

## **Poles and the European Migration Problem at the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Restoration of Polish National Independence**

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*Today, in the times of the immigration crisis which Europe is experiencing, a question arises as to whether Polish society is prepared to support the contemporary refugees. It is the aim of this paper to provide an answer to the question, as well as presenting Polish attitudes to accepting migrants in their country and an attempt to analyse the grounds of their convictions.*

Key words: *migrations; refugees; security*

Migrations, the movements of people, their peregrinations from one place to another are a process which has always accompanied mankind. They are one of the constant features of contemporary world in which dealing with the causes and consequences of migrations are becoming a challenge for the societies of numerous countries. This explains the focus of the attention of the representatives of particular scientific disciplines on the analysis of the roots of migrations, the process of the migrants' adaptation to new conditions, as well as the social, economic, and political consequences for the countries of destination.

A decision to emigrate is never an easy one, and the processes and events that are the grounds for such decisions are important and diverse. Analysis of the basis of migration make it possible to differentiate it according to the motives of the decision, dividing migrations into economic, social, political, and religious. Taking into account the freedom of decision migrations can be divided into voluntary and forced. The conditions of migrations influence their intensity (number of participants), their geographical direction, and their duration (permanent and temporary migrations).<sup>1</sup> Most of the contemporarily observed migrations occur on economic grounds (economic migrations), because their aim is to improve the migrants' material conditions (life conditions).<sup>2</sup> Political migrations are common, as well, and they occur when migrants seek protection from various forms of discrimination in their native countries, and when they are victims of civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and political turmoil. The boundary between them and economic migrations is fluent and it is difficult to be unambiguously defined, because

“political reasons are frequently powerfully connected with difficult material situation of the migrants who, when leaving their country, hope not only to increase their political freedom, but also to improve their level of life.”<sup>3</sup>

A crucial problem in the discussion on migrations are their consequences. What is taken into account in the undertaken analysis are the situation of the migrants and their families (stress, separation, loneliness) and the situation and the attitude of the societies of the destination countries.<sup>4</sup> For the latter, the otherness of the refugees, their religion, customs, traditions, language, and mentality may constitute a problem.<sup>5</sup> The otherness may lead to fears or even a sense of being in danger, which can justify the lack of acceptance of the “strangers” receiving help and support. The question gains particular importance in light of the migration crisis in Europe, which has been caused by a stream of refugees from war-torn countries outside of Europe and the limited capabilities of the destination countries to deal with them. The cultural differences (including religious ones) and the lack of acceptance of the differences in the behaviour, lifestyles, and the ways of manifesting needs and convictions of the arriving people encourage discussion over who ought to be granted help (asylum), and who ought not to be granted it (there is a clear tendency to label economic migrants non-refugees). At the same time, according to the references sources, “everyone who has been forced to leave their place of permanent residence as a result of political persecution, war, the will to improve their living conditions, natural disasters, economic breakdowns, and social and political changes” is to be considered a refugee.<sup>6</sup> International Human Rights Organisations state that “regardless of whether individuals are fleeing persecution, political violence, conflict, natural disasters, or poverty” they qualify as refugees.<sup>7</sup>

Many times in their history Poles have been refugees. The motives of the decisions to migrate (selection of the country of destination) would change in

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<sup>1</sup> Dziubacka K. (2010). Work as a value in the experience balance. *Czech – Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*. Brno, pp. 79–91.

<sup>2</sup> Pilch A. (ed.) (1984). *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych (XVIII–XX w.)* [Emigration from Polish lands in modern and contemporary times (17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century)]. Warszawa, PWN.

<sup>3</sup> Korczyńska J. (2003). Sezonowe wyjazdy zarobkowe Polaków do Niemiec [Polish seasonal travels to Germany for earning purposes]. Warszawa, Scholar, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Danilewicz W. (2007). Społeczne konsekwencje migracji zagranicznych [Social consequences of migrations abroad] *Migracja. Uchodźstwo. Wielokulturowość. Zderzenie kultur we współczesnym świecie* [Migration. Refugees. Multiculturality. A clash of cultures in the contemporary world]. Warszawa “Żak”, pp. 152–166.

<sup>5</sup> Jeznach A. M. (2007). Świat „innego”, świat „obcego” – świat uchodźcy [The world of the “other”, the world of the “stranger”]. *Migracja. Uchodźstwo ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–126.

<sup>6</sup> Oleksiewicz I. *Uchodźcy w Unii Europejskiej – aspekty prawne i polityczne* [Refugees in the European Union – legal and political aspects]. Bydgoszcz – Rzeszów, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Uchodźcy świata* (1998). [Refugees of the world]. Warsaw, PWN, p. 35.

connection with the character of the push factors. One ought to note that the migrations in the times of the Partitions of Poland (17<sup>th</sup> century) were motivated by political persecution, and those in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were of a typically economic character (the poorer members of the Polish society migrating “for bread”).<sup>8</sup> The years of the Nazi occupation (1939–1944) were a period of forced migration (e.g. for forced labour in Germany). It was strictly connected with the course of the war. In the 1960s it were mostly Poles with Jewish roots who migrated. The decisions of the 1980s were formed by both economic (travelling to find work) and political factors (e.g. repressions against the anti-communist opposition).<sup>9</sup> To confirm the coexistence of these two types of motivation, R. Habielski stated: “While the declared motive of the decisions to leave the country after the introduction of the martial law was the political situation in Poland, the *de facto* motives for migration were frequently of a mixed economic and political character. For many Poles, especially young people, the decision to emigrate had a significant economic basis. The economic crisis of the turn of the 1970s and the 1980s led to a substantial deterioration of the living conditions of numerous Polish families.”<sup>10</sup> The Polish accession to the European Union at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the opening of the borders after signing the Schengen Treaty marked the beginning of the period of the free crossing of borders which lasts until today; people do not need visas to reside in EU countries, and they can also look for employment there. The changing face of Poland, with the rising parameters of the living standard, democratisation, and political stability, make it, along with other EU member states, one of the potential destinations of the journey of those individuals who have been forced to emigrate. However, are Poles and Poland ready to accept them? The accuracy of the thesis confirming the above question results from the earlier reflections and it is related to Polish memory: it is expected of those who remember their own history and the help which they have received to “pay back” the debt incurred throughout generations. The basis of the second premise is the proverbial Polish hospitality which has been confirmed by the numerous instances when political, religious, and economic refugees<sup>11</sup> needed help in the past. What follows is the Christian faith, to which the majority of Poles declaratively belong, which teaches an open and natural readiness to help all those in need. The accuracy of the conviction presented here has been undermined by the negative stance of the Polish

<sup>8</sup> Thomas W. I. – Znaniński F. (1976). *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce* [The Polish peasant in Europe and in America]. Warsaw, LSW.

<sup>9</sup> Korczyńska J. (2003). *Sezonowe wyjazdy zarobkowe Polaków do Niemiec*. Warszawa, pp. 34ff; Danilewicz W., *Społeczne konsekwencje ... op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>10</sup> Habielski R. (1995). *Emigracja* [Emigration]. Warsaw.

<sup>11</sup> <https://wiadomości.onet.pl/tylkowonecie/przyjelismy-14-tysiecy-greckich-uchodzcow-dzisiaj-potomek-mowi-polacy-nie-ucza-sie-z/tyqzb1z>

government on the relocation of refugees to Poland,<sup>12</sup> as well as the divided opinions of the Polish society.<sup>13</sup> This fact does not, however, allow one to cease to search for the answer to the question formulated above; it also dictates the need to broaden the area of investigation to look into the conditioning of the manifested convictions and attitudes. I tend to support the thesis that they are determined not only by the parameters of social capital but also the sense of security (vs. danger), which in the face of a territorial proximity of “strangers”/“others” may be weakened (or reinforced). When focusing on the “sense of security”, and thus making this sense the basis for the analysis in the empirical part of the present reflections, we need to point to reference sources, in which this sense is typically defined as the “lack of dangers.” Two aspects are defined: objective (real danger) and subjective (the sense of being in danger). The former includes real threats and is subject to rational judgement, whereas the latter focuses on psychological reception. People’s “sense of security” is typically connected with such areas of their functioning as the natural environment, the economy, the labour market, social life, politics, as well as conditions “in which the society may preserve and nurture the values decisive in their identity (ideals, spiritual values), which are directly linked to cultural security, and a certain way of life / lifestyle.”<sup>14</sup> Does then, indeed, conviction that the quality of the functioning of Polish people in certain aspects of their lives will decrease lie at the basis of their lack of willingness to accept refugees in their country? The answers to the formulated questions and doubts will be sought through author’s own research, conducted at the turn of 2017 and 2018.<sup>15</sup> They are a part of a larger project pertaining to the living conditions of Poles and the factors decisive in the attractiveness of places of residence. Sense of security was mentioned as one of the factors determining the above. The method organizing the course of the research was a diagnostic survey, and the tool was a questionnaire including 54 open- and closed-ended questions. The surveyed included residents of rural and urban areas: women and men over 25 years of age who are financially independent. The interviewees were a group of

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<sup>12</sup> Stolarczyk M. (2017). Stanowisko Polski wobec kryzysu migracyjno-uchodźczego Unii Europejskiej [Polish stance on the migration and refugee crisis]. *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe* 2017/2, pp. 15–41 file:///c:/Users/Krystyna/Downloads/ksm\_2017\_2\_01\_Stolarczyk.pdf (retrieved: 03. 01. 2019).

<sup>13</sup> In May 2016 55% of Poles were opposed to accepting refugees: See: Public Opinion Research Centre. Research report No. 79/2016, source: [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.Pol/2016/K\\_079\\_16.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.Pol/2016/K_079_16.PDF) (06. 01. 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Michałowska G. (1997). Bezpieczeństwo kulturowe, w warunkach globalizacji procesów społecznych [Cultural security in the conditions of the globalisation of social processes]. Bobrow D. B. – Haliżak E. – Zięba R. (eds.), *Bezpieczeństwo narodowe i międzynarodowe u schyłku XX w.* [National and international security at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century]. Kraków Scholar, p. 132.

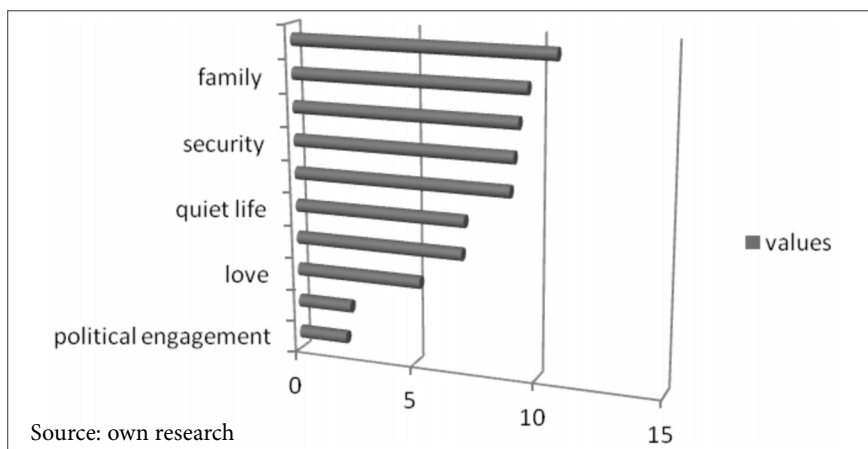
<sup>15</sup> Own research conducted as part of the statute donation to maintain research potential.

volunteer university students who had taken part in a few hours of training prior to the research. With their help, empirical material in the form of 2,986 questionnaires was collected in the course of four months. The collected data underwent statistical analysis. What was crucial to the entirety of the project was the layout of the particular variables and the relationships between them. Because of the limitations arising from the assumed scheme of the current study and its subject matter, some of the variables are not taken into account. The results cannot be treated as representative, nevertheless, they constitute a cognitively value source of knowledge.

We shall begin this part of the paper with a presentation of the features of the sociodemographic location of the participants of the study. That is done because of the role which is assigned to the particular features in conditioning the manifested convictions, attitudes, individual assessments of the observed phenomena and the mentioned problems. The researched was focused on the representatives of both genders, with women constituting 54.3% of the participants. The youngest participant was 25 years old, and the oldest 80. All were of Polish nationality and the prevailing majority were Christian. 38.8% resided in rural areas, and 27.3% in small cities. 19.58% resided in medium-size cities, and 14.3% in large cities. Analyses of the marital status have shown that married persons constituted 60.7% of the research participants, and persons in informal relationships made up 14.4%. 15.6% declared that they were single, 4.6% – widows and widowers, and 4.7% – divorced. The respondents' levels of education also varied: the most highly represented group was that of persons with higher education (Bachelor's and Master's degree) – 40.1%, and the least highly represented group was that of persons with primary education (or incomplete primary education) – 2.6%. Among the research participants 84.8% were in employment. 8.4% were retired or unemployed because of health reasons, 6.4% were unemployed, and 1.6% had never been employed. It ought to be added that in the assessments of living conditions (the economic aspect) 65.6% of the respondents declared that they were good, and 22.6% that they were very good. 11.3% were unsatisfied with their living conditions, with 0.3% assessing them as very bad. 59.6% assessed their present as better than their past, 30.2% did not notice any changes, and 10.1% stated that their situation now is worse than in the past. The future, when taking into account conditions of economic, political, and social nature, was considered by 48.1% participants as better than the present, in the opinion of 15% it was to remain the same, and 3.2% "predicted" that it would be worse. One-third of the participants of the study (33.5%) expressed a conviction that "you cannot know what to expect in the future." Let us also consider the sense of security, as conditioned by the administrative features of the place of residence. To the question on where it is safer to live, 23.2% replied that it was in rural areas, 38% indicated cities, and 38.8% of the research subjects perceived administrative divisions as irrelevant to the matter.

When analysing the basis of the system of values formed by the respondents it ought to be noticed that in principle it is consistent with the results of the studies published in reference sources by other Polish researchers and it is based on such values as health, family, and work.<sup>16</sup> The high ranking position of “security” is an exception.

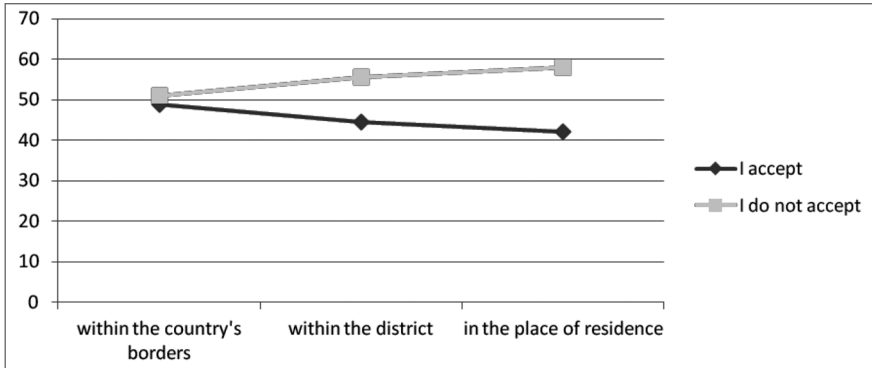
Graph 1. The system of values of the research participants.



When focusing on the attitudes towards refugees (migrants) within the country borders, it ought to be stated that the results of own research confirm their consistence with the available results of the polls pertaining to this subject. Let us, therefore, note that 51.1% of the respondents present a negative attitude to the project of the relocation of refugees to within Polish borders, with 48.8% accepting the idea. Let us add that the character of the declarations would change depending on the potential location of the refugees: the closer they were to be located to the place of residence of the respondent, the fewer respondents expressed their acceptance. This situation is presented in the graph below.

<sup>16</sup> Falkowska M. – Lewandowska J. – Wciórka B. – Wenzel M. (2005). System wartości materialnych i niematerialnych [System of material and immaterial values]. *Polska. Europa. Świat. Opinia Publiczna w okresie integracji* [Poland. Europe. The world. Public opinion in the period of integration]. Warsaw, Scholar.

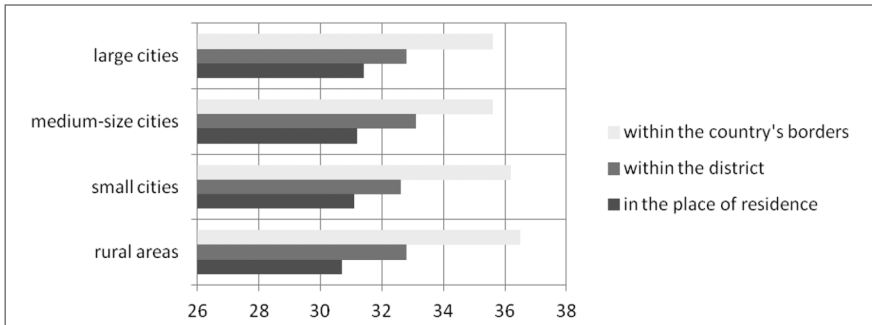
Graph 2. Acceptance of the presence of refugees in Poland.



Source: own research

When broadening the area of the undertaken analysis let us also note that a tendency (statistically insignificant) was observed of a correlation of the acceptance (of the lack thereof) with the place of residence of the respondents.

Graph 3. The level of the acceptance of the presence of refugees in Poland as conditioned by the place of residence of the respondents.



Source: own research

It has been shown, therefore, that with a low level of the acceptance of the presence of refugees in Poland the inhabitants of large cities are more frequently ready to welcome them in their place of residence than the inhabitants of smaller administrative units. The residents of rural areas, in turn, declare a slightly higher acceptance of the potential presence of refugees in their country, with a lower acceptance of such presence in the vicinity of their place of residence.

Consistently with the assumptions of the present study, in the analysis of the factors determining the declarations we make the attempt to answer the question as to the connection between them and the sense of security. Attributing significance to the above results from a high ranking position of “security”, which has been proven by the presented hierarchy of values, constructed on the basis of the individual preferences of the research participants. The high position of this value can be explained by recalling the “deficit hypothesis”, according to which we value the highest that which we lack, or that which is threatened. When a given value becomes a deficient article, or changes its instrumental character, its significance also decreases.<sup>17</sup> Qualitative analysis of empirical material made it possible to define three areas in which these fears were typically located. They include: personal security, cultural security, and economic security. Selected justifications of the negative attitudes of the respondents have been placed in the table below.

Table 1. The defined areas of danger.

<b>Personal security</b>	<b>Cultural security</b>	<b>Economic security</b>
<i>“I think it might be dangerous.”</i>	<i>“They don’t want to assimilate.”</i>	<i>“We can’t afford to accept migrants. There isn’t enough work for Poles.”</i>
<i>“You can hear about what they’re doing in the world. I wouldn’t want them to live nearby.”</i>	<i>“They should live in their own countries, their own motherlands, their own religion.”</i>	<i>“They are too costly for the country’s budget”</i>
<i>“I’m simply scared.”</i>	<i>“Too many things divide us. I want to live with Poles and among Poles.”</i>	<i>“And we’ll have to compete with them for jobs? It’s hard already, how hard is it going to be when they arrive?”</i>

Source: own research. Only the statements received in direct contact with the respondents have been included.

<sup>17</sup> Czapiński J. *Diagnoza Społeczna 2007. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków* [Social diagnosis 2007. The living conditions and the quality of life of Poles], p. 193.



Statements of the respondents referring to the functioning in the selected areas of life have also been made by those who expressed understanding of the necessity to accept migrants (personal and economic security, cultural security more rarely). The following arguments were made: "They work and they support the country's budget", "They can be here as long as they work and provide for themselves", "I don't see them as harmful", "I accept helping the migrants, but I'm worried about my family when I see what's going on in France and in Germany", "They are human and they need help", "They aren't a problem to me. Poles are also migrants in other countries", "If something bad was going on in my country I'd also like to have somewhere to run to", and "Poles also used to need help in the past."

At the end let us note that among the arguments there were also those of xenophobic and racist character: "I don't tolerate strangers. They have their own countries, let them stay there", "I don't tolerate different skin colours", "Depends who, but not blacks or Muslims." The problem of xenophobia in Poland is discussed by prof Czapiński who formulated the thesis (which has been confirmed by the work of his research team) that the percentage of persons with xenophobic attitudes is rising: from 26.8% in 2009 to 32.3% in 2015.<sup>18</sup> The connection between xenophobia and the sense of security (vs danger) is quite clear, because we fear that which we do not know, which is "strange", which is "different." That is why the arrival of the "other", as many are convinced, may constitute a threat to national stability, the achieved living standard, or the sense of security, in a broad understanding of the term.

The idea of the present paper was to attempt to contribute to the discussion around the migration crisis in western Europe while at the same time presenting the attitudes of the Polish society towards a potential relocation of some of the refugees to within the Polish borders. The analysis carried out on the basis of own research not only confirmed the consistence of the stance of the research participants with the results of the polls conducted by Public Opinion Research Centre (in May 2016 55.6% of Poles opposed the relocation of refugees to Poland), but they have also made it possible to confirm the role of the "sense of security" as a significant factor (not the only one) determining the character of the declarations provided. As a result of the analysis three areas of the everyday functioning of the research participants were defined as reference points. Therefore, in the areas of personal, economic, and cultural security an individual analysis of all the voices "for" and "against" was conducted. Let us refer also to the living standard and quality of life declarations of the respondents. Their parameters predestine, as it seems, to the preparedness to provide help and to the openness to the initiative to support the needy. On the other hand, however, the cost which is borne on the path to reach a certain status may facilitate fears

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 351.

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connected with losing it as a consequence of the arrival of “strangers.” The accuracy of the above is supported by the predictions about one’s future. Although optimistic convictions were prevalent (48.1%), there was also a group of 33.5% who were concerned and thus expressed the thought that “I don’t know what to expect in the near future.” Time will show whether the arguments made on the basis of the results of our research were justified.