

No. 9 (15), December 2019

Ukrainian migration to Poland: bigger and more diversified!

This issue of CMR Spotlight focuses on the transforming Ukrainian migration to Poland. As Agata Górny writes, not only the numbers but also the character of this migration is changing, which is visible especially in new destination cities such as Wrocław.

We have had an inspiring several weeks at CMR, with visits from prof. @MartinRuhs (photo) from the European University Institute in Florence @migrpolcentre and prof. Rinus Penninx from @uvAmsterdam. Prof. Ruhs attempted to convince us that Poles do not differ from other Europeans in their approach to refugees. Prof. Penninx reflected on the role of trade unions in migrant integration, and concluded that Central European workers in the EU today are worse off than the guest-workers of old: "In our eyes the guest-worker program was exploitation, but it was much better than the conditions now (...). Now you have unregulated exploitation".



Hoverla, the Ukrainian highest mountain
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Prof. Martin Ruhs at CMR. His full lecture is online on CMR's new YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwcE831WBNo&feature=share>



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New dimensions in immigration from Ukraine to Poland

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It has already been recognised that immigration from Ukraine to Poland became a phenomenon that bears significant economic, social and political consequences. In 2013-2018, volumes of various categories of migrants (e.g. seasonal workers, work permits holders, residence permit holders, students and others) grew several times. The most spectacular numbers relate to seasonal migration, i.e. employment within the so-called simplified procedure (on the basis of employers' declarations of a consent to employ foreigners for up to six months during consecutive 12 months), that amounted to 1.6 million documents issued in 2018. Unexpectedly, Poland became the European leader in seasonal employment of foreigners (OECD 2019). Most of the migrants are Ukrainians, constituting over 90% of seasonal foreign workers coming to Poland and major shares in other categories of migrants.

Consequences of those dynamic changes in immigration to Poland translate not only into growing numbers of migrants in Poland, but also into the transformation of migration patterns and the role being played by migrants on the Polish labour market. (Ukrainian) migration is progressively becoming a Poland-wide phenomenon, and not only a Mazovian



"Hello!" [in Ukrainian] – says this poster, part of the "Lublin learns Ukrainian" NGO campaign by ©HomoFaber

local specificity. The list of new destination areas has been growing, contributing to the spatial diversity of immigration to Poland. In terms of migrants' numbers, the main recipients are big Polish towns with their attractive local labour markets (e.g. Kraków, Poznań, Warszawa, Wrocław). In terms of

density (per working Polish population), the leader is still the Mazovian countryside – farm production centres (Górny & Śleszyński 2019).

Aims and data

With the aim to elaborate on new dimensions in immigration from Ukraine to Poland in recent years, we attend to two main topics: 1) What are the specificities of new Polish destination areas for Ukrainian migrants, especially in comparison to Warsaw and its surroundings that can be considered a ‘traditional’ destination area? 2) What changes in immigration from Ukraine to Poland, especially Warsaw and surroundings, can be identified in recent years?

Data we refer to originate from a selection of surveys on Ukrainian migrants conducted by the Centre of Migration Research in cooperation with the Centre of Migration Research Foundation, financed by the National Bank of Poland and the National Science Centre (see Box). These include surveys in Bydgoszcz (2018), Lublin (2016), Warsaw (2015, 2017), Wrocław (2018). Wrocław and especially Bydgoszcz can be considered as new destination areas. The case of Lublin is less evident since its dynamic academic sector has been attracting young Ukrainian migrants for some time already.

Before the change

Post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s opened up avenues for international mobility to and from the region. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary became magnets attracting foreigners mainly from the ex-USSR. However, the three countries’ paths towards becoming net immigration countries were not uniform and were marked by various swings,

conditioned by the dynamic economic and political processes underway during the last decades. Although Poland experienced an exceptionally dynamic inflow of so-called petty traders from the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s, the labour migration which followed was limited in numbers and in geographical coverage: most migrants directed themselves to Warsaw and the surrounding Mazovian farm-production centres. The majority originated from only a few countries: first of all the former Soviet Union states, especially Ukraine, and selected Asian countries. The persistent temporariness and circular character of immigration to Poland had not resulted in a substantial settlement of foreigners in Poland. They performed jobs mainly in agriculture, construction, domestic services, trade and gastronomy (Górny et al. 2010).

Origins of the change

The above picture of immigration to Poland was relatively stable for almost three decades following the post-communist transition. Neither the progressing development of the Polish economy nor the accession of Poland to the European Union did not constitute impulses strong enough to induce significant inflow of foreigners to Poland. A combination of three simultaneous processes proved to be the game changer. These were: 1) the significant supply of Ukrainian workers as a result of the eruption of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict and the following economic recession in Ukraine; 2) the progressing liberalisation of regulations on employment of foreigners in Poland; 3) and last but not least, the accompanying growth of activities of

recruitment agencies in employment of foreigners in Poland (Górny et al. 2018).

New dimensions

Growth of masculinisation. Originally, immigration from Ukraine to Poland was the domain of women. In 2015 in Warsaw, they prevailed especially among experienced migrants (who arrived before 2014), with a share of 65%. This has been explained by a preference of females towards long-term involvement in circular migration, allowing for a combination of caring duties in Ukraine and earning activities in Poland. Apparently, after 2014, this model lost its importance. In 2017 in Warsaw, migrants' gender structure was independent of migration experience. There was a moderate predomination of men, also in other Polish towns such as Wrocław and Bydgoszcz.

Decreasing role of Western Ukraine. In the past years inhabitants of Western Ukraine, especially the countryside, predominated in immigration to Poland, represented mainly by Warsaw. After 2014, migration from other regions, especially Eastern and Central Ukraine and an inflow from Ukrainian towns grew in importance. This is particularly visible in new destination areas, such as Bydgoszcz and Wrocław (2018).

Migration as a search for higher incomes. Immigration from Ukraine to Poland used to be viewed as a survival economic strategy of Ukrainian nationals in response to their dramatic economic situation in the home country. According to the surveys, nowadays more and more migrants declare that they came to Poland in search for better incomes, and not due to lack of jobs in Ukraine. The hunt for better incomes was being pointed to

especially by migrants surveyed in 2018 in Bydgoszcz and Wrocław. Additionally, the respective share of migrants pointing to this reason increased from 50% to 70% in Warsaw in 2015-2017. Such a tendency can be related to bettering of the economic situation in Ukraine, but also to the fact that new cohorts of Ukrainian migrants encompass broader socio-economic segments of the Ukrainian society: not only those suffering the most from the economic crisis. A contributing factor can also be the growth of activities of recruitment agencies in Ukraine, offering would-be migrants promises of better jobs and lives in Poland.

Diversifying education of migrants. Originally, Ukrainians with vocational education definitely predominated in immigration to Poland. This did not change significantly in Warsaw in 2015-2017. However, migrants in Lublin (2016) and Wrocław (2018) deviated from other studied towns with a relatively small share of such persons. The capital of Lower Silesia, in addition, stands out with respect to exceptionally high share of migrants with university degrees – almost half of the studied migrants. Therefore, educational structure of Ukrainian migrants is a visible dimension of spatial diversity of Ukrainian migration to Poland.

Climbing up on the occupational ladder. As in many other countries, labour migrants from Ukraine have been undertaking mainly jobs of unskilled and skilled blue-collar workers in Poland. Warsaw is the city where the proportion of migrants working in more 'respectable' occupations has been the smallest among analysed towns. However, it grew from less than 5% in 2015 to almost one

fifth in 2017. The corresponding share was similar in Bydgoszcz in 2018, slightly higher in Lublin in 2016 and considerably higher in Wrocław in 2018 (around one third). One may thus observe that Ukrainian migrants in Poland have been moving up slightly on the occupational ladder. However, this process is conditioned by the local character of the labour market, as portrayed by the exceptional case of Wrocław.

Diversifying sectoral structure of migrant employment. ‘Traditional’ sectors of Ukrainian migrants’ employment in Poland are agriculture, construction, domestic services and also trade and gastronomy. In this regard, changes on the Mazovian labour market in 2015-2017 were surprisingly small, relating, first of all, to the transforming gender distribution among Ukrainian migrants. Consequently, the share of Ukrainian domestic workers decreased four times during these two years, while the proportions of construction workers increased. Some growth in popularity of jobs in trade and services, where migrants could find jobs beyond posts for unskilled and skilled blue-collar workers, has been also registered. In new destinations – such as Bydgoszcz and Wrocław in 2018 – the proportions of migrants working in industry were particularly high (even in Wrocław it was almost one third). This can be linked to activities of recruitment agencies, particularly dynamic in this sector. Another characteristic feature of the Wrocław labour market from 2018 is a relatively high diversity of sectors where Ukrainians were finding employment, such as services, trade, gastronomy, construction, transport and domestic services. In the case of Wrocław, migrants also worked

in such ‘elite’ sectors like IT, technology, communication, finance and consulting, which has not been observed in other towns. Again, apparently this is first of all spatial diversity of local labour markets that contributes to the growing sectoral diversity in the labour migration to Poland.

Growth of incomes. In 2015-2017, incomes of Ukrainian migrants in Warsaw grew by as much as 35%, compared to around 8% for Warsaw in total (CSO data). It is linked to the changes in migrants’ occupational structure, but this change does not fully explain such a big increase. Nevertheless, incomes of migrants in Warsaw in 2017 were comparable to incomes of migrants in Bydgoszcz in 2018, while salaries of Ukrainians in Wrocław in 2018 were the highest among the studied towns, but also the most diversified, for example incomes of experienced migrants (with two-year experience) equalling 3200 PLN were 20% higher than incomes of newcomers in Wrocław.

Ambiguities of growth of permanency in Ukrainian migration. For over two decades, an inherent characteristics of Ukrainian migration to Poland was the prevalence of temporary and circular mobility. In 2015-2017, a twofold increase in mean duration of migrants’ stays in the capital city has been observed (up to 7,5 months), while the number of stays decreased two times. Interestingly, changes in migration plans of Ukrainians in Warsaw during these two years were marginal. At the same time, parameters of Ukrainian migration to the capital city in 2017 – as measured by the duration of mean stays and their number – resembled more temporary labour migration to Bydgoszcz in 2018 than the inflow to

Wrocław in the same year. Similarities between Warsaw and Bydgoszcz apply also to migration plans of Ukrainian nationals. In both towns, only around one third of migrants planned to settle in Poland within three years, while over 40% declared (a continuation of) shuttle migration between Poland and Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Lublin, already in 2016, was a town where the mean duration of migrants' stays was relatively long (around 8 months): almost twice as long as mean stays of Warsaw migrants in 2015. At the same time, almost half of Lublin migrants intended to settle in Poland in the five-year perspective. However, it is Wrocław (2018) where Ukrainian migration appears to be the most permanent from among studied cities: the longest stays (with the mean of almost one year) and the smallest number of stays. Additionally, almost half of the Ukrainian migrants in Wrocław planned to settle in Poland within three years. Wrocław constitutes thus an exceptional case on the map of Ukrainian migration to Poland with regard to eagerness of migrants to settle in Poland for good. Reasons behind this specificity deserve further studies, among them the role of the academic sector (important also in Lublin, characterised by relatively high permanency of Ukrainian migration) and of local policy promoting multiculturalism and of related socio-cultural activities.

Spatial diversity and change?

An unquestionable new dimension in migration from Ukraine to Poland is the progressively widening list of destination areas, extending beyond the Mazovian labour market. In this regard, the progressing spatial

diversity of migration models and patterns should be acknowledged. It would even be difficult to talk about Ukrainian migration to Polish towns as a homogenous phenomenon, which is very well portrayed in the comparison of Warsaw and Wrocław as destination areas. Among specificities of new destinations – such as Bydgoszcz and Wrocław – one can identify: visible shares of migrants from Eastern Ukraine, the active role of recruitment agencies in shaping the inflow of labour migrants and the relatively high importance of industry as a sector of employment of Ukrainian migrants. However, visible similarities between Bydgoszcz – a medium-size town and a new destination area – and Warsaw – the capital city and a 'veteran' in immigration to Poland – attract attention. They apply, first of all, to patterns of migration designating relatively high temporariness of labour migration to these towns.

Consequently, given the spatial diversity of immigration to Poland, it is difficult to assess the scope of growth in its permanency. Although stays of migrants in Warsaw got longer and their numbers decreased in 2015-2017, plans of migrants regarding prospects of settlement in Poland did not change visibly. At the same time, there are some Polish towns, such as Lublin and Wrocław, where the settlement character of immigration from Ukraine is clearly visible. The answer to the question how many other Polish towns share this characteristics requires further studies. Nevertheless, results of the quoted surveys allow for the formulation of some observations regarding more universal changes in immigration from Ukraine to Poland. Ukrainian nationals more and more

often undertake migration to Poland in search for higher incomes, and not only to pursue a survival strategy that would allow them to maintain their households in Ukraine. Apparently, in the last years, migration to Poland has been engaging wider strata of Ukrainian society and not only those residing in neighbouring areas of Western Ukraine. Earnings of Ukrainian workers are increasing and jobs they engage in in Poland more and more often extend beyond posts of unskilled and skilled blue-collar workers. At the same time, the sectoral structure of Ukrainian employment in Poland is diversifying, especially in big cities. How these processes will progress in the future depends on many socio-economic factors, as well as on the development of the Polish immigration policy in the next years.

An extended discussion of the above can be found in:

Górny, A., Kołodziejczyk, K., Madej, K., P. Kaczmarczyk. 2019, [Nowe obszary docelowe w imigracji z Ukrainy do Polski. Przypadek Bydgoszczy i Wrocławia na tle innych miast](#) (New target areas for Ukrainian migrants in Poland: the case of Bydgoszcz and Wrocław vs. other Polish cities). *CMR Working Papers* 118/176. Warsaw: Centre of Migration Research.

Other selected bibliography

Górny, A., Grabowska-Lusińska, I., Lesińska, M., and M. Okólski (eds). 2010. *Immigration to Poland: Policy, Employment, Integration*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar.

Górny, A., Kaczmarczyk, P., Szulecka, M., Bitner, M., Okólski, M., Siedlecka, U. and A. Stefańczyk. 2018. [Imigranci w Polsce w kontekście uproszczonej procedury zatrudniania cudzoziemców](#) (Immigrants in Poland in the context of the simplified procedure). Warsaw: OBM / WISE EUROPA. Online:

Górny, A., P. Śleszyński. 2019. „Exploring the spatial concentration of foreign employment in Poland under the simplified procedure”. *Geographia Polonica* 91, 3: 331-346.

Surveys

All the five quoted surveys were conducted with the Respondent Driven Sampling method. The research groups were defined as adult Ukrainian nationals that came to Poland for reasons different than only tourism, excluding full time and evening students. Details of the surveys:

- Warsaw (2015); sample size 578, financed by the National Bank of Poland;
- Lublin (2016); sample size 300, in cooperation with Homo Faber Association, financed by the National Bank of Poland;
- Warsaw (2017), sample size 510, financed by the National Science Centre (Sonata Bis – grant number 2014/14/E/HS4/00387);
- Bydgoszcz (2018), sample size: 310, in cooperation with Ipsos Sp.z.o.o, financed by the National Bank of Poland;
- Wrocław (2018), sample size: 500, in cooperation with Foundation Ukraine, financed by the National Bank of Poland.



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Keywords:

labour immigration / new destinations / Ukraine / Poland

Suggested citation: Górny, A., 2019. *New dimensions in immigration from Ukraine to Poland*. CMR Spotlight, 9(15).

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not reflect the opinions or views of the CMR or its members.

Editors of CMR Spotlight: Michał Nowosielski, Dominika Pszczołkowska

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