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THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL RETURN MIGRATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: An important process that takes place in rural areas is the spatial mobility of its inhabitants. It is estimated that during the past fifteen years the intensity of migrations from villages to cities has been decreasing. However, since the beginning of 2000, there has been an increase in the number of people moving from cities to villages. The rate of foreign migrations has risen significantly. The number of Poles who have temporarily resided abroad has exceeded 2 million, and about a third of them are rural area residents. In a period of increased international migration of Poles, a widely discussed issue has become the matter of their return from abroad, particularly important for developing areas facing long-term depopulation problems. This discussion, on the one hand, is an expression of the fear of a further “washing out” of young and educated people in the country and the number of negative consequences of these departures. On the other hand, it stems from the expectation of the returnees who are willing to invest their foreign capital in their country of origin. This latter aspect is clearly articulated by regional governments, which invest in the activities of returnees for regional development opportunities.

Key words: Foreign migrations, return migration, social and economic effects, territorial development.

Introduction

Significant changes have been taking place in rural areas in recent years. They are partially related to the spatial mobility of people [*Polska Wieś...* 2013, p. 9]. It is estimated that in the last 15 years there has been a significant decline in migrations from rural to urban regions, and since 2000 there has been a greater influx of people from cities to villages [*Program Rozwoju Obszarów...* 2007, p. 10]. Unlike internal migration, the main factor that influences the decline of the rural population is international migration. The phenomenon of international migration was intensified after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004. The number of Poles temporarily residing abroad is now more than two million and about one-third of them are rural

emigrants. Depopulation of rural areas mainly affects rural peripheral areas, in which the development of agricultural activities and especially non-agricultural activities is particularly difficult. In general, these regions are characterized by stagnation, a significant migration of young people, and an imbalanced demographic structure.

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1. Fundamental features of international migration and their evaluation in the context of homecoming

Significant changes have occurred in the emigration of Poles in recent years, being a direct consequence of Poland’s accession to the European Union and the gradual opening of Western labour markets. Polish emigrants are young and relatively well educated. They often start their professional life before starting a family. A predominance of young people in the structure of emigrants is a typical feature of spatial mobility. However, this situation has consequences for the country (region) of origin. The country loses people in the procreation age, persons with the greatest professional potential, and people who could become a developmental asset. Studies conducted on Polish re-emigration after 1989 show that old age is not a key factor behind the decision to return [Fihel *et al.* 2006]. Young people are more likely to decide to return to their home country, and this factor (young age) gives employers the opportunity to exploit the potential of returnees.

Among Polish emigrants, more and more people are persons with a relatively high level of education. In a sense, their status in the international labour market is problematic. Although emigrants have an opportunity to get work that requires higher qualifications abroad, the majority of them, even though they have a high level of education, have to settle for simple work in the secondary sectors of the host countries’ economies [Kaczmarczyk, Tyrowicz 2008]. It is difficult to estimate what percentage of Poles work in accordance with their qualifications abroad. However, we do know for sure that many of them do not use their skills and knowledge gained in their home country. Research carried out in several regions suggests that people who have already had experience working abroad and did not perform work in their profession abroad are the majority (persons employed beyond their profession oscillates around 70%) [Zagraniczne migracje... 2009]. A survey conducted in the Opolskie region

shows that almost 60% of the emigrants have undertaken work inconsistent with their qualifications¹.

Yet again, one can speak about the phenomenon of “brain waste”. It means that knowledge and skills during the migration period are significantly devalued, and the ability to return to the regional (national) labour market becomes limited. In a sense, various studies conducted in the region and in the country provide the answer to the question to what extent in the future will it be an encouraging or discouraging factor to decide to return home. If career paths are limited for Polish migrants abroad, a large number of them will be willing to return home. However, if their stay abroad is seen as a gap in their professional career, the situation may inhibit the re-employment process once they return home.

On the other hand, According to Kaczmarczyk and Okólskiego [2008], the escalating problem of unemployment among young people abroad seems to be referring to the concept of *crowding-out* – a “purification” of the Polish workforce from the labour market. As indicated, the increasing unemployment rate among people with higher education is becoming a major problem. The national average is one out of nine unemployed after graduation, and the most difficult situation remains in urban areas. The International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2010, while 24% of young people remained unemployed (over 75 million), qualified the issues of youth unemployment and job insecurity to the catalog of civilization problems.

Among the emigrants from Poland, unmarried persons make up an increasing share². This feature, however, considered in two aspects, certainly does not help predict trends of return migration. On the one hand, a great number of emigrants have families that usually remain in the home country. Not many emigrants bring their families abroad. Such a situation implies certain consequences of a social nature and affects the functioning of a family in a permanent state of separation. People who leave their relatives at home will certainly consider a return more often. On the other hand, the increasing participation of young, unmarried emigrants shows a lack of family responsibilities and more opportunities to settle down and start families abroad. Data from the British Office for National Statistics shows that one in four children born in 2011 in England and Wales have a non-British mother, mostly of Polish origin [Biuletyn 2012]. People who live alone in exile will make the decision to return far more seldom, but for those who have established a family overseas, migration will typically lead to a permanent settlement. It should be assumed that the country

¹ Project *Wypracowanie metod zmniejszania emigracji zarobkowej i wspierania powrotu migrantów na polski rynek pracy (Developing methods to reduce economic migration and support returnees in the Polish labour market)* carried out by the Academic Enterprise Incubator of the University of Opole in the period 2011–2013. In this section of the article a reference is made to research conducted in the above mentioned project. For broader results of the project, see e.g.: [Solga 2013, pp. 27-38].

² In quoted studies, people who have not yet established families account for 40%, almost an equal number of people as those staying in formal or informal relationships (43%).

will lose this group ceaselessly, but even in this group, there are spontaneous returns. For policymakers, this indicates the need to create the appropriate conditions for the returnees, *e.g.*, in the education of their children.

Contemporary migrations from Poland are simply an economic phenomenon. It is determined by the diversity of incomes and living standards between Poland and destination countries of emigration. It is important to bear in mind that differences in wages are not enough to explain the dynamics and diversity of the migration process. A large part of them have an economic nature, but apart from traditional reasons such as desire to find work and earn money to buy a car or a house, there are also new reasons, such as gaining work experience and qualifications. All of these elements formulate the thesis that the motifs of migration are diverse. In general, there are three groups of reasons for international migration: emigrants for whom the departure was the result of disappointment with the situation in the country/region in comparison to the opportunities offered by Western European countries; emigrants for whom the departure was a necessity, conditioned by lack of work or limited employment opportunities in the country/region; emigrants for whom the departure was a chance to gain new experience abroad and expand professional knowledge.

This issue is obviously of a fundamental importance in the topic. At present, the situation in the labour market and the quality of life and social security in Poland is not favourable enough to attract a significant group of emigrants. Hence, as long as economic and social factors are principal, being the most important stimulus for economic migration, they will trigger international migration but not necessarily at the same level. In this context, one can analyze the CSO data, which shows that the wave of Polish emigration will be systematically and gradually decreasing³. In view of the above facts, and taking into consideration experience of many European countries, we can expect a wave of emigrants to return to Poland. It is difficult to estimate how many emigrants will return and when will it happen. This will mainly depend on the situation in the European, national and regional labour markets and whether the mechanism facilitating the return for emigrants will be launched in Poland.

Many studies have shown that a great number of Polish emigrants have been considering returning to the country⁴. Their statements should be interpreted carefully, since no studies carried out in the country verify such declarations, and we what would be they impact on prospect behavior of emigrants. We know that the declarations of a return have a different character. In addition to relatively well-paid jobs, family responsibilities play a special role after returning home. Often it is ultimately the decisive factor for re-emigration. As indicated, if a family member emigrates, the likelihood that the emigrant will return home increases. In this case, the only impor-

³ According to the CSO estimation on migration for the period 2008–2020 a positive balance of foreign migration will occur after 2018. [*Prognoza ludności ... 2009*].

⁴ In quoted research – 71 % of emigrants.

tant thing is the time remaining abroad. Other factors declared by emigrants considering a return to the country include the following: the emigrant's young age, gaining professional experience and at the same time getting an idea for generating economic activity in the country (as employer or employee), possession of material and financial capital; fatigue of the current lifestyle as an emigrant, especially if the situation continues for many years [Solga 2013a, p. 275]. All these factors should be taken into consideration when forecasting trends for re-emigration.

An important factor in the context of return migration is also the length of stay abroad. Research shows that a substantial group of people leaving with the intention to stay for a short time decide to prolong their stay⁵. These results give reason to believe that with the passage of time emigrants' attitude evolves towards a greater indecision about life plans. Therefore, the length of stay abroad is a variable significantly affecting the diversity of a declaration about a possible return to the home country. The emigrants themselves can be characterized by a so-called "intentional unpredictability", which makes it difficult to decide whether to settle permanently abroad or return home.

2. Scale of return migration in the opinion of the representatives of regional authorities

At the national level it is difficult to unambiguously assess the scale of return migration. Various sources indicate that the return migration process is rather limited [Iglucka 2010, p. 122]. At the same time, for example, in the Opolskie region, approx. 25,000 emigrants, indicated by Romuald Jończy, who have returned to the region in recent years and the estimated number of 20,000-82,000 emigrants who might return to the region, in the frame of the project "Forecast of re-emigration to the Opolskie region of people working abroad by 2013" [Mackiewicz 2009, p. 7], are not reflected either in the number of startup companies or the number of unemployed or newly employed people.

An increase in the number of businesses started by people returning from abroad will not necessarily be in line with the growing scale of re-emigration. In regions where the investment activity of returnees has been indicated previously, it currently remains at a low level. Few reasons for the low level of business activity have been noted: the unfavourable conditions for conducting business in the country (legal, financial, organizational problems), the lack of sufficient initial financial capital. Only in the Silesian region and Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship has the entrepreneurship of returnees been estimated at an average level, and in no regions has the level been

⁵ In the group of surveyed emigrants, an increase in the number of people who eventually decided to stay abroad for longer periods or permanently can be observed. Only 13% of those people emigrated with the intention to stay longer or permanently, now 25% of the people decide to extend their stay.

significant (e.g., returnees' companies are an important part of the local business, as high as 30%). In most regions, the role of the returnees in the development of regional entrepreneurship is rather minor and, according to regional authorities, only in three regions may it increase in the future due to the equalization of living standards in the country and abroad as well as strong bonds with the country/region of origin.

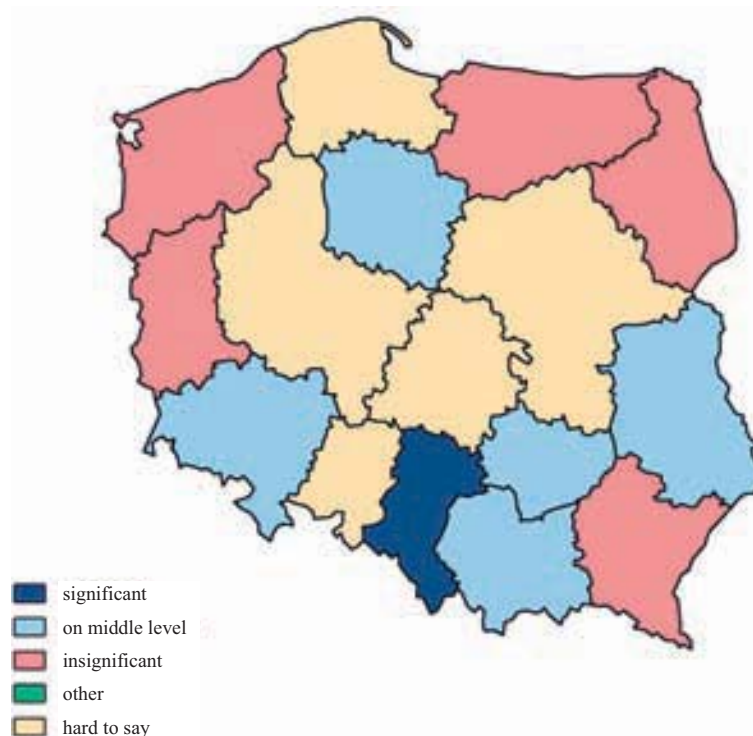


Figure 1. A scale of re-emigration assessed by representatives of regional authorities

Source: Own elaboration made in the frame of the project *The meaning of international migration in the aspect of regional development*, National Science Centre, 2011–2013.

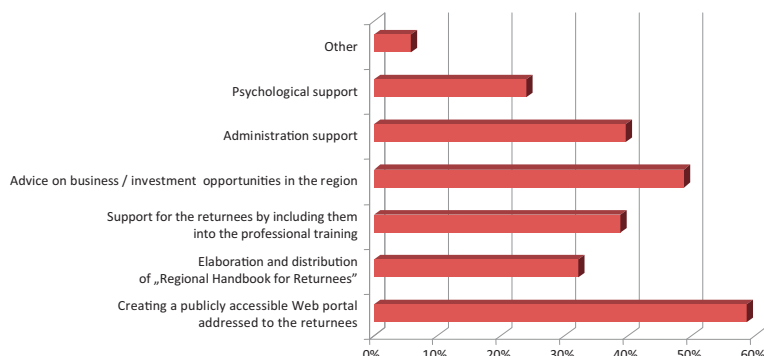
3. Role of public institutions and non-governmental organizations in the creation of a system of institutional support for returnees

Recently, more and more attention has been paid to the issue of return migration in the utilitarian approach to the subject. A good exemplification of this kind of interest is the project “*Developing methods to reduce economic migration and support the returnees on the Polish labor market*” carried out in the Opolskie Voivodeship. The assessment by the representatives of public institutions and non-governmental organizations on the validity of institutional support for the returnees in the process of their social and professional adaptation leaves no doubts; 89% of respondents

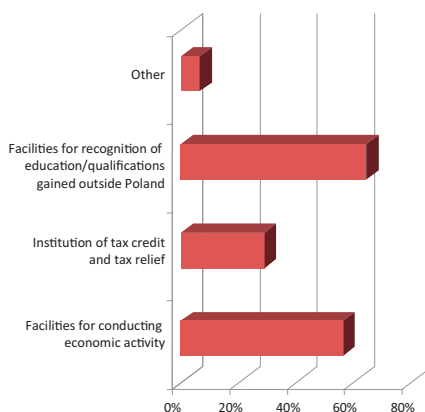
expressed a positive opinion, and only 3% did not see a need for special assistance. At the same time, the expressed opinions were very clear because only 6% of respondents expressed a lack of opinion (the answer “I do not know”).

The subject of the analysis were the most important supporting tools (actions) being a component of the governmental program aimed at emigrants returning to home country and adapted to the regional needs. They are diverse in nature and are addressed directly to the returnees and their families, and additionally to the public administration. In general, all supporting actions received a positive opinion (Fig. 2). 82% of the representatives of the institutions in the Opolskie Voivodeship noticed a need to improve the service system for returnees, 85%—to create facilities for people returning from abroad, 81%—to take specific actions aimed at families of the returnees, while 79% pointed out the need to focus on public administration. The greatest indecision was related to the need to create precise solutions targeted at specific groups of people returning from abroad (*e.g.*, scientists, doctors), this possibility was supported only by 61 % of the respondents.

a) service system for the returnees



b) facilities for the returnees



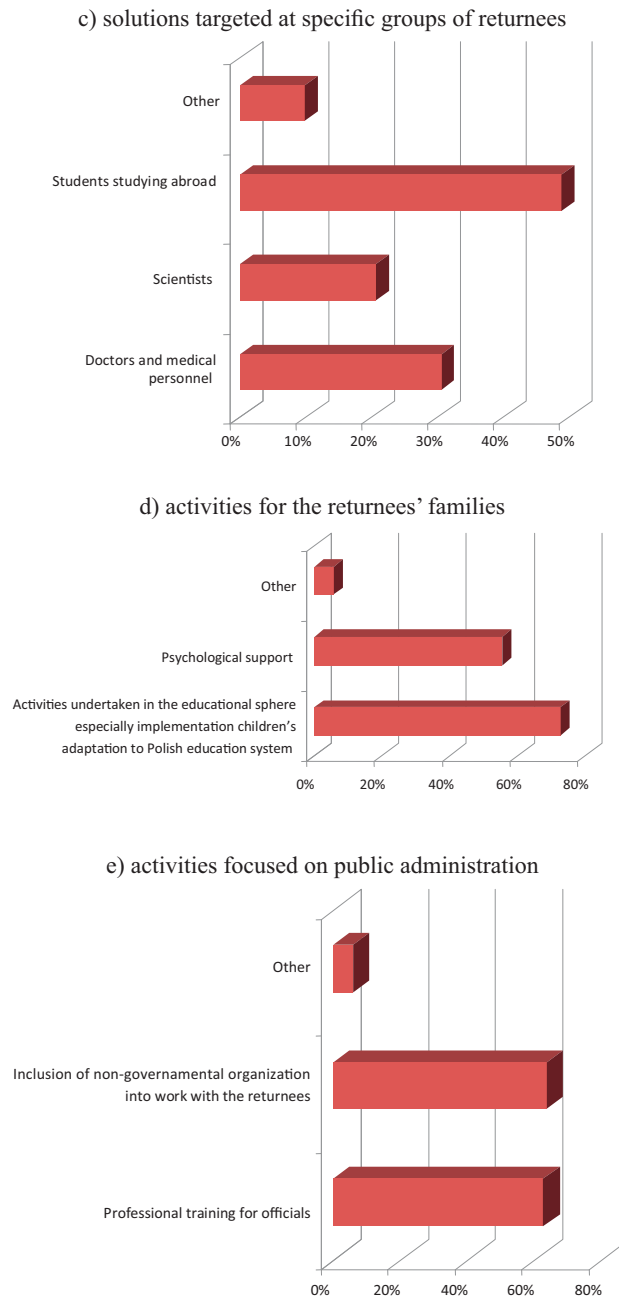


Figure 2. Actions aimed at emigrants returning from abroad in a specific field*:

* - one could choose more than one answer

Source: Own elaboration in the frame of the project *Developing methods to reduce economic migration and support returnees on the Polish labor market*, Academic Enterprise Incubator, University of Opole, 2011–2013.

Among the specific solutions, one can notice the relatively high acceptance of educational activities, especially in terms of the children of returnees adapting to the Polish education system (73%) and the creation of a publicly accessible and recognizable regional website addressed to the returnees (59%). One can also notice an openness to the need for greater involvement by non-governmental organizations for the returnees (63 %) and officials concerned with the re-emigrants (64%). According to the opinion of the vast majority of respondents, there is an additionally supported need for awareness and the appropriate training for employees of public institutions (84%) and NGOs (77%) to perform the tasks related to the needs and expectations of people returning from abroad. At the same time, 87% of the representatives of public administration institutions have expressed the need for networking of institutions coordinating works for the returnees, 8% of the respondents are against this idea, and only 4% expressed a lack of opinion on this issue (Fig. 3).

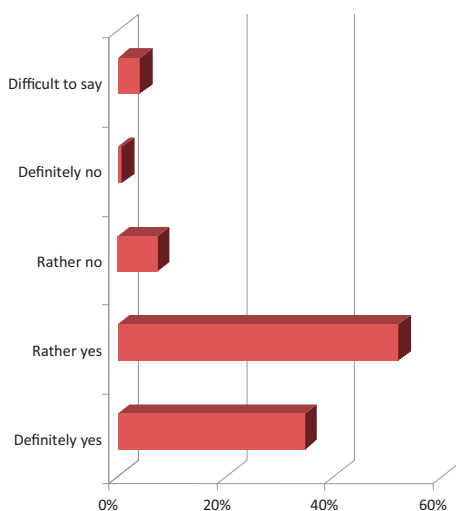


Figure 3. Opinion by representatives of public institutions and NGOs on the validity of institutional networking addressed to the returnees

Source: As in Fig. 2.

Conclusion

Previous and prospect returns from abroad create specific opportunities but also challenges. They can be important factors for the development of rural areas. It should be taken into account that in the current labour market situation in the countryside, it is important not only to encourage the re-emigration process, but also to establish a foundation for an effective return and a successful reintegration into society, and

most importantly a professional reintegration of the returnees. Therefore, broader and more coherent actions should be taken by public institutions and non-governmental organizations, whose mission is to support people returning from abroad. In this respect, some examples of the “best practices” used by European and non-European countries that launched a policy for the active support of returnees are worth examining. Their experiences show that a great role in the reintegration of returnees can be played in an efficiently organized manner of incorporating returnees into national institutional systems, *i.e.*, the labour market system, education, health care, social assistance.

So far, in Poland there has been no proposal for comprehensive solutions that would facilitate both the decision to return, and the returnees’ adaptation to new life. People returning from abroad are not perceived as a group that requires support from public institutions and non-governmental organizations. It is believed that among those institutions, awareness and knowledge about the returnees’ needs in the process of social and professional reintegration after their return from abroad, as well as the role of returnees in local and regional development, is insufficient. There should be an elaborated, precise guidebook with information on the re-emigration process and the problems faced by those returning from abroad.

Facilitating returns which have a sustainable and consistent nature may become an important factor in exploiting the potential of returnees. This is especially important, when we are dealing with the return of qualified persons with an innovative type of personality, with financial and social capital gained during their emigration, and are ready to invest it in their country of origin. A less desirable act of returnees is registering as unemployed and making use of social services. But this group—and perhaps primarily – should also be offered the appropriate mechanisms for social and professional adaptation.

In proposing the specialized support tools for returnees, one should keep in mind that they are a heterogeneous group. There are people among them whose stay abroad was focused on achieving certain goals after the return (*e.g.*, development of economic activity) and those for whom the decision to return might be related to the problems faced abroad (*e.g.*, unemployment issues, problems of assimilation in a different cultural environment, insufficient knowledge of a foreign language). This means that given the structure and profile of the returnees and their migration strategies, including strategies to return, one ought to keep in mind the particular target groups, specialized support mechanisms dedicated to these groups, and the recommendations for further actions. Therefore, it may be either a support for the rapid implementation of investment plans of returnees or activities enabling the returnees to overcome social and professional exclusion (*e.g.*, trainings organized by employment agencies, professional career counseling, psychological workshops, and therapeutic work with the families of returnees experiencing problems resulting from their return, drug addiction support). However, the key importance is to encourage entrepreneur-

ship among emigrants and returnees and arouse their interest in the changes that have taken place during their absence, at the same time illustrating specific opportunities in the area (*F* funds/grants to start own business).

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