

Foreign migration in the context of development and regional migration policy

After almost a decade of membership in the European Union and the opening of the European job markets for the Poles, the importance of foreign migration and its influence on the development of individual regions grew significantly. The representatives of local (all communes of the Opolskie Voivodeship) and regional (all voivodeships in the country) authorities unambiguously declare the need to create networks of institutional cooperation for the tasks related to foreign migration. This means that shaping the migration policy and identifying the instruments allowing for the effective use of opportunities and reduction of losses resulting from international mobility constitute an important challenge at the regional level.

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The place of foreign migration in local development

Representatives of the majority of communes in the Opolskie Voivodeship (66%) consider migration to be a factor influencing their development (The importance of foreign migration for local development). However, the strength of this influence may be different. The highest number of communes (41%) considered migration to be a factor determining development, but not in a fundamental way. On the other hand, within the area of 25% of the communes in the Opolskie Voivodeship, migration has significant influence on development. In only two communes of the region no relation was noticed between foreign trips of their residents and development. This means that in the Opole region foreign migration needs to be considered an important factor for development, which clearly defines the opportunities and directions of development for communes and local communities within 1/4 of the region's area.

The spatial distribution of the above-mentioned estimations is related to the traditions of foreign trips. The communes which noticed such strong relationships are mainly located in the central and eastern part of the region, which is an area of traditional emigration drainage.

The positive socio-economic changes taking place thanks to migration are not regarded by the local authorities as civilizational progress. It seems that even though the emigration of a significant part of the Opolskie Voivodeship's population has its positive effects (e.g. it alleviates tensions within the job market, allows for the transfer of income of the migrants, increases the wealth of the society and internal demand), it is not perceived as a stimulus for modernization. This is the case because the investment activity of emigrants (repatriants) is not significant within the region. Although the migrants abroad gain new abilities, language and occupational competences and exhibit high resourcefulness and initiative related to finding and taking up work, this capital is not transferred and utilized within the region to a significant degree. This means that despite the high influence on the functioning of the local communities, foreign migration within the Opole region is not a basis for general transformations and wide socio-economic progress.

It is not easy to unambiguously evaluate foreign migration and its effects with respect to opportunities and dangers for development. Almost 30% of local authority representatives have significant difficulties with making such an obvious evaluation. In the next 34% of responses, migration is evaluated in terms of opportunities, in 21% - losses and in 18% - "as many benefits as losses". Even if the opinions concerning migration are de facto positive, the difference is relatively small. This means that even though the literature on the subject confirms anxiety more strongly than it supports the hopes that the sending regions associate with the emigration process, research does not fully support this hypothesis.

The place of foreign migration in regional development

The evaluation of foreign migration made by regional authority representatives suggests that migration and its effects should be considered to be a factor visible in the development of the majority of Polish regions. In only three voivodeships it was stated that migration has no such effect. It was not, however, a definite evaluation. In none of the regions was the lack of such relationships confirmed. The strength of the influence of the migration development factor is diversified. In 8 regions the influence of migration was assessed as significantly determining the development of the entire region or its part, in 5 regions - as significant, but not fundamental. Therefore, in 13 voivodeships migration is visible in territorial development in various degrees. Spatial analysis of the above-mentioned evaluations suggests that in those voivodeships in which the scale of emigration grew rapidly



after 2004, the influence of migration on territorial development also became more significant (West Pomeranian, Pomeranian and Lower Silesian, among others). In the traditionally migrational regions (Opolskie, Podlaskie), it went down - at least partially.

The evaluation of foreign migration with regard to the opportunities and dangers for regional development - even if ambiguous - rightly puts foreign trips and their results in the context of developmental dangers. Despite the fact that the general evaluation is dominated by a dual perspective of strong and weak sides of migration (7 voivodeships), in as many as 5 regions this issue was treated solely as a danger and in none - as an opportunity for development. This means that in the number of different possible outcomes, those negative for development are dominant. Therefore, the following consequences of migration have more influence: loss of human and social capital, decrease in population and distortion of age structure, deficit of workforce, educated personnel and workers within specific lines of business, smaller local budgets. Despite the transfer of income, increasing standards of living and wealth of migrant families, decreasing unemployment and growing occupational competences of the migrants resulting from migration, the influence of positive consequences of migration is visibly smaller.

Regional migration policy - goals and areas of interest

It can be assumed that if foreign migration and its results are well visible in territorial development, the legitimacy for creating an institutional framework for this process should improve as well. This issue can be addressed both from the perspective of creating an institutionalized cooperation network of existing entities within the job market, social assistance, education, extra-governmental organizations, etc. and the perspective of forming regional migration policy from scratch. When it comes to the latter case, it actually consists in defining the rules determining the functioning of this system, especially legal and financial, as well as appointing additional entities to perform different tasks generally related to migration.

Research results allow for relatively unambiguous conclusions in this respect. According to the research, the majority of local authority representatives within the Opole region (82%) sees the need to support specific groups of migrants (i.e. emigrants, potential emigrants, repatriants, immigrants). Regional authority representatives present their views on that matter even more clearly. It turns out that, firstly - in all regions the issue was analyzed in a specified way, secondly - in almost all voivodeships (in 15) it was considered to be necessary to create a network of cooperation for specific institutions and coordinate their work with regard to the tasks related to foreign migration. The people coming back from



abroad should be of primary importance. Opinions concerning the help for other groups - even if still predominant - point to such a need to a smaller extent. Symptomatically, the highest indecisiveness is related to helping foreigners.

The opinion of local authorities with regard to the legitimacy of the creation of regional migration policy is also quite unambiguous, but not as lucid. However, in 68% of communes in the Opolskie Voivodeship it is considered appropriate to formulate a migration policy and provide it with rules similar to those shaped at the regional level by detailed policies (such as social assistance and job market policies). The results of the research conducted at the regional level do not leave any doubts either. In 13 voivodeships the need to create a regional migration policy was noticed, while in only 3 voivodeships this idea met with moderate criticism.

Regional migration policy should be realized in an integrated way. This means that the key areas of a comprehensive regional policy should be the following: the area of emigration, potential emigration, repatriation and immigration. During its formation it is important to identify the socio-economic policy instruments allowing for efficient control over migration processes at the regional and local levels. Undoubtedly, the traditional factors from the area of the job market, social assistance, housing industry, etc. are fundamental in such a policy. However, the creation of such a system would be mostly about developing clear instruments aimed at emigrants, repatriants and immigrants. Recently, when it comes to utilitarian solutions, more and more attention is paid to the problems of repatriants. The propositions of system changes concerning the people coming back from abroad are related to: the elimination of barriers and facilitation of repatriation, actions aimed at the families of repatriants, the creation of a repatriant service system and actions focused on public administration. A good example of such interests is the strategic SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of repatriation, as well as the establishment and description of priority actions in the area of institutional support for the people coming back from abroad. As a result of the latter, a proposition of detailed systemic solutions arose. A guide for people coming back from abroad and institutions relevant for repatriants - which is the above-mentioned solution - is an operational document containing recommendations of specific detailed actions (The development of methods for reducing economic migration and supporting the migrants returning to the Polish job market). It is aimed at the institutions which play specific roles in the process of the social and occupational reintegration of repatriants, especially at Poviats Job Agencies as well as Municipal and Commune Offices, which have the most contact with this group of people. The streamlining of the institutional support system is an important issue. Therefore, it may be assumed that the acclimation process of repatriants is highly dependent on the way in which all the formalities and



obligations associated with coming back from abroad are completed. The more efficient and relatively shorter they are, the more effective the adaptation turns out, which also makes the probability of future foreign emigration lower.

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