

Press note about the inhabitants of Podlaskie Voivodship returning from abroad

Upon the request of the Voivodship Labour Office in Białystok, in the framework of the project entitled "Observatory of Social Policy for Podlasie region", co-financed from the European Social Fund in the framework of the 2007-2013 Human Capital Operational Programme, IPC Research Institute from Wrocław conducted a survey on the inhabitants of Podlaskie Voivodship returning from abroad. The study was conducted in the period from April to November 2012. The main purpose of the study was to define the nature of the phenomenon of returns of the inhabitants of Podlaskie Voivodship from abroad, as well as diagnosing their social and professional situation, their needs and expectations.

The project involved the use of various research techniques, from secondary data analysis, through large-scale quantitative research covering almost seven thousand households, to qualitative research in form of individual in-depth interviews, and focused group interviews with returning migrants – says Jarosław Sawicki, Research Director of IPC Research Institute.

In the quantitative study, conducted using the technique of computer-aided telephone interviews, we screened almost seven thousand households. Such a large sample was designed to determine the extent of the phenomenon of return migration with as little statistical error as possible. Our studies show that this phenomenon appears in more than 2% of the households – adds Artur Kotliński, Managing Director of IPC Research Institute.

The districts (poviats) in which the return migration phenomenon is most visible, are Sejny and Augustów poviats (the phenomenon concerns about 4% of the households). The poviats of origin of most present emigrants, i.e. people who are currently staying abroad, are Mońki and Sejny poviats (the phenomenon occurs in about 10 - 11% of the households). Globally, in Podlaskie Voivodship, it concerns more than 7% of the households.

The people who returned from migration do not constitute too large a group among the unemployed. Returns in the intensity indicated by available data, do not mean great changes on the labour market in the region. The migrants' professional situation is relatively good. Up to 71% work full time, 7.5% run their own businesses, and only 5.5% work part-time. 4% of respondents are on a pension or retirement, 3.5% did not have a job and not looking for work, 3.5% are taught, and 1.5% of completed education. 3.5% did not indicate precisely what it does. This does not mean, however, that returning migrants do not need help. First of all, returning migrants need stability, and some of them are not able to "find their feet" in new conditions after the return from migration. Often, after several years, or even more than ten years from leaving, such people return to a country which significantly differs from the image they remembered.

As the reason of their return to their homeland, surveyed migrants mentioned the accomplishment of their migration plan, as well as family issues and obligations awaiting them in Poland. The decision to return was often taken even before the departure, and the date of return is determined by the attainment of the aim in view. The decision to return to the country is, in most cases, a well-thought one, and the time of return was precisely planned – says Aneta Wiśniewska, Project Manager of Observatory of Social Policy for Podlasie region, in the framework of which the present study was conducted.

The study entirely confirmed the thesis of the clearly earning-oriented nature of the migration of inhabitants of Podlaskie Voivodship abroad. Working abroad was supposed to bring definite, measurable financial benefits. Cases of migration in order to visit family (which sometimes turned

into working migration), or trips combining work with tourism and visiting the given country, were much less common.

It turns out that more than half of the surveyed migrants (54,4%) are not interested in further education and do not plan to undertake any activity in this regard. Every fifth surveyee would like to retrain and obtain education in the profession, which they never performed, and 12.1% of the respondents would like to complete their education in the profession performed before leaving. The low percentage of indications to the willingness to complete knowledge and skills connected with the occupation performed during emigration (2%) confirms once again the existence of differences in the occupations performed while working abroad and in Poland.

The vast majority of the migrants did not feel any change in the way their environment treated them after their return to the country. Migration did not prove to be a factor important enough to change the perception of the migrants by their environment. At the same time, more than half of the participants in the study believe that going abroad for work purposes has no impact on their personal or family life. For those people, the need of labour migration does not involve any negative consequences for family life. Those for whom a trip abroad had far-reaching consequences for family and personal affairs, most frequently mentioned (broadly understood) complications in family life (from longing for family members to breakdown of marriages, divorces), but also improvement of the family's material status: a better, higher living standard and general improvement of welfare.

The returning migrants surveyed are satisfied with their decision to come back to Poland. Their satisfaction with the return to their country is also testified by their commonly expressed conviction that they returned willingly to Poland. Rare were the cases of forced return. If they happened, they were mainly related with unexpected family problems. The decision to return to Poland is generally assessed positively, most respondents do not regret it and even having such opportunity, they would not withdraw it, quite the contrary: they would take it once more. Positive aspects of the return to the Polish are meeting with the family, migration target achieved, knowledge of a foreign language, the ability to communicate in their native language, was working in Poland and the related insurance.

The study allowed us to get to know in-depth the phenomenon of returning migration in Podlaskie Voivodship. This does not mean, however, that monitoring of this phenomenon should cease in the future. Taking into account the percentage of households with someone living in emigration, and I remind that it is more than 7%, we can expect that the phenomenon may intensify. More particularly as the economic recession in Europe has not yet finished. Its aggravation which results, among other things, in the reduction of the number of jobs, may bring more and more people back to Poland. Undoubtedly, this may affect local and regional labour markets. Monitoring of the phenomenon will make it possible to take appropriate measures in certain advance – as Jarosław Sawicki recapitulates it.