



Labour migration and the systems of social protection

Country report Poland

Bartłomiej Walczak

@ *Bartłomiej Walczak*



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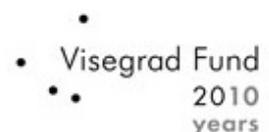
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About the author: Dr. Bartłomiej Walczak, born in 1977, is a sociologist and cultural anthropologist. His main interests are the epistemology and methodology of the social sciences, migration, multicultural education, the history of anthropological field research, and philosophy of text. He works as an assistant professor at the College of Rehabilitation Pedagogy in Warsaw and as an assistant professor in the Institute of Applied Social Sciences at the University of Warsaw, Poland.

On this report: Although Poland is usually considered a sending country, it attracts some groups of immigrants as well. I will mainly focus on the sending perspective, but I will also discuss migration to Poland. As this report is devoted to economic migration, I will not discuss Polish diaspora in Eastern European and former USSR countries.

A brief history of Polish migration

The history of the migration of Polish nationals is closely tied to the history of Polish statehood and economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe. The biggest known emigration coincided with the dynamic development of industry in Germany, and political repressions of the three Polish territories¹ between 1870 and 1914. It is estimated that within this period over 3.5 million Poles (10% of Polish society divided between the three territories) permanently left Poland; the level of temporary migration reached 10 million people. At the end of 19th century Poles had migrated not only to European countries, but also across the Atlantic Ocean, in particular to the United States, Canada and later Brazil (Wrzesiński, 2006, p. 162).

The level of economically motivated migration was still high during the interwar period, when about 2.2 million Polish nationals emigrated (Wrzesiński, 2006, pp. 166-167). The immigration of people from abroad in the period 1948-1989 was minimal. During the post-war period (1945-1948) roughly 1.5 million people immigrated to Poland, but this figure consisted mainly of Polish citizens. This can be compared with 4.2 million returns between 1919-1922, after the First World War and the revival of Polish statehood.

After 1948 there were no more than two to three thousand migrants each year (Okólski, 2010, p. 25). This figure consisted of spouses of Poles working or studying abroad, as well as a number of foreign students (mainly from Soviet Union, Bulgaria or Vietnam). There are rare exceptions, however. The most notable is the arrival of over 13,000 Greek communists in the late 40s. Many of them returned to Greece after 1974, but some integrated into Polish society.

Emigration from Poland after World War II became a rare occurrence. The so called “Great Closure”, which saw Poland transformed into a totalitarian country, drastically limited the emigration of Polish citizens. 9360 trips abroad were registered by former Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) Passport Bureau, including only 1980 trips to capitalist countries in 1954. The number of international trips grew to 22,200 cases at the end of the Great Closure period in 1954. In the same time period the number of people granted permission for temporary migration was even smaller: 1681 migrated in 1954, of which only 52 went to Western countries (Stola, 2001, pp. 65-66).

The dynamic changed after the end of the Stalin epoch. This was apparent from 1955 onwards, when number of trips abroad reached 33,430 cases. The relaxing of USSR visa policy resulted in the growth of short trips from Poland to USSR countries. These trips were family driven at first as there were over a million displaced people in Poland, who after the annexation of Polish Eastern

¹ The territory of Poland was divided between Russia, Germany and former Austrian-Hungarian Empire up to the liberation in 1918.

lands after the Second World War, had no opportunity to contact relatives living in the USSR). However the trips soon became economically driven. The differences in the cost of items in Poland and the USSR, and the difference in currency made illegal, small scale international trade exceptionally profitable for short-term migrants, whose number exceeded 60,000 in 1956 (Stola, 2001).

It should also be noted, that a significant number of ethnic Jews with Polish citizenship left (or were forced to leave) before 1968. The number of Polish Jews diminished from about 300,000 after the war to 1200 today.

In the 1960s a new phenomenon, called the “tourist trade” was born. As there was no opportunity to get official permission to work or trade abroad, Polish citizens developed sophisticated strategies to outwit customs officers. The small scale trade was based on the artificial, centrally driven currency change and availability/lack of desired products in the neighboring countries. The competition between the customs officers, and the tradesmen was fierce and lasted up to the end of the Polish People’s Republic.

The next notable bout of outward migration coincided with the “Solidarity” movement. Within the three years following the martial law about 130,000 Polish citizens left. The entire scale of permanent migration in 1980 is estimated at 1.3 million (over 3% of population). The scale of short-term migration within this period is probably three times higher. The role of temporary economic migration was reinforced after 1989, when the people won the right to travel (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2009). The number of temporary migrants (excluding those on one day excursions to bordering countries) was estimated at 3 million each year. Former small scale trade has merged into employment abroad (Okólski, 2001).

The nature of migratory flows changed after the 1st of May 2004. The accession to the European Union opened up access to several external labour markets: the UK, Ireland and Sweden. Two years later they were joined by Spain, Portugal, Greece and Finland. The Italian labour market was open to Polish employees since July 2006, and the Dutch one since May 2007.

What has changed? Germany, the traditionally favoured destination for Polish migrants (it attracted 38% of the migratory stream before 1st of May 2004 and 20% after accession²) was outclassed by Great Britain, which attracted 8% of Polish migrants before Poland joined EU, and 38% after. Before 1st of May the third most popular destination was the United States (14%/6%), but after accession it was superseded by Ireland (1%/10%). It is interesting, that Ireland which had attracted less than one percent of migrants, attracted ten times more after 1st of May 2004. The position of the former fourth most popular destination – Italy – has not changed, however due to the later opening of its labour market to Polish employees, the percentage of Polish migrants has decreased from 11% to 8%.

Destinations, outside the EU, include several European non-EU countries, with Norway in particular, and the USA (6%). Non-European countries (with exception of the USA) attract less than 1% of migrants (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2008, pp. 71-74).

² All the estimations are made basis of the Population Economical Activity Database (BAEL), see: (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2008).



Figure 1 Selected target countries in 2007, the percentage of the migratory stream is shown.
Based on GUS 2008

We do not have reliable data regarding the scale of the last wave of migration. First of all, data may be misleading due to the fact that there are many migrants who legalized their previous illegal migrant status after the 1st of May 2004. In the UK, for example, this may be up to 40% of Polish employees registered in the Work Registration System (2005). Secondly, trips shorter than two months are usually not considered migration (Kłos, 2006, p. 2).

The ECAS report, based on official statistic from receiving countries (which also covers seasonal workers) suggests there may have been 1.2 million Poles abroad in 2006 (Straser, 2006). The Polish Statistical Office (GUS), which employs data from the 2002 census and Population Economical Activity Database (BAEL) estimated that 1.95 million Polish citizens went abroad for over two months (at the beginning of 2007). Similar figures may be found in CBOS estimations from 2008 (CBOS, 2008). This suggests that almost one in ten Polish citizens in the economically active age bracket have been abroad temporarily. When we consider returning migration, the total outflow of the population aged 15 and over was 3.3% (GUS, 2008b; Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2008, p. 46).

Izabela Grabowska-Lusińska and Marek Okólski estimate, based on the BAEL database, that real outward migration between 1st of May 2004 and 31st of December 2006 was 1.1 million.

The dynamic of migration is particularly visible in the UK. Polish migrants have become the biggest foreign group in the UK, outstripping migrants from Ireland and India. There were roughly 24,000 Poles living in the United Kingdom for longer than six months in 2002, 209,000 in 2006 and 406,000 in 2007. 550,000 employees from Poland were registered on the Worker Registration Scheme in Great Britain between 2004 and 2008. (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski, 2009).

It should be noted, that the increase in migration after the 1st of May 2004 was not only connected with economic activity, but also with education. The abolition of administrative obstacles for workers and students had a visible impact on the scale of migration. But simultaneously it also caused an increase in the average length of migration. That borders can easily be crossed, and that recently chosen destinations are geographically closer than, for example, the USA, makes migration more frequent but shorter. The rise of budget airlines has also contributed to this process.

The dynamics have been influenced by changing administrative regulations and the world economy. For example the results of the UK Office for National Statistics census showed a decrease in the number of newcomers from 2008, and a slow increase since autumn of 2009 (Office for National Statistics, 2010). This is clearly connected with 2008 world economical crisis and the slow recovery from recession.

It should be noted, however, that the 2008 crisis has not increased the volume of return migration, but has dissuaded would-be migrants. When we look at the history of European recessions this is not unusual – economical crises stop people migrating but do not influence them to return. The majority of migrants appear to prefer waiting for the end of recession abroad. When home markets are also affected by the crisis, this strategy is not unreasonable.

The situation of the Polish workers in EU countries

An analysis of the situation of Polish employees in EU-15 countries may be undertaken on three levels: economic, social and legal. There are clearly countless links between these three spheres.

The social and economical aspects

On the economic level, the situation of migrants is usually considered within the context of primary/secondary market theory. The theory claims that receiving countries create labour markets which are parallel to those in the sending countries. This parallel market is focused on job positions that are not attractive for the native workers; and are not well paid or prestigious. Therefore the position of migrants in the labour market is marked by inequality from the beginning. Working in a parallel market often involves the downgrading of the migrant's skills or education level.

There are several sectors that are particularly overrepresented on the parallel market. These include a range of unskilled, manual jobs, in particular within the hotel trade and the catering establishments. The domestic and care sphere is widely described in the literature as a typical destination for migrant women (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2009; Parreñas R. S., 2000; Parreñas R. S., 2008; Parreñas S. R., 2005; Parreñas S. R., 2001; Świąćkowska, 2009). This phenomenon may also be considered as an example of social inequality. Women migrants face not only the burden of (legal or illegal) migratory status, but also gender inequalities. "While making decisions or planning migratory strategies, they have to consider, among others, the risk of difficulty finding work, the possibility of pay being withheld for work

performed, deportation, and when their status or work is illegal - such as in the sex-trafficking trade - harassment by employers ” (Koryś, 2009).

The literature presents many examples of migrant women playing key roles in satisfying the needs of the Global North countries in the spheres of domestic, care and the sex industry (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002). This has served to increase the numbers of female migrants in the migratory stream— when considering all the age categories there are more female than male migrants, particularly with respect to long term migration (Slany, 2006, p. 330). The migration of mothers is a distinctive example here.

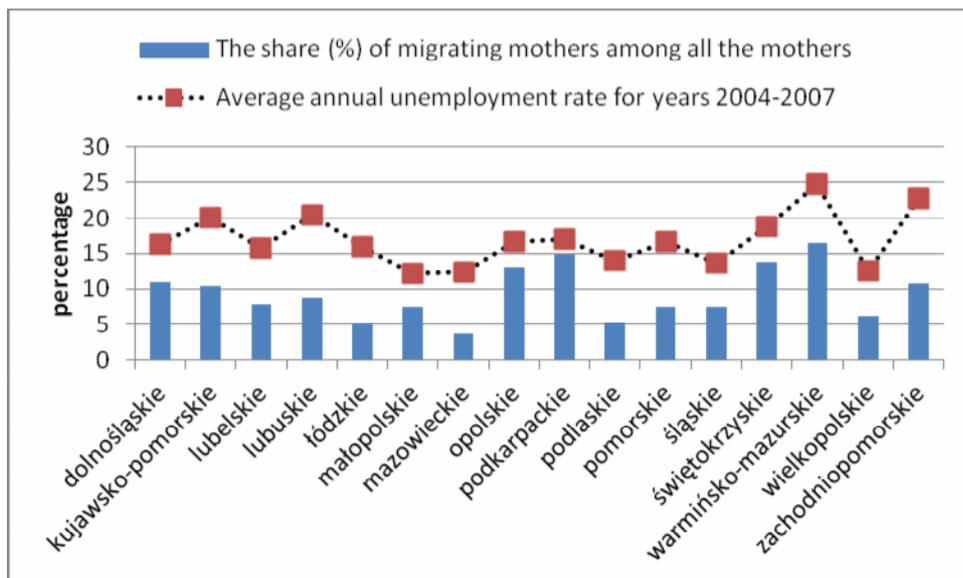
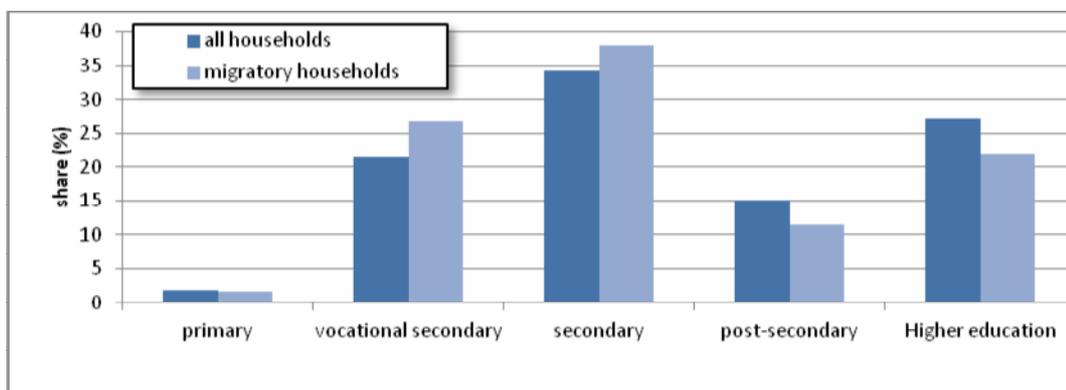


Figure 2 Unemployment rate, and the percentage of mothers migrating. Source: own research, GUS

There is a strong correlation between the migration of mothers and the situation in local labour markets. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient which measures the correlation between the percentage of mothers migrating in each region and the average level of unemployment in that area is significant ($p < 0,05$) and strong ($R = 0,77$). The regions with the highest percentage of migrating parents are the ones with the worst economic situations and/or the ones with the most developed migratory flows, like for instance Opolszczyzna.

When we look at migratory flows amongst parents social inequalities are particularly visible. Lower levels of educational attainment, lower paid and lower status jobs are over-represented.





Graph 1 The highest level of education and the highest employment level within the household.
Source: Walczak, 2010

When we look at the entire migratory stream the structure appears a bit different. Young, well-educated people are over-represented. According to the CBOS report published in 2008 almost 20% of people who have the highest level of education migrated (CBOS, 2008). It should be added, however, that the increase in migration among the well-educated is connected with a high percentage of graduates, who face a higher level of unemployment than other age brackets among this population.

We may summarize that migration strengthens the social and economical inequalities that already exist. Moreover, the migrants' low social status is reproduced in receiving countries –whilst they may have to cope with the other dimensions of inequality, like gender inequalities.

The legal sphere

Generally speaking, Polish workers in EU countries have the same rights as workers from other EU countries or local workers. This problem is, however, more complicated due to the overlapping transnational, European and national regulations. We will look more closely at the legal situation in Great Britain.

There are two kinds of status a worker might have: “worker” or “independent contractor” and these statuses determine their rights. Some migrants, employed by employment agencies are primarily accountable to the agency and not to the actual employer. At the beginning of a contract the entitlements which the worker has such as minimum wage, protection against discrimination, rights to health and safety provisions, and working time regulations are the same for all the employees. In order of seniority an employee may obtain additional entitlements, for instance an increase the length of annual leave. The workers employed through the employment agency have additional entitlements: an agency cannot charge for finding a position and cannot withhold workers' salaries. A worker employed by the agency has the right to a written contract, describing among others things the length of notice, the salary, the length of annual leave, and employer's obligations in regard to health and safety, before they decide to sign it.

Problems with employment may be divided into several areas. First of all there are issues regarding the security and hygiene at work. Journalists and researchers describe examples of inadequate training, improper evaluation of worker's qualifications, excessive working hours etc. As a consequence of these violations of employment legislation industrial accidents may happen (Carby-Hall, 2008).

Joseph Carby-Hall describes examples of exploitation, employees being forced to live in poor quality housing, and even enslavement. These examples are not numerous, but from time to time are depicted in the press. There have been reports about Polish migrants engaged in slave labour in the

UK, Holland, Italy and Spain. Such cases tend to occur when the employee has a lower level of education and does not know the local language. Therefore it seems to be a reasonable recommendation for sending countries to focus on education of workers' rights, and basic knowledge about receiving countries' language and culture (Carby-Hall, 2008).

Migrants' institutional background

The number of people emigrating out of Poland was one of the main issues in 2007 Polish Parliamentary campaign. In the same year the government established an Interdepartmental Team for Migration Issues (Międzyresortowy Zespół do spraw Migracji), whose tasks include, amongst others, the coordination of goals and activities focused on migrants, between different government departments and government administration. This team is headed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji) and consists of high ranking representatives of other departments.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk during his visit in London in 2008 introduced the program "Have you got a PLaN for your return? ("Masz PLaN na powrót?"). The publication *The Guidebook for Returning: Navigating your return (Powrotnik³ Nawigacja dla powracających)* was published within this program. The book includes information about legal and formal aspects of return migration. What was more important was the establishment of the web site powroty.gov.pl. It contains updated information on many aspects of return migration with regard to different countries.



Figure 3 The logo of Polish government program for returning migrants, source: <http://www.powroty.gov.pl/powrotnik>

Legal facilitation was also introduced, including the tax abolition for Polish employees working abroad and transnational marriages. The tradition of publications for potential re-emigrants is long in Poland. In 1933 the Organisational Council for Foreign Affairs (Rada Organizacyjna Pokazów z Zagranicy) published "A Guide for re-emigrants. A how-to book for those planning their return to Poland", "Informator dla reemigrantów. Poradnik dla tych, którzy myślą o powrocie do Polski" (Slany, 2010).

Efforts to increase remigration were also made by local authorities. In 2009 twelve big cities Poznań, Katowice, Bydgoszcz, Warszawa, Lublin, Białystok, Rzeszów, Wrocław, Gdańsk i Łódź started the program *12 cities. Returning, but where? (Wracać, ale dokąd?)*. This program was of an informative character and was intended to encourage returns, but due to the recession was suspended (Iglicka, 2010).

As Krystyna Slany suggests, the key role in solving migrants' problems may be played by transnational and multi-ethnic support groups, as well as women's organizations which are able to cooperate with politicians and the state. The cooperation between the International Migration Organization and EU Parliament, Social-Economical Committee, INTEGRA and EQUAL is a good example.

³ The Word „Powrotnik” is a neologism that is difficult for direct translation. It consists of two words: “powroty” – returning and “poradnik” or “przewodnik” – guidebook.

There are several NGOs, like the European Network of Migrant Domestic Workers (RESPECT – abbreviation for Rights, Equality, Solidarity, Power, Europe, and Cooperation, Today), The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), International Movement Against all Forms of Discrimination and Racism, Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride Coalition, Justice for Overseas Domestic Workers (Slany, 2006, pp. 340-341).

It seems that institutions founded by migrants themselves tend to be successful. When we consider migrants' opinions regarding Polish government policy, they are mostly negative (Iglicka, 2010). It seems that neither the Polish government nor local authorities were successful in developing support institutions or programs in sending areas. The most visible example is related to transnational families and parental migration. Although a special committee was formed in the Ministry of Social Policy, neither nationwide program nor cohesive policy was developed extensively. The educational offices in cooperation with the Ministry of Education attempted to estimate the scale of parental migration, but a long term project was not sustained. In the Lubelskie region the local educational office published an informative brochure for migrating parents. Although informative, the language it used reproduced a stigmatizing, pejorative understanding of parental migration (Walczak, 2010; Walczak, 2008)

Return migration

The economic crisis has not had a significant effect on migration. The 2008 global crisis undoubtedly resulted in a temporary decrease in the level of new migration, but has had no impact on returns. The majority of migrants choose to wait abroad for the end of the crisis (Iglicka, 2010). According to Krystyna Iglicka, this strategy may lead to several unfavorable outcomes: the growth in exploitation of foreigner workers, exclusion from the labour market, deepening poverty among some groups of migrants, and the rise of xenophobic attitudes towards the migrants (Iglicka, 2010b, p. 24)

In her analysis of return migration Krystyna Iglicka developed the notion of the “migratory trap”. She stated that among the migrants who migrated after 1st of May 2004 there are young people, with secondary or higher level education without any experience of the Polish labour market. When returning, they face problems finding jobs at the level to which they were qualified. Moreover, the logic of the primary and secondary labour markets in receiving countries force them to work under their qualifications abroad, and as a result they emerge with significant gaps in their curriculum vitae.

It should be added, that the supply of work in Poland did not increase during the crisis. Problems resulting from re-integration into the Polish labour market may lead an individual to re-immigrate – the individual uses strategies they already know, particularly when their initial migration was successful (Iglicka, 2010, pp. 27-28)

Poland as receiving country

Poland, which was historically an emigration country, seems set to turn into an immigration one in the future. Today there are two significant groups of foreign workers – the Ukrainians and the Vietnamese, but we may expect that immigration to Poland will increase as a result of administrative and economic changes.

The entry of Poland into the Schengen zone resulted in Poland becoming a significant nexus of circular migration. On the other hand socio-demographic changes in Poland have necessitated an increase in the number of incoming migrants. These factors include longer life expectancy and the

resulting aging population, the widespread increase in educational attainment, and the shift away from unskilled employment in farming, domestic and care work. The so-called „care drain”, resulting from the emigration of Polish women also is set to intensify this process (Lutz & Palenga-Möllnbeck, 2009).

Due to administrative obstacles and the lack of *push-in* factors, migration to Poland before 1989 was of marginal significance and was mainly for family and educational reasons. The situation changed after 1989. As administrative obstacles for migrants were reduced, circulatory (or transit migration) began. Poland started to accept the refugees, initially mainly from the African countries, Armenia, the Middle East, former Yugoslavia and Romania. The share of refugees from Afghanistan and South-East Asia countries increased later. Since 2000 the citizens of the Russian Federation, usually Chechen individuals, have made up a sizable number of the refugees. By the end of 2003 about 50,000 people had sought asylum in Poland (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2007).

The two biggest migratory groups in Poland are the Ukrainians and Vietnamese. According to the National Census (Narodowy Spis Powszechny) from 2002, 97,000 foreigners moved to Poland. The estimated number of illegal immigrants is probably similar (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2007, p. 45).

The large-scale migration from Ukraine to Poland started at the end of the 1980s, when visa policy in USSR and Eastern Europe countries was liberalized. There were 380,000 visas issued in Ukraine alone in 1988, and a year later 1.5 million. Between 1990 and 1991 2-2.3 million visas were issued to Ukrainians. This suggests that Poland is not only a target country, but also a transitory one.

Ukrainians are not only the biggest migrant group in Poland, but also the most significant group of foreign workers. Permission to work is granted to 2,500 Ukrainian citizens each year (Fihel, Górny, & Kaczmarczyk, 2008).

The most popular economic activity among the immigrants from the Eastern neighbors was small scale trade in the 1990s. At the end of this decade, when the differences in the prices of items became smaller, the trade was not so profitable and was soon superseded by unskilled work. The number of migrants coming to Poland for unskilled manual work in farming, cleaning, building, the domestic sphere and care was increasing. This migration was repeat migration. It is interesting to note that Ukrainian workers face exactly the same problems as Polish low skilled workers in the Western secondary markets: lack of certainty of employment, low wages and low status. Many migrants are not registered, so they do not have any legal, health or security protection.

It is important to note, that there is a relatively high percentage of well qualified migrants among Ukrainians. Highly skilled Ukrainian workers got 151 work visas in 1999 and 822 in 2006. Fihel, Górny and Kaczmarek emphasise an increase in the number of teachers from Ukraine. Up to the end of the 1990s the largest cohort of foreign teachers came from the UK. Simultaneously the number of Ukrainian teachers grew. There was a small difference between both groups in 1999: 519 work permits were issued for teachers from Great Britain in comparison with 495 issued for Ukrainians.

Ukrainian workers are particularly prevalent, in comparison to other foreign workers, as managers, expert and specialist workers, as well as in the medical services.

As mentioned earlier, Ukrainian migration is an example of circular migration. Permanent settlement is usually associated with marriage –transnational marriages between Poles and Ukrainians occur relatively frequently, 2,200 between 1992 – 1997, this makes up 11% of all the transnational marriages in Poland (Fihel, Górny, & Kaczmarczyk, 2008, pp. 55-57).

The migration of the Vietnamese to Poland started in the 1960s. Initially it was mostly educationally orientated migration, driven by political factors (USA engagement in Vietnam). The nationals from Vietnam were the biggest group of foreign students in Poland. After 1986 (so-called

“Vietnamese pierestrojka”) migration was focused on trade (with centers like “Jarmark Europa” in Warsaw or Tuszyn in Łódź). The number of Vietnamese in Poland before 1998 has been estimated at 30,000, which means that Poland is the tenth favorite destination for Vietnamese diaspora in the world, and 3rd in Europe. Over 75% of registered migrants have their own business, mainly wholesale or retail trade and catering establishments (Fihel, Górny, & Kaczmarczyk, 2008 and Fihel A. , 2008).

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