Integration of new female migrants in Polish labor market and society and policies affecting integration: State of the Art

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Working Paper No. 9 – WP4
December 2006

Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society. Policy Assessment and Policy Recommendations
A Specific Targeted Research Project of the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission

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Introduction

This paper attempts a review of the academic literature concerned with the influx of immigrant women to Poland, and issues related to their integration. Its timeframe is the period from 1989 - the beginning of systemic transformation in Poland - to 2006: the most recent available publications. The year 1989 marks a significant turning point in Poland’s migration landscape as well as in the development of migration research. Poland has a long tradition as a sending country, whereas inflow of immigrants to Poland is a new phenomenon, and remains on a much smaller scale compared to Western European countries. Studies on international mobility carried out in Poland are decidedly dominated by those focusing on emigration and the Polish diaspora in traditional settlement countries, such as the USA, the United Kingdom and Germany, as well as those that did not appear on the map of destination countries until the 1990s. This is why the literature on the subject of immigration is so far modest, although the number of research projects being carried out is gradually increasing. As Ewa Jaźwińska, a leading specialist in migration studies, points out, research on the phenomenon of immigration to Poland is fragmentary. Furthermore, gender analyses of migration have only been taken up relatively recently in a Polish context. Krystyna Slany states that in the 1980s in Poland, as in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, “most of the sociological and demographic studies (of this phase) did not differentiate gender; analyses were written from a universal gender-neutral perspective.” Unfortunately it appears that this perspective remains dominant in Polish research.

Research on emigration

Although the phenomenon of emigration from Poland is not the focus of this paper, it is worth briefly introducing the current state of research on the topic, especially since it is within emigration studies that women have been ‘removed’ from the sidelines, and we see that analyses that only take the male point of view into account are being gradually dispensed with. In addition, experiences from research on emigration influence research on immigration, in terms of the research methods and techniques employed, as well as the theoretical concepts used. The literature also highlights the similarity of migration patterns and strategies of Polish women emigrants as compared to female economic migrants now arriving in Poland. In both cases, migration has a circular or seasonal character. The intensification of emigration after 1989, brought about by the fall of the political regime and a relaxation of restrictions on foreign travel, meant that research began to be taken up on a wider scale. The emigration of Poles after 1989 differed from the general global model of the time. This difference between migrants from Western countries and the Polish migrants is described by Marek Okólski in this way: “whereas ‘people in motion’, mostly aspired to finding for themselves a new, better place ‘in this world’, the Poles – ‘people on the seesaw’ – generally remained tied to their home, maintaining continual contact with it, treating their stay in new places as temporary and making a point of not attempting to make lasting social contacts there” (2002:11). Okólski suggests calling this type of migration ‘incomplete’, and the category would encompass “people incapable of settling in Poland’s modern economic centres or attaining a stable professional position in the ‘main current’ of the country’s economy, and at the same time people capable of making use of opportunities to earn a living in target countries, albeit at the cost that they are left in situations of temporariness, without documents (illegality) and with increased risk”. (2002: 60) A review of the research allows us to distinguish three main levels of analysis:

- Micro-structural – concerning questions of motives for emigration, decision-making strategies and categories of emigrants, and identity (e.g. Cieślińska 1992; Dyczewski 1993; Iglicka 1998; Grzegorzewska-Mischka 1998; Oleksyn 1992)
- Meso-structural – concentrates on relationships with family and friends, social networks, forms of family organization (e.g. Balcerzak-Paradowska 1994; Jaźwińska, Łukowski, Okólski 1997;

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1 c.f. Data on inflow of foreigners in report ‘Labour market demand for female migrants. The Polish Case’ (WP4)
2 The opportunity to leave Poland and stay for up to 3 months in the countries of Western Europe without a visa.
3 This is a symbolic division, since researchers generally use previous work on the theory of migration as complementary.
Romaniszyn 2000; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2002; Praszałowicz 2004), effects on local communities (e.g. Okólski 1998; Jaźwińska 2002),

The theoretical debate taking place in many European countries has not been significantly reflected in Polish literature on the migration and integration process. The dominant concepts used to explain the phenomenon are connections, networks, social capital, chain migration, and dual labour markets.

**From silence to visibility**

One characteristic of contemporary emigration from Poland is feminisation. Once this fact was discerned in statistics, analyses of various aspects of women’s emigration began to appear. However, in spite of the increased interest in women in Polish migration research, the category of gender is still often treated only as a variable. It appears that the majority of research belongs to the phase described by Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) as “women and migration”4. Until the end of the 1990s, economic interpretations were dominant in the literature, and the decision to emigrate was regarded as a strategy of families struggling in a difficult material situation. Gradually, however, the variety of motivations of women began to be recognized in research. Grzymała-Kazłowska (2001) points to the existence of two categories of emigrant women: those with their own family, aged around 30-45, whose departure is dictated by the family’s economic situation; and the young (aged around 20-30), free, single women in “the liminal period”, for whom leaving represents the start of a new life and the opportunity to free themselves from the social straightjacket of the control of the traditional environment.

Research in the past few years is characterised by ever stronger connections to gender studies. It focuses on the dual influence of emigration – on the one hand resulting in the greater emancipation of women, but on the other being an aspect of ‘double oppression’ (the concentration on ‘us’ instead of ‘me’ and migration as a family life strategy). This results in fewer employment opportunities for women and a lack of guarantee of an advance on the social ladder. According to Praszałowicz (2006), writing about Polish immigrants in Spain, “the main source of financial support of the women migrating to Spain is seasonal work abroad during the summer. During the rest of the year they rely on the support of their families and income of their husbands. The majority have secondary education and little work experience.” (2006:14).

A recent phenomenon pertains to the so-called ‘brain-drain’ effect: the out-flow of well-educated, well-qualified people. Among those leaving, professions dominated by women stand out, especially nurses and qualified social workers. This phenomenon is usually discussed in the context of free-market mechanisms. Research highlighting gendered aspects of migration, analysed for example from the perspective of the theory of trauma, becomes interesting through its focus on the reflexive subject of migration, and how it brings out people’s experiences, attitudes, values and behaviours from their narratives. The turn towards qualitative research enables us to rediscover, as Piotr Sztompka emphasises (2005), the sociology of everyday life, and to show how the world is experienced and understood by those studied, as well as the researcher. Furthermore, a sociological interpretation of everyday life and the reflexive dimensions to this means that people may incorporate their sociological knowledge into their lives. Turning towards everyday lived experiences makes it possible to discover things that have been hidden by a ‘curtain’ of normative cultural norms, that may be embarrassing or humiliating, and for which the female migrants often had to pay a high price. Without considering the trauma as an essential element of the migration process we cannot evaluate this process adequately.

While this review in fact concerns research on emigration, a read through the increasingly extensive literature devoted to inflow to Poland suggests that the experiences gained from studies on

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4 Sotelo (2003: 5-8) distinguishes three phases in the history of gender migration studies. The first is “women and migration”, also known as the “add and stir approach”; the second “gender and migration”; and the last, currently being experienced, in which gender is treated as a constitutive element of immigration.
Polish diasporas will condition thinking on immigrants, especially given the increasing quantities of migration models.

**Immigration – a new phenomenon**

As emphasized in the introduction, immigration in Poland is a new, and not fully recognized phenomenon. A literature review shows a dominance of qualitative studies, carried out amongst immigrant communities, using techniques such as narrative interviews, focused interviews, and observations. Such research aims to look into the world of the immigrant’s life, and focuses on the conditions determining their conduct and the process of adaptation to a new reality. It provides an important source of information concerning the barriers and problems with which immigrants struggle, and can thus be useful for the formation of an integration policy. As in the case of research on emigration, gender is only one of many variables, and the feminisation observed in statistics has so far not been reflected in detailed studies. Praszalowicz claims that, with the exception of Kindler’s research on the economic migration of Ukrainian women, “so far there are no Polish studies which focus on the fate of women within the stream of repatriates, asylum seekers or high-skilled immigrants from the West” (2006: 4). It is necessary, therefore, to sketch the general state of research on the phenomenon of immigration in Poland.

An undoubted handicap, as pointed out by many researchers (e.g. Okólski 2003, Supińska et al. 2003, Kępinska 2004; Jaźwińska 2006, Tanajewski 2006; Bijak, Koryś 2006), is the lack of in-depth statistical data. The statistics that are available in Poland (GUS (Główny Urząd Statystyczny – the Polish Central Statistical Office), U RitC (Urząd do Spraw Repatriacji I Cudzoziemców – the Office for Repatriation and Aliens), the Border Guard, individual government ministries) are fragmentary, and do not entirely reflect the reality of migration, since they do not take into account certain important categories, such as undocumented immigrants, and pendular or circular workers (c.f. Nowicka, Cieślińska 2005). Detailed information is also lacking on victims of human trafficking, and people employed in the sex industry (although other countries too struggle with similar problems). The most reliable source on numbers of immigrants in Poland is the results of the National Census carried out in 2002, in which, for the first time, an attempt was made to provide a quantitative recognition of the phenomenon of immigration. Jaźwińska describes these results as “important, invaluable material”, since “estimating migratory flow and sources on the basis of partial research is practically impossible” (2006: 2). However, even these results are not error-free and were not spared criticisms highlighting their inaccurate assessments of migratory flows. Tanajewski points towards neglect in the preparation and execution of the census, as well as the fact that immigrants, particularly those without papers, would deliberately avoid the census-taker (2006: 54). Furthermore, registration data do not provide exhaustive information on inflow, leaving out important categories of immigrants, such as Pendular or informal immigrants.

**Categories of immigrants**

An intensified inflow of migrants has meant that social life has transformed in the sense that migrants have become an important element (Nowicka, Nawrocki 1996). Studies show that migrants of just about every category arrive in Poland: economic migrants, refugees, transit migrants, highly-qualified white-collar workers (so-called managerial migration), remigrants and repatriates. The majority of studies focus on the largest economic immigrant communities: Ukrainians, Belarusians and Vietnamese. The most common problem highlighted by researchers is isolation and marginalisation amongst undocumented immigrants, connected to their lack of participation in social and cultural life (e.g.

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5 As a consequence, the estimated numbers of paperless immigrants vary between 500,000 and almost 1.5 million.
6 By a census-taker we mean a person responsible for locating households, listing addresses, as well as conducting interviews with respondents.
Chodubski 2000; Supińska et al. 2003). Researchers point out the existence of the dual labour market strongly favoured by traffic infrastructure, labour exchange and social networks (see for example Antoniowski 1997; Grzymała Moszczyńska, Nowicka 1998).

Another crucial problem they point to concerns the ambiguous image of discrimination of immigrants in Poland. Official statistics frequently refute the concept (c.f. Supińska et al. 2003), while empirical research suggests that discrimination takes place’. Worthy of note are, for example, the studies carried out by A. Rajkiewicz’s research group (1998) on the work of Ukrainians and Belarusians, which take into consideration employment in grey area of the economy. This research found that, irrespective of legal status (those with or without papers), immigrants experienced discrimination in the labour market (lower pay, longer working hours, unclear contracts), as well as poor living conditions.

We can assume that discriminatory practices towards immigrants equally affect both women and men. A significant proportion of the immigrant population is made up of pendular migrants. According to Łukowski (1997), these migrations are encouraged by the existence of an international manufacture and trade corporation made up of grey-market producers, bazaars and carriers, around which a large-scale service sector has developed.

Research on migration has also addressed the issue of the integration process of economic immigrants. Studies carried out on the Vietnamese community have shown it to be insular and prone to seeking security within the own cultural group (Głowala 2002: 155). Antoniowski and Koryś put it simply as “the evolution of the Vietnamese diasporas towards the creation of an ethnic ghetto” (2002: 12). In Vietnam the great Confucian tradition and the small tradition of cults of a local community operate. Similarly, in the Vietnamese milieu in Poland the cultural tradition of the settlement country is the great tradition, while the traditions of the Vietnamese community are becoming the small culture (Halik 1999: 17).

Interesting research on economic immigration has recently been carried out by IPiSS (Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych – Institute of Labour and Social Studies) (Golinowska 2004). Its goal was to determine the reasons for employing immigrants from other countries, and recognize the motivation of economic subjects (workplaces and households). For this reason only the point of view of the Polish employer was considered, while no account was given of the intentions and needs of the immigrants themselves. For companies attempting to meet the demands of market economics and tough competition, immigrant workers play an important role in stabilizing the position of the company, and facilitating its continued existence (Golinowska 2004: 180). It has been suggested that foreigners with qualifications indispensable in new market conditions find legal employment, whereas those who are competitive only because of the cheap labour they can offer add to the grey market. Different motivations are offered by people employing immigrants in households; and in this case the most important factor is low cost, rather than quality of services (2004: 200).

Marta Kindler’s research on Ukrainian women working as domestic servants (she refers to the “Ukrainisation” of this sector in Poland) utilised risk theory. “Risk is present in my respondents’ lives both when they are abroad and at home. Ukrainian domestic workers in Poland trade economic and other risks present in and around their household in Ukraine for risk related to irregular migration and domestic work abroad” (2006: 2). It means that the risks present in a sending country (Ukraine) are replaced with other risks in a destination country (Poland). Ukrainian women working in Poland have their own individual “risk portfolio”; they do not associate migration to Poland with a high risk, and geographical proximity means that special financial expenses are not required. Kindler draws attention to the differences in the situations of live-in and non-live-in domestic workers. Immigration for the latter is initially associated with greater risk, but relatively quickly, they develop social networks that lead to a sense of stabilisation. Women taking up employment with accommodation, however, attain a sense of security only in the first phase of immigration. Losing their job means losing their home at the same time, and the less well-developed networks and resources they tend to have make it harder to return to the job market (2006: 22).

Socio-political transformation has had an influence on levels of return migration, and Poland has come to be perceived as a country of new opportunities, attractive especially for specialists (such as managers, engineers) and people willing to start up their own businesses in an emerging market economy.

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7 That it has been impossible to reach an unambiguous conclusion could, according to Supińska, result from the small numbers of legal immigrants together with flawed statistical data-gathering (2003: 85).
In the 1990s it proved difficult to determine the exact numbers of remigrants, since GUS collects information based solely on the country of origin of immigrants, while not accounting for citizenship. Furthermore, it is important to consider also people who did not officially register their departure, and whose return therefore escapes the statistics (c.f. Sakson 2002, Jończy 2003, Fidel, Górny, Matejko 2006). It is estimated that, in the 1990s, remigrants may have made up as much as half of the inflow to Poland (Iglicka 2002, Górny, Osipovic 2006).

Studies on the phenomenon of return migration conducted in Poland at the end of the 1990s used qualitative research methods, and revealed the motivations, strategies and consequences of migration (Heffner, Soldra-Gwiżdź 1997, Iglicka 2002, Górny, Osipovic 2006). The reference points of the pioneering project conducted by ISP (Iglicka 2002) were Cerase’s remigration typology and Bourdieu’s theory of different forms of capital. The analysis showed that every form of capital transferred during the process of remigration can lead to social change, understood here as coming closer to Western standards in all aspects of life, and hence a remigrant is conceived of as an effective actor creating new forms of social life (Weinar 2002: 76). The type of change and its consequences for the society to which migrants return, as well as the migrant him/herself, are dependent on the resources that can be reproduced or transferred (Weinar 2002: 42). Research findings show that the most significant changes have to do with the effects of the transmission of cultural capital. Equally important is the interest of and support from the state in creating active policies to facilitate the transfer of capital. Górny and Osipovic (2006) were the first to attempt a quantitative assessment of the phenomenon. Utilising the theory of transfer of capital, they concentrate on remigrants who have higher education, regarded as the most likely to occupy key positions in particular sectors, or to run their own businesses. The studies revealed a significant professional activity among remigrants, and emphasized their positive role in the development of the Polish economy through competent use of capital acquired abroad (2006: 44).

Repatriates constitute a special category – these are people of Polish origin, coming to Poland with a repatriation visa, and with the intention to settle permanently. They acquire Polish citizenship automatically on crossing the border. The Preamble to the Repatriation Act states that “it is the duty of the Polish State to enable the repatriation of Poles who have remained in the East, and especially in the Asian part of the former USSR, and who have never been able, owing to deportation, exile or other ethnic or political persecution, to settle in Poland”. The repatriation drive is targeted especially at people not covered by the agreement between the USSR and Poland and repatriation programmes in 1945-48 and 1956-59.

Academic publications concerning the issue of repatriation are exploratory in character, and focus on identifying demographic and professional structures, motivation, conditions determining repatriation (especially in the context of networks and connections), and factors favouring or complicating adaptation (Kozłowski 1999, Piątek 2001). These publications emphasize that repatriates are mostly made up of people born abroad, who are not aware of Poland’s cultural and economic realities, and generally have a fragmentary knowledge of the country (Hut 2002; Mucha 2001, Piątek 2001). Paweł Hut (2002) suggests using the terms “impatriates” and “impatriation”. It appears that their experience is closer to that of classical immigration than that of returning.

Piątek (2001) uses Kovacs and Cropley’s model of adaptation, which encompasses four dimensions – physical, cultural, social and personal – to identify the most important factors determining a successful adaptation process. In addition to individual qualifications (education, knowledge of languages, professional experience) and predispositions, the issue of genuine motivation is seen to have great significance. The process of integration is suggested to run faster for repatriates with a strong “ideological” motivation and clearly defined goals than for those following economic conditions (2001: 304). Furthermore an assessment of government integration programmes confirms that “in making efforts on the housing and financial fronts, putting a person on the labour market quickly tends to be forgotten about” (2001: 303). Bronisław Kozłowski (2006) highlights the local community’s

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8 Glowny Urzad Statystyczny - Central Statistical Office.
9 The agreements in question only affected people in possession of Polish citizenship before September 17, 1939. From 1945 to 1949 1.5 million people were repatriated to Poland, and 250,000 was the figure during the second repatriation (Bugaj 1982, Latuch 1994). From 1997 to 2003 4,259 repatriations occurred, of which 39% were from Kazakhstan (Demographic Yearbook 2004).
perception of repatriates. Although the repatriates feel a strong sense of belonging to the Polish nation, their lack of cultural competences causes them to be perceived as ‘foreign’ by their neighbours. The limited knowledge of Poles about the situation of those Poles living beyond the eastern border, along with stereotypical thinking, serves to deepen this tendency (2006: 129).

Not much research has been concerned with the phenomenon of refugees in Poland (c.f. Florczak 2003). The papers that are available are usually the results of fieldwork conducted in refugee centers, and amongst representatives of communities living in the immediate vicinity of the centers. The studies present on the one hand the adaptation mechanisms and strategies employed by the refugees confronting a new reality – a specific case of “the culture shock” phenomenon – and on the other the reactions of residents: the perception of refugees as outsiders (e.g. Moszczyńska, Nowicka 1998; Ząbek 2001; 2002).

According to Ząbek (1999; 2002), cultural dissimilarity and isolation (especially at the waiting stage for a decision on applications for refugee status) cause refugees to experience feelings of being alien, different, and isolated more often than other categories of immigrants.

Studies conducted in refugee centers also reveal a lack of knowledge and competence of officers employed there that are necessary for work in this particular field. (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2000).

The introduction of a market economy and inflow of foreign capital has brought with it a new category of immigration to Poland: high-class specialist management executives migrating worldwide for professional reasons. They create their own culture, supraethnic and supranational, a managerial culture of business (Supińska 2003), and an individual class of cosmopolitans. Romaniszyn emphasizes the significance of this transplanting of cultural management models and work organization onto Polish soil (2002: 48).

Agnieszka Wajder, describing this type of mobility as “eternal wandering” (2002: 189), notes that adaptation to new conditions almost exclusively takes place at the level of public institutions (2002: 201). These immigrants do not form links outside of their own culture (executive), and contact with Polish culture is minimal. According to Krystyna Iglicka (2000), this type of migration will gradually diminish, as Poland acquires its own highly-qualified executives. This theory does, though, leave room for doubt. The world is witnessing an enlargement of the cosmopolitan class, and young, well-qualified Poles too are inclined to join this category of people in motion, leaving room for others on the way.

Increased mobility in the countries of the former communist bloc, together with the inflow of immigrants through the eastern border, have led to an escalation in Poland of the phenomenon of mixed marriages. Górny and Kępińska’s (2005) analysis of the mechanisms at work in forming marriages used the example of Ukrainian-Polish relationships, and set this within the framework of rational choice theory. Their results show that it is usually women that settle in the home country of their husbands, and that it is they too who are the most likely to experience challenges in the process of adaptation. Distinctive is the fact that marriages were not usually caused by a desire to settle in Poland, but finding a partner occurred after emigration.

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10 Researchers (e.g. Supińska et al. 2003; Grzymała-Kazłowska et al. 2003) note that in everyday language this category is rarely known as “immigrants”; instead neutral terms such as “foreigner” are more likely to be used; “apparently the term ‘immigrant’ (especially ‘temporary’) is used in Polish for immigrants who are less qualified or of a lower social status” (2003: 14).
Summary

The basic conclusion that the analysis of all this material brings to mind is that the stories of women must be rendered visible and brought into the light of day, and that the particularities and varieties of female migrants’ experiences should be emphasized. It appears too that there are too few studies in which the authors, aside from describing the phenomena at hand, actually try to explain them. At the same time it is important to stress that interest in these issues is on the increase, and that hopes for more extensive research and deeper analysis are justified.

The following research projects provide an example of growing interest in this field:

- Female Migration Vision - Institute of Statistics and Demography, Warsaw School of Economics, project funded by Fondazione Brodolini
- FEMAGE: Needs for Female Immigrants and their Integration in Ageing Societies – Central European Forum for Migration Research International Organization for Migration, carried out within EU Framework Programme.

The aim of the former was to identify the phenomenon of the female migratory flows and to examine the implications for the host and origin countries. Research was focused both on statistical and qualitative data. The later is still in progress and its objectives are to generate knowledge about obstacles and needs for opportunity enhancement for economic and social integration and emancipation of women immigrants in a life-course perspective, identify requirements for integrative interaction between immigrants and national population in the host country.

It is worth briefly listing here the subjects still awaiting further exploration, and pointing out what is missing from the research and papers that has been produced so far, especially with regards to gender and migration studies:

- ‘Faulty’ statistics and reports – or ‘gender-blind’, ignoring the important variable of gender.
- A lack of empirical research in which the experiences of both genders and their relations are confronted.11
- There are many papers that merely describe concrete phenomena at the expense of a debate taking place at a more analytical and theoretical level.
- Limited research on integration and the labour market; looking at equal conditions, potential discriminatory practices, recognition, and respect for social rights.
- The need for a combined study and analysis of categories such as gender, class, ‘race’ and ethnicity.

The combination of the two processes – emigration and immigration – resulting in e.g. ‘paid’ transnational households (when female migrant is a mother, she is often forced to leave behind her own children in the care of other woman).
- Prostitution and trafficking require detailed research.

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11 Filling this demand would mean entering the previously mentioned 2nd phase of gendered migration studies – “gender and migration”. Morokvasic too points to this perspective: “gendering migration does not only mean that one should be adding women where they are missing. It means looking at processes and discourses in migrations involving women and men and their relations to one another.” (2003: 10-11)
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