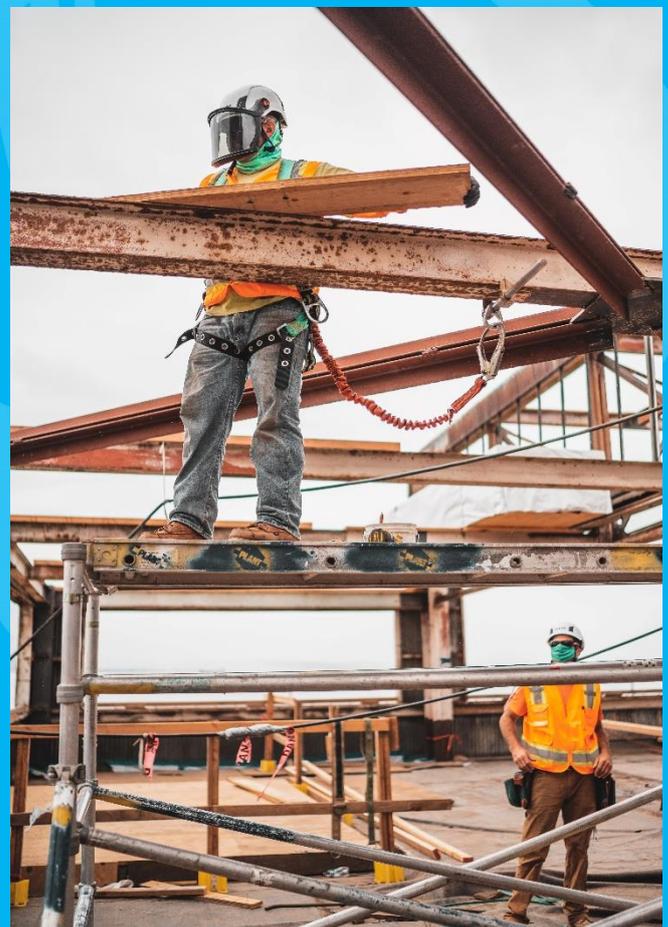


No. 20, July 2020

## What drives the economic integration of immigrants in Poland?

Does it make sense to consider various domains of integration in the case of temporary migrants? How to assess their economic integration? What is the role of ethnic economies and ethnic enclaves in the process? To what extent can experiences in 'mature' immigration countries be transposed to societies in the intermediate phase of the migration cycle and New Immigrant Destinations? These are only some questions considered in our recently completed [project](#) on the economic integration of migrants to Poland<sup>1</sup>. In the pieces below, we share some insights from our research on Ukrainian, Chinese and Vietnamese populations in the Warsaw area, hoping to encourage you to read the texts resulting from our project.



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<sup>1</sup> The research project: "The economic integration of immigrants in a country in the intermediate phase of the migration cycle—Poland versus selected EU countries" was funded by the National Science Centre, Poland (Grant no. 2014/14/E/HS4/00387).



# How to study the economic integration of immigrants – conceptual challenges

Zuzanna Brunarska, Anita Brzozowska, Paweł Kaczmarczyk, Krzysztof Kardaszewicz

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The concept of integration is extremely popular in studies on immigrants' presence in host societies (and economies) but – at the same time – it remains highly controversial and 'fuzzy'. After a few decades of research, it is commonly acknowledged that integration is not only a state but also a process and thus a dynamic approach should be adopted. It is clear that we are considering a complex and multidimensional issue (see also below). Most of us would also agree that it should be perceived as a two- or three-sided process involving immigrants, the host society and sometimes the country of origin. At the same time, however, there is an unexpectedly large number of issues that are still unresolved (for an in-depth review of the recent debate on integration and thorough presentation of the conceptual model see Brunarska et al. 2020).

First, despite an intuitive understanding of the term, there is no consensus on the definition of integration. For instance, in the case of economic integration – our key point of interest – it is being defined as a catching-up process in terms of wages (Chiswick 1978), unrestricted access to the labour market and employment (Penninx 2005) or an ability to obtain a similar (or even identical) economic position to this observed in the case of the

native population (Barrett and Duffy 2007). In the case of broadly understood social sciences, the lack of a clear understanding of the term resulted in a plethora of alternative concepts starting from 'adaptation' through 'inclusion' or 'participation' to 'anchoring' or just 'social cohesion' – with various elements emphasised by their proponents.

Second, there is an ongoing discussion on the normative connotations of the concept, including the assumed 'backwardness', the understanding of 'full participation' or presumption of the existence of an 'integrated society' (Bijl et al. 2008; Favell 2019; Schinkel 2017).

Third, various authors focus on different areas or domains of integration. In this regard, however, despite some differences, there are also clear similarities. Most authors distinguish a domain that refers to immigrants' participation in institutions of the host country (such as labour market, educational system or the welfare state) and is described as a *placement, structural, socio-economic* or *functional* domain. Then, a number of scholars clearly distinguish a domain denoting participation in terms of social contacts between immigrants and the receiving society (an *interaction/interactive/social* domain).

Other domains would encompass identificational or cultural issues (e.g. *expressive, identification*).

Fourth, typically the concept of integration applies mostly to long-term migrants and some authors claimed that it should not be used in regard to temporary migrants (Böhning and Zegers de Beijl 1995). This approach is hardly acceptable, considering a large group of temporary or circular migrants who are – in fact – trapped in the state of ‘permanent temporariness’ and often spend a considerable share of the year in the destination country (with an assumed or possible path towards settlement).

Fifth, for the above-shown reason the ‘traditional’ models of integration are hardly compatible with migration realities observed in the New Immigrant Destinations or countries in the intermediate phase of the migration cycle. These areas are specific not only due to the fact that immigration policies are often poorly developed there, but also because the structure of the immigrants’ population is commonly non-orthodox and includes large shares of temporary/circular migrants or migrant entrepreneurs.

To overcome these pitfalls, we proposed a new conceptual model that has been tested empirically within the project. As a point of departure – and major inspiration – we took two commonly used concepts: the migration project/migratory career and the aspirations-capabilities framework. In regard to the first one, we go beyond the discussion on migration strategies/tactics and claim that analysis of immigrants’ integration should look at migration projects defined as statistically traceable patterns of migrants’ behaviour

(with such basic characteristics as the duration of stay, frequency of travels back home or settlement plans). We assume that migration projects usually have a temporal dimension and thus one can also refer to the concept of *migratory career* described by Martiniello and Rea (2014: 1083) as a learning process of practice and of a change in one’s social identity.

By adopting the aspirations-capabilities framework we agree that migrants and would-be migrants are not rough income-maximisers but in their mobility (or immobility) decisions they take into consideration a broad range of factors. We refer to de Haas (2011) and several other authors and differentiate between aspirations (defined as a sum of personal goals and awareness of opportunities) and capabilities (freedoms to pursue personal life choices and decisions) and claim that the aspiration gap, i.e. the difference between individual’s current and aspired well-being, is an important factor to interpret not only the mobility decision but also integration outcomes.

Our conceptual model relies on several assumptions. First, due to a clear focus on the economic domain of integration, we adopt the definition of integration as proposed by Bosswick and Heckmann (2006) who view it as “the process of inclusion of immigrants in the *institutions* and *relationships* of the host society” (emphasis added by us). Second, as we are focusing on economic integration, our model puts the structural/socio-economic domain in the spotlight but it is clear that this domain should not be treated as an isolated one. For this reason, we suggest to look very closely at the interactional domain and leave

enough space for other aspects of immigrants’ functioning in the host society (e.g. identity, political/civic participation, spatial integration). Third, we are aware that all parts of the model are strongly conditional on structural factors and, in particular, on public policies, including migration policies, integration policies or those policies that refer to the labour market. Our intention is, however, to recommend it for a particular institutional setting and not for comparative purposes. Last but not least, we wanted to offer a model flexible enough to offer interesting insights not only for ‘mature’ immigration countries but also for migration realities observed in Poland and other countries that could be categorised as latecomers in the European migration cycle (Okólski 2012).

projects – but in an indirect way and directly on aspirations and capabilities of immigrants. We accept that possible changes in the domain of aspirations-capabilities can alter the migration project.

The main novelty of the approach – apart from the clear focus on migration projects – is that we suggest to include in empirical research various layers of aspirations and capabilities and argue that they can be useful not only in understanding certain migratory behaviour (including immobility) but are also instrumental in explaining and interpreting integration outcomes. This becomes clear when one realises how broad are the categories we are referring to. Aspirations could include, among others, long-term migration plans, household’s point of orientation (in the case of temporary or circular migration), entrepreneurial plans, desire to naturalise, the importance of bringing family members to the country of stay. Capabilities would entail legal status (including naturalisation options), human capital (including both formal and informal education), social capital etc.

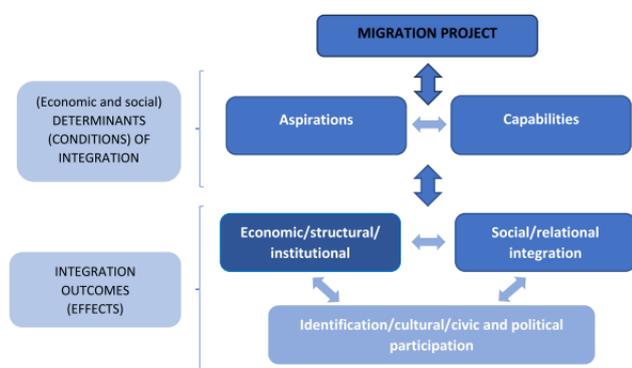


Figure 1. Conceptual model of immigrants’ integration  
Source: Brunarska et al. (2020).

As shown above, we propose a two-stage analytical model. Its first part focuses on an individual migratory project that is an outcome of both structural conditions as well as aspirations and capabilities observed on the micro-level. Then we argue that integration of migrants is conditional on specific migration

Figure 1 shows that in our project (and also in this Spotlight) we focused primarily on the economic integration of immigrants, but assume that there is a clear link between various domains of integration (with a large number of papers looking at the impacts of social relations – in terms of social bonds, social bridges and social links – on economic performance). In terms of economic integration, we suggest moving beyond the early American literature hugely concentrated on the income position of immigrants and the catching-up process (Chiswick 1978; 1980) and

including a much broader set of institutions, including labour market (labour market participation, risk of labour market exclusion, over-education, sector of employment, type of work contract, self-employment etc.), education, health system or the welfare system. In all cases, however, we argue that particular integration outcomes should be interpreted not solely in the context of a particular institutional context or integration policies in place, but rather conditional on individuals' migration projects and aspirations and capabilities that pre-define the propensity to be integrated and the scope and depth of integration.

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## Migration projects, migration outcomes... Are migration projects important for understanding integration patterns of immigrants?

Paweł Kaczmarczyk

Poland used to be described as a traditional emigration country but this situation is changing and the country is gradually transforming from a migrant-sending state to a migrant-receiving one. This breakthrough came after 2014, especially due to immigration from Ukraine that has increased to such a high volume, relative to other national groups, that one can talk about ‘Ukrainisation’ of migration to Poland (Górny and Kaczmarczyk 2018). Observed flows were a result of the co-occurrence of both supply and demand factors, accompanied by favourable solutions in the sphere of migration policy, i.e. the so-called simplified procedure that was introduced into the Polish legal system in 2006 (Górny et al. 2019). The demand side includes improvement of Polish labour market conditions, i.e. low unemployment rate, an increase in average wages as well as an increase in available vacancies while the supply side refers to the dramatic political changes and economic crisis in Ukraine following the Euromaidan protests, the annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in eastern part of the country. Moreover, the increase in immigration flows was so large that Poland has become one of the most important destinations for immigrants in Europe and a leader as far as seasonal work permits and visas are concerned (OECD 2018).

The structure and migration patterns of Ukrainians coming to Poland (as well as to other EU countries) has been a subject of research for almost two decades. Nonetheless, there was a clear focus on temporary or circular migrants – a clear result of the dominant strategy of Ukrainian migrants choosing Poland (Kindler and Szulecka 2013; Górny and Kindler 2016). This feature has been unequivocally documented by Górny (2017) who pointed to the very limited scale of Ukrainian settlement in Poland and identified three major groups of immigrants from this country – regular circulants (around 50% of the total), circular transmigrants (19%) and irregular circulants (26%) (based on a study from 2010) – whose importance was much larger than of long-term immigrants or settlers.

Along with the spectacular increase of the immigration from Ukraine its structure is also gradually changing (as is also shown by growing diversity in terms of sectors of employment and region of stay/work – see Górny et al. 2019). These changes are documented by empirical data gathered within the project in late 2017 / early 2018. In methodological terms, we acknowledged all difficulties that are inherent to studies of irregular or temporary immigrants (as typical difficult to reach populations) and referred to the Respondent Driven Sampling

methodology. If carefully applied (including well-trained research team, fine-tuned incentives and efficient tracking system) it allows for reaching a sample that is ‘saturated’ and, practically, close to a representative one (Heckathorn 1997; Górný and Napierała 2016). A clear limitation of the study is that it was focused on the Warsaw metropolitan area (WMA) but – as shown by all available data – it still represents the major magnet for immigrants coming to Poland.

Interestingly, the data gathered in late 2017 / early 2018 indicate that the well-established pattern of Ukrainian migration is changing. Based on a preliminary cluster analysis involving several important characteristics describing migratory projects of foreigners (time spent in Poland, number of trips to Ukraine, migration plans etc.) five major migration types/projects have been identified – see Figure 1.

arrived in Poland before 2014 and, additionally, this group included not only typical temporary groups as indicated above (circular – 23% and temporary migrants – 13%) but also long-term migrants (14%) and those with clearly expressed settlement option (24%). These categories have been then used as proxies of migration projects in the assessment of factors responsible for integration outcomes.

The case of Ukrainian immigrants in Poland exemplifies that an analysis of economic integration of temporary migrants – and additionally: typical target earners – in a country with limited immigration experience (i.e. not comparable to most Western European societies with decades long history of immigration) presents a specific case. First of all, almost all immigrants in the sample were economically active (all males and 97% of females) and the employment rate was exceptionally high (with 95% of males and 85% of females being employed) – this situation is rather unique against the case of other EU countries welcoming not only labour migrants but also several other categories not targeting (directly) the labour market such as asylum seekers or migrants’ family members. Contrary to common perception of the phenomenon, survey data shows that the majority of workers were employed legally (84% of females and 90% of males). Differences were observed rather in terms of other labour market characteristics as the legal basis for work in Poland (with the majority of workers coming to Poland within the simplified procedure) or type of the contract (with a still relatively low share of those employed full time). Figure 2 shows that the employment structure of

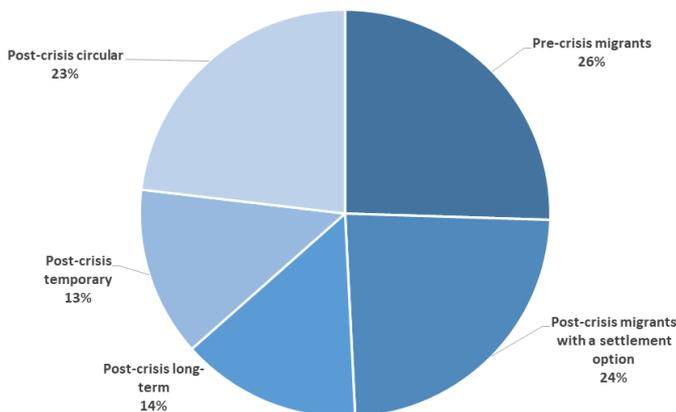


Figure 1. Ukrainian migrants in WMA – a typology, in %  
Source: Own elaboration based on the CMR survey.

There is a clear division between pre- and post-crisis migrants where ‘crisis’ indicates a military and political crisis in Ukraine. Moreover, the scale of post-crisis migration to the WMA was much larger than those who

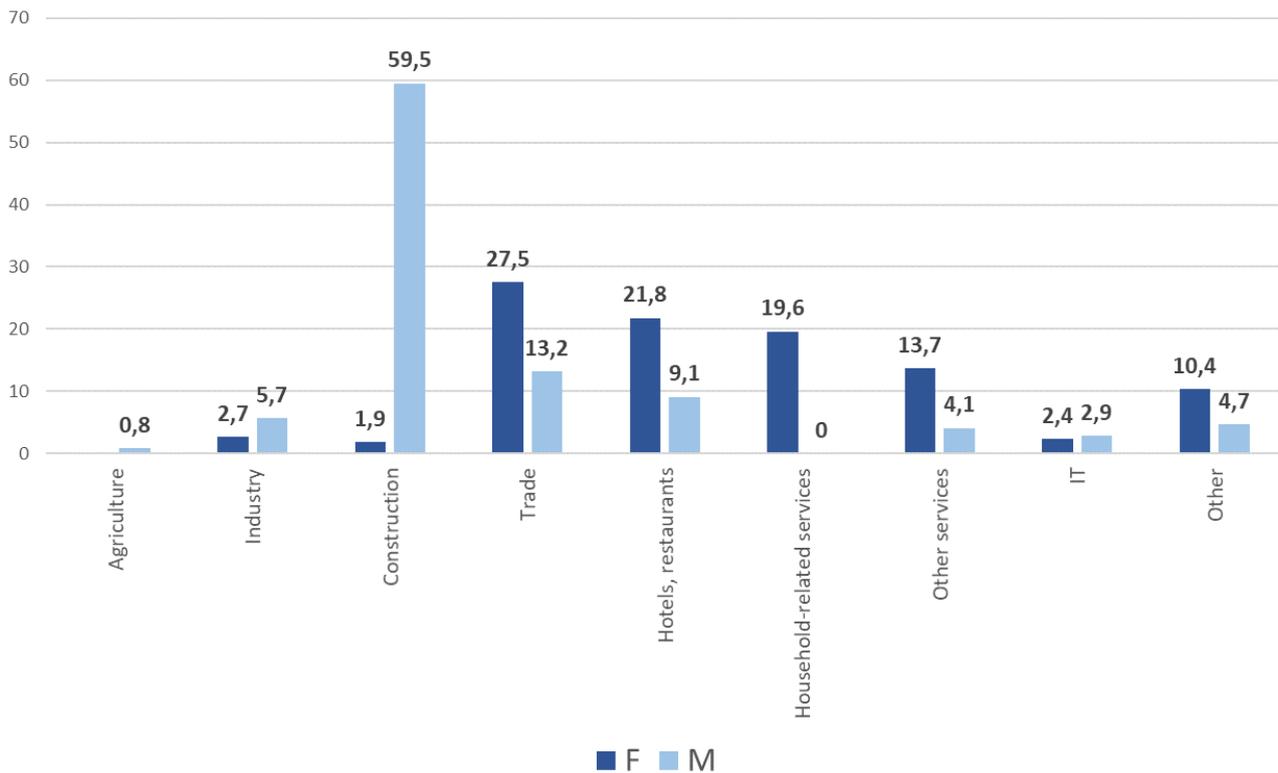


Figure 2. Sectors of employment of Ukrainian migrants in WMA, in %  
 Source: Own elaboration based on the CMR survey.

Ukrainians in Warsaw and its surroundings mirrors the general patterns observed in the last years with female migrants concentrated in trade, hotels/restaurants and deliver services for households and males choosing predominantly the construction sector.

The economic integration patterns (and the expected role of migration projects) has been tested for two indicators: the level of income and the employment below skills (over-education). Survey data shows that Ukrainian immigrants in the WMA are able to achieve relatively high incomes – in the case of females the average monthly income was as high as 2.4 thousand PLN (net) and in the case of males approximately 3 thousand PLN (net) (Maruszewski and Kaczmarczyk forthcoming). These mean values do not apply to the overall

distribution of immigrants’ income in Poland as the sample did not include agricultural workers and this is the group with the lowest earnings on the Polish labour market (Górny and Kaczmarczyk 2018). They show, however, the relatively secure position of Ukrainians in terms of wages. The econometric analysis reveals that the level of incomes is to a very small extent attributable to human capital characteristics (education and language skills). Instead, it is mostly impacted by basic socio-demographic characteristics (sex and age), sector of employment and intensity of work and – to some extent – migrant networks. Importantly, we noted a clear (and statistically significant) difference between various migration projects (proxied by categories presented on Figure 1) with post-crisis

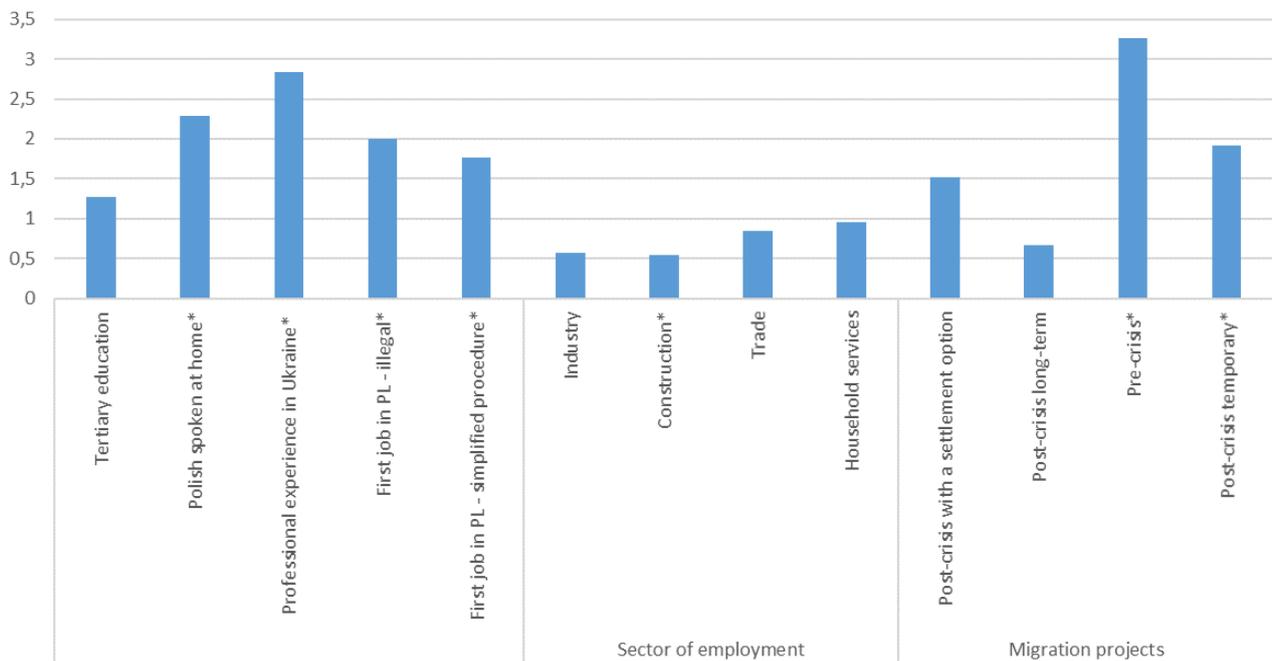


Figure 3. Selected factors increasing the risk of being employed below skills (\*Stars indicate results that are statistically significant at 5%)  
Source: Own elaboration based on the CMR survey.

migrants being substantially handicapped in terms of wages.

Low rate of return to human capital suggests that over-education is an important issue in the case of Ukrainian immigrants in WMA. In fact, over 30% of males and around 45% of females could be described as employed below their skills. Figure 3 presents the factors that – according to the logistic regression model – can explain the fact of being over-educated on the Polish labour market (with values between 0 and 1 indicating the negative impact and >1 a positive impact).

In the case of over-education the effect of migration projects turned out to be stronger and more significant than in the case of income level. Migrants with the longest (pre-crisis) and the shortest experience on the Polish labour market (post-crisis temporary) are facing the highest risk of being employed below their

skills. The second case is more intuitive as temporary migrants and circulars often lack access to ‘good’ jobs or are simply not necessarily interested in finding secure long-term employment according to their skills. The case of pre-crisis migrants is more puzzling. In this case, however, other results presented in Figure 3 are helpful. The model estimates reveal a relatively strong path dependency: those Ukrainian migrants who started their ‘migratory careers’ in Poland with an illegal job or an employment based on the simplified procedure face significantly higher risk of being employed below their skills in their consecutive jobs. Agriculture – used a reference category here – is the sector where the risk of over-education is the highest (particularly as compared to industry and construction). Finally, results of the model show that professional experience and language proficiency (as proxies of human

capital) does not translate into adequate position on the Polish labour market. Both models indicate that the concept of migration projects brings an interesting perspective into studies on the economic integration of migrants, the perspective that should be further enriched with qualitative studies focusing more on mechanisms of labour market incorporation.

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# Migration plans of Ukrainian migrants living in Warsaw (and their integration outcomes)

Anita Brzozowska and Karolina Madej

In the previous parts, we pointed to a spectacular increase in the scale of Ukrainian migration to Poland. However, even though we observe a significant increase in applications for residence permits, most Ukrainians coming to Poland remain temporary migrants, often circulating for many years between Poland and their country of origin. One of the explanations of this prevalence of temporary mobility results from Polish legal regulations – liberal concerning entry into Poland, but restrictive in relation to settlement. For this reason, it is important to identify the migration plans of Ukrainian migrants and to understand what factors shape them. To find this out we conducted 32 in-depth interviews with migrants from Ukraine living in the Warsaw agglomeration, who came to Poland for the first time not later than 2018.

During data collection, it became apparent that ‘migration plans’ were understood in different ways by the interviewees. Some of our interlocutors defined them as a very concrete intention to go to a country other than Poland or Ukraine and have already prepared themselves for the next migration, e.g. they checked labour market conditions, especially job opportunities, or started learning a new language and applying for visa or residence permits. In the case of these migrants, one can speak of quite a concrete and planned vision of the future. On the other hand, some of the interviewees understood the notion of ‘migration plan’ as a more vague dream about the future place of residence. However, it should be noted that even the decision to leave for Poland was often spontaneous, which resulted in lack of

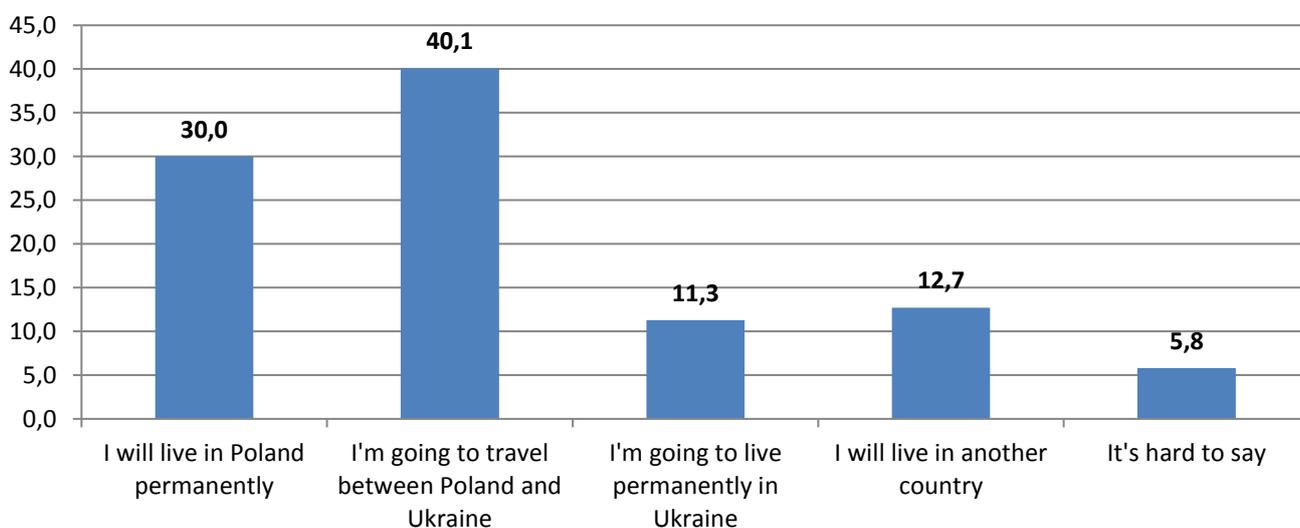


Figure 1. Ukrainian migrants in WMA by declared migration plans, in %  
Source: Own elaboration based on the CMR survey.

knowledge about work conditions and accommodation in the destination country. In general, not all interviewed Ukrainians who actually decided to migrate were well prepared for it. This can be linked not only to the usage of social networks that facilitates migration from Ukraine to Poland but also to activities of recruitment agencies offering general promises of better jobs and lives, as well as the introduction of visa-free regime between Ukraine and the European Union. Moreover, the results of the study indicate that migrants consider different aspects of their lives when reflecting on the possibility of migration. Many of them are linked to lifecycle stages and include the upbringing of children, taking care of elderly parents in the origin country, or the idea of return during retirement.

### **Settlement intentions**

Settlement plans related to living in Poland were closely linked to the economic integration and perceived differences in living standards between Poland and Ukraine (i.e. access to goods and services). Furthermore, migrants planning to stay in Poland strongly emphasized the need for stability and security, which in their opinion life in Poland gives them. The 'normality' of Poland as compared to Ukraine, which was a recurring topic in the gathered narratives, concerned issues related to the labour market, social life and functioning of the public administration. The effort put into learning how to function in the Polish society (including such aspects of social and cultural integration as learning the language and the formation of relationships and networks) was further justification for staying in Poland.

### **Circulation**

Circulation plans were also closely related to the economic aspect of migrants' functioning both in the host society and the country of origin, i.e. earning in Poland and spending in Ukraine. Consequently, interviewed migrants divided their lives into periods spent 'here' and 'there' with a constant feeling that they are missing out on something – family matters or job opportunities. Their circular mobility was linked not only with the above-mentioned migration regime (restrictive in relation to settlement) but also with the calculation of the cost of living in big Polish cities, especially with very high rental costs and the migrants' lack of creditworthiness due to relatively low earnings in the secondary labour market, which consists of usually part-time or temporary work.

### **Return to Ukraine**

Migrants planning the return to Ukraine perceived their stay in Poland as a way of earning a certain amount of money for a specific purpose, even if they tended to prolong their stay abroad. Among the main reasons for return they listed longing for family, friends and homeland, family obligations and having properties in the country of origin. However, in some cases, they made the return dependant on the situation in Ukraine, i.e. improvement of the economic situation, elimination of omnipresent corruption and better life chances for children.

### **Migration to another country**

The last researched group consisted of migrants who planned to go to another country and treated their stay in Poland as a transition phase before further migration to

Western countries. Some of them were young people characterised by great openness and willingness to try something new and in an unspecified way better than in Poland. In their narratives, the first country of migration was depicted as a training camp and linked to the opportunities of earnings that allow moving to another country. As one of the interviewees stated “Poland is not as European as Germany or Norway, but it is already very good and, in my opinion, ideal to begin with”. On the other hand, migrants who planned to leave Poland were exhausted by the extremely long, complicated and expensive (even for those who had spent several years in Poland) proceedings of granting a residence permit. For the latter, frustration is the main reason for leaving Poland.

#### **Integration outcomes**

Initial plans often do not match with actual migration behaviour. Migrants’ reflections on the possibilities of return or migration to another country are ambivalent and change over time. Return becomes a more distant

prospect, postponed into the future and evolving into ‘the myth of return’. It may also be a matter of staying ‘here’ for now, and seeing what the future brings both in the country of origin and the country of stay. For that reason, it is worth to analyse the integration of various categories of immigrants, including those who plan to go to another country, as well as those who plan to stay in Poland only for a certain period of time. The analysis of collected materials shows that migrants from all distinguished groups put significant efforts in making local contacts, including ‘crucial acquaintances’ and more enduring friendships with other migrants, co-ethnics and members of the majority population. However, forming social relations with Polish people was described by many interlocutors as the most problematic or even impossible (e.g. due the negative attitudes towards foreigners in the workplace). This reminds us that integration is a ‘two-way’ process that includes immigrants and the host society engaging not only the newcomers but also other residents.

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# The role of various economic adaptation strategies: entrepreneurship, ethnic economy employment and economic integration among Chinese and Vietnamese residents of the Warsaw metropolitan area

Aliaksei Bashko

Immigrant-run businesses are playing an increasingly important role in the Polish labour market and economic integration of foreign residents. The patterns of immigrant entrepreneurship and its impact on economic outcomes of immigrants depend on the structure of opportunities offered to them by the host society, human capital possessed by international migrants and their diverse social ties in both sending and destination countries (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990, Kloosterman et al. 1999, Ram et al. 2016, Kloosterman and Rath 2018, Kazlou 2019).

The role of entrepreneurial activity is especially significant for some immigrant groups. For example, the rate of business

ownership among Vietnamese residents of the Warsaw metropolitan area (WMA) is much higher than the overall average entrepreneurship rate for immigrant residents of the agglomeration. At the same time, entrepreneurship rates among Chinese residents of the WMA are not particularly high. National Insurance Institution (ZUS) data shows that 3.0% of foreign citizens currently employed in Poland and 4.0% of foreign residents of the Masovian Voivodeship (MV) are entrepreneurs. On the other hand, 13% of employed Vietnamese residents and 3.2% of employed Chinese residents of Poland are engaged in some kind of entrepreneurial activity. The prevalence of entrepreneurship

Group and date	Poland	Masovian Voivodeship	% of immigrants residing in Masovian Voivodeship
Vietnamese citizens, 03.06.2020	11722	9373	80.0
Chinese citizens, 03.06.2020	8255	5962	72.2
Vietnamese citizens, 31.12.2017	9063	7548	83.3
Chinese citizens, 31.12.2017	7505	5586	74.4
Employed Vietnamese citizens, 31.03.2020	8285	5945	71.8
Employed Chinese citizens, 31.03.2020	4314	3175	73.6

Table 1. Chinese and Vietnamese citizens residing and working in Masovian Voivodeship and Poland  
Source: Own elaboration based on the data reported by the National Insurance Institution and Office for Foreigners.

among Vietnamese residents of the MV is currently at 11%. The corresponding rate for Chinese residents of the MV is only 2.6%.

Importantly, Chinese and Vietnamese migration to Poland is characterized by the concentration of immigrants in Warsaw and its surroundings. At the time of the CMR (2017) survey, more than 80% of Vietnamese and more than 70% of Chinese citizens in Poland were residing in the Masovian Voivodeship. These shares barely changed since then (Table 1). As a consequence, our results – even if based on a local survey – give us valuable insights into the patterns of entrepreneurship and employment among the overwhelming majority of Vietnamese and Chinese immigrants in Poland.

In contrast to some other case studies (Constant and Zimmermann 2006, Clark and Drinkwater 2010), the analysis of employment patterns among Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants residing in the WMA demonstrates that they are not pushed to become entrepreneurs by a lack of alternative options. Typical Chinese and Vietnamese entrepreneurs in the WMA are not low-skilled, barely educated immigrants with no Polish skills who can hardly find any job outside the ethnic economy. In fact, university education and self-declared perfect understanding of the Polish language increase the probability of business-ownership among Vietnamese and Chinese residents of the agglomeration. Longer duration of residence in Poland and a high number of social connections are two other key characteristics that increase the odds of entrepreneurship among immigrants from these two groups.

Employment and entrepreneurship patterns indicate that Vietnamese and Chinese residents of the WMA are gradually integrating into the Polish economy. Importantly, they are able to successfully apply their human capital and are not stuck in ethnic economies. Participation in the ethnic economy (defined as working for the firm that is owned by immigrants/descendants of immigrants of the employee's origin or owning a firm that mostly employs immigrants/descendants of immigrants of the owner's origin) provides better income opportunities and offers an important adjustment mechanism for new arrivals from China and Vietnam. On the other hand, long-term residents of these two origins do not benefit from ethnic economy participation and demonstrate significantly higher probabilities of mainstream economy employment and/or entrepreneurship. University education and various forms of mainstream economy participation are key predictors of higher incomes among Chinese and Vietnamese residents of the WMA.

Interestingly, Chinese and Vietnamese residents of the Warsaw metropolitan area demonstrate significantly higher earnings than native-born Polish citizens. In 2017, after-tax median earnings of employed Vietnamese residents of the WMA were equal to 2780 PLN (Figure 1). Employed Chinese residents of the agglomeration enjoyed even higher median net earnings (4050 PLN). At the same time, after-tax median earnings of Polish citizens were equal to 2000 PLN in Poland and 2200 PLN in the Masovian Voivodeship (Polish LFS 2017). 84% of employed Chinese and 70% of employed Vietnamese residents of the WMA

were earning more than the median employed Polish citizen (Polish LFS 2017, CMR 2017).

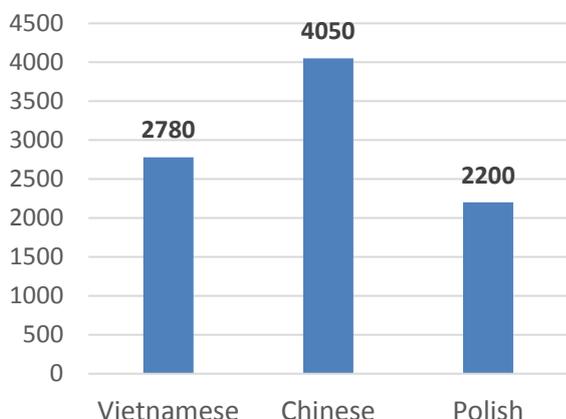


Figure 1. Median net monthly earnings in the Masovian Voivodeship by citizenship (2016-2017), in PLN  
Sources: Own elaboration based on CMR (2017), Polish LFS (2017).

Despite relatively high median incomes and positive integration trends, economic success among Vietnamese and Chinese residents of the WMA is by no means universal. Lack of a bachelor’s degree and insufficient Polish language skills are two key barriers that prevent some immigrants from these two origins from participation in the mainstream economy.

Our results clearly point to several key policy reforms that can accelerate the economic integration of immigrants and enhance their contribution to the Polish economy. In particular, as immigrants with tertiary education and more advanced language skills have better odds of integration into the mainstream economy and higher incomes, we would suggest a much broader and deeper integration policy that would target various categories of migrants and provide them with necessary linguistic training and a favourable business environment. Apart from that, governmental bodies should consider more creative approaches that have the potential

for a significant impact on the selectivity of immigration, could increase the shares of well-educated immigrants and stimulate Polish language learning. These would include visa lotteries (with participation conditioned on tertiary education and at least basic knowledge of the Polish language), fast-track naturalization of immigrants that demonstrate superior (C1/C2) Polish language skills and nudge-style measures (Thaler and Sunstein 2008), such as automatic registration of all the new residents for Polish language courses and exams.

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# Beyond Chinatown: changing Asian migrations to Poland on the example of the Chinese

Krzysztof Kardaszewicz

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The popular image of Asian migrants in Poland is that of anonymous bazaar traders – an isolated community of economic migrants focused on making quick money. It is an idea shaped during Poland’s post-socialist transformation in the 1990s, when immigrants from countries like China or Vietnam pursued opportunities in the emerging market economy, in particular as owners of ethnic restaurants and retailers of cheap, imported consumer goods. But while it is true that many Asian migrations in Europe were shaped by economic factors, several changes throughout the decade following the 2008 global economic crisis have permanently reshaped this trend (Nyiri 2007; Szymańska-Matusiewicz 2019). As such, the enduring perception of Asian immigrants as a ‘Chinatown-style’ trade diaspora is no longer an accurate reflection of their motivations or a good frame of reference for understanding their reality. In this short text I will focus on the case of Chinese migrants in Poland to show how their presence evolved from transient economic activity to lifestyle migrations focused on investing personal wealth in Europe.

## **Chinese in Poland: from economic to lifestyle migrations**

The Chinese community in Poland evolved along three migration waves, first taking shape with groups of students and entrepreneurs arriving in Poland from the mid-1980s to pursue opportunities in the emerging

free market. Until the mid-2000s, this community numbered under 1000 people and was composed largely of entrepreneurs engaged in import and sale of goods from China, and concentrated around a couple of wholesale trade centres, such as the one in Wólka Kosowska, on the outskirts of Warsaw. Few of these immigrants stayed permanently – they often moved between different countries in Europe, following the rise and fall of different business opportunities. Today, however, Chinese migrations are dominated by the middle-class coming to Europe in pursuit of a better lifestyle and often looking to settle.

This gradual change in motivations and the departure from economic toward lifestyle migration was related to several important structural changes in both Poland and China. The early migrations were shaped by a transition toward the market economy (in both countries) and driven by political and economic instability in China during the mid-1980s-90s. The small-time trade community then began to rapidly change following Poland’s entry into the European Union in 2004 and the onset of the 2008 global economic crisis – both of which marked the peak and gradual downfall of the import-for-sale business model. Many of the traders in Poland were forced to close shop or had to look for ways of remaking their business. Ironically, the economic crisis also became an

opportunity embraced by China’s middle class looking to invest its wealth into a better lifestyle. Europe was now considered less expensive and easier to access than the ‘usual’ top migration choices – such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – and began to be actively promoted in China as a destination. Finally, by 2012 China began an extensive diplomatic outreach in Europe, looking to engage and build its presence in multiple countries including Poland. A series of political and economic initiatives, like the 16+1 (launched in Warsaw) and the One Belt One Road were aimed at providing the foundation for a series of large-scale investments. Altogether, this created an increased interest in migration to Poland, based on a specific window of opportunity – which included prospects for economic growth, a lower cost of living as compared to Western Europe, and relative ease of obtaining residence documents (our survey results showed that up to 2017 significant numbers of Chinese entered Poland on a tourist visa and proceeded to apply for a 3-year residence permit).

These changes also meant that the rules and motivations behind Chinese migrations to Poland were now different. The small family business was no longer viable or competitive in contrast with large-scale Chinese investors, and the migrants arriving after 2012 came with a set of distinctly middle-class aspirations. These were usually expressed as a desire for a higher quality of life – understood as life in a country with a better natural environment, easier access to public services (ex. free medical care) and especially, better education opportunities for their children. Driven by

increasing pressure and competition in China and hoping for a greater sense of control over life, these migrants sought to invest their personal wealth to access a new environment and opportunities abroad.

For many, Poland was also a first-time and random destination, often recommended by an emigration consultant and embraced simply as a country in Europe. There was usually little knowledge or understanding about particular realities in Poland – its culture, public services or education system – which often made the transition and adaptation to a new life difficult. In fact, as a result, a number of the new arrivals were uncertain whether they could manage or wanted to extend their stay in Poland beyond the initial 2-3 year window guaranteed by their initial residence documents. These challenges are partly reflected in the official statistics (informal community-based estimates are often higher) which show that, currently, the

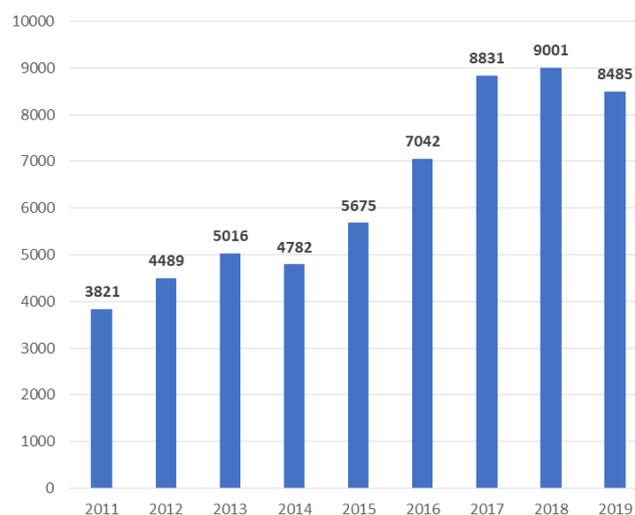


Figure 1. Chinese citizens with official residence documents in Poland

Source: Own elaboration based on Office for Foreigners data.

fairly dynamic growth in numbers of Chinese migrants to Poland has begun to stagnate.

**Beyond the numbers...**

Despite the current slow-down in numbers, several important changes should be noted in the way Chinese migration to Poland and Europe began to evolve:

**A new demographic:** Chinese migrants today are increasingly wealthy, well-educated and focused on investing their personal capital. They focus on quality of life, defined by the natural environment, medical care access and education. However, as Poland is often an accidental destination (see below), many often struggle with initial adaptation.

**Change of migration pattern from chain-migration to infrastructure-based:** Migration from China used to be largely driven by rural entrepreneurs from southern coastal provinces, relying on family ties and personal networks for arranging travel, business opportunities, and transition into the new environment. Today, migration is a mainstream phenomenon, embraced by people from all walks of life and regulated largely by capital – anyone is free to travel as long as they can afford to, with the entire process managed and marketed by a network of dedicated agents and consultancies, something described in the literature as a contemporary “migration infrastructure” (Xiang 2017).

**Changing mode of entrepreneurship:** Entrepreneurship and economic migrations are still relevant, but subject to significant evolution. As the established business model based on import and sale of goods from China is no longer profitable, Chinese businessmen are looking to remake their activity to match

the new realities. This generally means an emphasis on a greater scale of operation and a long-term effort to develop locally-based brand products, made in Poland and exported for sale to China.

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Despite the current slowdown in Chinese migration and investment (further undermined by the ongoing Covid-19 epidemic) these trends are likely to continue charting the future of Chinese emigration and activity in Poland.

The changes discussed here are also indicative of other Asian communities in Poland, in particular the Vietnamese (for a detailed comparison see: Kardaszewicz and Wrotek forthcoming). While different in their emigration experiences, both groups are increasingly defined by their focus on non-economic factors which make Poland an attractive place to live – in particular a good environment for raising children and access to public services, such as education or medicine. Their changing motivation also means that few of those who remain in Poland long-term prioritize economic integration (despite having the necessary human capital), or that economic factors have a significant impact on their settlement decisions.

\*[Unless indicated otherwise, the material here is based on: Kardaszewicz, 2019; Kardaszewicz and Wrotek forthcoming].

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