

Effects of Polish Migration throughout the European Union Since 2004

Anna Maria Hejnar

Krosno State College, Poland

Abstract

Polish Immigration has consistently been in the headlines in recent years as a result from joining the European Union in 2004. The Opened Borders are seen as a new hope for a better life. Migration to EU countries has become a choice for some and a financial requirement for others. As a result, with over 2 million Polish workers live abroad and there is a need for examining responsible migration in Poland. The aim of this paper is to discuss the current impact of migration on Poland through my experience as a recent migrant-returnee. The main focus will evolve around reasons for an intellectual 'brain drain', industrial skill shortages, and specialized professionals in the healthcare and education sectors that directly concerns the development of Polish society. The Polish government's policies are a main problem that appears to be flawed as they do not attempt to raise social standards of living which consequently only encourage further migration. The paper will argue that the current Polish government has undertaken very limited actions to stabilize the welfare and security of its citizens and discourage migration to EU countries. As a result, the impact on the future of Poland –education and the healthcare system; economic productivity; and the ability to fund services through locally raised taxation – is seriously challenged. The conclusion points to the need for change and an alternative approach by encouraging the skilled and educated to remain in Poland and work towards Poland's development.

After Poland joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, there has been a large explosion of emigration from Poland to other EU nations. This migration is marked as the first Polish generation who are legally entitled to be mobile and is often spoken of in rapturous terms of new freedoms (Sobczyk, 2010). According to estimates by Poland's statistical office, 1.87 million Polish citizens resided outside their home country in 2009, most in other EU states. Britain, Germany and Ireland are among the top three most popular destinations for Polish migrants. Out of that number, three-quarters (1.4 million) had lived abroad for more than 12 months and should statistically be included in the population of their host country rather than that of Poland whose population is estimated at 38.2 million (Sobczyk, 2010). This is causing a demographic change in Poland that is having an

impact on many areas of society. The purpose of this paper is to explain and illustrate the issues of emigration to other EU nations that are now being felt in Poland.

Life as a Polish Immigrant in the United Kingdom (2005-2014)

This report has been strongly influenced by my own experience with working outside of Poland since September 2005. I decided to move to the U.K. for work and study when I was barely 21 years old. The main reason was lack of opportunity and prospects for young people in Poland. Although education in Poland is free, I could not afford to study outside my home town due to the living expenses. My sister was already working in the U.K. and living in Milton Keynes which is a large town situated in Buckinghamshire about 45 miles northwest of London. I was determined to improve my own situation so I packed my bags and left my country to join her. My parents supported my decision however the departure day was very emotional.

I settled in almost instantly and found a job within two weeks. I started off as a warehouse operative like most of Polish migrants but unlike many, I refused the first job I was offered because I did not want to put up with the working conditions. It was a place where the work was 24/7 and people worked in silence labelling clothes. Shifts were a minimum of 12 hours and there was even a washing machine to wash your clothes during your day. I suspect that some people there were doing more hours than they claimed to work. After 2 days, I refused to carry on and called the employment agency who called me back shortly with another job.

This time, I ended up in a high maintenance, private book company in Milton Keynes, just a short bus drive from the town centre. I was appointed as a production/distribution assistant and one of my tasks consisted of proofreading. I got to read a lot and managed to break the language barrier quite fast because, at that time, I was the only Polish person in the warehouse and communication was essential for the job. I had studied English for many years before and I thought that I knew the language well but hearing it spoken at different volumes, speeds, dialects and accents completely changed my idea of language acquisition. Despite the difficult start, it was all part of a very valuable process. In life I often follow my heart so I usually know when the time is right, so after one and half years I needed to move away from my comfort zone to pursue the unknown and learn new things. I handed in my notice and began to look for another opportunity for development. My boss, Dave Stewart (Distribution manager), was very understanding and he wrote in his reference: "...Anna is available for new challenges only because of her desire to learn and grow further...We would have loved to see her stay, but certainly understand her need to advance beyond the positions we have available" and he rewarded my work with my first ever work references letter. The letter is quite long and I keep it together with my achievements and certificates.

I soon started another job in warehouse but this time it was an even more physical post. However, I soon got promoted to a different department and no longer had to worry about heavy loads. Another year passed by and at the beginning of 2009, I got my first

redundancy letter. Instead of crying, I thought to myself, just in time, as I was thinking of another challenge that would help me to develop my skills.

I had made some friends by then and one of them advised me that the company she worked for had a vacancy for an administrative assistant, so I applied and attended the interview. I got the job and I had to learn some new skills. I even learned how to operate a forklift truck because it was a logistic company. This was not a dream job for a girl but it didn't discourage me. On the contrary, this position turned out to be a blessing in disguise and enabled me to complete a Business and Administration NVQ on level 2 as it was supported by my employer. By then, I was already on a full-time, permanent contract. I enjoyed being busy and I was never bored at work, no matter how mundane it was. The tasks were exactly the same each day: stock check, picking, packing, data input, phone calls but I was simply making the best of it out the present situation and I always asked for more training. Then the recession hit again in 2010 and I received another redundancy letter. I thought, "Nice try! So now what?"

Then I found myself behind a closed door. Not for long though, as I began to look for the open widows. So, I attended the local college and did some additional qualifications, one of which was ESOL, and I got involved with volunteering. I did not waste time there either. I worked in a local theatre, Citizen Advice Bureau and vented my artistic ambitions in a local charity foundation as a leaflet designer and a photographer at the various, local festivals. My biggest volunteering milestone was becoming a Game Maker at the London Olympics in 2012. I managed two jobs. I was a First Aider at the Horse Guard Parade and the Closing Ceremonies Performer at the Olympic Stadium.

After about 4 months, I found an advertisement in a local newspaper for my dream job so I made a call and requested an application pack. I was prepared for this as I took up a summer course in PTLLS (i.e., teacher training) so that I was prepared when I attended the interview. In December 2010, I was appointed at the Milton Keynes Academy, a secondary school as a Teacher Assistant, but my title was Achievement Coach and it described exactly what I wanted to do. Every day was different and I faced many challenges. The training was ongoing and there was always something new to learn. However, there was this one thing that still held me back – I was lacking a degree. I felt the urge of following my dreams again and at the beginning of 2014, I decided to become a teacher. I resigned so that I could return and study back in Poland and in my home town. I found a brand new college offering a teaching degree and I started my studies there full-time in November of 2014. I am now majoring in English Philology and planning on graduating in 2016.

Recent Polish Migrations

My research suggests that in 2004, Germany was the lead destination country for migration from Poland. Today, the UK seems to be the main destination country although Germany is still an attractive location due to the geographical aspect. Seasonal migration from Poland is referred to as "incomplete migration" by Kepińska (2004) and Okólski (2001). They point out that "migrants increasingly focus on one particular aim: namely

earning money in the host country and spending it in the home country” and characterizes “mobility of this kind [as] a split living set-up, with economic activity pursued largely in the host country and family life taking place predominantly in the home country” (p. 105, p. 109).

In 2013, it was reported in a German newspaper called Passauer Neue Presse that “1.23 million immigrants had settled in Germany, which is the highest in 20 years”. The Deputy Bureau Chief of Central and Eastern Europe, Marcin Sobczyk, who coordinates Polish News coverage in Warsaw wrote an article in The Wall Street Journal: “Poland Loses 1.4 million people to brain drain” and underlines that “Germany and Austria have opened their markets to Poles in May 2011, but already before Poland joined the EU in 2004 the group of Polish migrants there was estimated at almost 300,000, and grew to 415,000 in 2009 (Sobczyk, 2010).” The number of immigrants had increased from 1.08 million in 2012 to 1.23 million in 2013 which means that migration on the whole was far from slowing down and if current trends continue, it is bound to increase in the near future.

Apart from the economic reasons for migration, there are other non-economic motivations that are considered increasingly controversial. With young people being identified as the most significant demographic component of this new migration, the aspiration of youth has been closely considered. For many experts, much of this migration starts as something similar to a “gap year” travel this happens when students decide to take a year out of university to travel abroad to earn money or just to experience different country. These younger, often highly skilled migrants can be termed ‘searchers’, who are interested in pursuing new experiences as much as new skills for the need of employment. On the other hand we have people who just like “storks”, continually return back to a country to spend money and finally we have “hamsters” who work only to be able to go back to their home country with some savings. The “stayers” are those who settle down and integrate within a new society who in most cases, are young people and families.

From my own experience since 2005, it has been clear that for many years that this situation is reflected in many English cities and towns where you can easily find a Polish corner shop, Polish restaurants, or clubs with Polish music. The demand for Polish services such as medical specialists, especially dentists, gynaecologists, and hairdressers has been very high in recent years, in addition to the Polish music industry where artists are booking gigs, especially in the bigger cities such London. This of course could become a nuance to an Englishman, whenever they see yet another opening a Polish Delicatessens or another concert purely organised for a Polish audience.

Factors Contributing to Modern Emigration from Poland

In the book *Opening and Closing Borders: Migration and Mobility in East-Central Europe* by Wallace (2002), the author discusses the diverse range of Polish migrants with equally varying intentions. Frequently, the young migrants openly stress that the fault lies in the unsupportive political system that simply isn’t working in favour of its citizens. By the same token, this can be seen in Poland as well. Last year’s Polish Senate elections have

illustrated this point clearly, with none of the reformers reflecting youth ideology were elected. When such a situation is added to the general mood of people, a lack of trust and disillusionment in Polish democracy develops. This could be clearly seen around this year's early May election too. As it was confirmed in The Polish Newsweek on May 26th, 2015: "During the first round of presidential elections in Poznan, Bronislaw Komorowski (left-wing) won 49.54% of the votes (*PKW: Andrzej Duda prezydentem. Kandydat PiS zdobył 51,55 proc., Bronisław Komorowski 48,45 proc. Głosów*, 2015). The opponent was Duda (right-wing) who had the support of only 22.09% of votes. In third place, with the support of 17.78% of votes, was Paul Kukiz who was an alternative candidate (i.e., former rock musician) who for many young people was the only option. The turnout was 55.3%...Andrzej Duda won the second round of elections with 51.55% - announced on Monday PKW giving the official results of the vote. His competitor and a former president Bronislaw Komorowski was supported by 48.45% of votes and the turnout amounted to 55.34%. So, as we can see, the problem lingers. "The election results show that Poland is still divided half and half...Unfortunately, this division continues" – as Sawicki – one of the politicians admits at a press conference in Lublin. I read about the statistics and data found on this very website: "In the first round of presidential elections turnout was only 48.96 percent. This is the lowest score in the history of presidential elections after 1989" but this does not surprise me at all. Then I see this comment down below the article: A person named Fractis says: "Does it matter who will be the president? This puppet function together with the Senate should be closed down. As 95% of Poles do not know who is president of Germany just as no one really cares who it is in Poland. The real power holds a prime minister here ... allegorically we really choose between the Christmas and Easter...so let us rejoice because everyone is right."

As it's consistently highlighted, the daily course of affairs in politics is progressively disapproved by the whole society nationwide, but in my personal view, especially by the younger ones. In addition, most people find the taxing system outrageous and obsolete, where "Income tax is progressive — the more you earn, the higher rate you pay. In 2013, the tax rates for individuals in Poland were 18% (for those earning less than 85kPLN p/a) and 32% (for those earning more than 85k PLN p/a) and the situation hasn't improved as yet. Imagine running a company in Poland where ZUS (social contributions) fees aspect is another worry added to your plate. ZUS is connected with taxes that go towards social insurance, pensions, retirement allowances and other social services. The thing is that you have to sort it out for yourself, so when a person is employed or runs their own business, they are responsible for working out ever changing fees that they owe. Everyone needs to pay the right amounts of contributions at the right time, although this is a job for an accountant because it requires a lot of time and specific knowledge. In case of a missed deadline, even an ordinary worker could face another fee to pay to ZUS. To be honest, this could be easily a topic for another article.

Furthermore, the lack of adequate infrastructure facilities to support a family is daunting and poses a real concern to citizens of Poland. The national Health Fund seems to be constantly lacking funds for basic things and I am convinced this organization is a serious risk for a patient. You cannot get anything done correctly and on time unless you pay for it, as this has been my recent experience. There are always long queues to see a GP,

and if your case is urgent, “make a complaint to the Health Minister” as what I was advised at the doctor’s office recently. For young people, there is a growing sense of insecurity and they are getting more anxious about making a living on a daily basis. Moreover, they are faced with the rather insensitive if not cruel attitude of their employers. For example, a common popular stereotype of employers among youth includes the attitude of “Don’t like it? Try your luck somewhere else!”

Another issue is gender discrimination not only when it comes to salaries but also through general treatment. I have first-hand information both from being recently interviewed for a job in Poland and from talking with family members. For example, during the interview stage for a job, women often get interrogated about their future plans concerning starting a family and they often face the most personal questions (e.g., about the profession of their husband) as my sister-in-law experienced. Women in Poland still earn less than men and seem seriously disadvantaged in their working life on the whole. I found a recent, very interesting study, online article on www.wynagrodzenia.pl which is the largest Polish internet portal dedicated entirely to compensation issues. This report below confirms my statement. The differences in pay between women and men in 2013 stand as follows: “The average monthly salary of men in 2013 stood at 4500PLN. Women earned about 900PLN less. One in four of them earned less than 2 500 PLN. Salaries 25% of men amounted to more than 7500 PLN (*Wynagrodzenia kobiet i mezcysyn w 2013 roku*, 2013).” It continues: “As every year we remind you that in our study is dominated by young people (61% have no more than 35 years), with higher education (72.2% operating in cities of over 200,000 inhabitants (65.2%). In addition, our respondents are at least specialized positions (73.4%), which makes their salaries are higher than most Poles.” This is despite laws enshrining the rights of women in employment. However, the legal process is so slow that many employers ignore the law and believe there will be a constant supply of willing workers if needed. And people are living in a constant fear and almost never decide to stand up for themselves.

The Results of Polish Emigration Since 2004

Nowadays, there are noticeably more Poles who are publically venting their frustration about the hopelessness of the situation in Poland, especially in the smaller towns or villages where originally this could be heard very often. Using data conducted from verbal interviews, Internet discussion boards, and my own experience, a vital arena for Polish migration focus is on one key post-socialist discourse in particular which is for the desire for ‘normality’. A normal life, one could perceive, is when people no longer have to be scared of losing a poorly paid job and worry to make ends meet each month. Normality is when people can afford to freely take a holiday and rest properly from time to time, without worrying that if they go, they might lose the job. Polish reality proves to work on different terms. People are working hard, usually in fear of losing their job and the money they earn can barely sustain the basic needs. Holidays are when “one gets during one’s sleeping time” a bus driver said to me who has been driving for 35 years “and that if you are lucky, that is” – he added. Although it probably does not happen in the cities such Warsaw or Cracow, it is visible in areas of South-East Poland where I live at the moment.

I have been talking to local bus drivers and farmers, including those in my family. People here need to keep a careful eye to nearly everything that grows and lives on the ground.

I went to a work experience from the College recently and after I finished teaching during my visit to one of the public schools, I asked everyone in the class to write a question for me concerning the lecture I just gave. I received anonymous questions on a slip of paper from 14 year olds. They all tried so hard to write their questions in English but what was surprising was that those questions were asking about purpose in life and the point of going to school etc. All of this discontentment is apparent in a number of Polish citizens and especially the young ones. Migrants are voicing out their hopes and frustrations as they justify their decision to leave Poland and move to the UK, searching for a 'normal life' and I was not different when I decided to leave.

In addition, if migrants will take the risk of returning to their home country then they would have to face an even bigger risk of working for the Polish minimum wage if they are lucky enough to find a job in the first place. At 1400zł per month in the South-East region for an established post (i.e., not an entry level job which are mainly available for students), it is difficult to justify the change in living standards especially in the light of a weekly British allowance of around 180-200 pounds (c. 1200zł). Where I live in Poland, 1200PLN-1400PLN is an average monthly salary. If you are a student, the rent in a small town such Krosno where I go to College will cost you around 300-400zł for a shared accommodation not including additional living expenses. Food is expensive and public transport is even more costly.

What can be seen as more ridiculous is the fact that if Polish migrants prolong their stay abroad it subsequently diminishes their chances for employment back home. This is exactly what happened to me. I have been unemployed since I returned to Poland in October of 2014. The situation looks even worse for the older migrants. For instance, this means that when returnees approach forty years old, their chances to return to any type of employment in Poland is literally next to none due to age discrimination. Another issue is not having enough "Polish" experience and foreign qualifications that aren't properly recognised here in Poland. Through personal experience and interviews I learned that where I live in the village of Haczów, is widely considered to be the poorest region in the country with an average rate of 14% of unemployment in 2014.

Another great issue widely discussed nowadays is the retirement age in Poland. I will quote from the polish law website www.infor.pl: "Starting in 2013, the retirement age is gradually increased (*Retirement age in Poland*, 2014). Apparently this is for the reason of equality for both sexes. According to the assumptions the retirement age for men and women will be changed to 67 years. The objective will be achieved for women in 2040 and for men in 2020. Mandatory retirement age in Poland as well as in Norway is the highest in the world." As for today, the newly elected President is promising to lower the retirement age in Poland, but for this we will have to wait until next year.

Thanks to social media there is a visible increase of consciousness about living abroad. In a recent documentary that became viral on YouTube.com: "*The place where life is*

possible” by Magdalena Piejko, migrants confirm all the above issues. I have created a fan page on Facebook called “Jedną nogą w Polsce” (One foot stuck in Poland) where I try to discuss all of the burning issues with other Poles. My aim is to integrate all Poles so that we can brainstorm ideas that will help people to live better lives and that I hope will revolutionise this country. Low budget documentaries raising awareness and independent films with English subtitles on living abroad are being released more frequently online but also broadcasted in the cities and towns in the U.K. These films can be easily found on YouTube and other websites. These often show many of the true sides of migration, such as the attitude of the UK population and difficulties in finding work, as well as the positive aspects of living abroad. However, some “stayers” who have already accommodated themselves are often less keen to admit to any mistreatment or abuse that they may have encountered in social settings or at work. This could be a direct result of the decisions that the “stayers” have had made about making a living outside their home country. The likelihood that the seasonal workers, so called “storks”, would speak out significantly more about the reality of living abroad is much higher.

I have read on BBC.com about some statistics concerning the most lingering dispute of recent times on immigrants and their contributions or benefit taking. According to a study by University College London (UCL), immigrants from the so-called New Europe (i.e., the countries that joined the EU in 2004 or the Accession Ten/A10 which include Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) contributed nearly £5bn more in taxes than they took in benefits (*New EU migrants add £5bn to UK*, 2014). The report also confirmed that EU immigrants are better educated than the UK population at large: 60% from southern and western Europe and 25% of those from Eastern Europe have university degrees. This compares with 24% of the UK-born workforce. Moreover, Prof Christian Dustmann, co-author of the study, said: EU migrants, in particular, made “the most substantial contributions” because of their “higher average labour market participation compared with natives and their lower receipt of welfare benefits.” I often heard about stories of many undocumented Polish workers, men and women labouring for twelve to fourteen hours a day in conditions no native worker would take under consideration. Hence, such attitudes also play an important part of the “hamsters” plan as those types of migrants, want to earn as much as possible and save on living costs so that they can take more savings back home.

From my observations, on a very rare occasion, Polish migrants would genuinely open up to voice issues such discrimination, lost identity, broken relationships or any other disadvantages that are associated with living abroad. Typically, the image they wish to present is of a harmonious and successful experience. This is due to the Polish mentality which is a type of pride about that crucial decision of leaving their home country, their friends, families, so therefore they can’t afford to complain because they now feel successful even if it meant more hardship than which they are accustomed to. This is of the highest importance because they feel a need to save their face or honour when it comes to the male migrants. Polish people do not like see themselves as losers but doers, go-getters. Since our government is not very generous you really need to learn how to get what you need.

One of the main Polish national characteristics that could be easily noticed among migrant people is honour and pride especially when it comes to managing their own living standard and financial situation. In Poland, there is a very popular saying that many people still live by: “Get a mortgage if you have to, to look better in front of your neighbour”. People here are careful not to lose a face. They still worry what their neighbour would think of them. By the same token, Polish people often chose not to take benefits and prefer to suffer poverty because they perceive it as an ultimate weakness. Some people view this idea of taking support offered by the Polish government as a charity. That is why they prefer to go abroad and earn money the “hard way” if that would help to save their honour. This attitude could be a form of manifestation towards the very little efforts that the Polish government is actually putting in to bettering Polish citizen’s situation.

In addition, from my observations, many Polish workers in Poland have a very limited trust for anything that seems a little risky or comes from outside their comfort zone. Most of the time, they fear losing their jobs so they hold onto their jobs carefully and do not allow themselves to stick out. In this light, we may speculate why so many migrants are stuck on minimum wage jobs abroad and why Poland, as a nation, is making such small-scale progress in comparison to other EU countries. Overall, a clearer explanation of migrant attitudes is that mentality that you better earn lots of money and fast while you can because you might not be so lucky next time around. This attitude is definitely one of the “hamster” characteristics when it comes to making a living and it definitely does not do anyone any favours.

What is also worth mentioning is that the Polish government seems to be turning a blind eye to the surrounding issues instead of acting on them. It has been quietly consenting to all the mixed messages in regards to working abroad that mass media have been supporting all of those years. There is a regular circulation of newspapers and advertisements that are ostentatiously displayed here and there which all seem so attractive that they almost make you obliged to reconsider your life in Poland (Figure 1). Furthermore, there are a number of recruiting agencies found online as well as in the Job Seekers Offices in Poland which encourage and support Polish people including students with offers of seasonal work or employment abroad. Likewise, such opportunities can be found online on any local websites, (e.g., on a local town’s website, there is plenty of work in Holland, Spain and Great Britain at www.krosno24.pl). In addition to this, the accessibility of the western job market is consistently highlighted to the public and also nationally consented to by government. I’ve recently purchased a hard copy of “Work and study abroad”, a Polish newspaper, and I honestly think such an example of convocation is a perfect example highlighting the above and it has also been legally up and running since 2003.



Figure 1. Example of advertisement for work abroad.

On the whole, the current Polish situation is strongly incubating the perfect environment for a 'brain drain'. As a result, for instance, interest in working abroad “has risen among the medical profession in recent times” reports Londynek.net (Biznesu & Monika, 2015). Indeed, it is worrisome. The United Kingdom is often mentioned in this matter and has been accused of actively hiring medical staff from developing countries such Poland: “According to the Polish Chamber of Physicians, more than 9 thousand specialists have the formal competence to work legally in the EU. Recent statistics show that the number of certificates issued to doctors applying for recognition in other EU countries has increased to 25%” (Biznesu & Monika, 2015). Among physicians applying for certification, the highest percentage includes anaesthesiologists, internists, surgeons and general radiologists and their country of choice is the United Kingdom.” The article underlines further: “It seems that working abroad, even short-term, is an investment in their career for medical professionals. Higher foreign wages, allow the professionals to return and have a chance to pursue career plans in Poland (e.g., open their own office). In addition, gaining additional qualifications, learning new techniques and familiarizing with advanced specialized equipment allows for career advancement on return.”

There is yet another issue. Poland is also facing the loss of young graduates and specialists who are more eager to look for opportunities somewhere else. Consequently, Poland is under a serious threat of a big hole in its demography by having young people start their own families abroad. This will soon have its consequences on a bigger scale. Cuts in the public sector already pose a problem as well as school closures plus redundancies for the teachers.

The results displayed below are based on empirical material collected in 2011 and 2012. The empirical material gathered by university students and volunteers and described in the book by R. Bera (2012) “A sense of professional responsibility of economic migrants” that I have studied since I could not run my own research at the time. The main criterion that seeks to preserve the selection of the sample is the country of residence of economic migrants, which is the largest group of Poles in the European Union after the Polish

accession to the EU. Therefore the study selected the United Kingdom, Sweden and Germany. As far as the data in Table 1 shows, both among immigrants (primary group) and those who are working in the country (comparison group), most workers are between the age of 21-30. This indicates that the migrants are young workers who are the most economically desired and often at the point of starting their careers. The 30-40 year old group are also a common percentage with every fourth migrant employed abroad and every ninth person employed in the country (11.4%). Relatively few workers are between the ages of 40-50 years and above 50 years old there are only 6 people in the comparison group indicating that immigration is a young person's activity.

Table 1. Age of respondents

Age	Immigrants (primary)		Workers in the country (comparison)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
>20	12	3.5	12	3.3
21-30	216	63.7	285	77.2
31-40	93	27.7	42	11.4
41-50	18	5.3	24	6.5
<50	-	-	6	1.6
Total	339	100.0	369	100.0

Looking at the level of education of Polish migrants we can see that (Table 2) among Polish migrants working abroad (Primary group) higher education clearly dominates. The score is over 25% compared to those 5% in the country. However, in the 'comparison group' most respondents hold a secondary education level (48.8 %). The lowest level of education has every eighth person while working abroad and only a few employees in the country supporting the evidence of a brain drain.

In the article "Poland Struggles to Reverse Its Brain Drain" (Davies, 2011), it is reported that a recruitment agency, AER International based in London, was set up to help an expected flood of professional migrants return to Poland and other Eastern European countries with booming economies. To encourage people to return, in 2008, the Polish government launched a campaign targeted at Poles working abroad: "Have you got a PPlan to return?" (Davies, 2011). The message said: "The Polish government would be very glad to have returnees, but it's too late. The 'Have you got a PPlan to return?' program was perceived by migrants as "propaganda. Furthermore, "According to the current situation and looking at the statistics, it is hard to see this campaign as being a success. Secondly, the Polish authorities have tried to encourage migrants to return to the country. The city of Warsaw, for example, has claimed that it will pay €11,700 to every migrant returning to the Polish capital and starting a business there, partly financed with EU funds". Thirdly, talking from my experience, there is this new custom in Poland supported by the EU that proposes that every Polish person registered at the Job Seekers Centre (JS) and is unemployed who decides to run a new business can make an application for a non-refundable loan. JS in Poland works similarly to the one in the U.K. It's funded and

supported by the government, however, financial support will only last a maximum 6 months. After that you are on your own. People go there for interviews, training, to find out about the job opportunities etc. JS is located in each city or town. The whole project is entirely funded from the EU budget. The condition states that your new company will have to prosper for at least one year otherwise the loan will need to be repaid. Personally, when I found out about this, I was excited at first but then I thought back to the taxing system, ZUS contributions and other bureaucratic aspects and decided not to go ahead with this concept.

Table 2. Formal education

Formal education	Immigrants (primary)		Workers in the country (comparison)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Elementary education	9	2.7	-	-
Vocational training	33	9.7	15	4.1
Secondary School	54	15.9	177	48.8
Technical School	72	21.2	135	36.6
Higher education	87	25.7	21	5.7
Graduate education	78	23.0	15	4.1
Other	6	1.8	6	1.6
Total	339	100.0	369	100

Andrzej Duda, the Polish president-elect at the time of writing stated: "Further emigration of Poles is a real threat to the existence of the Polish state. It is time to make repairs in many areas". He also mentions, among all the other issues, about obstacles for entrepreneurs. "The worst thing is taxation system in Poland [...] No one here has made a good change since 1989". Consequently, his election manifesto promised that he will appoint the National Development Council to create a strategy for development "in areas in need of repair." Whether the promises and changes will halt the current exodus of Polish youth is a topic for future discussion and examination.

Discussion and Conclusion

Since I have returned to my country, I have only seen a rapid growth in new shopping malls, infrastructure, a lot of road works, funded projects here and there, new spaces for entertainment, new buildings, higher price tags, longer queues, and unfriendly admin staff (ever so infamous in Poland). I have only heard empty promises from the government that feed our hopes. I hear people complain on a regular basis whenever I take a bus or stop by the road to hitchhike. I hear my parents worry all the time, my brothers struggle to make ends meet, and my sister struggles because she does not have a job and is currently expecting a baby. I refuse to listen to the fake promises, to take minimum wage jobs, and I am not going to attach a photo to my CV and pray that there might be someone who picks it up.

The status quo is not right here and maybe if people would shed their fear and start to work together instead of against each other, we would all experience a little bit less nonsense in our lives. Please don't get me wrong, of course, I realize there are many countries that are far worse off nowadays, many people seek shelters and fight wars as we speak but this is essentially the reason for all conflict on this planet. No amount of words can change the way this world works but right here I take my space to share my account on life in the country I was born and like many other people, I am subjected to injustice on a regular basis. This was essentially the main reason why I left Poland as a young person. Another reason was lack of opportunity for better life and normality. I knew I could not count on any help from the government, I knew it back then and I know it now. For example, I have recently received a four page decision telling me why I am not eligible to receive the Job Seekers allowance because I did not satisfy the requirements of the tax office and that I resided in the foreign country for too long. Therefore I failed to prove the initial sentimental attachment to the country.

I knew I needed to leave to make my own living and raise standards of living for my family on my own and I knew nobody else will do it for me. After almost a decade I find myself rejoicing in my family and starting a college degree. But I will not surrender to poor living conditions and put up with a constant struggle for survival. I will not say YES to the question: "Are you prepared to work for a minimum wage?" in the Job Seekers office. I refuse to take extended hours, unskilled and underpaid jobs just to be able to pay bills and taxes. Not then, when I was inexperienced teenager with only a high school's certificate and not now when I am 31 years of age with almost a decade of experience and qualifications. If Poland will not change its politics and the system will not start to support graduates with creating spaces for them properly, the migrants who came back to give yet another go, will not be encouraged to stay and the brain drain will become irreversible and a hole in Poland's demography. Those who work hard to get their education soon will not be even considering a job here at all when they find themselves appreciated with better working conditions, health system, family entitlements and salaries abroad. Consequently, things will only get worse for Poland if the status quo will not start to work in favour of Polish citizens.

When I look at this country, I wonder, is there any way at all, to change this sad reality? And I think to myself, there's always a way but the biggest question remains, what is the priority here: power or people? Success often requires small but consistent steps, people working together, and we all need to integrate as a nation. Together we can take steps towards a better change but at the same time, I cannot get rid of the feeling that people nowadays, especially young Polish people, would rather take those steps outside the country borders.

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