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Will migration stop the ageing of Polish society?

- In this issue of Spotlight, we focus on the results of [Mig/Ageing](#), a large project conducted at CMR. The project concerned the ageing of the Polish population, with a particular focus on how it will be influenced by migration. The results, presented in brief below, differ significantly from existing population projections.
- In November, the CMR was honoured to host dr [Majella Kilkey](#) and prof. [Louise Ryan](#), co-directors of the [Migration Research Group at the University of Sheffield](#), who gave a fascinating lecture about migrants' responses to "unsettling events", such as the economic crisis or Brexit. It seems we should not expect a major wave of returns to Poland in case of Brexit, similarly to what happened during the 2008-09 economic crisis in the UK. Together with dr [Aneta Piekut](#) the visitors from Sheffield also conducted a workshop on interviewing, which as it turns out is a form of dance.
- A new book "[Childbearing and Parental Decisions of Intra EU Migrants. A Biographical Analysis of Polish Migrants to the UK and Italy](#)" by CMR researcher Weronika Kloc-Nowak has just been published by Peter Lang.



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Demographic change in the period of intensive international mobility – results of the Mig/Ageing research project for Poland

Agnieszka Fihel, Marek Okólski

Population ageing in all demographic projections for Poland is perceived as one of the fastest and deepest in the European Union. Population ageing – defined as a consistent long-term increase in the percentage of old persons in the population – takes place in most parts of the world due to decreasing fertility and rising longevity. But the case of Poland is in this regard exceptional because – unlike in a majority of the more developed countries – international migration accelerates the pace of ageing. The intensive outflow of working-age adults observed in recent decades reduces the young segments of the population. The permanent immigration of young foreigners is too low to slow down the ageing of the population, as has been the case of several Western European countries. Population ageing may also intensify international migrations to Poland; immigration will most probably rise due to labour shortages, in particular in the area of services for old persons, such as long-term care.

This complex interrelation between the process of ageing and international mobility constituted the main interest of one of the longest (5 years) and the largest (13 persons involved) research projects conducted at the Centre of Migration Research – the Mig/Ageing project. Awarded to Professor Marek Okólski in the prestigious MAESTRO funding scheme of the National Science Centre, the Mig/Ageing project aimed to identify long-term demographic changes in Poland and

assess their impact on social institutions. While comprehensive analyses inquired into all components of demographic change and a wide range of its direct and indirect consequences, they specially focused on the effects of migration from and to Poland, a factor largely underestimated in the long-term population studies thus far. Special attention was also paid to the ensuing challenge to the predominant mode of the care for elderly, especially for ageing relatives of Polish emigrants. Specific research objectives included:

- investigating the process of migration transition, during which Poland is evolving from a ‘net sending’ to a ‘net receiving’ country,
- exploring the changes within the family and inter-generation relations, in particular in migrants' families, due to the process of ageing,
- analyzing the state’s response to challenges related to the demographic situation in Poland, with a special focus on migration policy.

The problem of population ageing under conditions of intense territorial mobility lays at the intersection of several scientific disciplines: demography, gerontology, economics, sociology, public policy. Such an interdisciplinary approach, typical of CMR studies, explains a relatively large number of researchers involved in the Mig/Ageing project. The results of the Mig/Ageing project were discussed in several articles, monographs and conference papers. In this and the following edition of CMR Spotlight we would

like to present selected outcomes and conclusions.

In contrast to what has been observed in most European countries over the last several decades, in Poland emigration still remains relatively large and it exceeds the number of immigrants, thus intensifying the process of ageing. According to a stylized course of the demographic transition, population ageing sets in motion when mortality is already very low and a decline in fertility gains momentum. Usually, during this phase of the demographic transition emigration decreases and – with some time-lag – immigration starts to grow. This phenomenon, which constitutes a part of the so-called migration transition, i.e. a shift in international migration balance from negative to positive, mitigates the scale of population ageing in most European countries. In Poland, a huge migratory potential which occurred due to the enormously high number of people born during the post-war baby-boom, was almost totally contained within the Polish population. This was due to the lack of opportunities for emigration until at least the early 1990s or – which is probably more accurate – until May 1st, 2004, the day of Polish accession to the EU. The massive outflow from Poland started when Poles acquired the freedom of residence in other countries of the European Union (and access to their labour markets) (Fihel, Okólski 2018).

Accounting for real trends in international migration, whether captured by official statistics or not, changes prospects of the population ageing in Poland. So far, the effects of migration

on ageing have not been fully explored in Poland because a large part of the emigration is neither recorded, nor officially recognized. Since the early 1980s unregistered emigration – persons who left Poland without de-registering from the place of permanent stay in Poland, dominated the long-term outflow (Figure 1).

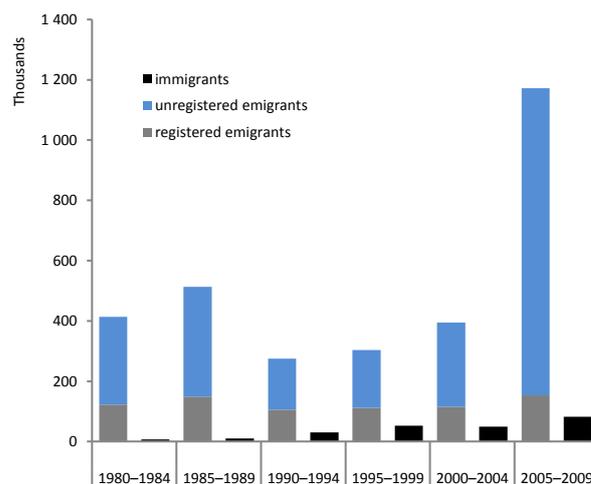


Figure 1. Number of long-term¹ immigrants and emigrants² 1980–2009, by period of migration (in thousands)

Notes: ¹ For at least 12 months. ² Both those who deregistered and those who did not deregister from the place of permanent residence in Poland. The number of registered emigrants comes from the population register; the number of unregistered emigrants was approximated on the basis of Sakson (2002) and population censuses and includes persons who did not return to Poland before 2011; the number of immigrants includes data from the population register and approximations based on the population censuses.

Source: Fihel, Janicka, Kloc-Nowak (2018).

In the period 2004–2014 more than 300 thousand persons deregistered from Polish statistics due to emigration, but additionally, the number of Polish residents staying abroad (without deregistering) increased from approximately 1 to 2.4 million. Therefore, it seems essential to duly adjust

demographic projections to real trends in international migration and explore the outcomes of such an adjustment. The Mig/Ageing project – in contrast with the public statistics and studies based on the official data – in its analyses adheres to the concept of resident population and accounts for actual and long-term (lasting more than 1 year) international mobility.

Poland is experiencing a decline of population due to the coincidence of extremely low fertility and massive emigration. While official estimates indicate a stabilization of the size of the Polish population, the Mig/Ageing project demonstrates that the process of depopulation started as early as the beginning of the 2000s. Since the end of the 1980s, Poland has been undergoing a sharp decrease in the number of births and its total fertility rate hit one of the lowest levels in European history. In the aftermath of the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, every fifth person aged 25-34 left Poland for a long period, and the stock of Polish emigrants was estimated at 2.4 million at the end of 2015. Consequently, the resident population of Poland may be as low as 36.5 million persons, that is 2 million lower than according to the official statistics.

The emergence and prevalence of the lowest-low fertility remains the main and fundamental determinant of population ageing in Poland. Our demographic simulations show that if the fertility remained at the level registered in 1985–89, the share of young persons (aged below 20) in the population would stabilize at around 30% and would not change importantly due to the outflow abroad or increasing longevity. In reality,

however, the share of young persons was as low as 23% in 2010, and will continue to decrease in the long-term because the generations of newborns are less numerous than those of their parents.

Contemporary emigration of young adults also contributes to the process of ageing. The largest population losses caused by the recent outflow were observed in the cohorts born at the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s, that is, persons in their twenties and thirties at the time of their departure from Poland. Consequently, the share of persons at the age of economic activity (20-64) decreased and the share of old persons (age 65 and over) increased solely due to the massive outflow taking place in the 1990s and 2000s. Although the quantitative effects amount to 1 percentage point only, that is, the above-mentioned shares in the population decreased / increased by 1 p.p., the measure of old-age dependency ratio increased to 20.5% in 2010 instead of 19.3% (in conditions of no international migration since 1990).

The impact of emigration on the process of ageing is also exerted through lower number of births taking place in Poland. Emigrants set up families and raise their children abroad, which deepens the 'birth depression' in Poland. The number of births 'missing' due to emigration since 1980 was estimated at 709 thousands during the period 1980–2014 (4% of 'real' births in Poland in that period). The most pronounced 'loss' of births was in the most recent period, 2005–2014, and equals 394,000, which is 10% of all births registered in Poland during that time (Figure 2). Most migrants have been abroad for several years now, and

official statistics of the main receiving countries indicate an important increase in the number of children born from Polish parent(s) abroad. Thus, emigrants set up families abroad and their returns to Poland are improbable.

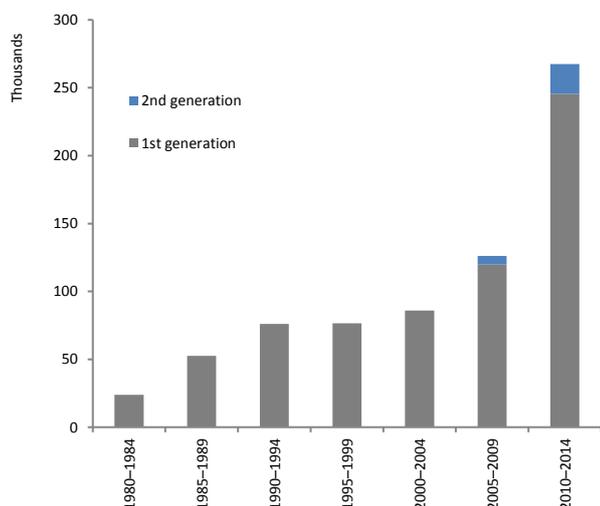


Figure 2. Approximated number of descendants (first and second generation) to Polish long-term emigrants¹, by a would-be period of birth (in thousands)

Notes: ¹For at least 12 months, both those who deregistered and those who did not deregister from the place of permanent residence in Poland.

Source: Fihel, Janicka, Kloc-Nowak (2018).

Along with demographic transition resulting in relatively low fertility and low mortality, the North-Western European countries and – in the last decades of the 20th century – South European countries adopted the so-called ‘net receiving’ migration regimes. This means that immigration exceeded emigration, thus contributing positively to the demographic change in the population size. To investigate the possibility of a similar scenario for Poland, the

Mig/Ageing project aimed to provide a demographic forecast for the period 2015–2060.

The methodology of the Mig/Ageing demographic projection was innovative for several reasons. First, it concerned only the resident population (de facto living in Poland), excluding long-term emigrants. The latter, whether captured in the official statistics or not, were considered as a real outflow. Second, assumptions concerning fertility and mortality trends in the future are probabilistic and are based on Bayesian methodology. No specific ‘target values’ were proposed for the life expectancy at birth or the Total Fertility Ratio. Consequently, results of future fertility and mortality developments were linked to the level of uncertainty. Third, assumptions concerning future trends in international migration were proposed on the basis of an econometric model estimated on the experiences of over thirty European countries, most of which already experienced the switch from a net emigration to net immigration regime (the so-called migration transition). Projected demographic and economic conditions were also included in the econometric model, which inter alia means that population ageing is considered as a possible determinant of future inflow to Poland. Last, but not least, this was the first demographic projection for Poland that distinguished between four international flows: outflow and inflow of Polish nationals and of foreigners. Net migration, an artificial statistical measure that is not linked to any real demographic event, is not a subject of analysis.

According to the Mig/Ageing population projection for years 2015-2060, Poland is expected to switch from a ‘net-emigration’ to a

‘net-immigration’ country in the years to come. The projection demonstrates a progressive decrease in emigration of Polish nationals and a significant increase in the immigration of foreign citizens (Figure 3). The latter exceeds the former already around 2025–2029 and peaks around 2035–44. The remaining flows: inflow of Polish return migrants and outflow of foreign citizens remain stable and visibly less important. The net result of four flows (inflow and outflow of Polish nationals and foreigners) becomes positive around 2025–29 and the migration transition is expected to occur in Poland. The net inflow reaches its peak of over 120 thousand in the period 2040–44 and declines gradually afterwards.

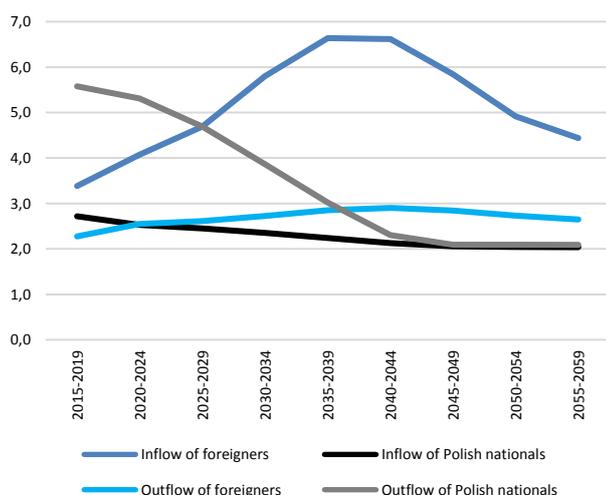


Figure 3. Annual rates of international flows (per 1,000 population), as forecasted in the Mig/Ageing project Source: Anacka, Janicka (2018).

Immigration will postpone to some extent the process of depopulation and of population ageing in Poland. In the future, the number of foreigners (not including the second generation) will increase to more than 3.8 million and their share

in the population – to 11% by 2060 (Figure 4). The Mig/Ageing demonstrates that the population will probably be younger than indicated by other demographic projections for Poland (by the Central Statistical Office of Poland or by Eurostat). This conclusion stems from two factors: first, most of today’s emigrants will probably not return to the country of origin in the future and, second, immigrants are supposed to reinforce young segments of the population. The number and share of persons aged 55-79, as well as the old-age dependency ratio will be significantly lower in 2050 than according to other population forecasts.

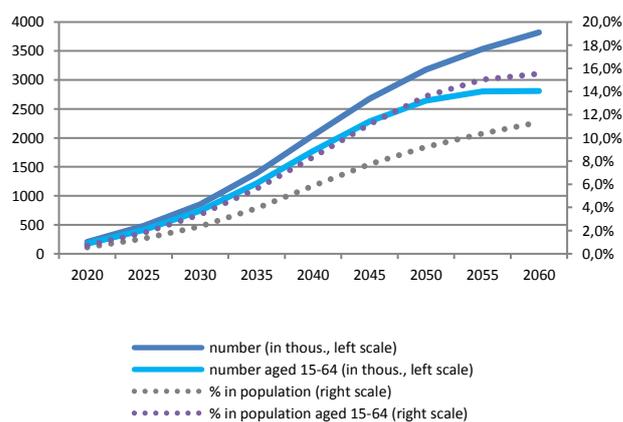


Figure 4. Number of foreigners and their share in population, as forecasted in the Mig/Ageing project Source: Anacka, Janicka (2018).

Foreigners will play an increasingly important role on the Polish labour market. According to the results of the demographic projection, foreigners will constitute almost 16% of the group aged 15-64 by 2060. Present rates of economic activity for foreigners living in Poland are comparable to those registered for Polish nationals; however, among the older segments (60 and above), they remain importantly higher. If this tendency

continues and the process of population ageing advances, by 2060 the share of persons of foreign origin will increase to 18% for those economically active aged 15-64 and 24% for those economically active aged 15-74.

The population ageing in Poland is supposed to become the most advanced in the near future in the European Union. This process, propelled by extremely low fertility, massive emigration of young adults and increasing longevity, will exert a crucial and most probably irreversible impact on family systems and arrangements of care for the elderly. Indeed, such demographic phenomena as a massive outflow of young adults and persistence of the low fertility entail the phenomenon of 'shrinking families', with lower and lower numbers of potential providers of care. Bearing in mind that in Poland care rests to a large degree within familial system of intergenerational transfers and support, the recent emigration may substantially undermine this mode of elderly care. This leads to the questions how to provide care arrangements for the growing number of old persons, diversify the financial means and involve and coordinate all potential carers: public and private institutions, NGOs and family members. This problem, undertaken in other research modules of the Mig/Ageing project, will be discussed in the next CMR Spotlight.

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The full title of the project behind acronym Mig/Ageing is: Unfinished migration transition and ageing population in Poland. Asynchronous population changes and the transformation of formal and informal care institutions. The research project was funded by the National Science Centre (grant no. 2013/08/A/HS4/00602). For more information, consult <http://migageing.uw.edu.pl/>.



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