian Construction and Meat-Industry Workers in Germany

Alexandra Voivozeanu\* 

*Drawing on in-depth interviews with Romanian workers posted in the German construction and meat-processing industries, with representatives of German unions and with migrant advisers, and on ethnographic work, this study examines precarity in posted employment. Firstly, the paper describes the precarious circumstances of Romanians posted in the construction and meat-industry sectors in Germany. Secondly, analysing the Romanians' own perspectives, it shows that low wages in the country of origin, often associated with insecurity and poor working conditions, drive these workers to engage in posted work. Their lack of knowledge of the German language prevents them from finding and carrying out standard jobs in Germany and, thus, determines that they remain in posted employment. Finally, the paper argues that posted workers experience different layers of precarity in the country of destination. It shows that those under contract with various companies for short periods of time are more precarious than de facto posted workers and workers with long-term informal agreements with one single employer.*

*Keywords: posted workers; level of precarity; migration; Romania; Germany*

## Introduction

That cold Saturday morning coincided with my first visit to a construction site where a block of flats was being built by a Romanian team consisting of around 25 workers. I met their team leader at the union's office and he permitted me to visit their worksite on Saturdays – the only workday when German supervisors were not present. I was not the only guest that morning. Dana, the wife of a worker, had travelled abroad for the first time to see her severely injured husband at the hospital. He had been cleaning the basement when a two-tonne cement staircase fell on him (later, the team leader, an engineer, explained that the staircase was insecure

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according to safety norms). The worker's legs had been crushed and he was only just conscious after remaining in a coma for a week. His co-worker, only superficially injured, was sent back to Romania the next day, basically losing his job. As Dana wanted to see the place where her husband's accident happened, we went downstairs together with the team leader. Stains of her husband's dried blood could still be seen on the cement wall.

This is an extreme example. However, even now, two years later, these images stay with me as a mark of the (severe) precarity which some posted workers face in a context where room is left for abusive relationships among employers and fragile employees.

Posted workers carry out work on a temporary basis for their employer, which provides a service in another EU member state. They move through Europe under the freedom to provide services, not under the free mobility of labour, hence they fall under a different regime to that of regular migrants. Posting is regulated through The Posting of Workers Directive 96/71/EC and through a series of decisions of the European Court of Justice (Laval, Rüffert, Viking) that provides workers with only minimum standards in the country of destination.<sup>1</sup> To make matters worse, loopholes in legislation and a lack of transnational control often lead to labour abuses.

Posting represents under one per cent of the entire workforce in Europe (Pacolet and De Wispelaere 2017). However, it is prevalent in several economic sectors in high-income countries, as it gives domestic companies opportunities to reduce labour costs and to avoid the obligations which they would have towards workers in standard employment (Berntsen and Lillie 2015).

In this article, I discuss precarity in posted employment, focusing on workers' perspectives. I look at posted migration using the dual labour-market theory (Piore 1979). First, starting from Rodgers and Rodgers' (1989) dimensions of precarity, I describe the working conditions of Romanians posted in the construction and meat-processing sectors in Germany. Secondly, I explain that low incomes in the country of origin – often linked with precarious working conditions – and the lack of knowledge of the German language both determine workers to engage and remain in posted employment, even if some would prefer standard jobs in Germany. Finally, considering matters of time (Anderson 2007) – namely the length of time in one particular job – I distinguish between the levels of precarity experienced by workers in the country of destination and show that *de facto* posted workers and workers under long-term informal agreements with a single company are in less precarious situations than workers holding short-term posted jobs with different employers.

This article is based on interviews carried out in Germany with construction and meat-industry workers from Romania, on interviews with representatives of German trade unions and with migrant advisors in the country of destination. The interview data were complemented with results based on participant and non-participant ethnographies collected at migrants' accommodation sites and workplaces and as a translator between the construction union representatives and Romanian workers.

## Definitions and concepts

A number of academic studies look at the impact of loopholes in the European regulatory framework over industrial relations (Berntsen and Lillie 2014, 2015; Wagner and Lillie 2014). The legislation gave main contractors the possibility to benefit from 'an array of regulatory contexts defined only partially and imperfectly by geographical contingency, between which they can choose and strategize' (Wagner and Lillie 2014: 416). In this context, the main producers in the German meat industry have a high bargaining power and are the main actors determining the working conditions of posted workers (Mense-Petermann 2018). Similarly, transnational companies in the German construction sector lead informal negotiations that disrupt the official framework of posting (Wagner 2015).

Unions, on the other hand, were mainly restricted from carrying out collective actions for posted workers. At the same time, their national-based strategies did not prove widely successful in organising transnational

workers (Lillie and Sippola 2011). The only notable initiative to develop transnational cooperation among unions in a greater number of European countries (Greer, Ciupijus and Lillie 2013) was ineffective in the long term. However, as shown by Lillie and Greer (2007), the capacity of main contractors to weaken collective bargaining depends on union responses and domestic labour-market conditions – unions that rely on autonomous capacities are more successful than those counting on institutionalised relations with employers and the state. Other studies argue that, in some cases, unions and NGOs develop unconventional alliances with favourable outcomes (Berntsen 2015; Wagner 2015).

Against this background, posted workers often find themselves in vulnerable positions in relation to their employers. Several studies address the perspective of workers towards this type of employment (Berntsen 2016; Caro, Berntsen, Lillie and Wagner 2015; Lillie 2016; Thörnqvist and Bernhardsson 2015; Wagner 2015). Berntsen (2016) shows that, in order to improve their precarious working conditions, posted workers use individual strategies with no significant impact on the overall situation. Thörnqvist and Bernhardsson (2015) conclude that Polish workers posted to Sweden are motivated to stay in posted employment by a ‘life project’ they want to fulfil with money garnered from migration.

Posted migration in the German construction and meat industries can be explained using the concept of the dual labour market (Piore 1979). The author divides the labour market into primary and secondary sectors. While the primary sector contains stable, well-paid jobs characterised by employment protection, the secondary sector includes flexible jobs, with a low standard of working conditions, low pay and reduced upward mobility. These jobs are not appealing for native workers and are usually occupied by migrants, Piore (1979) explains. A more-recent approach explains division inside the labour market as an effect of regulations in high-income countries (King and Rueda 2008). These authors use the concepts of standard cheap labour (regular jobs) and non-standard cheap labour (flexible and temporary jobs) including migrants in the second group. They argue that countries with a low number of standard contracts – such as Germany – will develop a labour market that relies on cheap non-standard contracts. With a similar approach, in her analysis of the German labour market, Wilpert (1998: 269) concludes that the growth of non-standard jobs is, rather, determined by the ‘de-regulation of working relations’ than by the availability of cheap migrant labour.

Precarity has become a predominant characteristic of social relations nowadays (Kalleberg 2009) with several categories – such as low-skilled temporary workers – being more exposed to it (Kalleberg 2011). According to Rogers and Rodgers (1989: 3), precarity is a somewhat diffuse term but a precarious job is the result of a combination of the following factors: ‘instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social and economic vulnerability’. The authors identify four dimensions associated with precariousness:

1. the degree of continuity of the job;
2. the degree of control over working and salary conditions;
3. the degree of protection – to what extent workers are protected, by law, participation in collective organisations or usual practices; and
4. income level (Rodgers and Rodgers 1989: 4).

While definitions of precarity have been refined, insecurity remains a strong component of the concept. Standing (2011: 10) describes precarious workers as missing some of the following seven forms of security: that of the labour market, employment security, job security, work security, skill reproduction security, income security, representation security.

Instead of being essentially precarious, migrants are exposed to *some* experiences of precarity – in their case, insecurity is linked with mobility across space and time lines (Waite 2009). Processes such as immigration control make migrants more dependent than citizens and hence a more desirable group for employers

(Anderson 2010). The same author argues that analyses of migration and labour markets should consider aspects of time such as ‘length of period in a job, the impact of working time on retention, length of stay, changing immigration status etc.’ (Anderson 2007: 6). In this paper, I use the term ‘matters of time’ in the same way as Anderson (2007). More specifically, in order to distinguish between the levels of precarity experienced by posted workers in the country of destination, I mainly consider the length of time spent in one particular job.

## Methods and data

This article is based on 19 interviews with construction workers and 13 with meat-industry workers from Romania. I particularly chose these two economic sectors in Germany because they both hire a high number of (*de facto*) posted workers. Moreover, of around 58 000 workers posted from Romania in 2014, 43.6 per cent work in Germany (Pacolet and De Wispelaere 2015).

The entire migration process for posted workers is organised by companies; hence, in many cases, the workers remain isolated from the host-country society. Moreover, a large number are afraid of their employers and are reluctant to talk about work-related issues. As a consequence, access to the field proved to be quite difficult. The fieldwork was carried out between December 2015 and December 2016 in Berlin, Bavaria, Baden Württemberg and Lower Saxony. I chose these sites taking into account practical aspects: I was based in Bavaria and Berlin and decided to travel to reachable places where migrants agreed to be interviewed.

I recruited my sample through local branches of the construction union, through *Facebook* groups of Romanian migrants and through personal contacts. I used the *snowballing* method to find new respondents. I interviewed migrants who, at any moment in time, had been in posted employment. However, most of them had held several such positions. The interviewees were aged between 23 and 51 years old and only two were women (construction is a male-dominated sector and attempts to interview more women working in the meat industry failed). Before gaining posted employment, respondents (with the exception of four of them) from the construction sector had previous migration experience in Hungary, Israel, Italy, Spain and England. Six of the meat-industry workers had no migration background. The others had lived in Italy or had previously worked in Germany, the Netherlands and Turkey. The interviews focused mainly on the workers’ professional trajectories. For each posted job they held, I was interested in issues such as their motivation to engage in this type of employment, their recruitment process, particularities of their contracts and their working conditions. Most of the interviews were carried out face-to-face, but I agreed to a telephone interview with two migrants who had moved out of Germany: one who had returned to Romania and another who was working in France.

Sampling through unions and through *Facebook* groups would possibly have put me in contact with migrants who had experienced extreme precarity. In order to have a more nuanced understanding of posting, I also collected data from other sources. I held interviews with other actors in the field: two Romanian construction engineers (leaders of teams consisting of more than 25 workers), two migrant advisers and representatives of IG Bau at the European level (Trade Union for Building-Agriculture-Environment) and DGB (The German Trade Union Confederation). I interviewed migrant workers, construction engineers and migrant advisers in Romanian and union representatives from IG Bau and DGB in English. I carried out informal discussions with local representatives of IG Bau in German. In order to protect workers’ identities, pseudonyms are used throughout the article.

The data were complemented with results based on my participatory and non-participatory observation. I visited one construction site each Saturday during working hours, interviewed migrants at their workplaces and accommodation and translated for a local office of IG Bau in their organising actions with Romanian migrants.

One of the limits of my study is that I was not able to interview representatives of companies that post workers abroad and of the Romanian authorities responsible for the issue. Their perspectives might have brought a better understanding on posting.

## Results

### *Precarity dimensions of posted workers*

#### Job security

Job security (Leschke, Schmid and Griga 2006) implies that workers will remain employed within the same company. Even if against regulations, many of the respondents did not have an employment relationship with the companies that posted them to Germany – and were, indeed, hired just before going abroad. Especially in the construction sector, it is common among the workers I interviewed to be posted only for the (short) length of time necessary to carry out a single project. When the contract they were hired for terminated, they had to search for a new job with another employer (or, as happened in some cases, to wait until they received a new offer from the same company). As Lillie puts it: ‘Workers expect to be fired at any time and realise they have to move to another job, another country’ (2016: 56). In the next paragraph, I describe the work trajectory of one of the respondents in order to illustrate the lack of job security in posted work. However, it is important to mention that, even if insecure trajectories are characteristic for most posted workers, some of them experience a higher level of security.

In the following quote, Mircea, a construction worker, describes the insecurity experienced both in origin and destination countries. Besides short-term employment, like many other posted workers I interviewed, he has had to deal with the illegal practices to which subcontractors turn in order to save on labour costs. For him, posted employment feels like a lottery, an unfair system in which workers can never be certain that they will remain employed or that they would receive the appropriate compensation for their work.

*There are very high risks. One can lose, one can win, one is never 100 per cent sure and one is not able to say ‘I am working and I will receive my payment’. You are not sure of anything, anywhere. We are people who live in stress, because we have no security. There is no safe job here [in Germany], nor at home (...). The thing is that they are all ghost [companies]; for me there is no well-known firm that went to Germany or to other countries with no problems. Either a pay delay or they cut off wages, they cut off overtime pay and so on... So, posting... people brought here [in Germany] are insecure.*

Mircea’s professional trajectory in recent years illustrates the job insecurity he speaks of. Between 2007 and 2015, he was posted to Germany by different Romanian subcontractors, he worked as self-employed twice in Germany and was posted to Belgium and Poland. Between jobs abroad he undertook work in Romania. Employment in foreign countries was unstable – during this period he worked for six different companies. In some cases, he agreed to work abroad for only a few months; in other cases, an infringement of labour rights constrained him to leave his job.

For example, even though he had a long-term agreement, the first time he was posted to Germany, he decided to resign after four months since he was not satisfied with the payment arrangements: he received a weekly food allowance and was paid his first salary only three and a half months after he started working. Following his resignation, he did not receive his entire remuneration.



After working in Romania for a few months, Mircea accepted a second job in Germany. Employers asked him – to absolve them from obligations towards him as an ‘employee’ – to register as a self-employed worker, even though *de facto* he was posted. Two years later, he went back to Romania. Subsequently, he was posted to Poland by another employer and, after working for 1.5 months without being paid, he and other Romanian workers found out that their contracts were legally invalid. Again, he had lost his job unexpectedly. Back in Romania, he started a small construction company. Later, he was posted to Belgium for six months, worked in Romania and was posted to Germany for a period of four months by the same company he was working for at the time of the interview. ‘I had a great misfortune in my life’, Mircea says when he speaks about his work life and his experiences abroad. The misfortune he describes is in fact the result of an unfair posting system in which workers’ rights are less important than companies’ rights to competitive advantage (Lillie 2016).

For many respondents, the length of stay in posted employment is determined by their readiness to work under improper conditions. Repetitive work and high workloads, fatigue and low temperatures lead to accidents and affect workers’ health. In some cases, these circumstances convince them to leave their jobs. Ana, for example, temporarily stopped working in the meat industry at her doctor’s suggestion:

*I could not handle it anymore. I got very sick, I had problems with my lungs, it was two degrees inside (...) and the doctor told me that I should either change my job or take a three-month break. (...) Both tiredness and stress and I was smoking a lot.*

### Income level

In the construction sector, a minimum wage was adopted with the introduction of the Posting of Workers Act or *Arbeitnehmer-Entsendegesetz*, the German correspondent of the Posting of Workers Directive. The Posting of Workers Act initially consisted of six economic sectors. It extended progressively, with the meat industry being included in 2014. Subsequently, negotiations for a minimum wage in the sector were carried and entered into force in 2015. In 2016, regulations on posting did not entitle workers to wages above the minimum in the country of destination and granted them almost no access to collective agreements. In 2018, the Directive (EU) 2018/957 introduced new amendments to the Posting of Workers Directive 96/71/EC. At an official level this provides better protection for workers (the right to remuneration, allowances and collective agreements), yet it remains to be seen whether the changes will be effective in practice.

The wage difference between Germany and Romania is substantial. In 2016, in Germany, the minimum hourly wage in the construction sector was set at between 14.40 and 14.45 euros gross<sup>2</sup> and at 8.60 euros in the meat industry. The minimum hourly wage in Romania was set at around 1.9 euros.<sup>3</sup> In the construction sector, it is common for workers to agree on a lower salary than stipulated in official documents (the salary ranges from 900 to 1 600 euros per month, irrespective of the number of hours worked). In the meat industry, in many cases, workers receive the monthly minimum wage; however, often due to long working hours, the remuneration per hour is actually lower. In other cases deductions for accommodation, transport and equipment costs are made, as Georgeta, a meat-industry worker, explains: ‘After 260 hours [worked] per month without any free day, we got around 900–1 000 euros, minus food [expenses], minus rent, minus transportation’.

My respondents described other abusive practices by employers. For example, in the meat industry, payments were delayed in order to discourage workers from resigning – if they did, they would not receive remuneration for their last worked month(s). In other cases, fees were charged for each day on which employees missed work due to health issues. In construction, employers postponed wage payments, sometimes for months, and offered small food allowances instead – in such cases it was common for workers to not receive all the remuneration to which they were entitled. Other respondents described the circumvention of payments

to SOKA-BAU, the Paritarian Social Fund in the construction industry (related to holiday pay during the posted period).<sup>4</sup>

Several studies on posted work present similar findings. Polish workers in Sweden receive lower hourly payments (Thörnqvist and Bernhardsson 2015). Workers in the German construction sector are also paid below the minimum hourly wage and experience the circumvention of annual holiday leave (Wagner 2015). Eastern and Southern European workers in Germany, Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have to deal with ‘wage theft’ (Lillie 2016).

### Control over working conditions and salary and degree of protection

Like other categories of migrants (Anderson 2010), posted workers are highly dependent on their employers, who grant them access to the labour market in the country of destination and organise their entire migration process. Migrants’ lack of knowledge regarding the regulatory framework, the institutional system and their poor German language all add to their vulnerability when working with subcontractors.

Workers usually avoid coming into conflict with their companies, since they could lose both their jobs and their accommodation abroad. On this premise, in most of the cases, posted workers do not exercise a high degree of control over their working conditions and wages. However, there are nuances. Experienced, skilled workers are more often in a position to negotiate the context in which they will work abroad. In the following quote, Mihai, who has worked in the German construction sector since 2010, explains how negotiations about wages take place between future posted workers and Romanian companies:

*The boss tells you ‘This is what I can offer’. If you accept it, you are going to Germany tomorrow. If you don’t accept it [what he will say is] ‘I can’t pay more’. But if he knows that he needs you, he starts by offering a higher amount of money. Or you can be the one telling him ‘Mister, if you need me, I was thinking that...’, but this can be seen as disobedient and they don’t take you into account any more.*

Even workers with greater negotiation capital try to avoid looking ‘too demanding’, otherwise they risk being excluded from the selection process. Besides, they are never certain that agreements with employers will be respected: ‘After [going abroad], we wait for a month or two and see the results. If they are cheating on us, people leave. They find other jobs’, Mihai continues. On the other hand, even if experience in the field is appreciated, some companies avoid hiring unionised workers or workers who have spent more time in the country of destination, as it is more likely that they will be familiar with work regulations or that they will take action in cases of labour rights violations.

Workers with a lesser likelihood of finding another job abroad are more vulnerable when working with certain employers. Some use individual strategies to resist the conditions imposed, instead of bargaining, as they do not feel that any action they might take would improve their working conditions. For example, Claudiu, a construction worker, ‘just pretends to work’, if he has to be on site for more than eight hours. Other studies similarly show that, in the lack of an efficient framework for collective action, workers turn to individual strategies that help them to cope with their precarious working conditions (Berntsen 2016). However, this leads to a perpetuation of the current situation, the latter argues.

Other workers remain in employment only until they have secured their positions in the country of destination, as Georgeta’s case illustrates. After she paid an illegal fee in order to gain a job in a meat factory in Germany, her employer made deductions she had not previously been informed about. For instance, she paid 200–250 euros monthly for sleeping in a bed she was sharing (in shifts) with co-workers. In order to pay back the money she had borrowed for travelling abroad and to support herself, she had to remain in employment for

a period of time. After she had saved enough to rent a flat, together with two other colleagues, Georgeta quit her precarious employment for a standard job in the German cleaning sector.

In other cases, instead of turning for help to institutions able to protect them, workers who face serious problems with their employers tend to return to their countries of origin. This practice is best summed up in Mircea's quote: 'If it is not ok, we leave. If we don't get along with the boss, with the company, I, personally, give up. I (...) take the first means of transportation back to Romania'. Even though they can become union members in Germany, most respondents are not unionised. Also, most of them are not familiar with advisory offices for migrants that offer counselling, in Romanian, in the country of destination. Usually, migrants approach such institutions only when extreme violations of their labour rights take place, as an employee of BEB,<sup>5</sup> one of the advisory offices in Germany, explains:

*Many [of them] work for four months without being paid and then they call here, when they have lost or are close to losing their accommodation, when they have absolutely no money to return home and when many problems congregate. But I think the trigger which pushes them to contact someone from the outside is the Lohn [wage].*

Previous research has found similar results regarding the frequency with which workers address unions (Lillie 2016). Workers' reluctance to contact the authorities about work-related problems also stems from their perception that institutions will not take their side, as Mircea explains in the following quote:

*It is my right, but who should I fight with? When I go [somewhere] here [in Germany] nobody helps, who should I fight with here or anywhere in the world? We are seen differently and no one takes you into account.*

Moreover, a lawsuit against an employer would be a lengthy procedure timewise and would imply material resources that the workers simply do not have (or that are highly disproportionate in comparison to those of employers). The quotes show that, in the current context, with national-based unions unable to address the problems of a transnational work force (Lillie and Sippola 2011), workers consider themselves under-represented by German institutions.

#### *Why do Romanians remain in this form of employment?*

##### Low-level wages and precarious working conditions in Romania

The wide gap between wages in the countries of origin and those in destination countries is what determines Romanians to gain posted employment in the construction and meat-processing sectors in Germany. In most cases, meat-industry workers' motivation for leaving Romania is linked to the low salaries on offer in the country of origin. For example, Ana had already worked for almost 10 years in the Romanian tourism industry, earning around 250 euros a month, when she started to look for a job abroad, because 'salaries in Romania leave much to be desired', she explains. After an interview with a company that could post her in the meat industry, Ana was told she needed to improve her skills in order to work in Germany. She decided to leave her job and do unpaid work in a meat factory owned by her employer in Romania until the company decides that she is qualified enough to go abroad (she obtained a contract two weeks later).

For Ana, and for other workers, going abroad involved the risk of trading a low but steady income for an insecure job. Due to the intense work rhythm and conflicts with her supervisor, Ana left her first job in Germany after four months. Liviu's case is similar. He was not satisfied with his earnings in the country of origin and was looking for an opportunity to go abroad when a friend suggested a job at the same meat factory he was working for in Germany. In order to gain employment, Liviu had to follow a meat-processing course, so he left his job in order to dedicate more time to it. After he received his certification, he could not reach his friend for a while. When he finally managed to contact him, he had to decide within a few hours whether or not to go abroad. He discussed it with his wife and decided to take the opportunity because 'one can't do much with the money earned in Romania', he says.

For construction workers, the motivation to go abroad is also financial, as Gigi, a construction worker who had several posted jobs in Germany, explains in the following quote:

*In Romania one earns very little in comparison to what one earns here [in Germany]. This is why I am here. Otherwise, I would have been near my family... I would have been in Romania and I would have carried on my life instead of drudging here.*

Many of my respondents in the construction sector had insecure jobs, characterised by low social protection, both abroad and in Romania. Especially after the economic crisis, when the construction market sunk, many employers sought ways in which to circumvent labour regulations. Eugen described the conditions he had to accept in recent years while working in the Romanian construction industry. His employers registered part-time contracts even though he worked for 10 hours a day. He was asked to take medical leave while going to work. He also undertook unregistered labour. He was paid below the minimum wage, so that his company could reduce social contributions.

However, I also encountered a slightly different narrative. Respondents, who had improved their living standards by going abroad for several years, continue to migrate to high-income countries in order to maintain their improved living standard. For example, Mihai, a construction worker, had worked abroad since 1994 (in Hungary, Israel, Spain, Germany and Belgium); he invested the money earned through migration in a house. He continued to work abroad as his current living standards require 'a certain capital and one can't maintain it with the money gained in Romania'. However, low wages and the way that business owners treat their employees are also of importance, as his quote illustrates:

*Last year (...) I spent the entire summer at home and I tried to work on my own. If you work for a company you are disesteemed. You are not appreciated for your own value. (...) Who works in Romania under these conditions? I can't work for such small amounts of money.*

To conclude, low wages and precarious working conditions in the country of origin make workers determined to accept posted employment, even when it involves a number of risks (such as not receiving wages or as remaining in employment only for a short while). For them, whose options in the country of origin are precarious as well, being posted abroad becomes desirable when considering the significantly higher earnings involved.

#### Lack of knowledge of the German language

Most posted workers state that it is their inability to speak German which makes finding a standard job or carrying out their work in a non-Romanian team rather difficult. For some this is an aspect to consider right

from the start. Ana explains that she did not look for a job in the tourism industry, in which she worked in Romania, because she did not have the required language skills: 'It doesn't matter that I have a diploma and I am experienced in the field if I don't speak German'. She considered that gaining employment abroad through a Romanian company would be a good option, since she would work in a Romanian team.

Other workers, who tried to find jobs on their own, blame language barriers for their lack of success. This was the case for Luca, a construction worker: 'All of them ask you to perfectly know the language (...) I also searched for a standard job in Germany, in my field. Everything was fine, until we got to the language issue'. Mircea, who has already been posted to Germany several times, believes that what kept him in this type of employment is the fact that he would not be able to fulfil his tasks in a non-Romanian setting: 'I could not work [directly] with a German, I can't. I mean not because I am afraid or too shy, but I am not able to... we would not be able to understand each other'.

Romanian subcontractors usually hire a German-speaking team leader who mediates between German supervisors and Romanian workers. In the country of destination, workers usually live in shared apartments arranged by their employer and work in teams formed of co-nationals. Often isolated from society in the country of destination (Caro *et al.* 2015), they are trapped in a vicious circle with few opportunities to improve their language skills.

### *Levels of precarity in posted employment*

As a result of unlawful practices and informal arrangements between them and their direct employers, workers experience different layers of precarity in the country of destination. In this article I take into account the issue of time (Anderson 2007), focusing mainly on the length of time a worker is in one particular job in order to distinguish between the precarity levels.

It is, however, important to mention that – for respondents – precarity is not necessarily linked with 'mobility across different spaces and time lines' (Waite 2009: 427). Many of these low-skilled workers also have to cope with insecurity and poor working conditions in the country of origin. They are, hence, more likely to accept insecure jobs in Germany either in order to avoid unemployment or in search of higher wages.

Those in a less precarious situation are *de facto posted workers*. They have an employment relationship with the company posting them before moving abroad for work (which proved to be seldom the case among the workers I interviewed). I identified four workers from this category, all of them employed by the same construction company. They were paid according to German standards and when not abroad they carried on working in the country of origin with the same employer. One of workers in this category is Ion. He does not speak German and describes his previous migration experiences to Germany in negative terms, as he felt isolated while working in the agricultural sector. Now, he works for two months abroad and for one month in Romania. He and his colleagues prefer postings to longer-term circular migration, as it allows them to earn more than in Romania while still participating in the lives of those friends and family they have left behind.

Workers who have long-term informal agreements with the same employer also experience relatively high job security. Due to breaches in legislation, they carry out their work in Germany for longer periods of time, longer, even, than permitted by regulations on posted employment, as a migrant advisor from Fair Mobility explains:

*We are talking about Kettenentsendung [chain posting] through Rotationssystem [a rotation system]. This means that people are sent [abroad] for a maximum of two years, 23 months, for example. Afterwards, they get a short holiday and they are re-employed by the same company. They either get leave or the contract*

*terminates and they are hired by the same company. Or they are registered for two years with another company that belongs to the same person in Romania.*

Three of my interviewees had long-term agreements with an employer at the moment of the interview (others had previously had similar settlements). Taking into consideration unsuccessful past experiences, they were relatively satisfied with the working conditions and preferred a long-term collaboration as it provided security in an unstable labour market. ‘The company is serious, it pays’, Ionuț, a construction worker who is bound for over four years with the same employer, explains. Even if he is unemployed (or on unpaid leave) for the short periods when the firm has no activity abroad, this practice offers him the certainty that he can have a job (abroad) for more than a few months.

Those in the most precarious situation are workers who are posted with different companies. This category is formed of migrants who either work in Germany only for short periods of time when they want to increase their income in the country of origin or who would prefer long-term employment abroad but who, due to the lack of opportunities, are posted with different companies in Germany or other European countries. Workers in the second group also move between companies because they are looking for better wages and working conditions. I identified 21 workers in this category (I excluded one construction worker and three meat-industry workers who found standard jobs abroad after being posted with one employer). In some cases, workers in this category encounter no serious work-related issues. In other cases, they suffer a number of moderate labour violations. However, some end up in extremely abusive employment relationships and thus perceive themselves to be in a dead-end situation, as Georgeta (a meat-industry worker whose case was previously described) explains in the following quote:

*Working in a meat factory means you don't have a life anymore, you forget yourself, you erase yourself as a person and start thinking you are a slave. You don't do this thing [this type of work] because you like it; you do it because you have to, because otherwise you have no money to go home, you have no money to pay your rent.*

Another case encountered in the field can be described as extremely precarious. A group of five construction workers stopped working as they realised that their employer would not advance payment (also, their contracts were not registered in Romania). They were working for 10 hours a day, they slept in tool containers on the construction site and received a weekly food allowance of 20–50 euros per week. They refer to the interaction with their recruiter in the following terms: ‘He sold us as if we were slaves’ (Doru, construction worker). More workers I interviewed described themselves as *slaves* when thinking about their relation with employers at their most vulnerable times, as they were aware of their lack of negotiation capital and of their work's commodification – which takes them abroad, in extremely precarious circumstances, while their personal lives back home are put on hold. Their experiences – in which emotions are an ‘important element for the control of employability’ – can be described using the concept of affective exhaustion (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006: 2).

With the exception of *de facto* posted workers, most respondents' contracts are effective only as long they are abroad. Following this timeframe, they are either in an idle period, as it is the case for construction workers with long-term agreements, or they have no job arrangements. Posted workers are, hence, on a continuous search for employment and rarely in a position to refuse opportunities, as this might be followed by a period of inactivity (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006). Some of the workers in the most precarious situations have no valid contracts in the country of destination. Others are asked by companies to register as self-employed even if *de facto* they are posted. Workers with no employment arrangements or with inactive ones do not contribute

to social security funds. This has consequences for their immediate situation as well as over their future one – since it will reflect in their pensions.

Precarity also impacts on workers' spare time. As labour was the only reason why they were abroad, most of them were quite willing to work extra hours. Moreover, all my respondents lived in shared accommodation organised by the employers (some residential containers/houses are placed next to the workplace, while others are not). Under these arrangements, workers are always under the direct supervision of their employers – rendering them unable to separate their work and private lives. Moreover, their spatial segregation, as well as the fact that, especially in the construction sector, they move around different geographical locations, has consequences for their willingness and capacity to integrate in the country of destination (Caro *et al.* 2015).

## Conclusions

The literature focusing either generally on the German labour market (King and Rueda 2008) or specifically on the construction and meat-industry sectors (Cremers 2011; Lever and Milbourne 2017; Lillie and Wagner 2015; Mense-Petermann 2018; Wagner and Hassel 2016; Wilpert 1998) argues that state and European Union policies encourage non-standard employment. This has led to the establishment of a secondary labour market (Piore 1979) with insecure jobs, characterised by low remuneration and low social protection and occupied by posted workers (among other categories of non-standard workers). In the German construction sector, around 12.9 per cent<sup>6</sup> of workers are officially posted. In the meat industry, around 70 per cent of the workers hired by the top four meat producers are posted and subcontracted, according to an estimation by NGG – The Food, Beverages and Catering Union (Brümmer 2013, in Wagner and Hassel 2016).

Against this background, several studies illustrate workers' perspectives regarding their precarious conditions abroad (Berntsen 2016; Caro *et al.* 2015; Thörnqvist and Bernhardsson 2015; Wagner 2015). This paper adds to the literature on precarity in posted work. Firstly, it analyses the case of Romanian workers posted in the German construction and meat-industry sectors. Secondly, it explains what causes them to remain in this type of employment. One of the factors is the high wage gap between origin and destination countries. In comparison to low-paid, often insecure jobs in Romania, workers prefer posted employment abroad even if it is connected with precarity and risk. The language barrier is another factor which prevents respondents from finding and carrying out work in a standard setting in Germany. If other studies acknowledge that migrants temporarily accept precarious working conditions in posted work because of a 'life-plan' they would like to fulfil in the country of origin (Thörnqvist and Bernhardsson 2015), this article has shown that some workers prefer long-term employment in Germany and only turn to posted employment when there is a lack of better opportunities.

Finally, I argue that, as a consequence of unlawful practices by companies and of the informal arrangements between them and their employees, workers experience different degrees of precarity in the country of destination. Considering the issue of time (Anderson 2007) – namely the period spent in one particular job – the paper analyses workers' trajectories in order to distinguish between the precarity levels. This shows that workers who gain posted employment with different companies (only for the period of time they are abroad) are in a more precarious situation than *de facto* posted workers and workers who have long-term agreements with the same company. On a global scale, posted workers can be seen as part of the *precariat*, an insecure *class-in-the-making* formed as a result of the changes which globalisation has brought to labour markets (Standing 2011).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Posting of Workers Directive was recently amended by the Directive (EU) 2018/957. Current changes entitle posted workers to the same remuneration rules that apply to domestic workers, to allowances (for costs such as travel) and to negotiations through collective agreements. None of them had been granted while I was carrying out my research. These current changes go a step further in protecting posted workers' rights but they will not have a significant impact as long as they are not accompanied by a better control of the conditions guaranteed by subcontractors and better (transnational) control over law enforcement.

<sup>2</sup> It has different values depending on the region (East vs West).

<sup>3</sup> The minimum monthly wage increased from 232 euros to 276 euros on 1 May 2016.

<sup>4</sup> In Germany, workers' leave entitlements are collected from monthly contributions made by each of their employers to SOKA Bau – The Paritarian Social Funds in the Construction Industry (for each 12 days of labour, workers are entitled to one day of holiday). When they take holidays, their current employer pays their leave and applies for a reimbursement by SOKA the following month.

<sup>5</sup> The full name in English is the Counselling Office for Posted Workers, EU Citizens Exercising the Free Movement of Labour and Self-Employed People with Unclear Labour Status.

<sup>6</sup> In 2014, the total number of posted workers registered with the Paritarian Social Funds SOKA-BAU is 98 214 (SOKA-BAU 2016, <http://tiny.cc/5yxvcz>, accessed: 27 August 2019), while the total number of construction workers employed in Germany is around 757 000 (Statista.com, <https://goo.gl/AAuiNa>, accessed: 27 August 2019).

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— ARTICLES —

# Abuse or Underuse? Polish Migrants' Narratives of (Not) Claiming Social Benefits in the UK in Times of Brexit

Mateus Schweyher\*, Gunhild Odden\*, Kathy Burrell\*\*

*The use of welfare support by EU migrants has dominated media coverage and political debates about EU migration in the UK for several years, regularly featuring claims about the negative effects of the presence of EU migrants on the UK social security system. Such claims became particularly prominent in 2013–2015, during the UK government's campaign to limit EU migrants' access to UK welfare benefits and in debates prior to the Brexit referendum. This article sheds light on how Polish migrants position themselves concerning the claiming of welfare benefits in the UK and how this affects their welfare strategies. The article is based on 14 qualitative interviews conducted in Liverpool 18 months after the Brexit referendum. Using stigma and benefits stigma as an overall theoretical framework, we find that the informants, in their positioning narratives, 1) put forward similar stigmatising expressions and stereotypes regarding the use of welfare as those featured by politicians and the media, which points to perceived abuse; 2) make a distinction between in-work and out-of-work benefits, the first being more acceptable than the second; 3) prefer living on savings or accepting 'any job' over making use of out-of-work benefits, which points to an underuse and/or to possible processes of marginalisation; and 4), a tendency among those who have experience with claiming out-of-work benefits to question the discourses of welfare abuse. Finally, 'working' and 'contributing' to the system as opposed to relying on welfare support is perceived as a precondition to staying in the UK after Brexit – welfare and work are seen to signal very high stakes indeed.*

**Keywords:** Polish migration; Brexit; social benefits; welfare strategies; welfare deservingness

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## Introduction

The use of welfare by EU migrants has dominated media coverage and political debates about EU migration in the UK for several years, regularly featuring claims about the negative effects of the presence of EU migrants on the UK social security system. The UK government has not critically distanced itself from such allegations but has, instead, contributed to the discourse with numerous statements about so-called ‘benefit tourists’ from Central and Eastern Europe, allegedly coming to the UK to exploit the welfare state. This became particularly prominent after the global economic crisis in 2008, when the coalition government adopted an extended series of measures to delimit the access of EU migrants to certain welfare benefits and treated intra-EU migration as a threat to British society. Such rhetoric and policies might have had an important influence on the EU referendum which took place in 2016 in which a slim majority of voters opted to leave the EU. While there is growing evidence of a positive net fiscal contribution by EU migrants (Dustmann and Frattini 2014; MigrationWatch UK 2016; Oxford Economics 2018; Vargas-Silva and Sumption 2019) the UK government has continued to pursue the aim of reducing immigration to Britain via the creation of a ‘hostile environment’ for migrants from both within and outside the EU (Burrell and Schweyher 2019).

This article explores how Polish migrants in the UK position themselves concerning welfare support in times of Brexit and the consequences which this might have for their welfare and labour-market strategies. Some research has already been conducted which accounts for migrants’ own perceptions and conceptualisations of claiming welfare support in the EU migration context (Dench, Gavron and Young 2006; Dwyer 2000; Ehata and Seeleib-Kaiser 2017; Kremer 2016; Osipovič 2010, 2015; Reeskens and van Oorschot 2015; Timonen and Doyle 2009). Regarding the UK context specifically, Osipovič (2015) conducted a pioneering study, based on qualitative interviews between 2007 and 2008, on conceptualisations of welfare and deservingness among Polish EU migrants. Overall, Osipovič’s (2015) findings confirm the major tendencies described in other studies on immigrants’ attitudes towards welfare and work – namely a strong endorsement of work-related conditionality and the principle of earned social rights among immigrants (Dench *et al.* 2006; Dwyer 2000; Kremer 2016) and the attribution of high moral value to paid work, making it a central aspect legitimising immigration (Jordan and Brown 2007; Timonen and Doyle 2009). More recently, Burrell and Schweyher (2019) have explored how recent shifts in the governance of British migration and welfare bordering regimes have affected the everyday lives of Polish migrants. While similar tropes of conditionality were found among our participants, they also found that the consequences of these changes were hugely stratified, having very varied impacts – from negligible to significant – on people, depending on work, general socio-economic security and, in particular, time spent in the UK.

Our contribution here relates to our specific focus on welfare benefits in times of Brexit; it thus enhances the wider debate on migration and welfare in general and adds more understanding to migrants’ perspectives on welfare benefits in times of political uncertainties in particular. The study is based on 14 qualitative interviews conducted with Polish migrants living in Liverpool in the UK in late 2017 and early 2018, around 18 months after the Brexit referendum.

In what follows, we first present the overall context of the study in more detail. We subsequently account for our theoretical and methodological framework before, finally, presenting and discussing Polish migrants’ narratives about claiming social benefits in a context where such claims, among this specific migrant group, are a highly politicised and mediatised social phenomenon.

## Contextual background

### *The EU worker citizen*

The European Union (EU), with its freedom of movement for member-state citizens, is sometimes considered as a test case for the compatibility of free migration and welfare states as it offers its citizens a comparatively generous amount of transnational freedom and protection (Osipovič 2010). According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), EU citizens have the right ‘to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States’ (Article 21) and ‘Everyone residing and moving legally within the European Union is entitled to social security benefits and social advantages in accordance with Union law and national laws and practices’ (Article 34).

As Vink and Baubock (2013: 622) underline, while citizenship arrangements may vary geographically and, here, in terms of scale, the common denominator is essentially a system which is based on a combination of membership as well as ‘a bundle of rights and duties’. It is not surprising that these EU citizenship rights come with clear duties and are subject to far-reaching limitations (Dwyer, Scullion, Jones and Stewart 2019). Directive 2004/38/EC limits the unconditional freedom of movement to only three months (Article 6) and the group of persons who have a *right to reside* in other member-states beyond three months to economically active or self-sufficient persons and dependent family (Article 7). All further EU citizenship rights, such as political rights and the right to social security apply only to those who have a *right to reside*. Thus EU citizenship can be understood as inherently conditional and ‘a highly stratified status built around an exclusive ideal of the citizen as a paid worker, which has led to the creation of inferior social rights for many mobile EU citizens outside the paid labor market’ (Dwyer *et al.* 2019: 135; see also Burrell and Schweyher 2019; Currie 2008; Weiler 1998). Work – meaning relatively well paid, secure work – has become central to how mobile EU citizenship is imagined, constructed and governed.

After EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007 and in the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008, concerns over welfare abuse, benefit tourism and a potential overburdening of national welfare systems became major political topics in many Western European member-states. Governments of countries which received large numbers of EU migrants from the new member-states began to interpret EU laws more restrictively, creating extra hurdles for EU migrants seeking to access welfare services – i.e. through the introduction of new tests and stricter criteria for assessing whether migrants had a *right to reside* (Dwyer *et al.* 2019; O’Brien 2015). Such efforts have been referred to as *welfare bordering regimes* (Burrell and Schweyher 2019; Guentner, Lukes, Stanton, Vollmer and Wilding 2016).

### *EU migration and welfare in the UK*

Until the introduction of the habitual residence test in 1994 there were no specific restrictions against EU migrants seeking to claim income-related benefits in the UK (Cracknell 1995). In the aftermath of the global economic crisis and parallel to austerity measures targeting welfare services in general, the conservative/liberal coalition government adopted an extended series of measures to restrict the access of EU migrants to certain welfare benefits. During the years 2013, 2014 and 2015 the government concretely implemented a total of nine measures to delimit the access of EU migrants to UK welfare benefits (Department for Work and Pensions 2017a). At the time, Prime Minister Cameron (2014) had announced the set of measures as a ‘plan to reduce the magnetic pull of Britain’s benefits system’. Members of the government repeatedly implied that Eastern

European migrants come to the UK to benefit from the welfare system without contributing to it. While Cameron (2014) stated: ‘You cannot expect to come to Britain and get something for nothing’, Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith announced:

*We have taken action to make sure our economy delivers for people who want to work hard, play by the rules and contribute to this country. These reforms will ensure we have a fair system (...) one which provides support for genuine workers and jobseekers, but does not allow people to come to our country and take advantage of our benefits system. The British public are rightly concerned that migrants should contribute to this country, and not be drawn here by the attractiveness of our benefits system* (Department for Work and Pensions 2014a).

It is important to note that these political debates about and policy changes concerning EU migrants did not happen in isolation, as the UK government at the time was implementing wider austerity policies which brought about the ‘deepest and most precipitate cuts ever made in social provision’ (Taylor-Gooby 2013: 8). These reforms were accompanied by a political discourse that emphasised participation in the formal labour market as ‘the hallmark of the dutiful, responsible citizen’ (Patrick 2016: 246) and stereotyped benefits claimants as a ‘parasitical drain on resources’ (Jensen and Tyler 2015: 480), reinforcing the ideological divide between working populations considered deserving and non-working, thus undeserving, people who are blamed for both their own situation and for diminishing social resources (Jensen and Tyler 2015).

Finally, there has been a shift towards negative representations of the welfare state and welfare users beyond policy and political debates. In a detailed quantitative analysis of the media coverage of social benefits users in UK newspapers between 1995 and 2011, Baumberg, Bell and Gaffney (2012: 7) found that press stories are ‘skewed towards negative representations’ and that articles are ‘considerably more likely to refer to characteristics associated with “undeservingness” such as dishonesty or failing to demonstrate reciprocity than “deservingness” in the form of need or disability’. Furthermore, the study confirmed that the coverage of benefits focuses disproportionately on benefit fraud, compared to actual incidents. According to the findings, there was a period of intense negative media coverage of benefits at the end of the 1990, a phase of very low negative coverage of benefits from 2000 until 2007 and a renewed strong increase of negative coverage in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. Interestingly, the study found that the language as well as the content of the negative coverage of benefits have substantially changed in the aftermath of 2008. The authors argue that benefits fraud has been a very important topic in both ‘waves’ of negative coverage. However, the post-2008 wave focused much more on deservingness and an alleged ‘lack of reciprocity and effort on the part of claimants’ (Baumberg *et al.* 2012: 8). With their research they thus confirmed, in quantitative terms, the rise of the ‘scrounger narrative’ in the UK media.

Even though recent policy changes and political rhetoric in the UK appear to have reached a new level of hostility towards benefit claimants in general and towards migrant welfare users in particular, as discussed, efforts to delimit the access of EU migrants to the UK welfare system and accompanying anti-immigrant rhetoric are not new. Earlier administrations also made attempts in this direction – for example, the conservative government under John Major introduced the abovementioned habitual residence test in 1994 in order to prevent ‘benefit tourism’ from continental Europe; political debates at the time also strikingly resemble the discourses surrounding the reforms of 2013–2015 (Cracknell 1995).

Nevertheless the situation of EU migrants in the UK at the time of our interviews was arguably very different from that of EU migrants during earlier decades, not only because of the implemented policy changes between 2013 and 2015 but also, even more, because of the result of the Brexit referendum. In June 2016, about 18 months before our research took place, a slight majority had voted that the UK should leave the

European Union and its legal framework, which obliges the country to participate in the free-movement agreement. This vote had profound implications for what new EU migrants can expect in the future regarding social rights, as they will lose the (remaining) privileges and protections conveyed through EU citizenship once the UK exits the EU.

As indicated, we focus here directly on Polish migration. The EU enlargement in 2004 led to a large increase of Polish migrants to the UK (Burrell 2009). While there were 94 000 Polish-born persons residing in the country in 2004, the number had increased to 922 000 by 2017. This number decreased, however, to 832 000 in 2018. It is reasonable to believe that this decrease was linked to the Brexit referendum. Despite this, Polish-born persons continue to be the largest migrant group in the UK, as they have been since 2015 (Office of National Statistics 2019). Polish migrants in the UK represent a highly heterogeneous population in terms of age, education, family situation and migration motivations and strategies (Drinkwater and Garapich 2015; Eade 2007; Favell 2008; Osipovič 2015; White 2017). Poles work in a wide range of sectors in the UK and find themselves in various working situations – from secure and well-paid professional work to unstable, precarious employment through work agencies (Burrell 2010; Sporton 2013). As the Brexit referendum revealed, there have been tensions in the UK about the scale of migration following EU enlargement. While the referendum Leave campaign depicted EU citizens as ‘scroungers’, as has been discussed, this followed a longer-established racialisation of Eastern European migration (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012), especially in the press. Therefore, while hundreds of thousands of Poles have made a home in the UK, many have been vulnerable to racist encounters, both before and since the Brexit vote (Rzepnikowska 2019).

### Migration, welfare and stigmatisation

In the academic literature, the migration–welfare nexus is sometimes referred to as the migration–welfare state paradox (Bommes and Geddes 2000; Carmel, Cerami and Papadopoulos 2012; Koning 2013). Some scholars have argued that freedom-of-movement regimes and the welfare state are at odds, with immigration at risk of overburdening the welfare system (Borjas 1999; Razin, Sadka and Suwankiri 2011). It has been asserted that social solidarity and support for the welfare state are built on a feeling of national identity and solidarity. In these accounts, it is suggested that the presence of foreigners undermines and decreases these feelings and therefore leads to reduced support for redistribution (Freeman 1986; Goodhart 2013; Miller 2006, 2008; Putnam 2007). It is important to assert, though, that the vast majority of empirical evidence does not reveal a link between increased immigration and decreasing welfare-state support (Burgoon, Koster and van Egmond 2012; Mau and Burckhardt 2009; Senik, Stichnoth and van der Straeten 2009; Taylor-Gooby 2005; van Oorschot 2008; van Oorschot and Uunk 2007). What these arguments do reveal, though, is how contested this topic continues to be.

As already suggested, much of this debate crystallises around the notion of welfare deservingness – the question of ‘who should get what and why?’ (van Oorschot 2000). Van Oorschot’s (2000) CARIN criterion identifies the following five dimensions regarding people’s preferences for supporting specific groups: *control* (poor people’s control or responsibility for their neediness), *attitude* (docility or gratefulness for support), *reciprocity* (past or possible future contribution to the welfare system), *identity* (social distance between the target group and the general public) and *need* (level of neediness). Existing studies suggest that migrants are often viewed as the least deserving of welfare support compared to older people, people with disabilities and the unemployed (van Oorschot 2008) and that a large majority of the general public in European countries is in favour of restrictions in access to welfare support for immigrants – i.e. making it conditional upon prior contributions to the welfare system or having acquired formal citizenship of the host country (Reeskens and van Oorschot 2012, 2013). As narratives of deservingness around immigration harden, the process of applying



for and receiving social welfare in turn becomes more vulnerable to stigmatisation (Baumberg 2016; Baumberg *et al.* 2012; Hernanz, Malherbet and Pellizzari 2004). For Baumberg *et al.* (2012: 3), claiming social benefits becomes something which ‘is seen to be embarrassing or shameful and to lead to a lower social status’.

Goffman (1963: 3), in his seminal work, defines stigma as an ‘attribute that is deeply discrediting’ but notes that an attribute is ‘neither creditable nor dis-creditable as a thing in itself’. Stigma comes from normative expectations towards particular individuals or groups and from what is considered appropriate or inappropriate, problematic or unproblematic, for this individual or group in a specific context. Stigmatising can thus be seen as the process of discrediting and rejecting a person or identity due to an attribute that is considered problematic or wrong in a certain context. The victims or targets of stigmatisation may identify with and accept the stigma and share the negative attitude towards the attribute or they can reject a stigmatised identity and contest stigmatisation. Nevertheless stigmatisation often has profound effects on the victim’s life and identity (Goffman 1963; Major and O’Brien 2005), and can lead to multifaceted consequences.

Benefit stigma, for example, has been identified as a key factor contributing to the non-take-up of social benefits – not taking up that to which you are legally entitled (Daigneault, Jacob and Tereraho 2012; Finn and Goodship 2014; van Oorschot 1991: 16). It represents ‘ineffectiveness and injustice in the implementation of a social security scheme’ on the part of the state and is ‘one of the factors responsible for people experiencing poverty’ (van Oorschot 1991: 16). Baumberg *et al.* (2012), exploring quantitative data on the long-term trends of benefit stigma and take-up rates in the UK, found that non-take-up and benefit stigma have risen concurrently. Research conducted by Baker (2010) suggests that benefit stigma is particularly strong and take up low in groups that cultivate a strong work ethic and regard for self-reliance and responsibility. Non-take-up can be attributed in some groups to the perception that one is not truly in need of public support, combined with pride in being self-reliant (Baumberg *et al.* 2012; Currie 2004; Whelan 2010). In some cultural contexts, benefits recipients are suspected of not ‘pulling their weight’ (Finn and Goodship 2014: 34). Claiming certain (means-tested) social benefits may be perceived as typical of ‘residual groups’ (Mood 2006: 447) including ethnic minorities, single parents and groups with so-called ‘social problems’. Some people who are entitled to social benefits might prefer not to claim these as they do not want to be associated with these groups. As we show later, these ideas and tropes all resonate with our Polish participants.

## **Methods and background context**

Our study is based on 14 qualitative interviews with Polish migrants residing in Liverpool in the UK. The interviews were conducted between October 2017 and February 2018. To ensure a diverse sample, the informants were recruited via different entry points, such as meetings of a Polish association and Polish events in Liverpool, Polish shops, a Polish Catholic church, a shelter for homeless people, encounters in public places, the personal networks of the researchers and snowballing. The final group of respondents consisted of migrants from different age groups, socio-economic backgrounds and education levels, in various family situations and various types of work, ranging from occasional, precarious work through work agencies to stable and permanent professional employment in different sectors. The participants all arrived in the UK between 2004 and 2016 and had come with diverse migration motivations. Some also had prior migration experience to other countries. During the interviews, the informants were invited to ‘tell their story’. A semi-structured interview guide was nevertheless used to make sure that all the themes relevant for the overall project were covered.<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted in Polish and transcribed and translated into English by one of the authors, before being thematically coded and analysed.

Using this approach enabled us to explore and analyse how Polish migrants position themselves on claiming social benefits in an interview setting, drawing on positioning theory (Davies and Harré 1990; Day and Kjaerbeck 2013; Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Rothbart and Sabat 2009) as a theoretical point of departure. According to this literature, individuals – consciously or unconsciously – construct identity-based narratives to make sense of and legitimise their own and others’ lives. For further methodological clarity, when we use the term narrative, we refer both to stories (for instance, an individual’s life story) and discourses (for instance, how specific aspects of a life story are talked about).

The informants have been given fictive names in the article. Furthermore, variables such as university degrees, specific working conditions, length of residence, and age are made relatively general in cases where it is assumed that these alone or together are so specific that the information can be relatively easily traced back to the informant.

For this article, we have analysed our informants’ narratives on the following five benefits: Child Benefit (CB), Working Tax Credit (WTC), Housing Benefit (HB), Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). These benefits, summarized in table 1, were selected as they were recurrently mentioned in the interviews. They were also among the most commonly claimed benefits in the UK.<sup>2</sup> Social benefits in the country at the time could be distinguished according to various characteristics. Some benefits could be described as *in-work benefits*, as they were a financial support for households or individuals with a low income but with at least one household member working (defined as working a minimum, usually, of 30 hours per week). WTC fell into this category. Other benefits could be described as *out-of-work* benefits, designed for households or individuals who are out of work (defined as working fewer than 16 hours per week). The JSA and ESA were examples of this category. There were also a number of benefits which could be claimed by people both in and out of work. In our study this applied to CB and HB. Benefits could also be distinguished by whether claimants were required to undergo a means test (disclosing private information on savings and income to the authorities) or not. Among the benefits considered in our study, only CB does not require a means test, since it is granted to parents regardless of their income or savings.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, two forms of JSA and ESA existed at the time of the interviews – a contribution-based and an income-related version. Contribution-based JSA and ESA were calculated according to the national insurance contributions paid previously by the claimant and were not means-tested. The income-related version of these benefits was for individuals who had previously paid no or few national insurance contributions and thus qualified for no or very small amounts of contribution-based benefits. The income-related form of the benefits was means-tested, with any household income and savings being assessed. In this article, we focus exclusively on the income-related form of the JSA and ESA, since none of our informants had claimed or explicitly referred to the contribution-based form of these benefits.

**Table 1. Selected social benefits in the UK**

Benefit	Child Benefit	Working Tax Credit	Housing Benefit	Job-Seeker Allowance (income based)	Employment and Support Allowance (income based)
<b>Target group</b>	parents with children below the age of 16 years	working individuals on a low income	individuals who are unemployed, on a low income or claiming benefits	individuals who are unemployed and actively seeking work	individuals who are unable or limited to work because of long term medical conditions or disability
<b>Eligible work status</b>	<b>in-work and out of work</b>	<b>in-work</b>	<b>in-work and out of work</b>	<b>out-of-work</b>	<b>out-of-work</b>
<b>Income and savings</b>	not means-tested	means-tested	means-tested	means-tested	means-tested

**Table 2. Informants**

Informant	Gender	Age	Education	Year of arrival	Employment status	Marital status	Dependent children	Use of welfare benefits
Patrycja	female	37	vocational	2007	full time, permanent contract, history of agency work and registered unemployment	separated	1	CB, history of JSA
Grzegorz	male	47	secondary	2016	full time, temporary contract, history of agency work	separated	1	CB and WTC potentially eligible for HB
Joanna	female	28	higher	2016	part time agency work	married	0	non, potentially eligible for JSA and HB
Arkadiusz	male	59	higher	2015	occasional agency work, history of registered and unregistered unemployment	divorced	0	ESA and HB, history of JSA
Martyna	female	31	higher	2015	unpaid maternity leave	married	1	CB, potentially eligible for JSA and HB
Aleksandra	female	40	higher	2008	part time self-employed	married	2	CB, history of WTC and HB
Wiktoria	female	30	higher	2015	part time agency work	married	1	CB, potentially eligible for JSA and HB
Ewa	female	45	higher	2012	full time, permanent contract	single	0	non
Łukasz	male	30	higher	2012	self-employed	single	0	non, potentially eligible for JSA and HB
Mariusz	male	47	secondary	2005	occasional agency work, history of agency work	single	0	WTC, potentially JSA and HB
Tomasz	male	40	vocational	2005	occasional agency work, history of unregistered unemployment	divorced	0	non, potentially eligible for JSA and HB
Rafał	male	31	vocational	2013	full time permanent contract, history of agency work	divorced	1	non
Piotr	male	50	vocational	2004	full time permanent contract, history of agency work	married	1	CB, history of WTC
Agnieszka	female	30	higher	2007	full time permanent contract, history of agency work	single	0	non

As our literature review indicated, EU citizens were experiencing a changed position *vis-à-vis* UK benefits at the time of our interviews. Numerous restrictions and special tests had recently been introduced for EU migrants claiming social welfare benefits in the UK. Before 2014, EU migrants only needed to pass the Habitual Residence Test in the UK in order to claim child benefit and income-based JSA. Since 2014, EU migrants can claim these benefits only after having rightfully resided in the country for at least three months. EU migrants who reside in the UK as jobseekers can only claim income-based JSA for three months. Those who retain the status of worker but who have worked for less than a year in the UK can claim the income-based

JSA for up to 91 days. If these migrants have a ‘genuine prospect of finding work’ this period can be extended. EU migrants can claim HB if they have passed the Habitual Residence Test in the UK. However, since 2014, EU migrants who have the right to reside in the UK derived from a status as a jobseeker have been barred from claiming HB (Department for Work and Pensions 2017a; O’Brien 2015).

Table 2 provides an overview of the informants and what benefits they had claimed in the UK. The table also indicates whether some informants were potentially eligible for certain benefits but had not claimed them. ‘Potentially eligible’ here means that, based on the information given to us during the interview, the informant is or was at some point in time probably eligible for a particular benefit but had not asked for it.

We now turn to focus on the testimonies of these participants. While this is a relatively limited sample, our aim here is not to produce results which can be generalised. Instead, we are interested in exploring what claiming benefits means to our participants and what this tells us about contemporary regimes of work, welfare and migration in the UK.

### **Talking about benefits: welfare, deservingness and stigma**

#### *Differentiated perceptions of in-work and out-of-work benefits*

In our interviews we asked directly about different social benefits and people’s experiences of them. Firstly, we found that the various benefits were perceived differently by our participants, with some carrying stigma but others not. Claiming child benefit was, for instance, universally seen as legitimate – not necessary something which could differentiate in terms of identity (see van Oorschot 2000). Informants said that families ‘deserved’ this support and did not question their right as immigrants to this benefit but, rather, pointed out that ‘every family in the UK’ is entitled to it. Three of our informants had dependent children living with their partner (or ex-partner) in Poland. Two of these had claimed child benefit for their children and shared the view that, as they were still providing for their children while they were resident and working in the UK, they deserved this support and saw it as uncontroversial.

Similar views were held about claiming benefits that are meant to support low-income households where at least one family member is working – benefits such as working tax credit or housing benefit. Several of our informants had claimed them and did not express any related feelings of stigma. As Grzegorz told us: ‘I got the [working] tax credit. (...) I got the child benefit, and now I am thinking whether I should soon apply for something else, for example housing benefit. Because these possibilities exist here. In Poland there are no such thing’. Grzegorz’s somewhat positive attitude towards CB, WTC and HB as in-work benefits was, nevertheless, in stark contrast to his opinion about claiming out-of-work benefits such as JSA or ESA:

*Some people abuse the system. (...) There are these Poles, these people, (...) bad people, both Polish people as well as other kinds of people, other immigrants. Because some did not come here to work. They came here to (...) live on benefits, at the expense of the government. (...) Those who don’t want to work, who have the possibility to work but don’t work or who trick the state, there are these people. And there are many Poles who act like that.*

Often just the very formulation of the way in which informants responded to the question of whether they had ever made use of welfare benefits revealed a clear distinction between in-work and out-of-work benefits. Aleksandra for example said:

*We have child benefit (...) and we had working tax credit. Some time at the beginning, when we didn't have our own house, we also had housing benefit. But (...) we never lived on benefits (...) we didn't live only on benefits.*

The formulation 'living on benefits', carrying clearly negative connotations, was used by several of our informants when they spoke of people who were receiving out-of-work benefits; the more benign phrasing of 'receiving' or 'getting benefits' was used to speak about people who claimed in-work benefits. Thus a clear distinction was made between people who were receiving welfare benefits but did not work and those who did work and still received benefits. In fact, several of our informants spoke of people who relied on out-of-work benefits as 'welfare abusers'; in their narratives, they distanced themselves explicitly from this stereotype. The first reaction of many when asked about the use of welfare benefits was to clarify that they had never made use of out-of-work benefits. For example, Piotr who, at a later stage of the interview, told us that he had received child benefits and working tax credit in the UK, initially reacted with the following statement when the topic of benefits was brought up: 'I've been here for these 15 or 16 years (...) and I have not claimed any benefit or unemployment days. Nothing'. The use of the term 'welfare abusers' was linked to expressed doubts that those who were claiming JSA were really unable to find work because, in the informants' own experience, there was 'enough work in Liverpool'. Thus, some suspected that people who claimed JSA simply 'did not want to work'.

While a small number of informants suspected other Poles of abusing the UK welfare system, more voiced doubts about this stereotype and argued, perpetuating a different trope in so doing, that 'most Poles are hardworking'. Deservingness, then, was a fine-grained aspect of the narrative of benefit claiming, closely linked to working status (Patrick 2016: 246). It was also used to distance Poles, as a group, from others deemed to have less integrity (Mood 2006). As Joanna said:

*There are many people who came here and claimed social benefits without any justified reason. For example, there are Arab families where the man has three wives, ten kids and he receives social benefits. They stay home and it is OK and he drives the latest model of a car.*

In most cases, our informants had not witnessed this first-hand but, reinforcing arguments about stigma and benefits, referred either to cases of welfare abuse which they had heard about in the media or to personal impressions based on observation of, for instance, neighbours and on stories told by friends (Baumberg *et al.* 2012).

*'For me, it is humiliating': not taking up benefits*

About one third of our informants told us that they think they had probably been entitled to out-of-work benefits during their stay in the UK but had not made use of them. All these informants, in their discourses, expressed doubts regarding the actual needs of those who ask for these benefits (van Oorshot 2000). Joanna is one of these informants. She was unemployed for quite some time and had been living off savings and occasional agency work. She was certain that she would have qualified for out-of-work benefits but, as long as she felt she was able to get by relying on other sources, she preferred not to make use of this type of support, even if it meant working in very unstable conditions and doing hard physical work in a warehouse:

**Interviewer:** *When you didn't have a job, did you ask for benefits or something?*

**Joanna:** *We don't take any benefits.*

**Interviewer:** Why not?

**Joanna:** *I don't want it. I don't need it. For me, it is humiliating. I don't know, I don't want to. I know I could apply. I could get them. But I know that I can work as well. I don't want to have this feeling that I am here for benefits. If I have a difficult situation in which I really need them then of course I will apply for some help but right now I don't need it. I don't take any benefits.*

Mariusz was living in a shelter for homeless people at the time of the interview. Despite being in a rather difficult financial situation (he could not afford to rent a room or apartment at the time), he had never attempted to apply for out-of-work benefits. Not only did he think he did not need to but he also felt it was too much work to comply with all the procedures that a jobseeker must undergo in the UK:

**Mariusz:** *I never had the status of a jobseeker throughout these 12 years.*

**Interviewer:** *If you had wanted to, could you have applied for jobseeker support?*

**Mariusz:** *(...) Earlier, yes, certainly I could have applied (...)*

**Interviewer:** *And why did you not do it?*

**Mariusz:** *I did not need it. I never needed it because there was always some sort of work. You could always go somewhere and earn a bit. You know, this benefit is very little, (...) it is £70 or £80 per week. And it is a lot of work, a lot of procedures. And then you have to go there every week with this booklet... for me that did not make sense. (...) No, I never took anything. And my friends as well... (...) I cannot remember anyone making use of jobseeker benefits at all. No one was making use of them.*

Martyna, who was staying home and taking care of her child while her husband was working as a self-employed truck driver, told us that, during the winter months, there was sometimes very little work for her husband so they had to get by on a very low or no income and live on their savings. However, they did not want to apply for any benefits apart from child benefit:

**Interviewer:** *Are you getting any benefits from the government?*

**Martyna:** *No, I didn't apply for any money.*

**Interviewer:** *Could you? Do you know if you would be entitled to something?*

**Martyna:** *I don't know if I could. (...) Because obviously you have to document everything then, they can come here and check everything. My husband has a company, and he doesn't want any troubles... (...) Later everyone can check on me, what I did with it... And if, God forbid, I fill in something wrong, I don't know, something happens, and then I have to return it, right? And where do I take that from then?*

Martyna's longer explanation also showed that her knowledge of welfare benefits in the UK and her entitlements was rather limited. She was also worried that the government could ask them to return money, having heard about cases where people who had received benefits had to repay them. Another important theme in Martyna's explanation was an uneasiness about the various checks and controls she might encounter, a sign of the intensifying welfare bordering regime (see also Burrell and Schweyher 2019). Martyna later added to her explanation:

*So, we have only this one benefit (child benefit) and I am not trying to get more. I don't want that. (...) It's enough for us, what we have. I don't want more. And later, everywhere, they are saying that Poles are coming for the benefits. As long as I am able to earn something or you know, maybe renounce buying myself*

*something... instead of going there and begging, after all it is a kind of begging. If I have something to eat, something to wear, and somewhere to live...*

Again, we see the distinction between the different benefits: CB is seen as unproblematic while others are not. Just like Joanna, Martyna perceives receiving out-of-work benefits as humiliating, comparing it to begging. Furthermore, she makes it clear that she is aware of the ongoing discourse and stereotypes that exist about welfare use among immigrants and does not want to be associated with this kind of discrediting. Just like Joanna, she also mentions that she is not in need of this support, that they are able to get by with other means. Finally, Martyna also uses the formulation ‘I am not trying to get more’ and ‘I don’t want more’, which is probably a reference to the stereotype that Poles are doing *kombinowac*, literally meaning ‘combine’, which is a term used by many of our informants and synonymous with ‘getting the most out of something’ and ‘tricking to get benefits’.

Wiktorina is another informant who had apparently not claimed benefits even though she was possibly entitled to them. She shared a positive attitude towards claiming child benefits while pointing out that she did not want to be dependent on the state when asked why she was not claiming other support:

*I have a small child, I’m pregnant; we could get housing benefit. But this is not the point, because I want to decide where I want to live and not have someone else decide for me, I don’t want to be dependent. We only get this child benefit, which everyone is entitled to...*

It appears that all of our informants were clear that they did not want to become dependent on welfare benefits, playing up their self-reliance (Baker 2010; Currie 2004; Finn and Goodship 2014; Whelan 2010). To avoid claiming out-of-work benefits, our informants were trying to get by with savings during the time when no work was available to them. Alternatively they could rely on the support of family members or friends – living temporarily with parents or sharing a room with friends. However, the single most important strategy for avoiding welfare dependency was to accept any kind of job that was available. No matter how badly paid and how physically demanding, no matter what kind of flexibility the work demanded and whether or not it was completely unrelated to the person’s education or career aspirations, any job was seen as much more preferable than being officially unemployed – a strategy that takes on so much risk individually that it inevitably has the potential to create new vulnerabilities on the working body (Burrell and Schweyher 2019; Dwyer 2000).

#### *Experiences of the use of out-of-work benefits*

In the conversations with those who had, at some point during their stay, relied on out-of-work benefits or who were currently receiving such support, the views were more differentiated. Informants who had or were claiming out-of-work benefits rejected the idea that people who were claiming them did not want to work. They were sure that no one, at least none of their acquaintances, would voluntarily rely only on welfare benefits. They also rejected the idea that it was possible or easy to trick the government and get benefits to which one was not entitled. Arkadiusz, who received various benefits due to his health condition, told us:

*You know what, from what I know, maybe I don’t know everything, but from what I know, there is not really a way to abuse the system. Because what can you get by tricking the system? You can... If you are not entitled to a benefit you will also not get it by trickery. Right? And these benefits have also been severely cut. I heard that five years ago you could get a lot of benefits... maybe these are just fairytales. In my experience what you get is not much. I experienced it myself – it isn’t like that at all. I have never planned*

*to live on benefits. That I am currently partly making use of them is a fact. But I never had any intention of abusing the system.*

A certain sense of guilt or shame or a need for clarification was nevertheless palpable. Throughout the interview he repeated several times that he had ‘never intended to live on benefits’ and that he was retraining in order to be able to start work in a job that was doable with his condition as soon as possible – again perpetuating work-orientated values and conditionality (Dwyer 2000; Kremer 2016):

*I got the Personal Independence Allowance,<sup>4</sup> which is apparently very difficult to get. But I got it. And I got it honestly. There are clear criteria for that. You know, I got a point for this and a point for that etc. etc. So, not that you could see it this way or that way, but because I fulfilled all their criteria.*

Patrycja, a single mother who had been laid off by her employer and was unable to find a job that she could combine with raising her child on her own, felt she had been left with no choice other than to claim JSA for several months. For her this was a shameful experience and, when talking about it retrospectively, she said that she did not even tell her family back in Poland:

*I probably didn't tell my mum about all this. My mum probably didn't know that I was out of work. I have the impression that I did not admit that to my mum. I told her about everything when it was over. I am sure that I didn't mention it to her; my mum thought that I was working. (...) All the time I was searching for work and it made me more and more and more depressed. (...) I would have done any work, you know.*

#### *Brexit and the use of welfare benefits*

These discussions were also significant for our participants' feelings about Brexit. Comments about Brexit and reflections about what rights they might have to stay in the UK once it has left the EU, revealed that there was a widespread sense that being in work and paying taxes is an essential precondition to being allowed to stay and avoid being ‘kicked out’ (informants' wording) of the country in the future. Wiktoria's reflections about the future after Brexit illustrate this sense well:

*We have had a job from the very beginning, we never used social benefits, if it changes anything... (...) I assume that nothing is going to change too much; probably they won't chase us out, because first they would have to do it with those who have never worked.*

Like Wiktoria, Mariusz also made the implicit assumption that not having claimed any out-of-work benefits or used any other welfare services may protect him against losing his right to stay in the UK after Brexit:

*You know, because now the situation is somewhat uncertain when it comes to Brexit. I don't know how it will be. I don't know if there will be some big difficulties, you know... I never made use of jobseekers' allowance nor of the hospital or of any other such things. But maybe they will push all this through...*

While there was a strongly felt uncertainty about their future status among the interviewees, virtually none of them appeared too worried about their own situation. Like others we interviewed, Arkadiusz was assuming that ‘[T]hose who do not have work and the homeless, they have to fear Brexit... and those who have a criminal record or who commit any crime. Those are the people who will be taken out, who are first in line’. Despite



getting ESA at the time of the interview, Arkadiusz was not scared of Brexit, since he was sure he would be able to secure a job in the future:

*I don't have anything to fear. (...) Why should anyone want to kick me out? If I planned to live on unemployment benefits, maybe yes, but you know, that's not what I am aiming at. I want to pay [taxes].*

Even though, in another part of the interview (see above), he expressed strong doubts about the concept that immigrants abuse the welfare state, he told us that he believed that immigrants who 'do not integrate, who don't work, who abuse society (...) [will] have to fear for themselves' after Brexit.

As can be seen in these extracts, the rhetoric surrounding conditionality can appear quite extreme. Criminal behaviour and worklessness or a reliance on welfare benefits were mentioned together as probable grounds for the loss of the right to stay in the UK. Grzegorz went a step further by making explicit connections between criminal behaviour and the unemployed population and by expressing support for a Brexit that would result in the latter losing their right to live in the UK:

*They have to clean up, I don't know how to say it, a certain kind of scum that exists here, scum in the sense of bad people – both Polish people as well as other kinds of people, other immigrants. Because some did not come here to work. They came here to either steal something or to pull off something, to do some illegal business, to give someone a shot or most often just to live off benefits at the expense of the government. I think that they should, for example, reveal those, let's say, who were already convicted in their countries – for example, for any kind of crime. And those who don't want to work, who have the possibility to work but don't work or who use trickery, there are these people.*

This example of the stark conflation of criminals and people out of work and the approval of punishment of these groups echoes policy and media discourses in which being out of work has come to be seen as something akin to criminal behaviour (Jensen and Tyler 2015).

Thus the uncertainty around Brexit has created additional wariness, confusion and hesitation on the part of many informants when it comes to accessing benefits; it appears that many now believe that claiming certain benefits might have a negative effect on the claimant's future right to stay in the country. This is certainly a worrisome trend because it is probably an additional factor contributing to the non-take-up of benefits, with all the negative consequences this can have. The ideology of the working and contributing citizen, which has always been part of how free movement in Europe is organised, appears then to have become even more radical in the UK with the prospect of Brexit. Polish migrants are feeling and expressing this when they perceive social benefits not as an EU citizenship right but as something that might ultimately cause more problems than it fixes, as they worry that it may lead to the loss of their right to stay after the UK has left the EU.

## **Further discussion**

### *Similarity in discourses*

Our informants' narratives regarding the use of welfare benefits in general and that by EU migrants in the UK in particular, to a large extent display similarities with prevailing media and political discourses and it is tempting to see a link, or even a causal relationship, between the two. These discourses have had far-reaching effects. However, it should also be noted that negative discourses and stereotypes about welfare claimants are not unique to the UK and may be informed by discourses prevailing in other places and media – i.e. in Poland.

Poles have often been described as people with a strong work ethic and our interviews contained much evidence that our informants considered this a major aspect of their identity. In a comparative analysis of interviews conducted in the UK, Sweden and Norway, we could nevertheless observe that, in Sweden and Norway, where the government and the media did not question EU migrants' use of welfare benefits to the same extent as they do in the UK, our informants did not appear to suspect other EU migrants of abusing welfare benefits in the same way and attitudes towards claiming out-of-work benefits were much more positive.

### *Delegating stigma*

Many of the interviews contained concerted discussions of perceived welfare abuse, sometimes among other Poles, sometimes among Brits and sometimes among other migrant groups. While our informants wished to distance themselves from any alleged welfare abuse by highlighting that they had never claimed certain benefits or had nothing in common with those who do, many agreed that benefit abuse was a real issue among certain populations – simultaneously forging a shared identity and creating work- and welfare-based others (Mood 2006; van Oorschot 2000). Informants expressed doubts about the deservingness of various groups who were perceived as not making enough effort to find work, thus 'delegating' the stigma of being an alleged welfare abuser to others (Patrick 2016). Similar behaviour has been documented in a study among British welfare users where the most notable strategy of managing benefit stigma was the 'othering' of other benefit claimants as less deserving. Such redirecting of stigma can be understood as a 'defensive form of citizenship engagement' (Patrick 2016: 245).

### *Distinction between in-work and out-of-work benefits*

One of the most notable features of our informants' accounts was the distinction between different types of welfare benefits and the differentiated perceptions about claiming them. Recipients of out-of-work benefits were often perceived as not making sufficient effort to contribute. Informants repeatedly implied that only someone who works and contributes to society in general and the welfare state in particular through taxes deserves support. On the other hand, welfare benefits such as CB, HB and WTC that were addressing working households were seen as less problematic. Work clearly appears to have a *symbolic meaning* here (see Dwyer 2000; Jordan and Brown 2007; Kremer 2016; Timonen and Doyle 2009).

Interestingly, figures released by the Department for Work and Pensions (2017a) about benefit claims among EU nationals in the UK appear to confirm how 'unpopular' out-of-work benefits have become and that increasing numbers of these migrants now rely on other forms of support – namely in-work benefits. The report shows that the total number of out-of-work benefit claims made by EU migrants in the UK has gone dramatically down in recent years. The number of new JSA claims fell 47 per cent within three years (2013–2016) and the caseload of EU migrants claiming the benefit decreased 76 per cent. Overall, the expenditure on out-of-work benefits for EU migrants fell from £844 million in 2013/14 to £613 million in 2015/16 despite increasing total numbers of EU migrants residing in the country. The Department for Work and Pensions suggests that newly introduced measures to limit the access of EU nationals to out-of-work benefits may have played a role as may have done an overall decline in unemployment in the UK. However, in the same period, claims for in-work benefits increased significantly, with those paid to European Economic Area nationals rising from £799 million in 2013/14 to £999 million in 2015/16.

Furthermore, the statistics show that out-of-work benefit payments to EU nationals accounted for only 2.5 per cent of the total out-of-work benefit payments in the UK. For in-work benefits this figure was significantly higher – 18 per cent of total expenditure. The total number of claims and the total expenditure for this type of

benefit are higher than for out-of-work benefits. This finding chimes well with the way our informants perceived these benefits.

### *Underuse of welfare?*

The observed reluctance among some of our informants to claim out-of-work benefits in the UK points to the potential *underuse* of these welfare benefits among EU migrants. Several of our informants were potentially eligible to receive welfare benefits but did not make a claim, a phenomenon we have referred to as the *non-take-up of social benefits* (van Oorschot 1991). Our informants also showed a lack of understanding of the UK benefits system. To a certain extent, the lack of understanding of entitlements can be attributed to the complexity of rules and entitlement criteria as well as poor-quality information about available benefits and poor communication between benefit administrators and EU migrants. Furthermore, EU migrants can face additional barriers to making a benefit claim due to their limited command of the English language. However, we also observed a lack of interest or an aversion to seeking information on the part of the informants. This lack of interest in certain welfare benefits might be the result of incorrect assumptions – for example, about eligibility criteria, stereotypes held by individuals about other benefit claimants and fears of being exposed to extensive controls or having to repay benefits. Nevertheless, there also appears to be a high level of stigma associated with benefit claiming in the UK in general and among migrants – and EU migrants in particular. Our informants explained that they did not want to claim certain welfare benefits because they were concerned about being associated with a stigmatised group. This might discourage particularly vulnerable EU migrants from finding out whether or not they are entitled to make use of certain benefits. The hostile climate towards migrant benefit-seekers in the media and political debates in the UK, particularly the aforementioned claims by the UK government and various UK media of welfare abuse among EU migrants have almost certainly contributed to the negative perceptions held by many of our informants about benefit claiming and can thus be seen as one of the potential reasons why our informants chose to not claim out-of-work benefits in the UK.

The UK government regularly publishes estimates of the take-up of social benefits in the UK (Department for Work and Pensions 2017b; HM Revenue and Customs 2017). Nevertheless, these statistics contain no information about the nationality or migration background of claimants. Thus, no official data estimate of take-up rates among different national groups in the UK has been published. However, these statistics show that the overall take-up rate of the Jobseeker Allowance has decreased dramatically from 69 per cent in 2009/10 to 56 per cent in 2015/16 while the take-up of Working Tax Credit increased from 61 per cent in 2009/10 to 68 per cent in 2013/14 and then decreased again to 63 per cent in 2015/16. Since no data on take-up rates by nationality or migration background are available, we can only speculate on the extent to which the overall trends apply to the Polish population. However, both the qualitative data from our interviews and the statistical data, mentioned above, on the number of claims for and total expenditure on social benefits for EU migrants strongly suggest a similar picture – although probably more pronounced – when it comes to the take-up of benefits by EU migrants.

### **Conclusion**

In this article we have shed light on how Polish migrants position themselves on the topic of welfare benefits in the UK and how this affects their welfare strategies. Firstly, we found striking similarities between our informants' discourses on the use of welfare benefits and those featured by politicians and some of the media. While many informants contested the idea of the 'Polish welfare abuser' by highlighting that 'most Poles do

work hard', several of them *perceived abuse* and made stigmatising assumptions about welfare users, including 'some Poles', 'other immigrants' and 'some Brits', thus 'delegating' stigma to others (Patrick 2016).

Furthermore we found differentiated perceptions of in-work and out-of-work benefits, the first being more accepted than the second. It thus appears that being in or out of work has very strong symbolic meaning and that the deservingness of benefits is strongly connected to the idea of mutuality, meaning that only those who work and pay taxes deserve state support. This is in line with previous studies (Baumberg 2016; Baumberg *et al.* 2012; Hernanz *et al.* 2004). Furthermore, we found that this somewhat binary way of thinking about the different types of benefit also influences our informants' claiming behaviour – i.e., their welfare strategies: while in-work benefits were widely made use of by some of our participants, there were several cases where informants told us that they had decided not to apply for an out-of-work benefit even though they were probably entitled to it. This finding points at an *underuse* or a non-take-up of out-of-work benefits by Polish migrants and relates well to current statistics on the use of different types of welfare benefit in the UK which suggest that these trends could be a widespread phenomenon. Some of our informants had, nevertheless, also received out-of-work benefits. In the narratives of these informants, however, a feeling of stigma was visible, accompanied by the need to explain to us 'why'. The latter can be interpreted as a strategy to challenge the discrediting attribute related to social benefits by, for instance, highlighting their deservingness and entitlement according to the law through an explicit questioning of the actual possibility of tricking or abusing the state.

The uncertainties about what the status and rights of EU migrants in the UK after Brexit might be have further complicated the situation and appear to be playing a role in migrants' relationships with welfare benefits. Most of our informants assumed that being in work and contributing to the economy and welfare state will make them more likely to have the right to stay in the UK once the country leaves the EU, while being out of work and relying on welfare support might result in the loss of such a right. These assumptions clearly contradict any rights-based approach to welfare and show that the logic of conditionality and deservingness connected to work status also applied to the future right to stay in the country (Burrell and Schweyher 2019).

Finally, feelings of stigmatisation related to out-of-work benefits have also led some of our informants to pursue other strategies to make ends meet, such as relying on private savings or the help of family members. However, the most important strategy to avoid becoming an official jobseeker was to get back on the labour market as quickly as possible. While this is generally what all jobseekers are expected to do, it was evident from our informants' accounts that they were ready to accept 'basically any job'. Having some sort of work, no matter whether it meant unstable working hours, no fixed contract, minimum pay, physically demanding work and general de-skilling and downward social mobility, was widely judged as being much more preferable to having no work at all. Welfare and labour-market strategies are clearly correlated. While the drive and efforts of EU migrants to stay in the labour market and not resort to welfare might appear positive at first sight, such a focus on 'having work' can also have various harmful consequences as it puts this group – which is already in a vulnerable position and often working under precarious conditions – at even greater risk of exploitation and lower social mobility on the labour market, of poverty and even destitution and homelessness because of inaccurate assumptions and the avoidance of, or delay in, finding out about welfare-orientated rights and entitlements. Thus, some discourses appear to influence individuals' actions more than actual laws and legally granted rights and entitlements. Our findings resonate strongly with research conducted by Nowicka (2012) which shows how young, highly skilled Poles in the UK have been pushed into unstable and precarious working conditions in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. It remains to be seen how the uncertainty of Brexit will affect these welfare strategies but it seems apparent that the economic, work-facing conditionality surrounding EU citizen status in the UK will both endure and potentially intensify. Not claiming welfare and being trapped in precarious work are likely to be the key strategies and realities of many less-economically secure Polish nationals in the UK, with all the personal costs this will bring.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The interviews were conducted within the framework of a larger international research project dealing with Polish migrant families in Norway, Sweden and the UK.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of the interviews, the UK was transitioning to a new benefit scheme called Universal Credit (UC). It is intended to simplify the UK benefit system, improve work incentives and reduce in-work poverty as well as fraud and error (Department for Work and Pensions 2010). It will replace six previously separate means-tested benefits, including Child and Working Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and income-related Employment and Support Allowance. Thus, UC will combine several out-of-work and in-work benefits in one. At the time of the interviews, the full service of UC had not been rolled out in Liverpool. Only since the second half of 2018 have new benefits-seekers in Liverpool had to apply for UC instead of the previous benefits and existing claimants will be transferred to the new scheme between 2019 and 2023 (UK Government 2018). None of our participants had been affected by the roll out of UC at the time nor did they mention any concerns regarding this issue. We have no information on how many of them were even aware of the upcoming changes. Further research will be necessary to explore how the introduction of UC may affect Polish migrants' perceptions of claiming benefits in the UK. This is of particular interest since UC combines in-work and out-of-work benefits – which were perceived so differently by our participants – in one.

<sup>3</sup> However a High Income Child Benefit Tax Charge exists, which requires individuals with incomes over £50 000 per year to repay part of or the whole child benefit in extra income tax.

<sup>4</sup> The Personal Independence Allowance is a benefit that can be combined with Employment and Support Allowance.

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# The Gender-Related Lifestyle Changes and Choices of Female White-Collar Migrants from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia in Poland

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*This article looks at the mobility of highly skilled female migrants from the perspective of the post-socialist semi-peripheral countries in Eastern Europe. It analyses chosen aspects of the biographical experiences of highly skilled women from three post-USSR republics bordering the European Union – namely Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia – in Poland, a post-socialist country itself but also an EU member-state. The empirical analysis focuses on their lifestyle changes and choices, made through the experience of living in a new, though quite familiar Polish culture, which is both more emancipated (Western) while, at the same time, pertaining to some of the familiar (Eastern) patterns. Due to this liminal nature of the host country, the adaptation process of migrants is easier and comes at a lower biographical cost. In the analysis, I explore two notions: the gender roles renegotiation and the changes in the women's approach towards the external manifestations of femininity, which I contrast with their reflections of the changes undergone. As for the gender role renegotiation, three main approaches were described varying by the degree to which the old, familiar patterns are maintained. In terms of the external notions of femininity, while taking care of one's looks is still an observable element of the migrants' identity, they do take advantage of the wider spectrum of options available in the host society, and try to blend in with the casual big-city crowd. The article was written on the basis of empirical material in the form of twenty in-depth, unstructured interviews, which were confronted with the selected subject literature.*

**Keywords:** female migrants; Ukrainians; Belarusians; Russians; Poland; gender roles

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## Introduction

Among the numerous factors which determine a person's identity and social position in the modern world is the increasing sense of importance attached to one's choice of lifestyle – attitude to clothing, diet, relaxation, spending free time and bodily practices – which, in turn, accounts for a person's social standing (Giddens 2012). This is obviously strictly linked both to the individual's economic resources and ability to participate in a consumer society and to other dispositions such as cultural capital – understood here as a set of subconsciously acquired competences (Bourdieu 1985) or to the gender roles in a given society which influence one's lifestyle practices. Bearing in mind that identity is a processual construct subject to redefinition and change (Strauss 1959), when a person migrates abroad the repertoire of the seemingly 'natural' choices changes. In most cases, finding oneself in a new environment, even if it seems culturally close, entails the need to reinvent the thus-far-obvious ways of being. In the migratory context, the new experiences and models of 'doing work', 'doing life' and 'doing gender' influence migrants' self-perception and require more 'biographical work (...) to be done in order to integrate one's experiences into more or less coherent wholeness' (Kaźmierska 2003, para. 11). What is more, 'migration is usually accompanied by a loss of status – with the exception of a few privileged migration groups – which involves an entrance into the new function systems on a much lower level than that reached in the country of origin' (Breckner 2007: 142). Qualitative research into migration which adopts the biographical perspective has, in a more or less detailed way, explored such notions, starting with the monumental work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918–1920). Yet it should be stressed that, in general, research into highly skilled migrants – the privileged elite of migrants – more often concentrates on the quantitative aspect, either on enumerating them (Blitz 2010; Docquier, Lowell and Marfouk 2009; Kofman 2000, 2012; Salt 1992) or on researching those professional groups which are numerous enough to be statistically significant or whose mass migrations trigger other social problems<sup>1</sup> in their sending countries – e.g. nurses (Brush and Sochalski 2007) – while not looking so much at the micro-level of their subjective experiences.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that there are no such analyses, yet the publications which explore the motivations, experiences and trajectories of highly skilled migrants tend to focus on intra-EU migrants and do not consider the gender dimension as a factor differentiating their experiences (Kaźmierska, Piotrowski and Waniek 2012; Piekut 2013; Ryan and Mulholland 2014), even if female migrants tend to outnumber male migrants in most developed countries (Dumont, Martin and Spielvogel 2007).

The aim of this paper is to look at chosen aspects of highly skilled migrants' biographical experiences from a different perspective. The focus of my research is female migrants from three post-USSR republics bordering the European Union – namely Ukraine, Belarus and Russia – in Poland, a post-socialist country itself but also an EU member-state (and, for a long time, a major 'exporter' of labour migrants to EU markets). I analyse their experiences from a micro-level perspective, thus departing from a straightforward statistical analysis. I look at the mobility of highly skilled women from the perspective of the post-socialist semi-peripheral countries in the new Eastern Europe, which began to form with the fall of the old regimes. In this article I discuss how the experience of migrating to Poland influences the gender-related choices and transformations of highly skilled female migrants<sup>3</sup> from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, to acknowledge their perceptions of the changes undergone.

Such an analysis is particularly interesting in the context of Poland due to its specificity as a host country. In the first decades of the systemic transformation there was a rapid and steady growth in the number of foreigners coming to Poland consisting largely of the citizens of the former USSR republics, who the Poles would collectively call 'Ruski' (a slightly derogatory version of the word 'Russian'). They would come to Poland on tourist visas and take up employment in the grey area of the economy such as petty trade at bazaars, seasonal agriculture work, construction work, transport, service sector. With time, however, the profile of the migrants began to diversify. Since 2010, Poland has become the most popular migration destination especially

for Ukrainians amongst all the EU countries. Moreover, it is the only EU country where, since 2014, one can observe a dynamic increase in the number of Ukrainians, the prognosis being that the numbers will continue to be appreciable (OSW 2017: 43). What is more, their occupational profiles are more diverse than those in other popular destination countries such as Italy, Spain or Portugal (OSW 2017: 40). Finally, a large proportion of them are women – who are increasingly deciding to settle, therefore becoming both present and future citizens. The number of Belarusians who are interested in going to Poland is also growing rapidly (Żarnasiek 2018). Russians are the least numerous of these three nations, but large enough to be statistically noticeable.

The paper is divided as follows: first, I outline the theoretical background against which I analyse the empirical material and explore the criteria for defining a highly skilled migrant. Secondly, I present the research framework, describe the methodology and the characteristics of my research participants. Then I put under scrutiny the changes in practices and perceptions of the interviewees resulting from the redefined gender models. Finally, I explore the transformation of the notion of femininity through the migrants' attitudes to clothing and appearance.

### **Highly skilled migrants – an overview of theories and definitions**

The migration of the well-educated or highly skilled is not a modern phenomenon but has been taking place on a large scale since the twentieth century. Blitz (2010: 3293) offers a three-phase typology of highly skilled flows:

- spontaneous and personal movements motivated primarily by negative push factors;
- state-sponsored recruitment campaigns; and
- a global phase identified by the growth of transnationalism and regionalisation and the development of a global migration market.

The traditional approach to the study of migration stemmed from nineteenth- and twentieth-century assumptions that a migrant was someone poor and uneducated who left their country in search of better economic conditions. This micro-level motivation was thoroughly researched within the neoclassical or the new economics of migration theories and Blitz's first type of migrant (as set out above) would pass unnoticed in the analyses carried out within such paradigms. The second type of migrant would be put under scrutiny within the dual market theory (Piore 1979), which shifted the focus on the demand for immigrant labour in industrialised societies (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor 1993), ignoring the level of qualification of migrants as long as they were fit to perform the expected jobs (even if a certain proportion of them were, in fact, highly skilled). This would also trigger the process of de-skilling, when migrants would take up the expected niche jobs even when these were below their level of qualification. The final type of migrant is a post-1980s phenomenon and would be researched within transnational and mobility theories or a number of intersecting approaches and disciplines, as migration becomes not an exception but the norm and mobility is the embodiment of the post-modern condition – 'a desirable act rather than an economic means to an end' (King 2002: 95).

Since the 1960s, the notion of migrants' skills and so-called 'brain drain' started to attract the interest of scholars (Kofman 2000; Koser and Salt 1997; Rhode 1993). Yet still there seems to be no consent as to what constitutes a highly skilled migrant, as they do not form a homogenous group. Blitz (2010: 3305) notes that:

*Skilled migrants may include managers, professionals, engineers, scientists, teachers, and bureaucrats, as well as many other occupations. They tend to be differentiated from unskilled or production workers, such as tradespeople, clerks, sales clerks, industrial workers, and farm hands by virtue of their high levels of education and relatively scarce skill sets.*

Therefore, the criterion the most commonly assumed to be the distinctive feature of such migrants is having a tertiary educational qualification or its equivalent. However, this has been criticised as somewhat of an overstatement, both because education does not always equal a high degree of expertise (which can also be acquired through the course of work experience) and because education systems vary worldwide, as does the relative value of the diplomas. Moreover, migrants do tend to take up employment below their status when they either cannot get their qualifications officially recognised or the less-qualified work is better paid than their primary job in the home country. Hence, an alternative criterion of distinguishing a highly skilled migrant could be the ‘occupational entry’ benchmark. Blitz (2010: 3306) also points out that a definite feature of white-collar expats is their scarcity in comparison to other migrants or to the demand for their services and, as such, they are often on the margins of statistical surveys. From the receiving country’s perspective, these are the desired foreigners, who benefit the local labour market according to pre-defined and country-specific economic criteria. As such, they are not perceived as problematic and, hence, are socially invisible.

For the purpose of this article I consider a female white-collar migrant to be a woman with post-secondary education holding an academic degree, who also possesses extensive professional experience, allowing her to take up employment on the primary labour market upon arrival in the host country in a job relevant to her qualifications, in sectors that are not commonly associated with the ‘migrant niche’ (e.g. care work, domestic service or the service sector).<sup>4</sup>

## **Research context**

I decided to focus on females from three post-Soviet-bloc countries since, as far as non-EU citizens are concerned, Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians constitute the most numerous groups of migrants/foreigners in Poland, a significant proportion of whom are women. In Poland, according to data from the 2011 National Census, Ukrainians were the most numerous group and constituted 24 per cent of foreigners (of whom 70 per cent were women), Russians accounted for 7.5 per cent (of whom 69 per cent were women) and Belarusians, 7 per cent (of whom 66 per cent were women). However, it is impossible to provide the exact number of (highly skilled) migrants, as the statistics compiled by various institutions will only partially reflect the migrant stocks depending on the type of data collected. Permanent migration is registered (number of issued residence permits) but is much less sizeable than temporary and circulation migration, which is recorded by various offices depending on their function (e.g. issuing visas, work permits and employment declarations or registering border crossings). According to the information provided by the Office for Foreigners on foreigners with valid residence permits, the four largest groups, as of 2016, were: Ukrainians (84 000), Germans (23 000), Belarusians (11 000) and Russians (10 000). The largest (almost threefold) increase between 2013 and 2016 concerns Ukrainian citizens, who make up 36 per cent of all registered foreigners. If we take a look at the gender proportions within the residence permits issued in more recent years (2016–2018), we can see that they are more balanced (see Table 1). In the case of Ukrainians, the higher number of men applying for temporary residence permits could be explained by the escalation of the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine in 2014 (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Permanent residence permits issued, 2016–2018**

	2016			2017			2018		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Ukraine	47.0%	53.0%	5 920	49.6%	50.4%	7 866	50.2%	49.8%	7 712
Belarus	41.5%	58.5%	1 628	43.6%	56.4%	3 835	43.4%	56.6%	4 597
Russia	55.7%	44.3%	327	56.3%	43.7%	451	55.5%	44.5%	508
All nationalities	4 118	5 024	9 042	6 229	7 075	13 304	6 709	7 701	14 410

Source: Author's own analysis based on reports issued by the Office for Foreigners.

**Table 2. Temporary residence permits issued, 2016–2018**

	2016			2017			2018		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
Ukraine	38.5%	61.5%	57 253	39.0%	61.0%	70 268	41.0%	59.0%	80 231
Belarus	51.0%	49.0%	1 800	42.0%	58.0%	2 257	41.7%	58.3%	3 234
Russia	56.0%	44.0%	2 189	53.4%	46.6%	2 150	54.5%	45.5%	2 394
All nationalities	32 624	53 992	86 616	38 895	64 320	103 215	44 866	69 189	114 055

Source: Author's own analysis based on reports issued by the Office for Foreigners.

For over a decade the Polish authorities have also been implementing certain measures to facilitate the influx of migrants from the East such as *Karta Polaka* (literally meaning Pole's Card, also translated as Polish Card or Polish Charter)<sup>5</sup> or various scholarship programmes for students.<sup>6</sup> Foreign graduates of Polish universities would intuitively be classified as highly skilled but, since the diploma grants them open access to the labour market, cancelling the requirement for a work permit, they blend in the aggregate statistics regarding visas or residence permits. Nevertheless, the Polish National Bank estimates say that, in 2017, there were about one million foreign workers in Poland, 87 per cent of whom were Ukrainians (Chmielewska, Dobroczyk and Panuciak 2018: 7). This is a significant figure when contrasted with the general statistics for the Polish labour market for 2017 – 15 720 000 professionally active people aged 15–64, with the employment-to-population ratio being 59.6 per cent for women and 73.5 per cent for men, and the 6.6 per cent unemployment rate, positioning Poland among the seven EU countries with the lowest levels of joblessness (Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy 2018: 16).

Another reason for concentrating on women from the three chosen countries is the specific socio-political background to the entrepreneurship of female migrants from the former USSR republics. Most research on female migrants from the post-Soviet bloc to the EU has been done on Ukrainians, who constitute the largest and therefore the most visible group (Fedyuk and Kindler 2016), yet little attention has thus far been paid to the study of other post-Soviet immigrants (both male and female) as they are statistically less significant. Concerning Ukrainians, if the analyses adopt a gendered perspective, there is little focus on the other-than-the-family context (Fedyuk 2016).

As I am interested in the gender-related experiences and lifestyle transformations of female white-collar migrants within the Eastern European context, it is essential to shed some light on the specificity of the region which is being discussed in this paper. In terms of the gender norms available to women in Eastern Europe, there are a number of similarities between Poland and its eastern neighbours. However, there are also certain less-obvious differences and, since I focus on how migrating to Poland has influenced lifestyles choices through gender-role renegotiation, it is worth describing first what the predominant patterns in the host society have been.

In an analysis of the gender roles and standards propagated by a widely read and opinion-forming periodical *Kobieta i Życie* (*Woman and Life*), published from 1946 to 2002 and raising three generations of Poles, Zofia

Sokół (2012) distinguished eight models<sup>7</sup> promoted in different epochs, which reflected both the current political ideology and the grassroots social changes taking place over the decades. First was the idealised and heroic *Polish Mother* – a patient, caring, and loving martyr either mourning the loss of or waiting for the return of her man/children, gradually moving on to the *forerunner of socialist work* – both actively engaged in the rebuilding of the war-torn country. Needless to say, since the late 1940s the Soviet Union became the main point of reference for all areas of social and political life – domestic work was considered irrelevant, as it did not serve the building of a socialist country. In the late 1950s, rising unemployment shifted the emphasis from the cult of work to the role of women as mothers, wives and housewives and established a new merged model of a woman – *the working mother*. However, the economic pressures which made women undertake professional activities did not translate into new gender norms but, rather, strengthened the traditional patterns based on caring, sacrifice and heroism. The hardships of everyday life led to the creation of a specific kind of heroic matriarchy in the (post)communist countries of Eastern Europe, where the woman assumed the irreplaceable role of the household and family manager, taking pride in her multitasking skills and achievements (Titkow 2007: 63–65).

The 1960s saw a gradual rise in advocating partnership and propagating a greater involvement of men in household duties, especially childcare. The feminist tendency continued into the 1970s, raising issues of unequal status and pay which, in the 1980s, evolved into the model of a *politically engaged woman* who takes an active part in shaping her reality within the gently patriarchal social structure. The systemic transformation of the 1990s saw an interesting flourishing of the available gender roles which, on the one hand, was a modern, entrepreneurial *businesswoman* and, on the other, a reborn *traditional housewife*.<sup>8</sup> The models imposed by the popular press were, to some extent, market-oriented – the ‘new woman’ was supposed to encompass a wide range of irreconcilable features, on the one hand being independent and entrepreneurial, taking care of both her external looks and her intellectual development and, on the other, being home- and family-oriented. However, another aspect of the 1990s in terms of gender roles was that, firstly, in a country which had to face a profound political transformation on many levels, economic issues had a clear priority over the problems of gender equality. In a situation of high unemployment, women were encouraged to return to the traditional role of housewife. Secondly, the Catholic Church, which had played a crucial role in supporting the anti-communist opposition, was not eager to step down from its privileged social position. Yet a major turn took place around 2004 as, on Poland joining the EU, there were various information campaigns and training courses for women on women’s rights, the position of women in the EU, how the situation of Polish women would change after accession and what the EU has to offer women (Fuszara 2005: 1066).

The liberal values which the EU advocated – such as individualism, gender equality and human rights – resulted in a moral panic of the Catholic hierarchs and conservative right-wing politicians’ resistance (Graff 2016; Graff and Korolczuk 2017, 2018). On the macro level, the foreign-sounding term ‘gender’ was consciously misinterpreted and put on a par with demoralisation, perversion, abortion, non-normative sexuality, promiscuity and the colonising ‘ideology’ of the morally corrupted West and was the enemy of ‘healthy’ Polish, traditional family values and religiosity. This led to the intensive anti-gender discourse campaign of 2012–2014, launched and run by the self-proclaimed defenders of the only ‘morally just order’ and the victory of the right-wing conservative parties in the national elections of 2015 (Graff 2016; Graff and Korolczuk 2017). However, it would seem too easy and tempting to discuss gender issues by juxtaposing the influence of the Catholic Church in its sanctioning of the conservative *status quo* with liberal, secular, Western European values (Siara 2013: 106–107), which is clear when one looks at the micro level. In recent decades, the position of the Church among Poles has undergone a massive decline. As written in *Tygodnik Powszechny*<sup>9</sup>:

*More and more people stop identifying themselves with the Church. The Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church recently recorded the highest fall in church attendance in the last few years. In 2016, this number decreased compared to 2015 by over 3 per cent and is 36.7 per cent – the lowest in the post-war history of Poland (Wiśniewski 2018).*

Additionally, the results of an opinion-polling institute regarding the Social Evaluation of Honesty and Professional Consciousness show that the current assessment of priests and clergymen is the worst since 1997, when the research was first conducted (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2016). In another poll regarding Occupational Prestige, priests are at the bottom of the ranking, having dropped by 13 percentage points and classifying among the professions which lost the most in relation to the period before the systemic transformation (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2013). Besides, a person considering him- or herself to be religious does not exclude him or her from having an egalitarian approach to life or feminist views (Siara 2013).

Therefore, the often-quoted Polish Catholicism is increasingly a cultural legacy and not a governor of souls, even when, on the political-discourse level, it is still strongly defending its bastion. This discrepancy was clearly seen in 2016, when the government was to vote on a total ban on abortion (the abortion law already being one of the strictest in Europe) which was met with a massive outrage amongst the women (and men) who organised the ‘Black Strike’ – also referred to as ‘Black Friday’. This first mass mobilisation of Polish women in defence of their rights was country-wide and not only a big-city phenomenon. Some 100 000 women (and men) protested in 118 Polish cities and more than 50 places abroad, forcing the government to reject the proposal (Chmielewska, Druciarek and Przybysz 2017). Statistics from the 2011 National Census are also ruthless when it comes to the family – almost a quarter of all the families in Poland were single-parent ones and 89 per cent of those constituted single mothers – and such models are socially accepted, which goes against the ideals promoted by the conservative circles.

Therefore, despite the bad press that the concept of gender has been getting since 2012, research shows that the majority of Poles declare that they are generally in favour of the equality of men and women (women outnumbering men); those who strongly oppose it are from the so-called ‘enclaves of patriarchy’:

*An average Polish supporter of ‘traditional’ gender order is at least 55 years old, lives in the countryside or in a small city, has elementary or basic vocational education and regularly participates in religious practices (even more often than once a week). Right-wing political views favour traditional attitudes towards gender equality (Centre for Public Opinion Research 2017: 5).*

Considering everything said above, Poland – in relation to its eastern neighbours – has made steady economic progress within the 25 years of the systemic transformation, especially after joining the EU in 2004, and benefited far more from visa-free travel and the influence of Western gender models and norms. Even if the officially promoted discourses are against ‘gender ideology’, this does not translate into a mass following of the neo-conservative order. The spectrum of the available roles has been quite wide and will also depend on social class, religiosity, education and the place of living – whether this be the capital city or a small town in a less-developed rural area.

Looking east of Poland, the gender models which Soviet ideology offered were based on the delusive emancipation of women through their full-time incorporation into the workforce, alongside the exhaustive household and maternal duties perceived to be ‘naturally feminine’, which were not shared by the prototypical Soviet men (Ashwin 2002; Bureychak 2012; Kis 2012). The hypocrisy of such standards lay in the double burden of the women, with men fulfilling their role outside of the home only.



When the Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990s, the respective former republics and their people experienced uncertainty and endured the hardships of the transformation period to a different degree. While Belarus embarked on its own, somewhat distinct, transformation path which resulted in a quite stable economic situation (Dobrinsky, Adarov, Bornukova, Havlik, Hunya, Kruk and Pindyuk 2016), Ukraine and Russia saw a sudden economic downturn which resulted in the large-scale deterioration of the quality of life (Round and Williams 2010). The women in Ukraine who, during the economic hardships of the transformation, sought various survival strategies and undertook the burden of pro-active endeavours to provide financially for their families, were often described as ‘feminists despite themselves’ or ‘pragmatic feminists’ (Kis 2012). Yet they did not identify themselves as feminists in the Western meaning, as ‘feminism’ would evoke negative or mocking associations and be considered a disreputable attribute for a woman (Rubchak 2012). In Belarus, where gendered research is neither frequent nor popular, society is mostly patriarchal and there are strong gender stereotypes related to the life and roles of women and men in family and society (Burova and Yanchuk 2014). As for Russia, Round and Williams (2010: 184) refer to the World Bank estimates and assert that the ‘male life expectancy fell dramatically, from 61 in the late 1980s to 58 in 1993’, which was ‘the fastest fall recorded in the global north outside of wartime’, and concede that ‘20 years later, this figure has little improved’. Therefore, the Russian women for long have been ‘breadwinners by default’ (Kiblitckaya 2000) and do not perceive being only a housewife as a satisfactory option (Ashwin 2002).

## Methodology

Scholars argue that ‘the economic bias’ of most research on migration renders women invisible, as there is still a male-hegemonic approach (at least in symbolic terms) towards the ‘world of skills’, which is analysed through male-dominated and knowledge-based sectors of the economy such as finance, science and technology (Iredale 2005; Kofman 2000). These are the prestigious sectors which

*are seen as the driving force of globalization, productivity and wealth creation. (...) The presence of migrant women is not analytically linked to the world of production or to skills but connected with social, welfare and integration. Thus they are omitted from the discussion of women as economic actors of migration and situated in the realm of a largely unchanging symbolic gender order* (Kofman 2012: 73).

For the reasons mentioned above, I put under scrutiny those who, thus far, have received little, if any, attention in the migration literature.

The analytical part of this article is based on my research sample – I have chosen 20<sup>10</sup> (out of 39) in-depth, unstructured interviews with biographical elements, which I conducted between February 2015 and September 2016 with women who, at the time of the interview, had been living in Poland for between 1 and 18 years.<sup>11</sup> Of the 20 interviews, 2 were with Russians, 3 with Belarusians and 15 with Ukrainians but, as I do not conduct quantitative research, the sample is not intended to be representative. Nevertheless, the proportions translate into the differences in the number of migrants from given countries in Poland, where the Ukrainians prevail. All of the interviewees came to Poland as (young) adults, having completed some part of their tertiary education in their home country (except one interviewee who came to Poland after finishing secondary school and did her whole studies at a Polish university). The interviewees’ home-country university diplomas ranged from a Bachelor’s to Master’s degree, with a few having a PhD, yet at some point most of my interviewees continued their education in Poland – for example doing post-graduate studies which would equip them with additional qualifications needed at work. However, what is of paramount importance is that, from the onset of their stay in Poland, they all took up employment relevant to their education and/or expertise and have had no

experience of working in the secondary ‘migrant’ segment – 9 women work in private companies or multi-national corporations (in finance, banking, research, advertising, sales, logistics etc.), 4 are engaged in non-government institutions (they have created a niche, where they use their high qualifications, – for example a lawyer – and work in intermediate positions among the Polish and migrant communities), 3 work for the Polish public sector or in science/teaching, 2 for the mass media, 1 is a sworn translator running her own business and 1 is a doctor. Of the interviewees, 15 live in the Warsaw area, 4 in Kraków and 1 in Gdańsk. As for the language of the interviews, only 2 out of the 20 had to be conducted in English (as the two interlocutors’ knowledge of Polish was basic) but the majority of the others, some of whom had no or barely detectable traces of a foreign accent, spoke fluent Polish.

**Table 3. Civil and family status of the interviewees**

Nationality \ Status	R U	R U	B Y	B Y	B Y	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A	U A
With children	1		1	2							2						1			
Childless		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Single/divorced		✓		✓	✓		✓			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			
In an informal relationship with a Pole						✓		✓	✓										✓	
In an informal relationship with a compatriot												✓								
In an informal relationship with a foreigner													✓							✓
Married to a Pole	✓																	✓		
Married to a compatriot			✓								✓									

Notes: RU = Russian; BY = Belarusian; UA = Ukrainian. Source: Author’s own analysis of the interviews.

I conduct the analysis being interested in the bottom-up experiences of the migrants. I therefore asked my interviewees to tell me a spontaneous story of their life and their experiences. When the narrative part was over, it was followed by a few precise questions in order to deepen the topic and render it interesting from the researcher’s perspective. Such free narration gave me insight into the social world of expatriates from the East and the processuality of their professional experience.

In the analysis, I depart from the dyadic analytical approach ‘country of emigration/immigration’ for three reasons. Firstly, there are strong arguments for the abandonment of ‘methodological nationalism’, which limits the scope of research to the boundaries of a country. This is particularly relevant as 14 of my interviewees have Polish roots (12 Ukrainians, 1 Belarusian and 1 Russian) and the other six are connected in other ways to Poland – e.g. by coming from areas with historical ties with Poland like Ivano-Frankivsk<sup>12</sup> Grodno or the Brest district.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, even if the interviewees themselves did not have Polish roots, they were to some extent familiar with the Polish language and culture, even if in a very passive way. Secondly, clinging on to very ‘pure’ national categories in the analytical process is somewhat pointless, especially in view of the fact that, during Soviet times, there were massive forced internal migrations of people (Fedyuk and Kindler 2016). These

were connected with centrally managed workplace coercion and quite a few of my interviewees, despite having, for example, Belarusian citizenship, in fact reported having Russian and Ukrainian roots. The final reason why I abandon the strict national division is because, for almost seven decades, the three countries had been united into one socialist state where, due to the centrally managed ideology, politics and economy, the imposed gender models and many aspects of the lifestyle regime were similar. Therefore, despite certain differences, the women I talked to shared the post-socialist legacy of the country/countries of origin.

### Gender roles re-examined

The majority of the women to whom I talked were born in the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s; even if they were born at the turn of the political systems, they were raised by parents who were socialised into the Soviet reality and grew up in the post-Soviet social and cultural milieu, where the more-Western models were only starting to unfold. Migration westwards, to Poland, opened up new opportunities and space for redefining the roles and norms to which the women had been socialised.

The strong Soviet gender model legacy is reflected in the words of Tamara, a 34-year-old Russian who came to Poland with her Russian husband and who, for six years, experienced this regime abroad:

*In our countries, it seems to me that it is derived from the tradition of the Soviet Union times, when everyone had to work and there was no possibility for a woman not to return to work, so for us it is absolutely natural that we work, and at the same time I take care of the children, and what is more I still have to look good, take care of myself, take care of the house, take care of my husband. It seems that this is terribly difficult to juggle, but for us it is more natural, so when here [in Poland] women start to complain that it is so hard or vice versa that they are sitting at home, that they do not have a job, that the husband is not nice to them, or other things, it always surprises me a bit, because I do not know what they are on about. This is a normal course of things that we do this and this and that.*

What might sound like the definition of a superwoman – the merger of the Soviet ideal of a ‘heroine of labour’ with the feminine house goddess – is a cultural legacy and norm which becomes reinterpreted due to the experience of migration. Tamara, the breadwinner of her family, recalls that, at one point, she was so busy and tired that she hired a housekeeper and a nanny to help her out in performing some of the expected duties. This is also interesting, as it is often the migrant woman who relieves the host-society woman of her gendered household and care obligations and not *vice versa*. After a few years of being stuck in this work-family-appearance-household-husband treadmill, without the active support of her spouse, nor his willingness to reinterpret the gender roles in the relationship and family, Tamara takes the decision to divorce her husband. This is possible because she is financially independent and, through her exposure to the wider range of gender norms offered by the country of migration, ‘the man’ ceases to be the focal point in her life. She mentioned that, in Poland, everything takes so long, that at first the couple dates for two years, starts living together and only then gets engaged and married while, in Russia, everything is fast and, within two years, it is possible to already have divorced twice. However, then she reflects that it might actually be better to do it ‘the Polish way’, as people have the possibility to get to know each other; in this way the relationships are more lasting and the choices more considered. Therefore, while she is willing to retain certain familiar gender patterns, at the same time she is renegotiating the borders of her individual space and sacrifice, looking for a male partner, not a burden.

A similar course of redefining the gender roles can be observed in the case of Ulyana, a 42-year-old Belarusian who, at the time of the interview, had lived in Poland for 17 years. Migrating had been her husband’s

decision and she had followed his plan. However, he never settled and she was left in Poland on her own, with children, before finally divorcing her husband seven years later. Finding herself thrown in at the deep end, she was forced by circumstances to assume and develop agency in order to provide for herself and her children. Somewhat to her surprise, she landed a good job and pursued a successful career in teaching, which relieved her of financial concerns and strengthened her independence in making decisions. As she compares Belarus to Poland now, she says that they are worlds apart. In Belarus, women do work a lot but enjoy a lower status than men. She says that no woman of her age would take out a mortgage and buy a detached house all by herself. She also very quickly became annoyed by the way in which she is treated back in Belarus and recalls one particular situation:

*After a few years spent here in Poland I came to Belarus and I wanted, I had to change the tyres, and my ex-husband arranged my meeting with a friend of his, in Minsk, and the treatment of a woman is quite a different thing there. (...) It just struck me that (...) I was treated like air by those guys, who just shook their hands. (...) I went there by myself to have the tyres changed, and it was like 'Woman, what are you doing here! Only men do such things!' So such exclusion of women, (...) this division into female and male functions is still... (...) Women simply have fewer opportunities for self-fulfilment, (...) there are women who run companies and thriving businesses, big ones, but such daily matters, I think it is much harder for women to break through in Belarus than here.*

She interprets this situation as an observable difference between the gender norms in Belarus and finds herself accustomed to being treated with greater respect to her 'agency' in Poland. She does admit, however, that what to do after the divorce was a big dilemma – whether to go back to Belarus, where she has family and support, or to stay. However, having seven years of hard proof that she can manage well on her own with two children, she decided to stay. She recalls that, after Poland joined the EU, she was offered a marriage of convenience by a colleague at work, who could not stand seeing how she struggled with administrative issues, but she firmly refused, explaining that taking shortcuts was not the way to handle her matters. Being independent and self-reliant has become, for her, a value in itself, not just a necessary role enforced on her by her difficult situation.<sup>14</sup>

A different example of a woman in the process of renegotiating her gender position is Darya, a 32-year-old Belarusian who has lived in Poland for four years. She, like Ulyana, came to Poland following her husband who, having Polish roots, feels emotionally tied to Poland. In Darya's case it is interesting how her approach to the available gender patterns fluctuates while she tries to find her way in the new society. As she is a graduate of the Medical Academy, she felt it would be a pity to waste her skills and hence undertook the daunting challenge of nostrifying her diploma. The process took 1.5 years; however, she was not discouraged by initial failures and persevered with her ambition to become a fully recognised professional and be able to continue working in her profession. Despite her success, she seems to be intimidated by the acknowledgement of her own agency:

*My husband's family is mixed, Polish-Belarusian, always, I'm a little bit, very ambitious, I am so very, if one can say that about oneself, so progressive and having worked five years I understood that I have a ceiling. Then it happened that my husband, (...) his company received contracts with clients also from Poland, and I understood that I would not like, I am not the kind of wife who will sit and wait. And so I thought that (...) I might try, because to follow my husband to Poland, just to live there with the child and not to work, for me it was a pity to waste my studies, because I had already been doing my specialisation (...) and it would be a shame to sit at home or to work as a so-called cleaner.*

She uses specific adverbs and expressions deemphasising the nouns in expressions like ‘a little bit/very ambitious, progressive/if one can say that’, as if she felt using too strong words could perhaps mean stepping out of the gender line. She describes her successes on the labour market, stressing that it was her husband who had sent her CV around. While she characterises herself as open, flexible, cosmopolitan and determined, sends her daughter to an international school and declares the wish to go further west, where she believes the healthcare and education system are better, she still maintains the husband-centric perspective on life:

*I would like to go somewhere west, but I have a husband who loves Poland so much (...) because here is buried his grandfather, grandparents, grandmothers lived (...) and I as his wife, I agree with him on everything I teach our child, now it will be British School, Polish, I read books, fairy tales. (...) And because of this, where my husband will be, there it will be better for me too.*

A similar discrepancy between the hierarchies of values resonates in the interview with Nastya, a 32-year-old Ukrainian who came to Poland as a single adult and pursued a career in international corporations. Having Polish roots and living in Poland long enough, she holds Polish citizenship and declares that, while her home is Poland, where she feels good and comfortable and is planning to purchase property, she does not reject the possibility of migrating further westwards. She invests in self-development, makes professional plans for a good job and her own business on the side but, at the same time, when asked about her future plans, stresses that:

*Maybe in some company, even where I'm working now, there are different possibilities to go to Madrid to work, or to another country, but for me the family is important. If my boyfriend wants to go, then yes, but if not, then no. (...) In fact, I am a woman who will follow her husband. But if he does not want to, then Poland as it is, is OK.*

What is interesting is that she is not married nor even engaged but, nevertheless, projects a neo-conservative gender life model on her potential future choices.

Nastya points to another change in the gender perspective, which is observable among other interviewees as well – namely the adjournment of plans for settling down and procreation. Like many of my interviewees, she says that, in the East, people mature faster for a number of reasons. Firstly, everyday life is more stressful and more difficult. Secondly, people can graduate from university as young as 21, therefore they also start working earlier. Thirdly, they do not have as many opportunities to travel abroad or to lead a more self-oriented consumerist lifestyle where their own pleasure comes first; often, as a normative consequence, they set up families faster. Most of my interviewees, who were over 30 years old, said that, in their age group, everyone has a family and children and living differently is considered to be somewhat abnormal:

*This is an interesting topic, yes, this was one such benefit too [of moving to Poland], because there is social pressure [in Ukraine]. If a guy met you, and you are 32 and you were never married or divorced, it means that there is something wrong with you. (...) If you are going to parties, in Ukraine, you are 32 years old, then surely there is something wrong with you.*

A similar stigma attached to marrying late and the social pressure to settle down well before one's 30s is reported to be well-rooted in Belarus, while migration stretches the age limits and results in the adaptation of more Western patterns, with women, in particular, questioning the existing *status quo* (Bobova 2016).

The opening up of new possibilities for realising one's dreams and aspirations (considered to deviate from the way of life in one's motherland) which are precipitated by migration, generates jealousy and condemnation back in the home country. Anastasiya, a 27-year-old from Ukraine, recalls one conversation with her former classmates:

*We are organising [a class reunion], 10 years now since we finished school (...) I ask what the plan is, because I would like to, I have to come, take some days off or something. Somehow there were such unpleasant jokes because, in my class, probably only three people have no family, and everyone else already has families. And it was such a joke: 'If I were you I would not even ask when we're having this meeting'. I say 'What?!' And he says: 'Well, what can you boast about? Family? Children? Unless you print your photos from Brazil'. Because I just got back from a holiday in Brazil.*

For her Ukrainian male friend, Anastasiya's single, childless life at the age of 27 seems to be less meaningful but might, at the same time, provoke resentment that, being so young, she can afford to do so much, hence the belittling comments. This might also stem from the fact that Ukraine (just like many other European countries) is suffering from a demographic crisis (Romaniuk and Gladun 2015). Therefore, Anastasiya's successful migratory experience and achievements might be perceived negatively, as she not only secures herself a better life abroad but also 'betrays' her country, contributing twofold to the demographic decline by emigrating and by not having children.

Another Ukrainian, Marina (30), living in Poland for 12 years, perceives the gender role renegotiation as an incurable disease. Since her arrival, she has been in a few relationships with men of different nationalities: German, Polish and the former USSR (though not Ukrainian). Drawing from her practical experience and observations, she concludes that, with few exceptions, men from the East are culturally conditioned to being treated as the centre of the universe (due to their mothers' and girlfriends' conduct) but, once you are aware of these imposed disproportions, you can fight with them in your head, as it is also degrading for a modern man to be treated this way:

*I sometimes catch myself that even though I had been working for 10–15 hours, I had been doing something, and it is already late, and I would like to go to sleep, but beforehand I have to make dinner, really. I think that this is also such a humiliating treatment for a man, a man is treated as a disabled person, who is not able to fix his own meal, I don't know, is unable to clean up and put away his own things. I fight with it, but as I say, sometimes I catch myself having some strange, culturally inscribed ideas for life, that a man is most important.*

One way in which migration can help to create more gender-balanced proportions to a woman's lifestyle is the extensive contact with a wider range of patterns and the experience of everyday life with non-compatriots, resulting in greater freedom to choose how to live one's life. Marina says that, after all the years spent in Poland, she does not let herself get drawn into such conversations and, when she hears that Ukrainian women are good at cleaning, cooking, etc., she replies that this is not a genetic feature that one is born with.

On the other hand, while the range of patterns broadens, at the same time certain aspects are gone in the gender negotiation process. The price of 'emancipation' through migration means that certain desirable ways of 'doing gender' get lost with the kilometres travelled. One interviewee said, for example, that what she really missed in Poland was the courteous gesture of men who would offer a woman their hand when she was getting off the bus.

As other research findings suggest, men undergo cultural transformation in a different way (Bobova 2016) and are less willing than women to redefine the gender-role paradigms. I have observed signs of such notions during some casual conversations with Ukrainian males; however, my research sample and the scope of this article do not allow for a comparative study of women and men.

### **The external notions of femininity**

Another strongly gendered aspect which I would like to analyse is the change in the approach towards one's own appearance and dress code through the experience of migration. This aspect emerged particularly in the interviews with the Ukrainian migrants, hence I will focus on their sample.

For Ukrainian women, taking care of one's looks is reported to originate first and foremost as a rejection of the 'asexual (and simultaneously patriarchal) Soviet culture [which] considered [women] only as "working mothers"' (Zhurzhenko 2001: 31). As Ukrainian scholars assert, having rejected Soviet ideals of the 'Super Woman', Ukrainians were faced with the delusive choice of new canons of femininity (Kis 2005; Zhurzhenko 2001). Oksana Kis (2005) argues that one of these would be the *Berehynia* – the revived myth of the matriarchal goddess-protector of the family, the home and the nation and another would be the 'Barbie' the embodiment of the Western model of a woman propelled by the free-market ideology and the culture of mass consumption. As Kis observes, the 'Barbie embodies the perfect achievement of heterosexual femininity' (2005: 122) where the bodily, aesthetic and sexual features of a woman play a crucial role. 'Both models, Berehynia and Barbie, presume that the only path towards women's self-fulfilment is to be satellites orbiting men' (2005: 129). Tatiana Zhurzhenko claims that the post-Soviet 'apparent diversity' of the new female identities 'is in effect reduced to two models and two poles of this spectrum: businesswoman and housewife' (2001: 39). They are both the byproducts of the free-market ideology with its mass media and mass consumption (which most Ukrainians, in fact, cannot take part in), one in which the housewife fulfils the traditional roles of the mother and wife, and the businesswoman is the female entrepreneur undertaking the burden of work in the new capitalist order.

This Ukrainian feminine habitus<sup>15</sup> (encompassing the various elements described above in different proportions) becomes transformed through the experience of migration to Poland, where the ultra-feminine regimes cease to play a crucial survival strategy role. As a result, the women experience a certain relaxation of the normative, social expectations and discover new available models which, to a different degree, they incorporate into their lifestyles.

One issue which has reappeared in some of my interviews is the notion of high-heeled shoes and the concept of the 'appropriate' dress code, as Nastya (32) from Ukraine illustrates:

*Yes, it's such a misunderstanding sometimes, you come to work just like me today, they ask: 'Huh? Are you going on a date today?' 'Oh, why on a date? It's just how I am, I got dressed, high heels for myself'. Now smaller heels, at the beginning they were always high, it was so strange for everyone.*

Nastya also points out that, in Ukraine, women take care more of their external looks and interprets this as a result of greater competition for male attraction. Other women impose very strict, moral categories on the clothes they wear – for example, two girls told me that they sent back their high-heeled winter boots to Ukraine because they felt that wearing them in Poland made them look like prostitutes. Now they say they even appreciate the fact that they can wear elegant, though comfortable and flat shoes to work, and generally dress in a more casual way in jeans and sweaters without any feeling of inappropriateness.

Those women who try to merge Ukrainian standards with the Polish context are sometimes frustrated when they are treated as ‘a pretty Ukrainian’, states 31-year-old Oksana:

*It was so ambiguous. I have no problem with... I am very aware that I look good and I take care of it, but it annoys me when someone is trying very hard to behave in this way (...) especially men. This is not just a matter of men; women are also reminding me about it, or heaven forbid if you are to some degree their competition or you might be competition, then it is a horror, but it is probably normal among women, at least in Ukraine it also functions like this, it's just simpler. However, when men said such things, it hurt more, although there is still much less of it in Poland than in Ukraine.*

However, an interest in taking care of one's appearance can only partly be explained by the ‘Barbie’ habitus. As Ukrainian scholars often stress, ever since the fall of the USSR the Ukrainian people have been stuck between the old patterns and the new, Western, models of consumption, while having very limited possibilities to participate actively in the realisation of their assumptions (Abbott and Sapsford 2006; Zhurzhenko 2001). As one of my interviewees, Ksenija, aged 32, recalled in a casual conversation, when one of the major economic crises hit Ukraine in 1998 she was a young teenager and, despite both of her parents working, they found themselves to be degraded to the ‘working poor’, and there was not enough money in the household to even buy food. She had only one set of ‘fancy’ clothes (a white polo-neck sweater and a pink, second-hand jacket) which she had to wear to all the social events important in a 14-year-old's life, like birthdays or school parties. As a result, when she migrated she was finally ‘promoted’ financially to the consumer class and gained access to a wide range of affordable options. She said she felt ‘shopping-hungry’ and needed to satiate this with various purchases in order to regain a sense of dignity and have the feeling of belonging to the majority group.

Another observed way of ‘doing femininity’ is through a total redefinition of Ukrainian identity(ies). Polina, aged 40, usually wears trousers and casual tops, comfortable flat shoes and very little make-up. She also has two tattoos and a big motorbike which impresses Polish men, who usually compliment her saying that it's beautiful to see a woman riding such a big motorbike. When she goes back to visit her parents, she hears from people that she looks different – meaning not like ‘one of us’, which could be interpreted as a sign that she has developed her own style, free from the dominant gender models she was used to and feels comfortable ‘being herself’.

The examples quoted above are not to say that Polish women neglect their appearance or deny their womanhood, yet they seem to have a culturally wider spectrum of available ways of ‘doing femininity’ – apart from the ultra-feminine attributes like high heels and long hair, it is common to wear flat shoes and casual clothes, to have tattoos and short hair and still feel and be perceived as a woman. Therefore, the Polish model is more emancipated (Western) while, at the same time, pertaining to some of the familiar (Eastern) notions and does not require the migrants to completely reject their acquired, domestic patterns which, in turn, seems to facilitate the transformation of notions of external femininity among Ukrainians.

## Conclusions

Changing the country of residence, especially when outside the ‘national’ migration networks, is an undertaking in which people's experiences of the everyday will vary depending on many factors – age, gender, type of work, civil status or the structure of opportunity. Women and men experience migration in different ways and so will be the influence of migration on gender norms. Just as with Polish migrants in the UK and Ireland, one study can point to the emancipating effect for females of relocating westward (Siara 2013), whereas another



will highlight the maintaining of the *status quo* when migration is undertaken for the sake of the family's interest and not of individual benefits (Muszel 2013). The effect also depends on socio-educational factors – the woman's education and the place of origin (big city, town or village).

The aim of this article is to give voice to highly skilled female migrants from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia – instead of just limiting them to being statistical figures, even if they do not speak with one voice – and to take a look at how their individual, gender-related lifestyle choices and transformations are affected through the experience of migration to Poland. In terms of gender-role renegotiation, I have observed the following approaches:

- retaining certain familiar ways of 'doing' gender, with the simultaneous redefinition of personal borders and the scope of female/male roles;
- the fluctuating approach – leading a modern, professionally successful lifestyle, while pertaining to traditional values of 'following her man' on declarative level; and
- abandoning the male-centric perspective on life and developing independence and self-reliance.

In terms of the external notions of femininity, while the majority of my interviewees claim (and manifest) that taking care of one's looks is still important, they do take advantage of the wider spectrum of options and enjoy getting rid of the stiff corset of the ultra-feminine dress code and blending in with the casual big-city crowd.

I do not claim that such processes are reserved for either women from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia or for highly skilled females (see the research on Mexican, Dominican, Iranian or Filipina migrants quoted earlier: Darvishpour 1999, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parreñas 2001, Pessar 1995) and, as the research methodology is qualitative, I do not present my findings as representative of the discussed cases. However, unlike in the case of, for example, the migration of nurses, where gender inequality is one of the push factors (Jones, Bifulco and Gabe 2009: 289), for my Eastern interviewees it was the migration experience that often made them see the greater levels of inequality back home.

What is particular in the sample researched is the socio-historic context. The three chosen countries share a common denominator of the historical legacy with the gender/work/lifestyle models imposed by the Soviet ideology; and Poland, as the country of immigration, had also been subjected to this ideology for well over three decades. However, with the systemic change in the late 1980s and the country's 2004 EU accession, Poland symbolically disconnected with its socialist past. For these reasons, Poland as a country of immigration is both familiar and foreign; however, Polish gender models are easier to assume, because the differences are not as extreme as they are in countries with greater gender equality, which makes the adaptation process easier. The Polish big-city gender and lifestyle models are, on the one hand, more emancipated and thus more attractive, more Western while, at the same time, they pertain to some of the familiar Eastern 'socialist' notions and do not require migrants to abandon the patterns acquired in the course of socialisation in the home countries. This way, the biographical work which needs to be done in order to integrate their experiences into a coherent new identity is easier and comes at a lower cost, not only for the migrants but also for the host country.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A large body of literature devoted to the problems triggered by the mass migration of women concerns the case of transnational motherhood and its impact on the children left behind (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenberg 2012; Parreñas 2001; Tolstokorova 2010; Urbańska 2015). However, even if some of the women considered by these studies are skilled, in the quoted works they are analysed from the perspective of the work undertaken (usually in the domestic and care sectors) – which is not classified as highly skilled and is, instead, associated with deskilling and the migrant niche.

<sup>2</sup> An interesting counterexample is Walton-Roberts' (2019) article on the experiences of male nurses from India.

<sup>3</sup> Men also undergo gendered changes in the process of migration, both as individuals and in family relationships, although their experiences will be different, and the limits of this paper do not allow for a comparative analysis. However, in most cases, when people migrate from more-patriarchal to more-liberal societies and cultures, it often has an emancipating effect – especially for women when it triggers their greater economic independence and, consequently, decisiveness – whereas men lose their thus-far-dominant status (Darvishpour 1999, 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Lutz 2010; Pessar 1995). On the other hand, research on Indian male-nurse migration has shown that, despite entering a heavily feminised profession, males actually benefit more professionally because the requirements for their emotional involvement in work are lower than for women and the discrimination they experience is less violent (Walton-Roberts 2019: 23).

<sup>4</sup> Another important category of skilled migrant which should be noted is the spouse of a Polish national (Górny and Kępińska 2004), although she does not have to be professionally active. However, in my research sample I do not have such cases.

<sup>5</sup> It is a document (from 2007 which came into force in March 2008) which originally could have been granted to a person from the former USSR republics (and as of 2019 can be granted to any national, including a stateless person) who submits a written declaration of belonging to the Polish nation (and meets other conditions specified by the Act on *Karta Polaka*, Journal of Laws 2019, item 1095). This is not equal to obtaining Polish citizenship but does put the individual in a privileged position by, for example, allowing him or her to obtain a national visa entitling them to multiple crossings of the Polish border and to apply for permanent residence/citizenship (both free of charge); above all, it grants them open and equal access to the labour market.

<sup>6</sup> According to the statistics published by the Polish Central Statistical Office (2016: 448), over the decade 2006–2016 the number of foreign students in Poland rose by 5.7 times and currently amounts to 57 119 undergraduates, 53.5 per cent of whom are Ukrainian (women constituting 55 per cent). The second-largest group are Belarusians, who make up 8 per cent of the total number (of whom 59.5 per cent are women). This has resulted in the coining of the term 'the Ukrainisation' of Polish higher education. Russian students account for only 1 per cent of the foreign undergraduates, although this group is also female-dominated (women account for 64 per cent).

<sup>7</sup> The eight models and time periods are:

- the heroic post-war *Polish Mother* 1945–1948;
- the *forerunner of socialist work* 1949–1955;
- the *home woman – mother, wife, housekeeper* 1956–1960/61;
- the *woman – working mother* 1962–1974;
- the *feminist woman* 1975–1989;
- the *politically active woman* 1989–1992;
- the *successful woman – businesswoman* 1998–2000; and
- the *traditional woman* 2001–2002 (Sokół 2012: 15–16).

<sup>8</sup> It was argued that socialism, through women's large-scale inclusion in the labour market, had destroyed the traditional Polish family by outsourcing childcare to state institutions; with the end of that system, the housewife model (with the woman as the guardian of the home and her husband's supporter) could finally be restored (Łaciak 1995: 237–238).

<sup>9</sup> The Kraków-based *Tygodnik Powszechny*, founded in 1945, presents an open ecumenical view of Polish Catholicism, bringing together the values of liberalism with the principles of faith.

<sup>10</sup> I have selected those interviews that were richest in the empirical content which is the focus of this paper.

<sup>11</sup> As my target researchees do not constitute a group in the sociological sense and are not necessarily strongly embedded in intra-ethnic networks (since they work outside the migrant chains), I had to seek interviewees in a number of ways. First, I contacted my personal acquaintances and contacts recommended by my friends, or I wrote directly to the women I knew from the media. Next, I sought contacts on various social media fora for expats and in some migrant-related institutions – e.g. NGOs; the remaining interviewees were contacted through snowballing.

<sup>12</sup> Ivano-Frankivsk had been under Polish rule a few centuries ago, then became part of Galicia, one of the crown lands of the Austrian Empire which also covered the south-east regions of Poland until 1918. In the interwar period 1919-1939 it used to be part of Poland again and was called Stanisławów.

<sup>13</sup> Grodno and Brest are areas with strong historical ties with Poland which, until 1945, were within the Polish borderland territory.


<sup>14</sup> It happened at a time before legal provisions facilitating long-term residence and employment were introduced, when a marriage of convenience was a more common strategy for dealing with legal hassles (Górny and Kępińska 2004).

<sup>15</sup> I understand ‘habitus’ after Bourdieu’s theory as ‘a set of dispositions (including ways of thinking and acting) acquired, mostly subconsciously, by the members of specific groups and social classes as a result of being in the same objective conditions’ (Giddens 2012: 1074).

### Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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# The Motivations and Reality of Return Migration to Armenia

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*Return migration has been increasingly gaining prominence in migration research as well as in migration policies across the world. However, in some regions, such as the Caucasus, the phenomenon of return migration is little explored despite its significance for the region. Based on 64 interviews with returnees and key informants together with additional online surveys with Armenian migrants, this study discusses important issues about return and reintegration with policy implications. It covers voluntary returnees as well as the participants of the assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes and presents the case for a multiplicity of the return migration motivations and experiences which are dependent on the return preparedness and the strategies which the returnees use.*

*Keywords: return migration; return motivations; reintegration; structural barriers; Armenia*

## Introduction

Armenia is a country with a large diaspora, estimated at 8 million, compared to the 3 million population residing within the country (Migration Policy Centre 2013). The classic Armenian diaspora was largely created after the 1915 Armenian Genocide, when Armenians were escaping violence in the Ottoman Empire (Safrastyan 2011). Some Armenians also migrated during the turbulent years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Makaryan 2012). Armenia is an understudied country with large migration flows. In countries with a significant amount of outmigration, such as Armenia, any return migration is important because it raises significant implications for the region. According to an official from the Armenian Ministry of Diaspora, there have been around 65 000 returnees to Armenia since the early 1990s although only 35 000 of them ultimately remained (personal communication, 6 July 2016).

The priority of return in migration policies in Armenia is not only highlighted by the existence of numerous programmes supporting the phenomenon but also by official Republic of Armenia legal documents – such as the state strategy for migration policy for the years 2017–2021 which features, as one of its top goals, support for the return of Armenia's citizens, their further reintegration and their possible future involvement in the

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economic development of the country (State Migration Services 2017). However, the statistics on Armenian migration primarily deal with labour migration to Russia, which is of the highest significance to the region but is outside the scope of this paper.

Return migration can be defined as ‘the process of people returning to their country or place of origin after a significant period of time in another country or region’ (King 2000: 8). The International Organisation for Migration (IOM 2011: 56) specifies the timeframe for return migration, which can be considered as happening ‘usually after spending at least one year in another country’. Reintegration is migrants’ adaptation to society in the country of origin, which can be a difficult task because it would be unreasonable to expect that, during the prolonged period of absence, nothing would change in the country of origin (Arowolo 2000). Reintegration is defined as ‘the process through which a return migrant participates in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the country of origin’ (Cassarino 2008: 127). The IOM distinguishes four dimensions of reintegration – the social, the cultural, the economic and the psychosocial (IOM 2015).

A combination of individual and structural factors has been found to influence reintegration and the sustainability of return (Black and Gent 2006). Sustainable return can mean the absence of re-emigration but there are also other factors affecting returnees’ long-term socio-economic well-being, such as access to income, shelter, healthcare, education and other services (Black and Gent 2006). The broad definition of sustainability involves both the reintegration of individual returnees and also the wider impact of return on macroeconomic and political indicators. Koser and Kuschminder (2015) focus on returnees’ own perceptions and feelings regarding their well-being and safety in their country of origin. They found that many of the factors influencing the sustainability of return – such as family relations – are outside the scope of direct policy intervention. However, it might still be useful to examine them in order to understand their dynamics.

We can distinguish different types of return on a scale varying between voluntary and forced with voluntary return being the preferred mode. The widest definition that can be used for voluntary return is the absence of force (Black, Koser, Munk, Atfield, D’Onofrio and Tiemoko 2004: 6). If the return is forced or semi-voluntary (Sinatti and Horst 2015), it is harder for the returnees to integrate fully because some of their migration objectives, such as saving money, might not have been accomplished. Returnees who took part in AVRR (assisted voluntary return and reintegration) programmes form a specific group. There have already been several studies on returnees in Armenia (Johansson 2008; Lietaert, Derluyn and Broekaert 2016; Pawlowska 2017). Lietaert *et al.* (2016) found that returnees who took part in AVRR programmes attached great symbolic importance to their transnational ties, even though they were rarely able to partake in the transnational field. Pawlowska (2017) focused on the ethnic return of Armenian Americans and found that this specific group were disillusioned by their repatriation to Armenia and maintained a symbolic boundary between themselves and the local population. Therefore, returnee groups are not homogenous and any previous experience before returning strongly influences their post-return experience. There is also some policy literature which usually covers short-term labour migration to Russia but only deals with return migration to a limited extent (Agadjanian and Sevoyan 2014).

This paper looks at return migration to Armenia, with the purpose of capturing those factors of return and reintegration which can further contribute to the development of the country of origin. Based on interviews with returnees and key informants, as well as on surveys with Armenian migrants, our research questions are:

- What are the return motivations for Armenian migrants and returnees?
- What are the factors negatively and positively affecting reintegration in Armenia for voluntary and forced migrants?

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section describes the theoretical framework for return migration and development. Then we present the methodology and data for this study and its results before, finally, concluding with a discussion of the possibilities for sustainable return.

## Return migration and its impact on development

Cassarino (2004) asserts that, due to the diversity of migratory categories, there is a need to distinguish between the different types of returnee. The distinction can be based on their previous countries of settlement and their individual characteristics (such as skill levels measured by the levels of education). Returnees coming from varying locations face different possibilities and hardships when returning despite sharing the identity of ‘returning residents’ (Horst 2007). Kuschminder (2017) asserts that differences in personal characteristics and between the countries from which returnees come back can affect the overall return outcomes. Furthermore, return is not only a personal issue but also a contextual one, affected by structural factors (Cassarino 2004). The structural barriers can affect returnees across all skill levels. Black *et al.* (2004) also argue that there are both individual and structural factors influencing the return. While structural factors include the conditions in the country of origin and in the host country, individual factors reflect the migrants’ personal attributes (such as gender or old age) and social relations. The model also works with policy interventions (incentives and disincentives to migrate). Chobanyan (2013) discusses both push and pull factors in the return migration of Armenians, including worsening conditions in the receiving country, xenophobia, homesickness and a desire to raise children in the home country.

A discussion of the reintegration of returnees and its impact on development requires an understanding of the broader context of migration and development – in other words, the migration–development nexus (Faist 2008; Skeldon 2011). Development can occur on the micro and macro scales, taking into account the improving skill levels of individual migrants or, if the number of migrants is sufficiently high, the possible effects on the development of the country of origin. Some governments or international organisations have seen migrants as ‘agents of change’ (Faist 2008) or ‘heroes of development’ (Rodriguez 2002) and, over the years, the global discourse on migration and development has oscillated between pessimism and optimism (de Haas 2010). Let us take remittances that are closely connected with both migration and development as an example. While many hailed these financial flows as the new ‘development mantra’ in the early 2000s (Kapur 2005), others were more sceptical and claimed that there has not been conclusive evidence that remittances promote macro-economic growth (Yang 2011). However, many consider them to be one of the main benefits of migration for development – for example, as an efficient tool for poverty reduction on the household level (Adams and Page 2005).

According to Radu and Straubhaar (2012), the impact of return migration depends on the magnitude of the migration flows and the selection of migrants. There are different ways in which returnees can contribute to development in the country of origin. Their potential contributions can be subdivided into the occupational choices of the return migrants or, more specifically, returnee entrepreneurship (Dustmann and Kirchkamp 2002; Wahba and Zenou 2012). However, some development scholars criticise the fact that the link between return migration and development is often taken for granted and not critically interrogated (van Houte and Davids 2008). There is a need to explore the barriers to reintegration which can prevent returnees from meaningful engagement linked to development. Returnees who benefit from so-called assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes (AVRR) often struggle with the return that is not entirely voluntary and with their reintegration. In addition, many returnees report different levels of coercion to encourage them to take part in these programmes (Lietaert *et al.* 2016). It has been argued that IOM employees are aware of this tension (Koch 2014).

Cassarino (2004) argues that return motivations have two components – the level of their willingness to return and their preparedness. Even if migrants express the wish to move, it does not necessarily mean that they are *ready* for that move – they might not have enough tangible and intangible resources for the return. In addition, an early repatriation can have an adverse effect on returnees because they might not recover the

resources that they had invested in their journey. Moreover, these returnees might not have enough experience from the country of settlement to be able to use it in the form of social remittances (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011) or when starting a new business. On the other hand, returnees who spend longer outside their country of origin might face difficulties due to the changes that occurred in the origin country and to cultural or structural barriers. Therefore, having built on the existing body of literature, we decided to investigate the factors that are important for the sustainable return of Armenians. We inquired about the factors influencing the return decision (i.e. the motivation to return) and the factors affecting returnee reintegration (both positively and negatively), which are also connected to the occupational choices of the returnees.

## Methods

This research combines semi-structured interviews (i) with returnees and (ii) with international migration experts residing in Armenia, with (iii) an online survey with migrants of Armenian origin. The fieldwork in Yerevan and the interviews took place between July and September 2016 and in January 2018, while the online survey was carried out between January and March 2017. The semi-structured interviews with the returnees revolved around the issue of return and reintegration. To have a balanced sample representing different views, an effort was made to recruit people from diverse groups of return migrants (highly skilled vs other skill levels, returning from various countries, assisted, or not, by an organisation during the process of return). In total, there were eight returnees in the sample who were participants in the AVRR programmes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. First, open coding was used to come up with new ideas and, second, axial coding connected to the text emerged. After the interviews, coding was used to analyse the data. In total, there were 32 returnee interviewees (17 males, 15 females). Of them, 21 had higher education and seven had finished secondary school. All the returnees had lived abroad for at least one year within the last decade but many of them lived abroad for longer periods of time. The return migrants who were interviewed returned from Europe (Germany – 4, Belgium – 4, Hungary and France – 2, Ukraine, Slovakia and Austria – 1), North America (USA – 6, Canada – 3), the Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Qatar, Egypt, 1 each), Russia (2), and Georgia (1). In total, 19 returnees were employed, seven were self-employed and six unemployed. They spent different periods of time in Armenia: 12 of them less than a year, five of them one to two years, seven of them two to five years and eight more than five years (see Table 1).

Additional data were drawn from the interviews with the 32 key informants – all experts on international migration in Armenia. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted around the key theme of return migration, with the aim of grasping the complexity of the phenomenon and eliciting answers to the research questions. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed using qualitative coding. Most of the key informant interviews took place in Yerevan because the vast majority of organisations dealing with migration, state agencies, NGOs, international organisations such as United Nations agencies and of academic institutions have their seats in the capital. The key informants were selected from a list of organisations working on the issue of migration in Armenia and their selection was made following consultation with other key informants and researchers working in the country.

A combination of snowball sampling and personal and organisational networks was used to engage further interviewees. Many of the interviewees were active in the policy field and worked actively with the State Migration Services – the key migration actor in Armenia. The interviews revolved around the themes of return migration and reintegration, development in Armenia and potential barriers to returnee reintegration. Some of the interviewees were returnees themselves. The expert interviews are seen as ‘crystallisation points’ for insider knowledge and also serve as an entry point to the field of research (Bogner, Littig and Menz 2009: 2).

This type of data generation is not unproblematic but it serves the purpose of eliciting ideas that can be applied to a broader range of people.

**Table 1. Overview of the interviewed returnees**

	<b>Total group (n=32)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	17
Female	15
<b>Education</b>	
Secondary	7
University	21
Unknown	4
<b>Previous region of settlement</b>	
Europe	15
North America	9
Middle East	5
Central Asia	3
<b>Work situation in Armenia</b>	
Employee	19
Self-employed	7
Unemployed	6
<b>Period of time spent in Armenia</b>	
Less than 1 year	12
1 to 2 years	5
2 to 5 years	7
More than 5 years	8

Another method used was a survey aimed at Armenians living outside Armenia. An online survey was launched on the SurveyMonkey platform from January to March 2017. The survey included a total of 25 questions divided into two categories – demographic data and the possibility of a return to Armenia. The questionnaire was mixed – i.e. it included both closed and open-ended questions. To disseminate the survey widely among Armenians outside Armenia, networking websites such as Facebook and LinkedIn were used. The link to the survey was posted on various groups for diaspora Armenians on Facebook (e.g. Armenians in Germany, France, the Czech Republic and Slovakia). Personal and institutional networks were also used to disseminate the survey.

In total, there were 146 respondents in the survey, 93 (64 per cent) of them female and 52 (36 per cent) male. They came from a wide range of countries, including the USA (11 per cent), France (9) and Russia (4). There were 28 respondents from the Czech Republic (19 per cent) which was also due to the channels through which information about the survey was disseminated. Other respondents lived in China, Poland, Germany, Turkey, Canada, Hungary or Slovakia. More than half of the respondents (51 per cent) were in the age group 21–29 years. The second most represented age group was made up of Armenian migrants aged 30–39 (29 per cent), followed by those aged 40–49 (7 per cent) and 18–20 (6 per cent). Compared to the overall population of Armenian migrants living abroad, younger and more educated respondents answered the survey questions. In total, 62 per cent of the respondents had a graduate degree, while 18 per cent had a BA and 11 per cent

a high-school qualification. The marital status of the respondents also reflected this younger age bias, with 59 per cent being single and 30 per cent married. The majority of the respondents (74 per cent) had no children.

Almost half of the sample (48 per cent) stayed abroad for more than five years. The second most frequent period of stay was between one and three years (24 per cent); 15 per cent of migrants stayed less than one year and 13 per cent between three and five years. Finally, the respondents were mainly employed (44 per cent) or students (39 per cent). Some were unemployed and looking for work (4 per cent), while those who were not in employment and not looking for work numbered 3 per cent, as did retired migrants. There can be several limitations with this type of survey, mainly because it is self-selected. Another limitation was the online form, which was not accessible to everyone. The third barrier was the English language. However, designed as it was, it shed light on a relatively little-researched group of Armenian migrants – those who speak English, have professional jobs or are students. Moreover, in Armenia, seasonal migration to Russia and the effects of remittances from this country are relatively well researched (Agadjanian and Sevoyan 2014; Grigorian and Melkonyan 2011). Therefore, this type of limitation in the surveys may be justified – it allowed us to learn more about the group of potential returnees who could have a high impact on the development of Armenia due to their high skill levels.

### **Return motivations**

The motivation to return represents an important factor for returnee reintegration. While there is a complex array of overlapping motivations encouraging returnees to go back, several of them emerged as important. These motivations and expectations will be discussed in the following section on return motivations. In the next part, we focus on the reality of return, which is a difficult experience for many returnees who struggle with reintegration. We investigate both the negative and positive factors influencing returnee reintegration, both on the individual and on the structural level. We have found that the returnees' personal characteristics – such as skills, networks and social relations – and their willingness and preparedness to return are necessary for them to be able to reintegrate successfully. However, the wider environment in Armenia, including the economic and other social and structural factors (such as corruption) can affect reintegration in a negative way.

We enquired about the motivations to return in the survey as well as in the interviews. The return motivations are similar for the Armenian migrants residing abroad and the returnees. In both groups, family (being close to relatives and friends) and work-related reasons were mentioned frequently. The themes related to human security, patriotism, and the overall environment in Armenia also appeared in both the surveys and the interviews. In response to the survey, the main reasons cited for the respondents' return to Armenia were family (n=80), employment (n=33) and safety (n=23). The motivations did not generally differ by gender. However, respondents under the age of 40 gave family reasons as their main motivation for return (n=76), whereas the older respondents (40+) were more motivated to return because of an employment offer (n=6). Among other answers not directly related to the previous options, the migrants mentioned factors such as patriotism, reasons relating to the rule of law, political and social situation, lifestyle or future projects in Armenia (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Reasons relating to return among migrants (survey results)**

Factors	Examples of statements
Family	my child, home, parents, friends and family only
Employment	work in the tourism sector, ability to grow in the field of IT, stable income
Safety	comfort zone, sense of belonging, community, peace
Patriotic reasons	belonging to the motherland, homeland, be useful for the country where [I was] born, patriotic feelings, love for Gyumri [a city in Armenia]
The rule of law and political situation	law and order, trust in the Armenian government, freedom from corruption, change of the ruling regime, better economic situation, [an]other president
Social situation	healthy social environment, the social state of the country, change of living conditions
Lifestyle reasons	despise the lifestyle of Americans, work-life balance, nature, ecology, nostalgia, sun, people of Armenia
Future projects	business, to open my own clinic, aim to improve my skills

The motivation to return due to relations in Armenia was a general feeling echoed by many migrants across all skill levels. These sentiments are often mixed with patriotic reasons for returning. Some of the survey respondents remarked that they wanted to return because they wanted their children to grow up in Armenia and be close to their grandparents. Similar factors influencing return also appeared in the interviews. One 43-year-old returnee from the US mentioned how important it was for her that her daughter should have ‘full Armenian identity’ and be close to her grandparents. Another woman (54) returning from Germany stated that she went back to Armenia to take care of her elderly mother. When she was in Germany, she did not feel integrated and missed Armenia. This woman was assisted by an NGO within the framework of an AVRRO programme. Other assisted returnees mentioned motivations relating to their families but also to the conditions in their previous country of residence and the lack of choice when it came to decision-making about their return.

Motivations connected to patriotism often appeared in the interviews. One 33-year-old returnee from Canada stated that he returned for ‘identitarian and pragmatic reasons’. A 27-year-old returnee from France noted, ‘I liked living in Europe, but I felt it was my neighbour’s home. And I have to create the same effort in my home, meaning my country. I am an Armenian woman. I have to work for some change and help people’. Moreover, the feeling of not belonging being the main impetus for return can also be connected to discrimination in the country of settlement. One female interviewee aged 27, who had returned from Iran, stated that ‘as a member of a minority [she] felt discriminated [against]’. Another interviewee, a 27-year-old man who had come back from Syria, said that the situation in his previous country of residence made you feel that ‘you don’t belong there’.

For many returnees, security was equally important. This relates not only to having a stable job but also to general levels of security in the country. One male returnee (29) from Syria stated, ‘I moved here for the job as well as the security. I had arranged my first job before coming here’. The safe environment and the general levels of security in Armenia were perceived as favourable. One female returnee from the US (43) asserted, ‘There is less stress here; the type of worry is different. For example, in daycare in the US, I had to be aware of strangers and had to teach my child to beware of strangers’.

Many returnees enjoyed the lifestyle in Armenia that was perceived as relaxed and conducive to the life–work balance: ‘Here you have the small city lifestyle. You can walk everywhere. You can sit down and have a coffee without thinking that you’ll be late’ (man, 42, returned from the US).

However, for some of the returnees, Yerevan was seen as quiet and not offering many opportunities. One 28-year-old female returnee complained: ‘First, I hated the slow pace of life here. So slow. In Lebanon, there is this active lifestyle. I had two jobs. I ran from one to the other’.

In the online survey, the migrants rated the opportunities for a good work–life balance compared to other countries. About a third (35.3 per cent) of the respondents thought that Armenia offered few opportunities for a good work–life balance and only 11 per cent thought the contrary.

Another motivation often cited by both the migrants in the survey and the returnees in the interviews is the importance of future projects, as one returnee noted:

*Now it is happening that smart people return to Armenia when they have young kids. They see it as a future for the kids. They have some emotional ties with the country. The first people who returned were the revolutionary types who started the movement to the country. Now the new types look for housing, a better quality of life and schools for children. They decide to come here for three years and see how it is. They already come with a job as a CEO or start their own company (male, 45, returned from the US).*

Generally, there are multiple reasons for return. However, in case of voluntary returns to Armenia, people usually went back because they had relations in the country or for work-related and patriotic reasons. These returns are generally planned in advance and the returnees can make use of their social networks in Armenia to start new projects. In contrast, as a result of a return that is hasty and not prepared in advance, returnees often struggle with reintegration. This is usually the case during the so-called assisted voluntary returns, during which returnees might have been coerced into leaving the country of settlement. It is apparent that a strong motivation to return is important in preparing for the returnees’ integration (Cassarino 2004). This, in turn, plays a significant role in the success of the reintegration process.

### **Factors negatively affecting reintegration in Armenia**

In this section, we explore the returnees’ experiences after their return to Armenia by investigating the factors that influence the reintegration process. It is important to note that most of these factors can have both positive and negative effects – in other words, they can go either way. The factors affecting reintegration are closely linked to the migrants having enough tangible and intangible resources for the return to their country of origin. The timing of the return also plays a role. An early repatriation can have an adverse effect on returnees because they might not recover the resources that they had invested in their journey. This is generally the case of the AVRР returnees who go back after only a short period of time, usually not exceeding one or two years. Moreover, these returnees might not have enough experience from the country of settlement to be able to use it in the form of social remittances or when starting a new business. Similarly, the intention to return, together with being properly prepared for it, are crucial too. Our aim was to find out which of the factors are perceived quite positively and which are understood as negative in the Armenian context. We first focus on the factors negatively affecting the reintegration process in Armenia before analysing those with positive effects.

We begin this section with a discussion of the Armenian migrants’ perceived concerns about reintegration. We then proceed to the actual experience of the returnees and examine what they see as the factors that negatively affected their return. Finally, the statements by the key informants about the barriers to returnee reintegration will conclude the section. In the online survey, the Armenian migrants mentioned the following barriers, which they feared could have a negative impact on their reintegration. For the clear majority of them (52 per cent), the main issues were employment- and economy-related. Others were concerned about corruption (7 per cent), the government (5 per cent), family (4 per cent) or injustice (3 per cent). Poverty, low salaries

and high levels of unemployment create conditions that make people leave in the first place and make it equally difficult for them to return. Despite some improvements over the past two decades, labour-market conditions in Armenia are still problematic (ETF 2013).

Similar concerns were raised by the returnees during the interviews. For those who did not have the opportunity to become self-employed and who lacked the relevant networks, finding employment was often difficult. Even if the returnees found a job, there were other issues that they thought prevented them from reintegrating. These issues mainly revolved around the low levels of salaries and limited opportunities for professional growth, which one 32-year-old female returnee from the US called ‘an inhibition of opportunities’. Others noted that the economic aspects of living in Armenia are challenging. One noted, ‘I’m working for experience now. You didn’t come here to save money’ (woman, 28, returned from Lebanon). Another returnee – a 29-year-old male returned from Syria – mentioned the practical difficulties with making ends meet: ‘The salary in my first job was low and the rents are expensive. This can be difficult for some people’.

However, returnees who had already found a job also mentioned other concerns connected to the social environment in Armenia. One, a 43-year-old female back from the US, mentioned that, in Armenia, ‘older people are not safeguarded’. Returnees were also concerned about government services such as healthcare. For example, the returnees ‘would like to have more services from the government for [the] taxes. There is just basic healthcare’ (female 27, returned from Iran).

The returnees also pointed out some issues connected to the norms in the society that were not comparable with what the returnees experienced while living abroad. They mentioned, for example, the relations between genders or other norms such as smoking indoors. According to this 32-year-old female, returned from the US, ‘There are some things that I find difficult here, some cultural things. Sometimes you are stared at and [I find problematic] the way in which men treat women’. This male returnee from Canada (33) claimed that, ‘There is a lot of ignorance too, for example, about second-hand smoking. So you’re going to live in a safe country but everyone is going to have lung cancer’.

The key informants agreed that, for many returnees, it is difficult to find a job. One of the employees of the Targeted Initiative for Armenia asserts that

*the first and the most urgent issue that they face is unemployment. When they come back, they have no economic resources to support the family. These are the reasons why they decided to migrate in the first place (personal communication, 22 July 2016).*

Some key informants also stressed that difficulties in reintegrating await everyone, even those highly skilled returnees who have been targeted by the project run by the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ). One of the employees of GIZ claimed that

*moving back to Armenia is not a one-day decision; they should come to this idea gradually. Of course, they can have a lot of barriers in mind. Therefore, our idea was also to present the cases showing how these difficulties can be overcome. If a person wants to return, it is his (sic) decision and he should know beforehand that there will be problems (personal communication, 13 July 2016).*

Corruption is yet another problem that is encountered not only when returnees want to avail themselves of the services of the state but also when they try to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This issue is experienced as a problem particularly by returnees from countries with low levels of corruption (Paasche 2016). The state is the most important player when it comes to addressing corruption. Even if some of the returnees stated that the situation in Armenia is better than it was several years ago, it still represents an important problem for



Armenian returnees. One man (41) who had returned from Russia claimed that ‘in many countries, corruption is experienced on different levels. Normally it is the task of the government to eliminate petty corruption, but it is not happening in Armenia’.

Transparency International (TI) in Armenia is the main organisation addressing corruption. TI’s current Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) places Armenia 107th out of 180 countries observed. While this index has its limitations, it nevertheless illustrates the stark differences between Armenia and neighbouring Georgia (placed 48th). The following statement comes from a member of the TI staff in Armenia:

*Because of corruption we have a small market. People leave the country so there are fewer consumers. People cannot import goods because it is very monopolised because we cannot touch certain areas. If I wanted to start a business importing fuel, I would be asked not to do that. So is the market small or maybe more illegally regularised? (personal communication, 29 July 2016).*

To summarise, Armenian migrants, returnees and key informants single-mindedly stressed the importance of income-generating activities for returnees. However, there were also other factors which negatively affected the returnees’ sense of well-being – such as corruption, the social environment and social norms. Beyond these, it has already been stated that the primary motivation to return affects the returnees’ subsequent reintegration in the country of origin. In the case of semi-voluntary or forced returns, it is much harder to reintegrate than in returns where the decision was purely voluntary. If people perceive their return as forced (even in the case of AVRRC programmes), reintegration becomes difficult, as illustrated by the following quote from a 61-year-old male returnee from Belgium: ‘I am alone here. It is a torture for me. If I had a safe and legal chance to go back I would go’. This person was separated from his family, who were still in Europe, due to legal reasons and had little time to prepare for his return. This quote came from him in spite of his being assisted by a non-governmental organisation during his return process.

### **Factors positively affecting reintegration in Armenia**

As in the previous section, we begin our analysis with the migrants’ perspectives, then continue with the returnees’ views and key informants’ opinions. As already mentioned, the factors that influence reintegration in Armenia are linked to the resources which can be tangible (such as money) or intangible (such as returnees’ skills, strong personal networks or sense of initiative).

The survey results show that 59 per cent of the respondents thought that their levels of skills and professional knowledge had increased significantly while 32 per cent thought that they had increased to some extent. This is consistent with the returnees’ responses during the interviews, when they were asked about their skill levels. Some stated that there were various skills that they had learnt while living abroad. One 27-year-old female returnee from the US stressed the skills such as flexibility and open-mindedness: ‘I have some skills from the US. For example, the education system taught me flexibility. There are many different things, research skills. I am willing to learn new things’. Another woman aged 43, similarly returned from the US, highlighted better communication: ‘You ask about everyone’s job and you try to do networking. I think that after this experience, I approach people more easily’.

The returnees also stressed a sense of initiative and creativity that was important for their reintegration. ‘I’m really creative now. Before, I used to believe what I was told. Now I have my own ideas and solutions’ (woman, 27, returned from Iran). A 41-year-old male returnee from Russia noted that ‘Everyone wants to open a hairdressing salon, a kebab [stall]. People complain about the taxes, but even if you don’t need to pay taxes

but you don't have any ideas, you'll fail'. The innovative ideas that are conducive to reintegration were mentioned by returnees and key informants alike. Some organisations try to support innovative ideas and returnees' involvement. While the UNDP attempts to work in the region, they acknowledge that the most innovative ideas come from the capital. One UNDP staff member argued that 'These entrepreneurial activities are (...) fighting against this sense of apathy amongst the population which is very high. We try to attract ideas from outside Yerevan, in the regions' (personal communication, 22 July 2016).

Other returnees stress the sense of entrepreneurship that is seen as crucial for sustainable reintegration. As this male returnee (42) from the US stated: 'They suffer a lot here if they are not entrepreneurial types. If you are running away from something, for example, if you were not successful, it is not going to work'. Another returnee from the US, a male in his 40s, agrees that 'there are opportunities for entrepreneurship, you see others who have succeeded then it becomes possible. Economic opportunities are the most important hopes of economic prosperity'.

Another important factor for successful and sustainable return is strong personal networks. Some returnees noted that they felt that their networks supported them in their decision to move back to Armenia.

*Here I feel at home. I learned to make this my home. I did not feel like this from the beginning. (...) But the life is real, the issues are real. (...) My family [outside of Armenia] was supportive of my decision to move because they were very attached to Armenia* (man, 53, returned from Canada).

The returnees made use of their support networks back in Armenia, especially at the beginning – i.e. right after their return. One female returnee (27) from Iran said that 'The neighbours are helpful, they cooked food for me. There is a lot of trust because they're Armenian'.

New social contacts and friends made it easier for returnees to reintegrate.

*The social life here is great. It is easy to make friends here. People enjoy their life and there are some things that money can't buy. In [the previous city of residence] it was hard to connect with people. It was hard to form a genuine connection* (woman, 32, returned from the US).

Networking, or being able to capitalise on their social contacts, emerges as an important strategy for a successful returnee experience, needed to secure income generation. As one 25-year-old female returnee from Hungary remarked, 'Networking is all that we are left with'. Should this fail, returnees depend on the support of non-governmental organisations, support which differs across organisations. Many of them work on the premise that returnee entrepreneurship can be beneficial for the development of Armenia regardless of the skill levels of returnees or their personal characteristics.

Some of the returnees with high levels of skills did not see many obstacles when it came to reintegration or starting a business. As one man (45, returned from the US) noted, 'In order to start a business, there are no barriers, no differences [but it] is dependent on the sector'. Another skilled returnee from the US, a male aged 42, agreed.

*There are no obstacles to people who want to work in Armenia. If you want to start a business, nobody will discriminate against you. There can be problems with culture and language. You have to speak Russian if you want to do business in Armenia but other than that, legally, it is not a problem.*

While not all returnees encounter difficulties, it is more common that they occur. Furthermore, the obstacles vary across different groups of returnees; it is possible to conclude that they are less serious for returnees with

higher levels of skills. Moreover, there can be some cultural and language difficulties but these are quite rare for first-generation returnees (i.e. those who were born in Armenia).

Organisations supporting returnees are also important for returnee reintegration. Black *et al.* (2004) argue that one factor that affects the sustainability of return is the availability of programmes for returnees. According to van Houte and Davids (2008), returnees can become disappointed with the support that they receive from non-governmental and international organisations because of the unrealistic expectations which they, the returnees, create. There are different support programmes for returnees in Armenia, ranging from the provision of support for skilled returnees (e.g. Repat Armenia and Birthright Armenia) to AVRR schemes run by IOM as well as by some NGOs. However, this is often short-term support. A member of staff from the ICMPD warned that 'the economic growth cannot come from reintegration programmes. This type of assistance is not really sustainable [as] it is a temporary measure' (personal communication, 25 July 2016).

Returnees who had been assisted by an organisation with their return often complained that the levels of assistance were low. The same view was held by the experts, who asserted that the financial assistance that returnees receive might not be enough to start up a business. While returnee entrepreneurship represents quite a productive activity, it should not be taken as a replacement for access to the labour market. Moreover, the assistance of some organisations is often provided in a form of a loan that has to be paid back. While the returnees might not have a choice as to whether to become entrepreneurial or not (due to a lack of other employment opportunities), they must still repay the loans which they were granted.

Returnees and the organisations working with them usually stress the importance of returnees' own initiative and sense of entrepreneurship. However, not all returnees have the required personal characteristics to become entrepreneurs and this should be taken into consideration when devising programmes for them. Another sensitive issue is that the support given to returnees has to be well-thought out. One of the employees from the OSCE office in Yerevan stated the following:

*We have to be careful with the returnees because in some situations, the neighbours who never left are often worse off and they don't get any attention. This creates social tensions, an increase of dissatisfaction and frustration* (personal communication, 26 July 2016).

## Conclusion

Our paper has dealt with the motivations and the reality of return migration to Armenia. We have covered two broad but closely related areas – the motivations to return and the factors that affect the reintegration process in Armenia. We found that the motivations for return are largely connected not only to personal networks but also to the overall social and economic situation in Armenia, which is still perceived as problematic by some of the migrants and returnees. As for the factors affecting reintegration, we have identified a combination of individual and structural factors which can influence it. While we consider our results to be informative, we also admit that they cannot be generalised and applied to other countries or regions due to the small sample of respondents.

The results have shown that both return motivation and the returnees' preparedness for it affect the overall return experience and the sustainability of reintegration. The returnees who are motivated and prepared to return are often in a better position compared to returnees who may have been assisted by an AVRR programme. Particularly when the return is subjectively perceived as forced, it is difficult for the returnees to reintegrate. In contrast, voluntary and well-planned returns significantly increase the chances of successful reintegration. This suggests that our study confirms the link between the motivation to return and the subsequent subjective perception of reintegration which has already been established in the literature (Cassarino

2004). However, the strength of such a link, as well as the influence of various factors affecting returnee reintegration, are dependent on the individual characteristics of the returnees. To create effective policies on return and reintegration, it is crucial to know who the returnees are and what needs they have.

It seems that, in the case of Armenia, the previous country of settlement itself is not that significant in returnee reintegration. This study covers a large sample of previous countries of settlement but there were no obvious similarities among the returnees coming from the same countries. However, what mattered was the type of migration experience and the returnees' skill levels and social capital, some of which were acquired in the previous country of residence. While some returnees return because of the economic situation in the receiving countries (Buján 2015), this was generally not the case among the interviewed Armenian returnees. The structural barriers to reintegration – such as high levels of unemployment and difficulties in obtaining a job – related particularly to the labour-market conditions in Armenia. The returnees with higher levels of skills and work experience from abroad might have a comparative advantage *vis-à-vis* resident Armenians and usually obtained a job despite some initial difficulties. Our findings are in line with other studies on return migrant transnationalism, which show that migrant transnationalism and integration might not be competing forces (Carling and Pettersen 2014). Return migration can also be the outcome of successful integration in receiving societies (de Haas and Fokkema 2011) or at very least, successful integration might not significantly affect return intentions (de Haas, Fokkema and Fihri 2014).

The duration of the stay abroad also influences the return migration outcomes. Returnees who only stayed abroad for a short time (such as returnees assisted by AVRR programmes) might not have enough experience from the country of settlement to be able to use it in the form of social remittances or when starting a new business. During the study, the expert opinions largely mirrored the views of the returnees themselves. However, there were some exceptions – for example, the issue of corruption as one of the barriers to reintegration was stressed more by the key informants than by the returnees. Compared to the study by Paasche (2016), Armenian returnees did not perceive corruption as the major obstacle to their reintegration. Many returnees also perceived the differences in the social and gender norms in the Armenian society compared to their previous country of residence. However, this is quite common among the return migrants (Christou 2006).

In all cases, reintegration should be seen as crucial to a meaningful engagement in the country of origin. This issue is also connected with the social remittances that the returnees continue to exert in their country of origin and which can have positive impacts on the social norms (Levitt 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011). Therefore, it is important to critically investigate this link between reintegration and development because it will allow analysts, policy-makers and the different organisations working with returnees to devise policies and programmes not only to improve the return experience but also to enhance the positive effects on development in the country of origin. However, return migration is understood and interpreted differently by policymakers and migrants targeted by the policies (Sinatti 2015). While the AVRR programmes are largely skewed in favour of the donor countries (largely in Western Europe), their outcomes are rarely investigated. Therefore, more emphasis needs to be put on evidence-based policies and those practices which work well. This study serves as a stepping-stone to this debate by comparing different reintegration outcomes based on return motivations, incorporating the experience before return and the post-return barriers.


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# The Principle of Complementarity in Polish Migration Law. Is It a Facade?

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*The article presents an analysis of the real role of the complementarity principle and the reasons why immigration law is still based on this principle. The basic assumptions of the state's attitude towards labour immigration were set out in a period when this kind of immigration to Poland was at a much smaller scale than currently. First and foremost, one of the basic premises is the complementarity of labour immigration (complementarity principle) with the labour market test as an element of the procedures, although with some exceptions. The mechanism of controlling the complementarity is obligatory and preventive. The current economic situation in Poland, including the conditions for the functioning of immigration law, is very different from the reality of that time. In view of growing shortages of Polish employees on the labour market one can doubt whether preventive enforcement of complementarity by law is needed. The complementarity of labour immigration to Poland is a socio-economic fact and legal guarantees to ensure this result seem obsolete. There are strong arguments to consider that opportunistic political motivations are the main reason against the rationalisation of legal regulations concerning immigration of workers. The complementarity principle has become a facade of restrictive immigration law, while allowing for its use in a way that ensures the access of immigrants to the labour market.*

*Keywords: labour immigration; labour market test; complementarity principle; Poland*

## Introduction

The subject of the following considerations is the validity of maintaining preventive mechanism for verifying the complementarity of labour immigration in Polish immigration law, mainly by means of labour market testing. This form of immigration to Poland has been increasing since 2014 at a pace unprecedented in Poland's social and economic history (see also Duszczyk and Matuszczyk 2018). In spite of the dynamism and the social importance of this rapid growth, legal regulations on access of immigrants to the labour market have not been adapted to a new reality. These regulations are still largely based on premises which were adopted when labour immigration to Poland was at a much smaller scale. Primarily, according to these premises, the availability of the labour market to immigrants is basically allowed on condition of being complementary in relation to the

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employment of national labour force, although with some important exceptions mainly regarding seasonal or short-time work (see further details). The premise that the law should guarantee only the complementary character of labour immigration and prevent its substitutability, which means replacement of nationals by immigrants in the case of domestic labour, will be defined as the ‘complementarity principle’ (see also Florczak 2019).

The thesis of the article is a claim that in the current reality, with the labour market having undergone structural and most likely permanent changes, the preventive care to ensure the complementarity of immigration workforce is a highly artificial solution, which presents mainly bureaucratic hurdles. The extent to which the principle is executed – basically in connection with how accessible the labour market is for long-term employment – raises similar doubts. The text also undertakes to identify why the prevention of complementarity still features in Polish law, and the presented hypothesis argues that it is a politically motivated choice to maintain a facade of strict immigration policy in various dimensions and a fear of the costs of political decisions, which could be interpreted as a step towards the liberalisation of immigration policy. The assessment of political motives which have created the current real policy towards labour immigration is only a hypothesis. However, in the author’s opinion, informal goals of immigration policy (or perhaps better: the ambiguity of goals) was lent credence to by the inactivity of the state in view of mass labour immigration.

The concept of complementarity or substitutability regarding labour immigration is mainly specific to economics and sociology. The law is treated by these sciences, typically, and understandably, as only a tool to reach an aim and is not a separate subject for consideration (e.g. Grabowska-Lusińska and Żylicz 2008). The issue of complementarity is also touched upon in the context of political or interdisciplinary studies on labour migration (e.g. Duszczuk and Matuszczuk 2018). The present article is based on a comprehensive approach to the immigration law’s environment (socio-economic, political, other flows connected with migration) but the author’s perspective is legal. The complementarity principle in law is the focus of his attention, while the complementarity of labour migration as a socio-economic issue to a lesser degree.

The analysis covers the development of legal regulations in 1989–2019, the literature on the complementarity issue and official government documents on immigration policy. The comments relating to current legislation pertain to the Act of 12 December 2013 on Foreigners<sup>1</sup> and the Act of 20 April 2004 on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market.<sup>2</sup> Such an approach is close to public policy science.

The arrangement of the text covers, respectively, the evolution of legal provisions with regard to the access of foreigners to the labour market, including their current shape, with particular emphasis on the development of the complementarity principle, considerations regarding the paradigm of complementarity in law and the relevance of maintaining it, as well as a presentation of the hypothesis clarifying why it is still supported.

### **Evolution of the legal regulation of immigrants’ access to the Polish labour market**

Polish immigration law did not begin to take shape until communism had fallen (1989), with the country essentially closed to immigration prior to that, in a manner typical of a socialist bloc. The basic assumptions of the state’s attitude towards labour immigration were set out in the law very early, i.e. in the Act of 29 December 1989 on Employment.<sup>3</sup> That regulation was not well-developed and mainly amounted to introducing a common type of work permit and an early form of the labour market test. The term refers to a tool of selective immigration policy aimed at ensuring that a foreigner seeking to obtain the right to work and related stay will obtain employment only if it does not have a negative impact on the local labour market, i.e. no national of the host country has expressed interest in the vacancy (Duszczuk 2013). The link between this tool and the rule of complementarity is direct and clear. In line with art. 33 of the Act on Employment, employers could hire foreign nationals within the Polish People’s Republic if they were permitted to do so by the employment body

on the voivodeship level (the highest level of administrative division, body of state administration). The act stated laconically that the body should verify the situation on the labour market prior to issuing the permit. It was assumed this was the basis for evaluating whether or not there were native employees who could undertake the job before it was decided that a foreigner could. The introduction of protectionist solutions at that time is hardly surprising since it was a legal act passed in critical conditions for the economy, in the midst of a shock therapy leading from socialism to capitalism. Among the many symptoms of a crisis at the time, the unemployment rate was rising rapidly and was decisive in the process of introducing protectionist solutions, which were designed to safeguard the native workforce from being forced out of the labour market by immigrants. In the regulations to follow, the lawmaker searched for an appropriate formula to test the labour market.

The next act was more restrictive (Bielak-Jomaa 2015). Art 50(1) of the Act of 16 of October 1991 on Employment and Unemployment,<sup>4</sup> places of employment or physical persons could employ foreigners on the territory of the Republic of Poland or entrust them with paid services, upon obtaining permission to do so from the local labour office. To resolve the case, the official body was to take into consideration the situation on the labour market and the decision had to be supported by the mandatory decision of an advisory body – the provincial council of employment – in each case. Yet another legal act – the Act of 14 December 1994 on Employment and Prevention of Unemployment – appealed to the situation on the local labour market and special criteria, unspecified by law, which could be indicated by the voivode (the highest body of regional state administration) and apply solely to a particular voivodeship. The criteria could not discriminate against candidates on the basis of sex, age, disability, race, nationality, convictions (especially political and religious ones) or union membership. The Act of 1994 was also the first among acts which normalised the matter to allow for a number of exceptions to obligatory labour market testing, which was motivated by a range of reasons, e.g. early symptoms of candidate shortages for some highly-skilled professions (such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists who were graduates of Polish schools).

The act which is currently in force, i.e. the Act of 20 April 2004 on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market<sup>5</sup> with only few changes replicated the previous regulation in its original wording. The changes pertained to broadening the competences of the voivode, who could, in cases justified by the situation on the labour market, limit the type of work to management activity and representative functions for the entity. The voivode could also take into consideration the usefulness of the entity for the labour market and economy. In 2009 the lawmaker decided to use a new formula of the labour market test<sup>6</sup>. The current article 87 paragraph 1 subparagraph 2 and paragraph 3 of the aforementioned act obliges the entity entrusting work to apply to the starosta (medium-level of administrative division, body of local authority) for information on the inability to satisfy the staffing needs of the employer based on registers of unemployed persons and job seekers, or for information on the negative outcome of the recruitment held for the employer, taking into account the priority of Polish nationals and foreigners exempt from the duty of having a work permit to access the labour market.

As the law stands now, it has become ever more difficult to describe the scope of the complementarity rule and explain the rationale of the lawmaker in this respect. The defragmentation of this regulation is manifested in particular in the establishment of several dozen exceptions from the obligation to obtain a work permit. The introduction of some of these exceptions was strictly necessary, as it resulted from the international obligations of the Republic of Poland (e.g. towards beneficiaries of the free movement of persons or beneficiaries of international protection). Other exceptions are to do with various preferences, e.g. related to the Polish nationality of a foreigner, or the immigrant's profession being particularly desired on the labour market (see Mitrus 2018). Migrants who are covered by these exceptions are obviously excluded from the complementarity principle.

Labour market tests do not apply if the profession that the foreigner is supposed to undertake or the type of job they are to be entrusted appears on the list of professions and types of jobs exempt from the responsibility. The list is maintained by the voivode and when making a new entry, they should be guided by the situation on the local labour market, particularly with regard to the number of registered unemployed persons as well as job seekers in specific professions in relation to the number of offers submitted to district job agencies (Podgórska-Rakiel and Szypniewski 2018). In addition, it is not necessary to apply for the information from the starosta if the voivode issues a prolongation of the work permit for the same foreigner in the same job, or when it results from other regulations.

Labour market testing is only applied in some proceedings resolving the issue of access to the labour market. Currently, there are various paths for obtaining this access, which can be systematised primarily depending on the subject they concern – the actual employment or the legalisation of the foreigner's stay (access to the labour market is a consequence of granting the residence permit).<sup>7</sup> Four paths have economic significance due to its frequency of granting – 1) 'declarations'; 2) work permits; 3) seasonal work permits, and 4) temporary residence and work permits ('single permits'). Other types of permits exist as well, but they elicit little interest and as such will not be described in detail.

*Declarations.* In 2006, a simplified procedure granting an immigrant entry into the labour market was introduced, in which the basis for performing work is an entry of the intention to entrust work to a foreigner into the register performed by an administrative authority and made at the request of the entity that entrusts the work (the so-called 'declaration system' or 'simplified procedure'). This procedure is the most significant exception from the complementarity principle and does not require labour market testing. Its introduction resulted from shortages of labour supply and problems in finding Polish employees willing to take up employment, which appeared in the agricultural sector (especially in horticulture). Owing to this reason, the procedure is compared to similar initiatives, e.g. the Bracero programme in the USA (Górny, Kaczmarczyk, Szulecka, Bitner, Okólski, Siedlecka and Stefańczyk 2018; more on Bracero Program: Gratton and Merchant 2018). In 2007, the programme was extended to other sectors of the economy. The circle of its potential beneficiaries was also expanded – they are now citizens of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia. In essence, it enables the citizens of these countries to provide short-term work (currently for six months within twelve consecutive months) on the basis of a declaration of intent to entrust work to a foreigner (and since 2018, on entrusting work to a foreigner) entered in the register, without the need to obtain a work permit (Mitrus 2018).

*Work permits.* At present, permits concerning only employment (without the permission to stay, which is a separate case), regulated in the Act on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market, come in the form of a work permit. Work permits are issued by the voivode. The group of foreign entities obliged to obtain the permission is very specifically determined by law, as confirmed by a number of different exceptions established in relation to the general obligation to have the permit. Despite the fact that foreigners cannot invoke any of them, they need to obtain the permit if: they want to perform work on the basis of a contract (which includes order contracts, not just typical contracts under labour law) with an entity whose registered office, place of residence or branch, plant or other form of organised activities are found within the Republic of Poland; they want to perform work on the basis of self-employment or perform specific functions as a legal person (e.g. member of the board); they are a seconded employee (some exceptions apply). The labour market test is applied as described above.

*Seasonal work permits.* As of 1 January 2018, on the basis of the Act on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market, short-term work may also be carried out by an immigrant who was granted a seasonal work permit (regulated in Directive 2014/36/EU<sup>8</sup>). Seasonal work permits are issued by the starosta.

The areas of the labour market requiring seasonal work permits are outlined in the common regulation (executive order to the act) of ministers responsible for issues of employment, agriculture and tourism. The ministers are to take into consideration a much higher demand for workforce at certain times during the year, as a result of recurring events or types of events determined by seasonal changes (Art. 90[9]). The labour market test is practically eliminated, because the regulation (implementing act to the act) indicates the citizens of countries excluded from this requirement. Currently, this preference applies to citizens of the same countries to whom the simplified procedure applies. Due to the nationalities of the beneficiaries of this type of permit, this is in fact almost total exemption.

*Single permits.* These are permits regulated under the Act on Foreigners, which implements Directive 2011/98/EU<sup>9</sup> in this respect. This type of permit is issued to foreigners who wish to perform work on the territory of the Republic of Poland and, as a result, they need both legalisation of stay and access to the labour market. It is a comprehensive permit and therefore most beneficial to the foreigner. However, granting it is dependent on a number of strict economic conditions (i.e. stable and regular income, health insurance; see: Podgórska-Rakiel and Szypniewski 2018; Dąbrowski 2019). The permits are issued by the voivode. The labour market test is applied as described above.

Synthesising the observations so far leads to a conclusion that in the initial period of post-communist transformation, Polish immigration policy and law were based on the principle of complementarity of employment of immigrants to Polish citizens and this assumption has survived basically in relation to longer-term employment. The observation requires clarification, though. From among all the listed modes of access to work, which all have an economic impact due to the frequency of application, the labour market test is only ever relevant in the case of work permits and temporary residence and work permits (single permits). As a rule, the former are issued for a period of time not exceeding three years, or five years in some cases, with a possible extension in both cases. However, the law does not provide the lower limit of the period of validity of the work permit, which means that the permit can only be granted for a relatively short period of time, e.g. when the extended employment contract with the entity entrusting work will be for a few months only. Single permits are granted for a period necessary to achieve the purpose of the stay of the foreigner within the Republic of Poland, not exceeding three years. The Act on Foreigners provides that the circumstances which provide the basis for applying for the permit should justify the foreigner's stay within the territory of Poland for a period longer than three months. The rules seem to be rather fluid then, and it is impossible to draw a simple timeline that would separate declarations and seasonal work permits from the alternatives enabling a longer stay and employment.

In the context of introducing a simplified procedure allowing access to the labour market in 2006 and seasonal work permits in 2018, which are, respectively, fully exempt and almost fully exempt from the complementarity rule, one may wonder whether its validity is essential and whether its existence poses any problems. Indeed, there are several concerns arising from the status quo. First of all, it is the problem of the effectiveness and internal consistency of overly defragmented law. Currently, the same immigrant can easily access the labour market in the simplified procedure, as well as a result of obtaining a different type of permit. What is more, immigrants often use these procedures interchangeably, e.g. they first enter the labour market based on a declaration, then they work on the basis of a contract, followed by yet another available method ensuring their access to the labour market. Applying different rules as part of different procedures may lead to applying the law ineffectively. Secondly, there is also no evidence or even signs that longer-term work should be protected more than short-term (seasonal) work, because the risk of substitutability is higher. The need of Polish economy for labour supply is surely not limited to work or employment which comes only in certain seasons. Today's law seems to be closer to the concept of preferences for circular migration, i.e. the procedures which

are encompassed in the exemption from the labour market test (simplified procedure and seasonal work permit procedure) are based on the premise that the stay of beneficiaries is time-limited during a year.

It is worth emphasising that no attempt has ever been made in Poland to introduce solutions alternative to the labour market test, such as the ones that have been used in other countries, for instance point systems and immigration quotas (see further comments, however).

### **Is the complementarity paradigm needed in law?**

Poland has been in a phase of dynamic growth of employee immigration since 2014, caused by the coincidence of two factors. The first is an obvious shortage of workforce on the Polish labour market, the second is increased emigration pressure in the Ukrainian society. Ukrainian migration, notably in the economically richer countries of the region — Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia — is a phenomenon similar to the migration of Mexicans into the United States (Barnickel and Beichelt 2013). The reasons for the shortage of employees include a stable and sustained economic growth in 1995–2018 and a rapid increase in exports, contributing to the creation of new jobs, a high level of emigration among people of working age from Poland prompted by Poland's accession to the EU, demographic processes related to the aging of the population and untapped human resources in the labour market (in particular a high percentage of inactive people over 50)<sup>10</sup>. In addition, it is likely that Poland has in fact developed the so-called '3D sector', i.e. the area of the labour market with jobs deemed as 'dirty', 'dangerous' and 'demanding' (see Connell 1993), which Poles do not want to do, forcing employers to desperately look for resources.

As for increased emigration pressure, it is worth paying attention to the natural causes of the emergence and consolidation of Ukrainian migration networks,<sup>11</sup> which are: the direct proximity of Poland and Ukraine, the cultural closeness of Ukrainian and Polish societies on many levels, including linguistic, as well as, since 2006, preferences for Ukrainian citizens on the Polish labour market (included in the simplified procedure). In 2014, Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation, which led to a war in eastern Ukraine and caused a rapid deterioration of the Ukrainian economy. As a consequence, the financial situation of the population took a hit, provoking economic emigration. Strong migration networks already in place and the prospect of finding employment easily have made Poland one of the main choices of this wave of Ukrainian emigration (see also Brunarska, Kindler, Szulecka and Toruńczyk-Ruiz 2016). The dynamics of this change is illustrated by the data below. Between 31 December 2008 and 31 December 2012, the number of valid residence cards (main identity card issued to immigrants) increased from around 77 000 to approximately 112 000, which marks an annual average increase by approximately 8 to 9 thousand. On 31 December 2018, there were already 372 000 valid residence cards (average annual increase between 2013 and 2018 by approximately 40 thousand).<sup>12</sup> The number of declarations registered in the simplified procedure increased by leaps and bounds (2014 – 387 000, 2015 – 782 000, 2016 – 1 314 000, 2017 – 1 824 000, 2018 – 1 582 000 declarations).<sup>13</sup> The number of work permits granted in 2013 was just over 39 000, while in 2018 it was already over 328 000, with 121 000 permits of a new type – for seasonal work.<sup>14</sup> In each of these cases, the increase was primarily associated with the increase in immigration from Ukraine (see also Polakowski and Szelewa 2016).

For sure the Poland of today is dealing with three joint phenomena: a record low unemployment rate – 5.3 per cent at the end of June 2019 (see also Florczak 2019), labour immigration at an unprecedented social scale in Polish history, and an unmet and – as it seems – growing labour deficit, which is becoming a structural feature of the Polish labour market. As labour immigration is on the rise, unemployment is not increasing, and the human deficit on the labour market is growing, one could be excused for questioning the advisability and sensibility of continuing to protect the native labour force before it is forced out of the labour market by immigrants. What is more, according to many Polish economists, the country's development processes have led

to employers becoming overly reliant on the immigrant workforce, whose presence is a key factor in maintaining the economic growth (see among others Duszczuk and Matuszczyk 2018; Grabowska-Lusińska and Żylicz 2008). Of course, the answer to the question of whether only labour immigration is able to fill shortages on the labour market is controversial, but what may be decisive, however, is the lack of a clear proposal how to alternatively solve the problem of this shortage.

Likewise, it would be impossible to ignore the conclusions arising from an even cursory overview of the decisions issued. The percentage of negative decisions in the cases of work permits issued in 2018 stood at 0.6 per cent only,<sup>15</sup> and not necessarily so due to the negative result of the labour market test. This indication demonstrates convincingly that as far as law enforcement goes, the labour market test does not realistically achieve the objectives for which it was introduced. Even if they wanted to, starostas are not able to show a threat to native workforce by employing an immigrant, because vacant jobs with even minimum requirements remain vacant. Besides, other countries' experiences have shown that effective labour market tests are notoriously difficult to implement (Ruhs 2005). To some extent, employers also protect themselves against refusal by including in the application to issue the information in question requirements specific for immigrants and unavailable to Polish citizens, e.g. fluency in a language (Ukrainian, Vietnamese), even in offers for simple jobs. Naturally, as far as recruitment standards go, this practice should not be condoned, being a clear example of discrimination on the basis of language. It has been formally recorded in the analytical papers of the Ministry of the Interior and Administration (*Spoleczność...* 2007) but has never been subject to research on migration. There is also no information available confirming that any anti-discrimination procedures have ever been initiated with regard to those practices. There are only single rulings of administrative courts in such cases, where the starosta had questioned the veracity of such a requirement.<sup>16</sup> Still, a quick look at current job offers for vacancies in small Asian enterprises proves that the practice is still very much common. All these factors suggest that the entity entrusting work to a foreigner can relatively easily obtain information from the starosta about the failure to meet their staffing needs with the native workers.

These circumstances clearly support a rethinking of the assumptions on which Polish immigration policy and immigration law are based. The expectation to find a new model of policy towards labour immigration is also clear in the light of other EU countries' experiences connected with the shortage of national workers on their labour markets. For instance, it is worth analysing the Swedish reform of immigration law in 2008. Sweden moved then from a system that required employers to meet a labour market test, and provided for different entry streams tailored to specific occupations and sectors with different rights and privileges for different migrant statuses, to a single-stream, demand-driven system. It does not impose either skill requirements on migrants or labour market tests, and it is available across all occupations in the Swedish labour market. The reform was designed to create a flexible system that would facilitate the recruitment of workers from third countries in the absence of sufficient domestic labour reserves (Woolfson, Fudge and Thörnqvist 2014). The more general recommendation towards EU is formulated as the abandonment of the administrative labour market test policy in favour of labour market driven selection (i.e. of those obtaining a job offer in the country), possibly combined with general universally applied selection criteria (Kahanec, Zimmermann, Kureková and Biavaschi 2013). However, the ruling class refuse to take up this challenge, which begs the question about the agenda at play.

Irrespective of economic considerations as to whether immigrant workforce should even be regarded as leading to such a replacement of nationals (see, among others, Somerville and Sumption 2009) in view of a growing shortage of Polish employees on the labour market one can doubt whether the complementary character of labour immigration to Poland needs a preventive mechanism of controlling it nowadays. Of course, one should remember that the consequences of the increased presence of immigrants in a given labour market are likely to vary widely depending on the segment, and sometimes the influx of immigrants may result in

increased unemployment (Piore 1979). Still, even if the substitutability takes place in some segments of the labour market, a broad application of legal tools like the labour market test is not justified. This point of view means the lawmaker's attitude is obsolete. However, nothing indicates that ruling authorities consider amendments of law in this scope.

### **Do politicians prefer to maintain the labour market test (*status quo*)?**

The hitherto discussed changes in the environment in which Polish immigration law operates coincided with a completely different process of a purely political nature. For most of the period since the fall of communism, immigration policy remained overshadowed by a number of other social issues in Poland. Unlike many other European countries, it was the domain of officials rather than politicians and had a technocratic and reactive dimension (see e.g. Duszczyk, Lesińska, Stefańska, Szczepański and Szulecka 2010). The situation changed quite rapidly during the last parliamentary election campaign (summer/autumn 2015), which took place at the time when the European Commission was grappling with the migrant crisis and eventually proposed the immigrant relocation mechanism. The now ruling party (Law and Justice, PiS) decided to include in its programme radical criticism of those plans, combining it with an aggressive anti-refugee rhetoric. This element of the campaign turned out to be crucial, as it struck a chord with the society's deep fear of Muslim immigration. Having come to power, PiS opted to embark on an acrimonious political dispute in the EU arena regarding the relocation programme and manifesting a critical view of EU immigration policy. In one particular move, the reception of 7 thousand immigrants, which the previous government had approved, was blocked (see e.g. Szulecka, Pachocka and Sobczak-Szelc 2018).

In a paradoxical twist of fate, during the administration of the party which decided to play the anti-immigration card in the elections, there was an unprecedented increase in immigration rates to Poland. This must come with a considerable level of discomfort for those in power. One can say that there is a very fine line between an anti-refugee narrative and a general anti-immigrant narrative. The government has to bear in mind that a part of the electorate is completely opposed to immigration, being accustomed to the homogeneous nature of the society – an experience in common with all post-war generations of Poles. For those in power, this situation means finding themselves at the proverbial crossroads. In any case, the relaxation of immigration policy proposed by some business-related circles (e.g. Trzeciakowski and Wesołowska 2018)<sup>17</sup> would jeopardise the support for the party and bring about a possible exodus of voters towards the far right. On the other hand, it makes economic sense to at least provide employers with a permanent access to immigrant workforce and, further down the line, liberalise policies and laws vis-a-vis labour immigration. At the same time, the government must take into account a very real threat to economic growth if it is guided by the anti-immigration *vox populi*, which may also come at a high political price.

It seems quite plausible to suggest that in these political circumstances the government follows an immigration policy whose core is to maintain the conditions facilitating a large influx of immigrants to the labour market, in line with the economic interest of the country, while manifesting distrust of immigration in some areas, e.g. with regard to refugees (see also Szulecka 2019) or avoiding a clear stance on other immigration areas, e.g. with regard to labour immigrants. Thus, immigration law is treated quite instrumentally – formally it must still be characterised by a certain degree of restrictiveness, but at the level of application it is not really to hinder the use of foreign labour. It is worth noticing that the 'silent approval' of labour immigration does not only concern the ruling party. The other political parties in the political mainstream have not made a stand on that issue either. It remains in the sphere of guesswork to determine what the reasons are and how serious the threat of introducing pro-immigration rhetoric is.

In such a political reality the principle of complementarity and its flagship instrument – the labour market test, has become an element of a political game aimed at maintaining a pretence that the government is pursuing a quasi-restrictive immigration policy. The legal status of the principle of complementarity remains in its unchanged form for purely political, not socio-economic, reasons.

The current situation may be described as perpetuation of formally restrictive and protectionist law, which has no chance of being efficient in its social-economic environment at the present time but simultaneously also as ‘silent’ acceptance to fill shortages of labour supply by immigrants. One could liken this part of migration law to a ‘tiger without teeth’. Such an attitude seems to be internally contradictory, but if we take account of opportunistic political motivations it will become clearer. The ruling politicians have to balance between two contradictions. The first of them is the desire to maintain the support of the electorate that takes exception to immigration and would resent the liberalisation of immigration law. At the same time, the government must strive to maintain a high influx of immigrant workers to Poland, otherwise it will risk an economic downturn, possibly at an even higher political cost. Under the weight of these two considerations capable of driving immigration policy in two entirely different directions, the government maintains the facade of restrictive immigration law, while allowing for its use in a way that ensures access of immigrants to the labour market.

The confirmation of ‘disguise of restrictiveness’ hypothesis is indirectly provided by governmental documents concerning immigration policy prepared in last years. First of them is document *Socio-Economic Priorities of Migration Policy* which was prepared in Ministry of Investment and Development and adopted by Council of Ministers in March 2018. Second document is a draft of *Poland’s Migration Policy* (dated 10 June 2019), prepared in the Ministry of the Interior and Administration. The works have not been finished due to some controversies and it is not clear whether they will be continued. Both documents show extreme caution of the authors of the document in their approach to any attempt at possible rationalisation of legal regulations in the scope of immigration of workers. Both documents feature only very tentative and general statements regarding the ‘analysis of the legal system affecting the employment and stay of foreigners and in the event of diagnosing obstacles in this respect, in particular excessive bureaucratic burdens, putting this system in order, with priority given to national security, protection of the national labour market and ensuring appropriate employment standards’ (respectively point 2(d) and the section ‘Actions to be taken’).

### **The facade of the ‘quota-system’?**

The other legal practice that lends credence to the ‘disguise of restrictiveness’ hypothesis is the new legal possibility to determine maximum limits of permits enabling employment, which can be issued in a given calendar year and the number of declarations that can be entered in the register during the same period. The limits refer to:

- permits for temporary residence and work;
- permits for temporary residence for the purpose of highly qualified employment;
- permits for temporary residence for the purpose of performing work by a third-country national posted by a foreign employer to work on the territory of the Republic of Poland;
- permits for temporary residence for the purpose of economic activity;
- work permits;
- seasonal work permits;
- declarations of entrustment of employment.



The legal bases enabling the establishment of such limits were added by amendments to the Act on Foreigners<sup>18</sup> and the Act on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market<sup>19</sup> adopted, respectively, in 2017 and 2018. In this way, the Polish lawmaker used the possibility of optional implementation of such restrictions, provided for in the relevant directives.

Seemingly, the rationing system ends up being even more restrictive because it acquires mixed features, by combining labour market testing and the quota system. Generally speaking, the quota system is about determining the number of migrants who can enter a particular country at a particular time to undertake work (Duszczyk 2013). Such a combination is very odd in European countries (Kahanec, Zimmermann, Kureková and Biavaschi 2013). Setting such limits would spell a significant change and deterioration in the situation of employers and immigrants compared to the current situation (see also Górny *et al.* 2018). However, the quota system does not seem to be actually applied. The statutory provisions constituting the basis for their establishment provide for the relevant minister to issue an appropriate regulation (in the system of sources of Polish law it is an executive order to the act), but they do not create an obligation to issue it. Ministers will therefore be in compliance with the law if they do not exercise this option. To date, no legislative work has been undertaken in this regard, and the desire to undertake it has not been signalled. Considering the economic forecasts indicating a further increase in the labour deficit, it is unlikely that the government will decide to take a step compromising the conditions to do business in Poland.

One can therefore get the impression that adding these regulations constitutes a kind of ‘alibi’ for the government, ready to be weaponised for political use in the event of an alleged lack of anti-immigration measures. As it is, this restrictive solution does not seem to have any real impact on the way the law is applied.

## Conclusion

Under current conditions, the Polish labour market generally does not need the complementarity principle in its present shape. The labour market test does not have any regulatory function over the labour market, and its maintenance in its present form is only explained by political considerations, i.e. the desire to preserve the appearance of restrictiveness of law. The hypothesis of the deliberate guise of restrictiveness of law can be explained using the case of labour market testing inasmuch that its obsolescence is now becoming clearer than ever and yet those in power do not undertake to change it. Besides, the complementarity principle in this shape causes bureaucratic burdens.

The criticism of the current solutions leads inevitably to questions about the requested future model of the regulations. Due to the complexity of the matter, as well as its novelty (no real public discussion on the issue has taken place so far), the suggestions can only take a very general form. It seems that the time has come for a paradigm shift – instead of the current preventive mechanism focused on the complementarity of employment of immigrants, the administration should be equipped with powers allowing them to monitor the situation on local labour markets regarding the complementarity or substitutability of immigrant workforce on the one hand, and on the other hand, in the event of negative tendencies being detected, with authority to suppress adverse consequences of labour immigration. Formally, this step could be interpreted as liberalisation of existing rules, yet in the context of the actual effects the current law has brought about, i.e. the massive influx of immigrant workers, it would in fact be a step towards rationalisation of administrative and legal requirements, rather than actual liberalisation of immigration policy. Without digressing too much, it would be worth considering whether, while working on a new solution, the current defragmented network of paths granting access to the Polish labour market is really effective, as well as whether employers, relieved of present bureaucratic demands, should not be the target of new obligations preventing abuse of immigrant workforce. It is worth to remember about Swedish experiences in this matter.

From the point of view of political interest, the characterised model of operation could probably be considered relatively rational. Similarly, an economist would presumably argue that the end, i.e. ensuring access of immigrants to the Polish labour market, is the most important, and the legal means to achieving this goal and the wording of ‘law in books’ are of lesser importance. On the other hand, from a lawyer’s perspective, the situation when it is necessary to distinguish between the declared objectives of law and the objectives actually set before them and obtained through the application of said law undermine the authority of law and as a consequence cannot be seen as anything other than a pathological phenomenon.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Consolidated text: Journal of Laws 2018, item 2094, with amendments.

<sup>2</sup> The Act of 20 April 2004 on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market, consolidated text: Journal of Laws 2019, item 1482.

<sup>3</sup> Journal of Laws 1989, vol. 75, item 446.

<sup>4</sup> The Act of 16 October 1991 on Employment and Unemployment, consolidated text: Journal of Laws 1991, vol. 106, item 457.

<sup>5</sup> The Act of 20 April 2004 on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market.

<sup>6</sup> The Act of 19 December 2008 amending the Act of 20 April 2004 on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market, Journal of Laws 2009, vol. 9, item 33.

<sup>7</sup> Inter alia: permits for temporary stay and work (so-called single permits, very common in Poland) specified in Directive 2011/98/EU; temporary residence permits for the purpose of highly qualified employment (Directive 2009/50/EC, the so-called Blue Card); temporary residence permits for the purpose of performing work in the framework of intra-corporate transfer (Directive 2014/66/EU) and temporary residence permits for the purpose of performing work by a third-country national posted by a foreign employer to work on the territory of the Republic of Poland.

<sup>8</sup> Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers, OJ 2014 L 94, p. 375.

<sup>9</sup> Directive 2011/98/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State, OJ 2011 L 343, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> According to the report of the European Commission (2017), *The Ageing Report, Underlying Assumptions & Projection Methodologies* (p. 204) the number of employees in Poland will fall at a rate of 0.5 per cent a year until 2030.

<sup>11</sup> The notion ‘migration networks’ is used in the meaning ‘sets of interpersonal relations that link migrants or returned migrants with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen at home’ that ‘convey information, provide financial assistance, facilitate employment and accommodation, and give support in various forms’ (Arango 2000: 291).

<sup>12</sup> The estimation on the basis of data prepared by Office for Foreigners, online: <https://udsc.gov.pl/en/statystyki/> (accessed: 21 September 201). This number includes also immigrants who obtained ‘single permits’. However, figures for this particular type of permit are not provided separately.

<sup>13</sup> A separate issue, though not elaborated on here, is the particular vulnerability of this procedure to fraudulent behaviour observed in 2006–2017, which was then mainly related to visa fraud (the declaration was also the basis for a visa application; see e.g. Szulecka 2016, 2017). Although it is undisputed that the number

of immigrants in the simplified procedure is much higher than those who were actually employed (the scale of fraud is not easily detectable), this does not change the fact that volume-wise this is the most important channel for immigrants wishing to enter the Polish labour market (see also Duszczuk and Matuszczyk 2018).

<sup>14</sup> The estimation on the basis of data prepared by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, online: <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/statystyki-i-analizy/zatrudnianie-cudzoziemcow-w-polsce> (accessed: 21 September 2019).

<sup>15</sup> The estimation on the basis of data prepared by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, online: <https://psz.praca.gov.pl/rynek-pracy/statystyki-i-analizy/zatrudnianie-cudzoziemcow-w-polsce> (accessed: 21 September 2019). Data on the number of refusals to issue information by starostas is not available.

<sup>16</sup> <http://orzeczenia.nsa.gov.pl/doc/374CA8006B>.

<sup>17</sup> For instance: *Labour Migration Flexibility of Regulation for Employing non-EU nationals*, Lithuanian Free Market Institute 2018, online: <https://for.org.pl/pl/a/6100,analiza-7/2018-potrzebujmy-imigrantow-jak-zatrzymac-ukrainskich-pracownikow-w-polsce> (accessed: 18 December 2018).

<sup>18</sup> The Act of 24 November 2017 amending the Act on Foreigners and Some Other Acts, Journal of Laws 2018, item 107. The basis to issue regulations are art. 114a and art. 127a, art. 139b and art. 142a of the Act of Foreigners.

<sup>19</sup> The Act of 20 July 2017 amending the Act on the Promotion of Employment and the Institutions of Labour Market. Journal of Laws 2017, item 1543. The basis to issue regulations are art. 90b (1)–(3).

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