

Marlena Blicharz
War Studies University, Warsaw
marlena.blicharz@gmail.com

Florentyna Kurzeja
War Studies University, Warsaw
flokurzeja@gmail.com

Challenges and threats to Polish migration policy. The system of public assistance dedicated to foreign migrants in contemporary Poland

*Wyzwania i zagrożenia dla polskiej polityki migracyjnej.
System publicznego wsparcia imigrantów
we współczesnej Polsce*

Summary:

The article portrays the situation for migrants in Poland. The authors describe types of help offered to applicants for refugee status on Polish territory. The paper underlines that Poland has evolved from an emigration country into an immigration one over the past two decades; as a result of this phenomena, contemporary society faces a situation unknown to the previous generation. Integration of migrants and their participation in civic society should be a priority matter for policy makers. The nature of migration problems is overcomplicated, and the authors of the article aim at identifying the main challenges in order to effectively influence migration policy.

Keywords: emigration, refugees, social assistance, migration policy

Streszczenie:

Artykuł obrazuje sytuację migrantów w Polsce. Autorki opisują rodzaje pomocy oferowanej osobom starającym się o status uchodźcy. Artykuł podkreśla, fakt ewolucji Polski z państwa emigracyjnego do imigracyjnego, co nastąpiło na przestrzeni ostatnich dwóch dekad i stworzyło nieznane dotąd wyzwania związane z integracją imigrantów w polskim społeczeństwie. Autorki podejmują próbę identyfikacji głównych wyzwań związanych ze zjawiskiem migracji.

Słowa kluczowe: migracja, uchodźcy, polityka migracyjna, pomoc społeczna

1. Introduction

European countries cherish a long tradition of offering shelter to persecuted people. However, the phenomenon of the influx of refugees did not exist in Poland until early '90s. Political transformation in Europe significantly changed this situation, and due to the challenges presented by the new geopolitical position, our country created a system for protection of migrants from scratch. Starting with the adoption of international declarations and conventions, through to the creation of national legal solutions and implementation into the legal system, and ending with transfer of real help to people entitled to it. Poland has changed from a country associated mostly with emigration to Western Europe and USA, into a responsible partner on international scene, dealing with the migration crisis. Currently, the factors accountable for the influx of people into Poland are `the natural transformation of migration into permanent migration, EU enlargement with the accession of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, the improved situation of the Polish economy (despite the global financial crisis), improvement in the quality of life and the influx of foreign capital. In the coming years, Poland will be facing demographic problems, will be forced to open up to the human capital of immigrants coming from other countries, to prevent demographic collapse.

The authors of this article attempt to identify trends of the current migration process, to prevent the adverse effects of illegal immigration. The paper tries to evaluate the Polish system of social assistance for migrants applying for refugee status, and identify the changes needed to be implemented to make the system more efficient, and looks at the challenges facing the Polish immigration policy. The coming years appear to be crucial for the demographic structure of Poland, which is why the authors recognize the necessity of a coherent vision for upcoming challenges. The absence of demarcated goals in the area of migration policy and demographic development may be fatal for Poland in the next few decades.

2. Evaluation of social assistance system dedicated to foreign migrants

The Republic of Poland introduced an integrated system of social assistance for refugees in the pre-accession preparations. Currently, on the 12th anniversary of accession to the European Union, this system has many advantages, but also disadvantages. Poland, during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union, organized a conference regarding asylum (11-12 July 2011), where the main topic was the EU asylum system. The Common European Asylum System, which is in the process of being designed, has a main aim: harmonising asylum laws and practices in the Member States, as well as apportionment of responsibilities for refugees incoming to Europe. Any country is able to accept half of all asylum seekers in Europe,

as is happening in Greece¹. Member States and the countries of origin should take joint action to support migrants. Countries should ensure pre-departure support to migrants in order to facilitate their integration. It should be the basis for developing a framework for dialogue and cooperation. The document evolved at the government level. "Polish migration policy" introduces specific tools which can be used by the state to manage migration. Part of the solution is implemented continuously, such as that related to illegal immigration, but a huge part is still in the realm of planning due to financial barriers. Still, a big challenge remains with the ongoing monitoring of the migration situation, inhibited by lack of financial resources, numerous and competent personnel, and the final obstacle of non-integrated systems and incomplete records². The main message of the document is to provide a framework and vision for improving the demographic situation of Poland. Poland as a country should be more open for immigrants with desired skills, willing to integrate into Polish society. "Polish migration policy" also includes the principle of priority of the labour market and the need to ensure the competitiveness of the Polish economy, which are the instruments of shaping immigration policy³. The document also includes an extensive international context, resulting from Polish membership in international organisations, first of all the European Union and integration into the Schengen system. It was considered that Poland should remain a country open to immigrants, where everyone who wants to live in the country finds a friendly social climate for living and integration with the community.

A phenomenon particularly undesirable for any country is illegal stay. Even a restrictive policy in tourism, border protection and tightening controls are not able to overcome the problem of illegal immigration (the best example is the United States of America). In Poland, the phenomenon of illegal residence is also a serious problem, although it seems to be ignored by the state administration. The authorities should react by creating such conditions in which the minimum number of people would have unsettled status and effective programmes are launched to remove them from illegality. Estimation of any data is quite risky, because researchers and public administration provide very divergent numbers of people residing in Poland illegally⁴.

Actions which took place in recent years were focused on reducing the grey economy and led to introduction of state control among people previously staying

¹ *Common European Asylum System until the end of 2012 r.*, <http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/pl/wiadomosci/2011/wspolny-europejski-system-azylowy-do-konca-2012.html>, [accessed: 23.07.2016].

² *Migration affairs in 2013*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 45, December 2013, p. 1.

³ M. Prus, *Polish migration policy: finish is visible!*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 30, July-August 2011, p. 2.

⁴ *Immigrant's movement against abolition.*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 27, October 2010, p. 9

in Poland illegally. However, abolition also acts as a factor attracting further immigrants. Currently, cases of illegal border crossings have become less frequent, while the phenomenon of using legal entry into Polish and then remaining on Polish territory without a valid residence permit has strengthened. Legalisation of the stay of migrants in Poland also entails positive effects, mainly in the social and cultural aspects. An immigrant should be able to consciously realise his needs, and activity in the local community should be popularised. An equally important task is the activation of migrants on the labour market. Admittedly this is not a solution for labour shortages in the market, but offers at least a partial remedy. A much bigger advantage is legally entering the labour market. Today, most illegal immigrants work, but in the grey zone. Registered work for the aforementioned group of legal work will result in the discharge of health insurance contributions, social benefits and paying taxes. This relieves the state budget, overstretched with social assistance, and additionally increases state revenue. This will benefit both the migrants as well as the state. Research carried out in Spain⁵ showed the positive and long-term effect of directing immigrants into mainstream legal employment. According to the report of the Foundation for Applied Economics Studies, the work of immigrants significantly affects the growth of income per capita, without reducing the salaries and total employment of the Spanish. What is also very important, the regularisation of immigrants in Poland brings benefits in terms of security. According to Prof. Irena Rzeplińska representing the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, it does pay to have legalised migrants, because then they are known, countable and visible. Stuck in the grey economy, they are at risk of criminalisation, both as victims of crime and committers of crimes⁶. Unfortunately, legalisation of staying can also have negative social effects in the case of migrants who have lived and worked in Poland illegally (for many years). Public opposition to non-compliance with the applicable legal standards can build barriers to migrants, who despite breaking the law as a result of changes in regulations, are gaining equal rights (sometimes even better) than when they follow legal principles. Lack of a friendly atmosphere will impede the integration process of migrants, building an attitude of hostility.

The integration of migrants is therefore an extremely complex, multidimensional matter and requires the involvement of many institutions and organisations. In the past, the most commonly overlooked aspect of immigration to Poland was problems with integration. The submission of repeated applications for refugee status is still a relatively big problem. Following the law, international regulations allow

⁵ *Migration in EU and over the world*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 13, June-July 2007, p. 6.

⁶ I. Rzeplińska, *Social aspects of abolition*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 13, June-July 2007, p. 3.

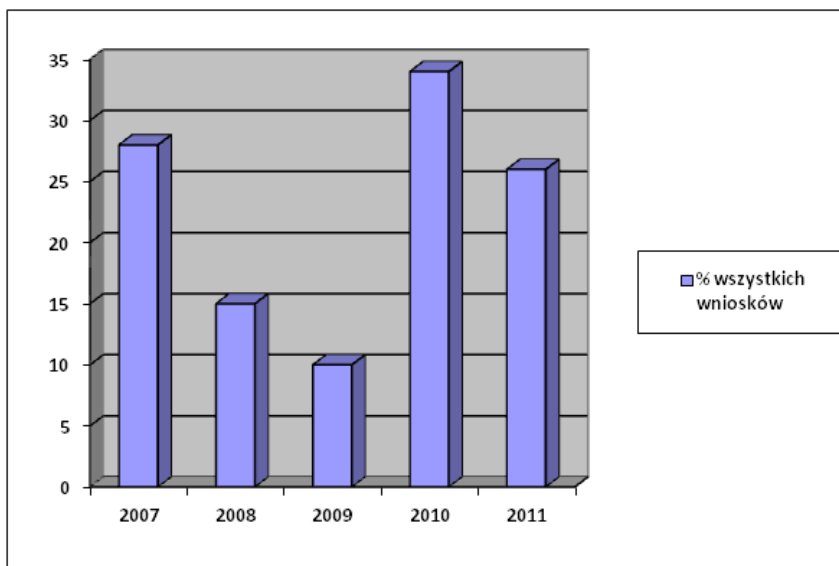
for submission of renewed applications; however, this is a huge problem for administrative authorities in terms of time and formal requirements. When there are no significant changes in a migrant's situation, i.e. unfulfilled conditions as contained in the Geneva Convention, there is no possibility of obtaining protection status, which is granted with refugee status. However, migrants are exploiting legal legerdemains, and, despite that the fact they do not have reasonable grounds for preparing a further application, they decide to take such a step, in order to keep social benefits in refugee centres. A special case study can be made for 2009, when Poland faced a very large number of migrants arriving from the East. After the Russian-Georgian war, citizens of Georgia and citizens from Russia of Chechen nationality constituted the largest groups applying for asylum in Poland. At its peak, from June to August 2009, nearly 100 people a day with Georgian nationality were coming to Poland, exceeding 3 000 people in total⁷. Then the influx from Georgia has decreased slightly, but still remains at a relatively high level. In 2011, one out of four applications for refugee status in Poland came from Georgia. So far, none of the applicants for protection has received refugee status or subsidiary protection. The reasons given in the applications from Georgians were: persecution by the current authorities for political activities, beatings, verbal abuse, threats against religious and ethnic groups, as well as bad financial situation and the lack of employment-related to discrimination⁸. Currently, Georgia is considered a safe country and there are no bases for granting refugee status (if the circumstances in the application do not occur in the country of origin, there is a reason to believe that the migrant will be freely able to live in this part of the territory⁹) or subsidiary protection. Migrants arriving in Poland are mostly motivated by economic than political reasons. This conclusion can be extrapolated on the basis of several factors. First of all, Poland is transition country on the way to the West. Georgians often do not even bother with refugee centres, but head straight to the western border. On the other hand, for people staying in Poland and undergoing the process of applying for refugee status, room and board at the cost of the Polish state are an effective alternative compared to a life of poverty, unemployment and lack of funds in Georgia. Every fourth foreign migrant applying for international protection in Poland in 2011, made a re-application for refugee status (see: Figure 1)¹⁰.

⁷ R. Stefańska, *Wave of asylum from Georgia is continued*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 37, August 2012, p. 3.

⁸ See.: G. Firlit-Fesnak, L. Łotocki, *Situation of foreigners searching for protection in Poland – interview report with foreigners staying AT refugee Centre in Czerwony Bór*, "Migration Report", 2007 no. 8.

⁹ *Act on granting protection to aliens within the territory of the Republic of Poland*, art. 18.

¹⁰ R. Stefańska, *Eternal refugees – permanent problem*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 36, June 2012, p. 4.

Figure no. 1. Number of renewed applications for refugee status.

Source: R. Stefańska, *Eternal refugees – permanent problem*, “Migration Bulletin”, no. 36, June 2012, p. 4.

Apart from typical reasons for applying for refugee status, such as fear or reluctance to return to their country of origin, a common motivation is the possibility of continual use of social services in refugee centres. Social assistance for seekers of asylum in Poland channel resources into many grants and financial subsidies. Each person receiving material aid costs the state approx. 220 PLN per month. Relatively modest benefits for asylum seekers, represent a significant financial burden for the Polish Treasury in re-examining procedures. Assessments point to several million zloty per year¹¹. Today, by placing the relevant provisions in the Act on migrants, re-submission of the application for refugee status does not suspend the proceedings on the obligation to return¹². With the amendment to the Act of 2003 on Granting Protection to Aliens within the Territory of the Republic of Poland, migrants were given the opportunity to provide a new form of protection, i.e. for subsidiary protection. With this change, migrants benefiting with subsidiary protection were granted the right to annual integration programmes, which were previously only available to people with a given refugee status.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² *Foreigners Act*, art. 303.

In Poland, there is a unique possibility of having an individual integration plan. A refugee or a migrant benefiting from subsidiary protection, undertakes (in writing) to: learn Polish, register at the place of residence, register in the clinic, actively search for a job, and work and cooperate with a social worker. Part of the commitment is not accomplished because of lack of willingness on behalf of migrants, sometimes because of system errors¹³. According to the Mazowiecki Provincial Office, 107 out of 370 people who were participating in integration programme did not receive any kind of education¹⁴. The most common excuse was the need to provide care for children, which is linked with limited places in the kindergartens. There were also other explanations, such as high costs of public transport to school, part time job or seeking a job. Only 11 migrants did not have any excuse¹⁵. It can therefore be concluded that the reason for non-fulfillment of obligations under the programme wasn't lack of willingness, but the lack of tools to achieve guidelines.

Many elements of the Polish system needs to be improved. A particularly important task is to strengthen the language competence of employees' at the centres in order to improve a migrant's access to information and provide it in a language they understand. In detention centres, there is also problem of limited contact with the outside world (e.g. strictly regulated walking time, also for children) and difficult access to medical care (e.g. lack of interpreter during meeting with psychologist or psychiatrist). As noted by Kamila Fiałkowska in "The Bulletin of Migration", placing children in detention centres in order to expel them is controversial. The rationale for this thesis are the negative consequences of staying at a closed centre for the psyche of child and its development, limited access to education, which is also a failure of constitutional compulsory school attendance for all children under 18 years of age residing in Poland¹⁶.

In October 2012 in guarded centres in Białystok, Biała Podlaska, Przemyśl and Lesznowola, there were protests and hunger strikes. Migrants staying at the centres demanded wider access to legal assistance and interpreters, proper medical care and access to education for children of school age. It should be noted that medical care is provided, but particularly in the case of psychological issues, help is not effectively implemented, due to the lack of translators. Absence of interpreters on the patient – psychologist line or use of online translators during therapy does not give a chance

¹³ R. Stefańska, *Problems with integration. What is refugee's fault?*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 37, August 2012, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ K. Fiałkowska, *Interned foreigners and their rights*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 32, December 2011, p. 3.

for effective treatment. The authors of this article claim that only some ideas are justified; nonetheless, most of the expectations represent the restitutionary attitude of migrants staying at the centre.

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights prepared a report, which describes cases of violations of the rights of persons applying for refugee status and protected in Poland in 2012-2014. It shows that escape from the country of origin or persecution and reaching the borders of the Republic of Poland does not guarantee the safety of migrants seeking refugee status in Poland. The report shows that it is even problematic reaching the borders of Poland, because the Border Guard officers do not allow them to enter the country if the reasons for arrival are different than fear of persecution in their country of origin. The main task of the Border Guard is to devolve foreigners requests to the Office for Migrants, not to judge their credibility; this is often an object of complaint regarding migrants unsuccessfully trying to submit an application. Further difficulties were identified at the stage of the refugee procedure. Dangerous activities include the Polish authorities trying to confirm a migrant's identity (without documents); the Polish authority pitch an inquiry to diplomatic missions of their country of origin, exposing the refugee and his family to even greater persecution than in the country of origin. Polish authorities have repulsed these allegations, explaining that they do not reveal the type of proceedings. Another concern is related to the excessive length of refugee procedure, which in Poland takes an average of 3-4 years, while the first instance of the process should last approx. 6 months. Despite all the mentioned problems, which cannot be marginalised, the most difficult obstacle in Polish migration policy seems to be lack of refugee centres in metropolitan area. Locating such institutions in urbanised areas may create much more opportunities for migrant integration, both in the labour market and in aspects of social assimilation. It is a common problem that the person applying for refugee status is not able to live outside the centre, which often results in conflicts and hinders integration in overcrowded centres.

2. Challenges for Polish migration policy

Migration policy is a big challenge for the state, because it can be considered to a certain extent as state self-creativity, as it influences the composition of a fundamental element of a country's existence, which is its population¹⁷. Political action is able to decide who inhabits the territory of the country, the policies of emigration and immigration are equally important and, therefore, determine the identity of the state. In addition, migration policy, which covers many areas of state activity has

¹⁷ A. Kicingier, *About migration policy, so about...?*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 15, November 2007, p. 1.

become one of the most comprehensive and complex policies pursued by the state, where issues of sovereignty, identity and security are intertwined and overlapped with social welfare, education and the labour market. The process of creating international regulations concerning protection of refugees began in the early years of the twentieth century, within League of Nations activities, then later the United Nations. An apogee was the adoption of the Convention on the Status of Refugees on 28 July 1951, which remains a key legal document in the field of refugee protection, despite the passing of time. Initially, the application of the Convention was limited to the protection of refugees on the territory of Europe as a result of World War II¹⁸. The protocols were extended at the convention of 1967 and geographical and temporal barriers were removed. It should be noted that the convention is not intended to combat the root causes of refugees, i.e. limiting the violations of human rights, political or armed conflicts in the home country. As indicated by the Representation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the starting point for the 1951 Convention, is the reduction of the negative consequences of escaping from places of residence by offering international legal protection to victims and other assistance by supporting refugees at the beginning of a new stage in life.

The last decade brought a major change in the world of migration. First of all in numbers, because, according to UN statistics, the number of registered residents of all countries of the world, who were born outside their borders has increased from 170 to 214 million in the last decade, i.e. to about 44 million, while between 1990 and 2000 this figure increased by 15 million¹⁹. There has been a significant increase in the number of inhabitants of the poorer south emigrating to wealthier countries. However, there was a change in this trend in 2007, when the economic crisis began in highly developed western countries, which resulted in significant outflow of residents abroad (e.g. Czech Republic, Portugal and Ireland) and the rate of inflow of immigrants decreased. Causes of migration have changed as well. Currently, the dominant factor is just the possibility of migration, its full freedom and the ability to choose a place of residence, in contrast to family migration and involuntary migrations, which prevailed at the end of the last century. What is more, among new immigrants significant improvement in the level of education has been noted. The authors of the article assume that better education has resulted in a desire to migrate, broaden horizons and explore new cultures. A moderate decline was also recorded in the number of international refugees, as well as the increased return of refugees to

¹⁸ *Convention relation to the Status of Refugee 1951*, <http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/pl/materialy/konwencje/konwencja-dotyczaca-statusu-uchodzcow-z-1951-r.html>, [accessed: 25.05.2016].

¹⁹ M. Okólski, *Characteristics of contemporary migrations*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 42, June 2013, p. 2.

their countries of origin. This trend is important for the purposes of this study; I will prove that the programmes created at international level by the International Organization for Migration work and bring the desired effect. Support for voluntary return, which is designed to help refugees who were illegally residing outside their country of origin, with return to the country of refugee's origin –when reasons for the migration have ceased are especially important. Another change in the context of this phenomenon is the decrease of undocumented migration. It seems that Polish immigration policy has finally managed to get out of the administration scheme. Today, we can see a change in perception of this sphere in politics, as most political parties have incorporated the theme of migration into political programmes. What is more, interest groups and NGOs engaged not only into halting the emigration of their own citizens, but also for integration and assistance to foreigners applying for refugee protection in the Republic of Poland. In the coming years, Poland will be faced with an emerging demographic problem. That is why a dedicated document was created, establishing the strategic direction of Polish migration policy. The general message of “Polish migration policy” is a statement that Poland is open to foreigners, but remains aware of all challenges and threats. The most desirable foreigners in Poland are qualified personnel, students who want to live and work in Poland, and those who want to integrate into Polish society. In addition, the document emphasises the principle of priority of the labour market and the need to ensure the competitiveness of the Polish economy, as the main aspects shaping immigration policy.

According to the authors, the biggest challenge in the social sphere will be demography. It's estimated that by 2035 Polish population will decrease by more than 2 million, and a further 4 million by 2050²⁰. Such a huge loss of population will not be without consequences for the economy, especially the pension system. The increasing number of retired people will impact heavily on the social welfare sector; changes in the structure of society may exacerbate social tensions. Therefore, the most important object of policy should be inhibition of negative demographic changes. In addition, Poland should create the best conditions for the return of citizens who have emigrated for economic reasons.

One of the solutions allowing for completion of shortages is selective immigration, which will support the country's economic growth. However, it carries a lot of negative demographic trends. In the case of Polish depopulation and the rapid increase of people in retirement, filling the gaps in the labour market would only be possible if the labour market was replenished with approx. 100 thousand people

²⁰ R. Stefańska, *About demographic challenges in Poland*, „Migration Bulletin”, no. 35, April 2012, p. 1.

each year²¹. The result of such a policy would be 45% participation of foreigners in Poland's population. Certainly, the influx of foreigners is inevitable in a globalising world, but it cannot be assumed that such a step will solve Poland's demographic problems. Therefore, in the near future, answers to many weighty questions have to be found: how will it affect the future of Poland, the shape of the society and national culture? How to design a balanced immigration policy, and social integration? Answers to these questions are sought by many debates, panels and public consultation; however they remain unanswered. Poland's immigration policy should be carefully analysed in terms of the objectives which Poland wants to achieve. It should be remembered that the overarching objectives, subordinated to immigration policy, should be timeless and beyond the political. On the other hand, strategies for these goals may vary over time. Thus, immigration policy should be implemented on permanent lines (overarching objectives), as it should be flexible in responding to the changing environment (operating strategy). Magdalena Lesińska formulated general overarching objectives in the following way, which should be the foundation of policies for both emigration and immigration²²:

- security;
- economic development;
- suitable demographic structure;
- social and cultural integration.

Of course, these key objectives should be accompanied by more detailed targets, e.g. effective protection of borders, effective procedure of deportation and the fight against illegal immigration. At the same time, it should be remembered that current immigration policy will only focus on ad hoc measures. On the contrary, it cannot be limited to the present, scenarios of its development and should be focused on a few dozen of years perspective.

3. Proposed changes for current model of social policy

Any changes in Polish immigration policy must begin with a change of thinking, both among the authorities and the public. It's time to see that Poland is not only only a country of emigration, and the growing population of immigrants may in the future pose a real challenge. The most important task in formulation of immigration policy is to predict future effects of migration, which will influence various fields (society, economy, labour market, etc.). The consequences of changes may be significant for

²¹ M. Piechowska, *Poland as Titanic? Immigrants in Poland*, „Migration Bulletin”, no. 35, April 2012, p. 4

²² M. Lesińska, *About imigration policy; so about... future considerations*, „Migration Bulletin”, no. 16, January 2008, p. 2.

the existence of the country in the future. We are a society with one of the lowest birth rates in the world. Significantly reduced total fertility rate in the long term perspective will reduce a generation of people of productive age. In addition, the strong outflow of young people abroad intensifies the negative effects of demographic changes. In the historical context, such significant weakening of human potential has never led to strengthening of the nation, but rather weakness on an international level in the political and economic context. Therefore, for the country's development, an influx of population is necessary - through population explosion or immigration. The authors of the article agree with Prof. Mark Okólski²³ that Poland is facing a specific, complex demographic situation and rich in serious civilisational challenges. As a source of overcomplicated circumstances, Prof. Okólski points out the:

- population decrease maintained since the mid-1980s;
- high level of migration.

The trend for a decreasing number of births greatly enhances the ageing of the population. One panacea can be mass immigration of young people, potential parents. However, in recent years, mass emigration of Polish people has been observed, while the level of immigration is negligible. The condition of society can be precisely assessed on the basis of demographic trends and indicators, as population is the greatest investment and, if properly developed, can assure prosperity itself. Absolutisation of the economic situation as the only factor that can ensure the development of society is one of the main sources of the current crisis. The Republic of Poland is still not considered as a target of migration, with shortages of staff in some sectors of the economy a real concern. 2013 was a record year in terms of applications for refugee status (over 15 thousand applications²⁴). The biggest groups of applicants were Russians (85%), Georgians (8%) and Syrians (2%), many of whom have tried to get to Western Europe. As part of the so-called Dublin Procedure, these people (approx. 10 thousand) were returned to the border of Poland. Concerns expressed by politicians in the 90s, predicting that Poland will be flooded with cheap labour, seeking better living conditions, are completely untrue - immigration is still a marginal phenomenon. The current challenge facing Poland is how to keep skilled workers such as engineers, doctors or IT specialists in Poland, who frequently opt for richer Western countries? One solution seems to be the promotion of Poland, the quality of education system and university staff, as well as the relatively cheap cost of university education.

²³ M. Okólski, *The inaugural lecture: There is no bigger value than human – why is it more profitable to follow demographic trends than stock price*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 44, p. 1.

²⁴ *Migration affairs in 2013...*, p. 1.

Under current legislation, there are no regulations concerning integration – a process most important for preservation of the cultural cohesion of the state. Emerging ad hoc programmes are not a permanent and comprehensive solution. We need long-term and system integration solutions, focused on people with refugee status but also those who come to Poland as economic migrants. Integration activities should be covered by a broader group of foreigners, so that society will not be faced with the problems of exclusion and racism in the future, but feel a connection with Poland. Additionally, migrants should be made aware of their rights, undertake more activities for local communities and begin to engage in Polish politics²⁵. Unfortunately, Poland does not have any practical experience in integration issues. It is a challenge for coming years, essential to regulate in order to avoid the situation of France, Germany or the United Kingdom.

In the context of the current situation in Poland, new countries of immigration provide very valuable experience. Most of these countries support the active participation of non-governmental organisations, focus on information instruments and create an offer in order to integrate, particularly beneficial for Polish migration policy, such as²⁶:

- signalisation of the short path leading to the legalisation of stay in Poland for valuable immigrants, e.g. family unification;
- creating Polish language courses swiftly.

A good example is cooperation between various organisations and public institutions in helping immigrants and the significant role of volunteers in integration activities. Such activities should be coordinated, both at local and state level. An important issue is intercultural dialogue, especially conducted in local communities. When creating integration policy, it should be remembered that it serves everybody, regardless of their ethnic origin. Thus, both groups - citizens and immigrants – should be able to coexist, mutually adapt and prevent exclusion from public life. Symptoms of changes seen in recent years have brought about the more frequent involvement of migrants in creating a platform for cooperation.

Integration has been noted as important element in creating immigration policy. However, there were opinions that, from the Polish point of view, it is still too early for creating specific system solutions, as the number of immigrants is relatively small. The authors agree with the opinion of Patrycja Matusz-Protasiewicz that the introduction of e.g. programmes stimulating the entrepreneurship of immigrants and

²⁵ See: M. Biernath, *Immigrants in Poland – alone bowling?*, “Migration Bulletin”, no. 27, October 2010, p. 8.

²⁶ M. Okólski, *Speech summarizing the project “Migration policy as an instrument for promoting employment and reducing unemployment*, “Migration Bulletin”, May-June 2008, p. 8.

preventing their exclusion from the labour market should begin at this stage. This is involved with real social and economic benefits. First of all, the fewer people for integration causes less social tension and cross-cultural networking is easier to conduct in smaller groups. Secondly, integration programmes spread over time are a lighter burden for the state budget and, thus, will not create social barriers between Polish people and immigrants.

At present, too large a role in the integration of immigrants is played by central administration. Its tasks should be limited to the creation of directions and guidelines in the long term perspective and creating an adequate legal framework. Greater responsibility for integration should be delegated to local government. As rightly noted, the integration should be done at the local level with the use of funds from the central level; planning and monitoring of the activities should be conducted by the central level as well. The plan of action for integration should include 7 extremely important areas:

- language and education;
- employment;
- laws and values;
- health and social security;
- sport and recreation;
- intercultural dialogue;
- regional approach to integration.

The basis of integration is knowledge of the law and language, which in the case of immigrants in Poland is a greatly neglected sphere. The solution may be a free and open course of Polish language and culture, which will help foreigners to gain greater independence. Precise social campaigns also bring appropriate consequences, result in greater understanding and willingness to cooperate in society.

This particularly important aspect of cooperation is the basis of Polish migration policy, contained in the strategic document. It is based primarily on the involvement of volunteers in work for foreigners staying at the centres, as well as on activating citizens. As noted by Paulina Babis²⁷, volunteers are mainly engaged in Polish language classes, arranging cinema evenings, matches and meetings with Polish citizens. In addition, an important role is played by getting know two groups that exist on the same territory.

A good solution is to promote teaching of Polish among foreigners; knowledge of the language to some extent may prevent social exclusion. Currently, less em-

²⁷ P. Babis, *Polish migration policy: how to prevent marginalization of immigrants*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 33, January 2012, p. 4.

phasis is put on this issue, which may lead to formation of enclaves and ghettos of people settling in Poland. Also, the active involvement of immigrants in the social life and process of integration allows a balance in society to be maintained. Migrants who stay in Poland and want to stay permanently cannot be passive. The state should assist in the initial steps of adaptation, but, in later stages, migrants should show initiative in order not to remain on the margins of society. The conclusion is clear: a key role is played by effective cooperation and willingness from both parties in the issue of immigration concerns.

The European Commission presented the European Agenda for Integration of Third Country Nationals in 2010 with key recommendations for member states in three key areas: integration through participation, action at local level and the involvement of countries of origin. Member states should ensure integration through participation in the following ways²⁸:

- language courses, reflecting various needs of migrants, at different stages of integration process, accessible financially and geographically;
- organisation of introductory programmes for newly arrived migrants, including language and civic orientation courses. Such programmes should address the specific needs of women, promote their participation in the labour market and enhance economic independence;
- measures to identify and assess the needs of individuals and recognition of professional qualifications and experience;
- increased activity of migrants in the labour market through active labour policies;
- efforts in education systems, equipping teachers with skills for managing diversity, recruiting teachers from migrant backgrounds, as well as participation of migrant children in early childhood education;
- special interest in specific needs of the most vulnerable groups of migrants, such as beneficiaries of international protection who are nationals of third countries;
- means to implement practice of equal treatment and prevention of institutional and everyday life discrimination;
- efforts to remove obstacles in the participation of migrants in political life (including promoting and supporting activities of migrant organisations, granting of rights for migrants to vote in local elections, creating local, regional and national consultative body with the participation of migrants).

²⁸ R. Stefańska, *European recommendation for integration policy*, "Migration Bulletin", no. 32, December 2011, p. 10.

In addition to the above actions, it is very important to involve migrant representatives in the development and implementation of migration policies, especially those interrelated with integration programmes. In the second area recommended by the European Commission - action at the local level - Member States should ensure:

- comprehensive integration strategies designed and implemented with effective participation of all stakeholders at local and regional level, based on a grassroots approach (including revitalisation of the social infrastructure of the city to avoid the ghettoisation of immigrants in the poorest neighborhoods);
- creation of “territorial pacts” at different levels in order to plan common policies on integration.

The authors of the article claim that the local level of activities is the most difficult area in which to build initiatives. In countries where the shaping of civil society is in progress, it is a big challenge to build bottom-up initiatives, not only in migration policy but in every area of life. Therefore, the role of local governments in integration and also in other processes related to the presence of migrants in Poland must be amplified. A significant change in policy on migration took place after the adoption of Polish Migration Strategy, a document that was long awaited in the research community as well as among practitioners dealing with immigration. Polish Migration Strategy was supposed to be starting point for long-term migration strategy in our country.

4. Conclusions

The Republic of Poland as an active member of the international community participates in supporting people who have been forced to leave their country of origin because of persecution and threat to life. According to international regulations, providing shelter is connected with guaranteeing a minimum level of social benefits, allowing for survival in the new state. The solutions that have been implemented into the Polish legal system have created a network of legal norms, procedures and institutions. International regulations are interrelated with each other in order to meet the basic material needs of people applying for refugee status in Poland. The conclusions drawn have allowed for wording recommendations to the system of social assistance, to make it stronger:

- outline of immigration policy for the coming years should be defined, together with indication of direction for change. Ignorance of system solutions may lead Poland to the problems which plague the United Kingdom, France and Italy.
- integration of foreigners staying at the centres must be strengthened, so that foreigners can easily integrate into the Polish labour market;

- there is a need to support centres and institutions with qualified medical personnel, psychological care and interpreters, in order to lead to a better understanding of situation, more effective convalescence and *familiarisation* of foreigners with civil society;
- Poland should prepare long-term plans to adopt and exploit the potential of refugees to reduce the demographic problems in coming decades.

Poland's system of social assistance for migrants applying for refugee status is assessed by the authors as efficient and achieving fundamental objectives and assumptions. Refugees receive real material and psychological help. However, sometimes expectations of refugees are very high which result in a demanding or imposing attitude. Migrants seeking better material conditions will not receive refugee status because their lives are not endangered. Those who will be granted with refugee status receive the support of the country. However, some changes are necessary in the context of foreigners creating ghettos. Such a situation will lead to discontent and xenophobia among the autochthonic population. Therefore, care for effective integration with Polish culture and customs should be taken into consideration during examination of an application for refugee status. Integration allows for the introduction of conscious and active new members into Polish society.

In summary, the theme of refugee status and social assistance in Poland is an important topic for national security. The authors have dealt with both challenges and threats which decision-makers cannot circumvent. The ageing of the population will force a significant change of approach to foreign migrants in Poland. Now we can observe an upward trend in the settlement of foreigners on Polish territory; after decades of being an emigration country, Poland has become a target country for immigration. The European Commission's plans for redistribution of refugees among member states indicate that this subject is in the current area of discussion.

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