



CENTRUM STOSUNKÓW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

MONITORING POLSKIEJ POLITYKI ZAGRANICZNEJ

U.S. Visas: Myths, Facts, Recommendations

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More stringent enforcement of U.S. immigration policy, focusing - to a large extent - on the internal security dimension, has been observed since the 11th of September 2001. Increased restrictions of migration policy generally entail a decline in the number of legal migrants, at the same time causing the increase in illegal migrants (illegal border crossing, illegal employment). In spite of policy restrictions, illegal migrants respond to a permanent economic demand for cheap, foreign labour. This is however not the case of migration from Poland to the U.S.

The following tendencies in migration from Poland to U.S. have been observed since the European Union's enlargement in 2004:

- **numbers of legal immigrants have remained at approximately the same level since 1996;**
- **position of the U.S. among the destinations of Polish labour migration shifted from number two (prior to the EU enlargement) to number five;**
- **U.S. became less attractive to young and educated people as both a destination of labour migration and the country of settlement;**
- **percentage of non-immigration visa refusals has exceeded the American quota (10%) in just a couple of regions; consequently, many pay for the mistakes of few.**

MIGRATIONS FROM POLAND TO U.S.- HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Many stereotypes associated with migration are rooted in the perception of population outflows and influxes as settlement migrations. A European crossing the Atlantic Ocean in search of a better life constitutes the embodiment of a migrant from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries¹. He was never to return to his homeland. Therefore, these migration stereotypes are still alive in both researchers and politicians. When analysing them, we use such words as „exodus” (in the case of sender countries) or „flooding” (in the case of receiver countries).

Poland has been the country of intense migration. Post-war migration can be divided into direct emigrations (departures from Poland abroad, ending in temporary or permanent stays) and indirect emigrations, in the case of those who could not return to Poland after war and emigrated from current countries of stay².

The tradition of Polish emigration to the U.S. has a long past. The first information on Poles in Northern America dates back to the 17th century. The first, more accurate estimates of numbers of

¹ Graham, H., 2004, 'Circular migration: Keeping Development Rolling'? Migration Information Source.

² Pilch, A. i M. Zgórnjak, (red), 1984, Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych, PWN, Warszawa.

Polish people in the USA go back to the period prior to the First World War and suggest that there were 3 million Poles staying in the USA³. Descriptions of emigration from Poland to America indicate various reasons and waves of emigration. The latter range from the emigration of Polish peasants in the years 1890-1914, motivated by purely economic reasons and called the emigration of „founders” to war emigration of „soldiers” between the years 1944-1948 which was characterized by a relatively high level of education.

Subsequent waves of Polish migration to the States include the economically-driven wave of „consumers” in the years 1950-1980 and the wave of „solidarity activists” in the years 1980-1989, motivated by mixed politico-economic factors⁴.

The most recent wave overlaps the period of economic transformation, with economically-driven emigration of whole families remaining the dominating type of outflow.

The analyses of magnitude of Polish emigration in a historical and transatlantic context revealed that labour migration as early as at the turn of the 20th century was perceived differently depending on whether it was to Europe or to America. At that time the myth of America as a paradise for emigrants was deeply rooted in the mentality of Poles. More importantly, what this myth included were both economic (high earnings) and moral (work ethos, Puritanism) factors.

Migration to Europe had definitely negative connotations. A migrant to Europe was described as „...he is walking about idly and becomes influenced by a city proletariat, with which he can get on with easily”, or: „...they make the most of world there, nobody to watch over them, no father, no mother and no priest, nobody to be afraid of ...”⁵. Unlike the migrant in Europe, the American one „...is bound to stick to his own kind and be controlled by them, or at least he is surrounded by people who work and save money diligently”⁶.

The myth of America is also that of a birth of a Polish peasant, who freed himself of a „villein soul” syndrome, “with its social value and power, the myth of a peasants’ Poland was projected onto the lands of a New World.”⁷

It is worth remembering that what has contributed to the emergence of the myth of America as a paradise for emigrants i.e. building enclaves for „their own kind” - is the U.S immigration policy with the reunion of families being one of its key components.⁸

³ Pilch A., 1988. Emigracja z ziem polskich do Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki od lat pięćdziesiątych XIX do r. 1918, [w:] Kubiak H., Kusielewicz E., Gromada (red.) Polonia

⁴ Mostwin D., 1991, *Emigranci polscy w USA*. KUL, Lublin; Mostwin D., 1999. *Rodzina przeszczepiona z perspektywy trzydziestu lat*, Archiwum Emigracji, z.2. Toruń. Kubiak H., 1975, *Rodowód narodu amerykańskiego*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie;; Walaszek A., 1994, *Świąty imigrantów. Tworzenie polonijnego Cleveland 1880-1930*, ‘Nomos’, Kraków.

⁵ Thomas, W.I. i F. Znaniecki (1976: 29), *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, LSW, Warszawa, cyt. na podstawie Bukraba – Rylska (2007:29), *Ibidem*

⁶ Bujak, F., (1903:101), *Żmija. Wieś powiatu limanowskiego*, Gebether i s-ka. Poznań, cyt. na podstawie Bukraba –Rylska (2007:29), *Ibidem*.

⁷ Duda-Dziewierz, K.,(1938:152), *Wieś małopolska a emigracja amerykańska. Studium wsi Babica powiatu rzeszowskiego*. Polski Instytut Socjologiczny. Warszawa-Poznań.

MIGRATIONS FROM POLAND TO U.S.- CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Migrations in Poland in the Nineties were primarily caused by a political system and socio-economic transformation which led to then apparently permanent changes in international mobility of population and gradual transition of Poland from an emigration country to an emigration and immigration country.⁹

At the beginning of the 21st century, the population of our part of Europe is witnessing yet another intense wave of migration in the economic circumstances associated with strengthening processes of European integration and globalisation. The immigration component is quite visible in official Polish statistics, however the emigration factor is definitely prevalent. Along with the drop in birth rate, migrations were the second component of a real diminution of the Polish population.

New tendencies have been observed since the 1st of May 2004 in population flows in Poland which are predominantly associated with the change of the geopolitical situation, the latter being the driving force of multiplication of demographic, economic and social factors, leading to one of the biggest Polish migration waves in the post-war period.

The most recent estimates of the Central Statistical Office indicate that at the end of 2006 nearly 2 million Polish citizens migrated temporarily abroad, over 1.6 million to Europe.

More stringent enforcement of U.S. immigration policy, focusing to a large extent on the internal security dimension, has been observed since the 11th of September 2001. Increased restrictions of migration policy generally entail a decline in number of legal migrants, at the same time causing the increase in illegal migrants, responding to a permanent economic demand for cheap, foreign labour. It is not however the case of migration from Poland to the U.S.

The following tendencies in migration from Poland to U.S. have been observed since the European Union enlargement in 2004:

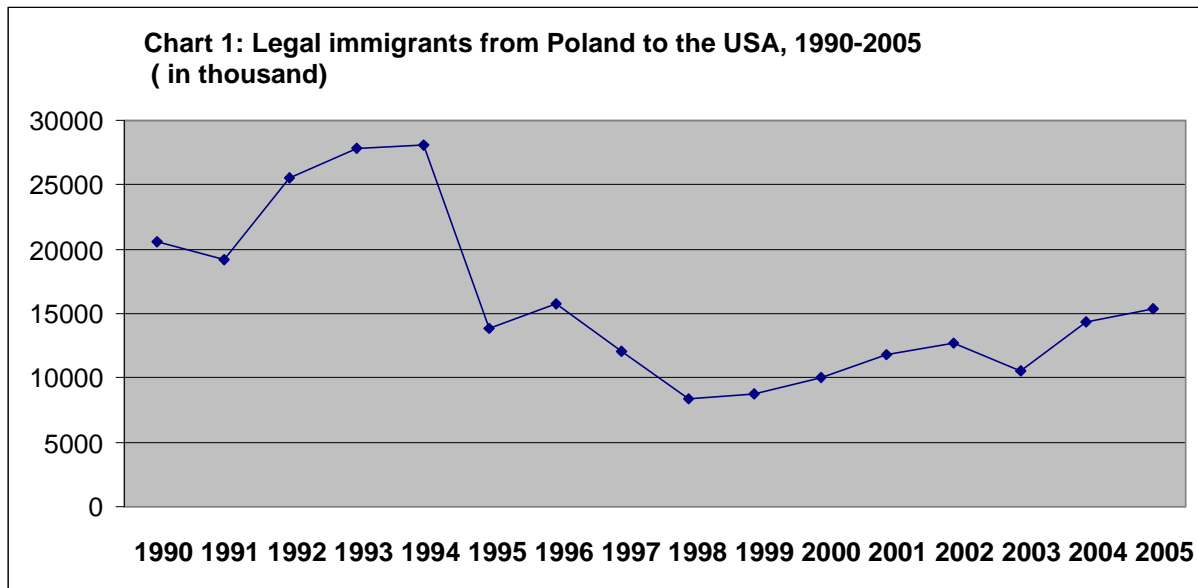
- **numbers of legal immigrants have remained at approximately same level since 1996;**
- **position of the U.S. among the destinations of Polish labour migration shifted from number two (prior to the EU enlargement) to number five;**
- **U.S. became less attractive to young and educated people**

The chart below demonstrates a rotating number of legal immigrants from Poland in the last 15 years, After the period of increased naturalisation in the first half of the Nineties (numbers then varied from 20 thousand to 30 thousand), there was a dramatic decline in the number of legal residents

⁸Slany, K., 1995, *Miedzy przymusem a wyborem, Kontynentalne i zamorskie emigracje z krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodnie, 1939-1989*, UJ, Kraków.

⁹Iglicka, K., 2001, *Poland's Post-War Dynamic of Migration*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

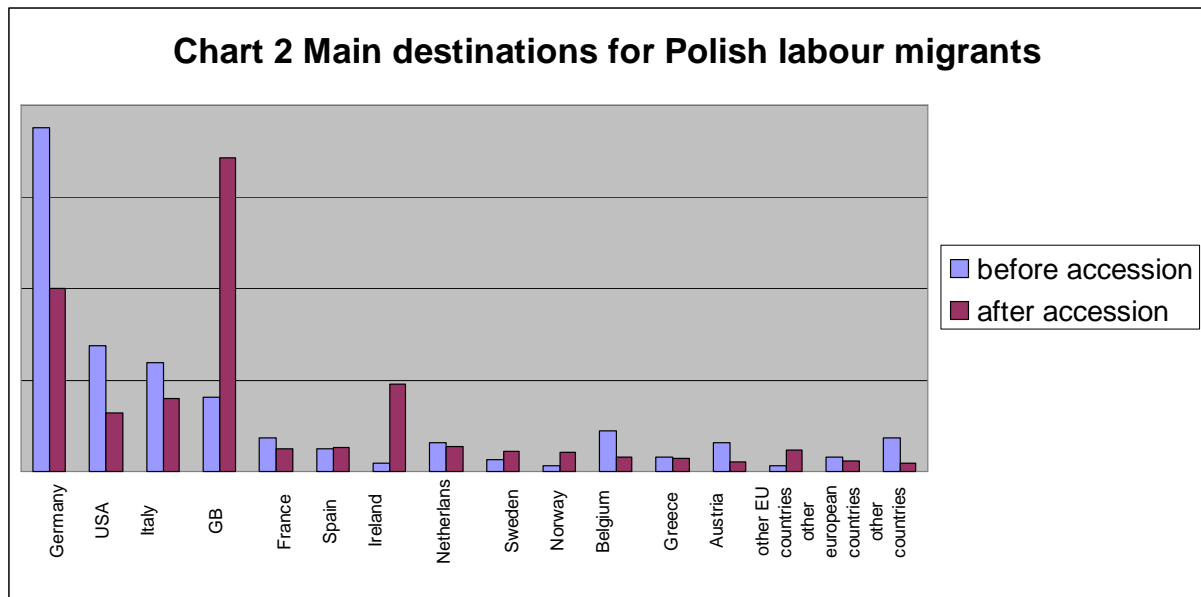
(immigrants) coming from Poland. These numbers have remained at a fairly stable level, ranging from 10 thousand to 15 thousand.



Source: www.census.gov/compendia/statab/population/immigration

Data received from an American immigration bureau indicates that Polish people still form an ethnical diaspora. In 2005, out of a total number of 15 352 Polish legal immigrants 5 626 resided in the state of Illinois, 3 106 in the state of New York and 1 705 in the state of New Jersey, i.e. in the regions which have been traditionally inhabited by Polish immigrants for last two centuries.

EU enlargement in 2004 led to tremendously significant qualitative changes in international population flows. The data below (chart 2), generated from BAEI database and demonstrating the group of over 6 000 labour migrants who have stayed abroad for no longer than 12 months indicates clearly that the countries traditionally receiving the largest numbers of Polish migrants, i.e. Germany and the U.S., ceased to be the leaders in that domain. Great Britain has taken the leading position whereas the **US shifted from the second place (occupied prior to EU accession) to fifth place. It is a significant drop, given the fact that the European leader - Germany - went down just by one place.**



Source: Biuletyn Migracyjny, January 2008, www.biuletynmigracyjny.uw.edu.pl

These are predominantly the inhabitants of three Polish voivodships, namely Małopolskie, Podkarpackie and Podlaskie, whose travels to the U.S. entail violations of immigration law. Consequently, US migration statistics and American politicians alike, uphold a quantitatively significant and emblematic figure of a Polish peasant-migrant from the turn of the 20th century who would cross the Atlantic Ocean in search of a better life and would not return to his homeland.

The well-known Disraeli's sentence: *'there are lies, damned lies and there are statistics'*, appears to be particularly relevant to migration statistics on migration from Poland to US.

According to American sources¹⁰, the United States of America remain an attractive labour migration destination for Poles; to those however whose relatives and close friends live in the USA. According to American sources, a typical profile of a Polish labour migrant in the U.S. includes the following characteristics: middle age, no English and looking for employment in the Polish community in the US.

THE FALL OF AN AMERICAN MYTH

The tendency of a decreasing attractiveness of the U.S. as a migration country has been observed on a global scale since 2001. The number of issued student visas in the years 2001-2003 decreased by

¹⁰Presentation by representative of the U.S. Embassy in Poland, during the conference showing CIR research results, organized by CIR and ISS UW (17.01.2008.).

80 thousand (27%) and the number of visas issued to skilled workers dropped by 60 thousand (which was also equal to 27%)¹¹.

Recent studies conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center demonstrate that U.S. immigration policy after September 11th produced the least expected results: legal migration to the USA has decreased whereas the ever-so-strong demand for labour in American economy led to the increase of illegal migration, mostly from the Latin America and Asia¹².

The dramatically diminished attractiveness of the U.S. as a country of both settlement and labour migration for young and educated people is due to economic factors and geopolitical factors, i.e. dollar decline versus Polish zloty and EU enlargement and not to a restrictive immigration policy.

Studies on labour migration to the USA¹³ revealed that young respondents emphasised the importance of cultural differences and negative stereotypes of Poles in the U.S. as one of the obstacles to their settlement in the USA.

Historically different socio-economic-cultural circumstances of a Polish ethnic community in the States and European countries can also account for the fall of an American myth among young Poles at the beginning of the 21st century in the period of far-reaching modernisation.

As a result of the emergence of private tertiary education services on the market higher education became in the period of transformation a readily available commodity for the residents of small towns and villages¹⁴.

Young inhabitants of small localities, large numbers of whom have been recently graduating from colleges and universities and who have become familiar with the big city life during their studies, decided after 2004 to migrate to European countries rather than to the US, where their lives and work would be essentially limited to a narrow and controlling milieu of a Polish community.

Decline of the U.S. popularity as a migration destination for young and educated people is also accentuated by official data on visa issuance. In 2007 only 13 500 students enrolled in the Work & Travel programme which enables students to work and stay/travel in the USA during holidays for a period no longer than 4 months. In 2006 16 500 students participated in the programme and 19 500¹⁵

¹¹ Wucker, M., 2006, National Security and Noncitizens in the United States after 9/11, w: K. Iglicka (red), *Immigration Policies and Security*, CSM, Warsaw.

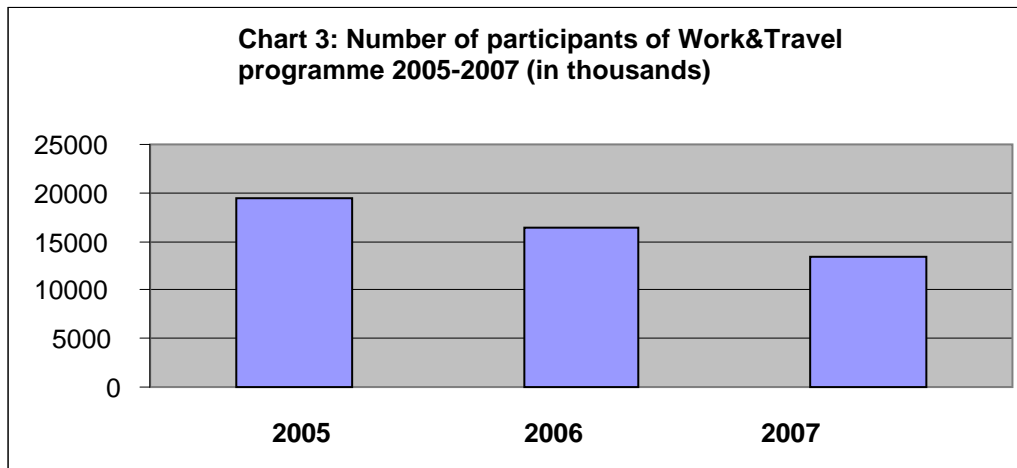
¹² Witt, A., 2006 (:11), 'Challenges in the Area of Immigration, Integration and Security', w: K. Iglicka (red), *Immigration Policies and Security*, CSM, Warsaw.

¹³ Analiza CSM (www.csm.org.pl) Nr 08/07 Krystyna Iglicka, Survey Research on Job Migrations from Poland to the USA after 1st May, 2004

¹⁴ In the period of last 15 years the number of students in the tertiary education has increased in a whole Central European region. Consequently, percentage of students in the EU- 15 is currently lower than the percentage of students in new EU member countries. For more detail see: Weizsacker, J., 2006, 'Welcome to Europe: A European Blue Card Proposal' w: K.Gmaj i K. Iglicka (red), *Brain Drain or Brain Gain – a Global Dilemma*, CSM, Warsaw.

¹⁵ Bielecki, J. *Polacy nie snią już o Ameryce*, Dziennik, 30.01. 2008

in 2005. We have witnessed in the last two years a decrease in the number of programme participants by over 40% (see chart 3).



Source: Bielecki, 2008

RECOMMENDATIONS

The most recent analyses of Polish-US emigration trends indicate that abolishment of visa requirements toward Polish people travelling to the USA would be more of a symbolic rather than practical importance. Therefore:

- **Abolishment of visa requirements should not be associated with negotiations of issues which are much more significant for Poland, such as military security or the ballistic missile shield (BMD).**

Everybody pays for the mistakes of the few. Therefore, it seems right to prevent such a situation from occurring, it would be better to do so within our own means rather than in the course of negotiations.

It would be therefore recommended to consider the following:

- cooperation of Polish community associations and entrepreneurs of Polish origins with Polish self-governmental authorities representing the areas characterised by the highest percentage of U.S. visa refusals within a structured campaign against „U.S migration law violations”;
- Public expression of support for effective policy of penalizing these businessmen who illegally employ Polish people by the American authorities;
- conducting a propaganda campaign in Polish communities in the USA entitled, for example: „ / *do not use clandestine labour*”;
- running an information campaign in Poland in collaboration with American consulates, aiming at identification of these voivodships where the proportion of visa refusals is less than 10%. In our opinion, such an initiative would provide inspiration for regions with a visa refusals indicator exceeding 10%.

American consular authorities claim to refuse to issue a visa only when there is reasonable suspicion of an intention to illegally extend one's stay in the US or to seek illegal employment. We take such statements at face value. However, development of many stereotypes associated with migration from Poland was influenced by different than current behaviours and attitudes of Polish people, therefore:

- It is recommended to consider the possibility of establishing a visa refusal monitoring body. Polish people whose visa applications were rejected would thus have the opportunity to participate in another interview or to describe their circumstances, rather than to appeal the decision.

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Economist and a social demographer. Professor at the Lazarski School of Commerce and Law. Polish government expert on migration policy. Since 2002 Professor Iglicka combines her academic work with the work at various Polish think-tanks as e.g. the Institute of Public Affairs (where she was a Director of Migration and Eastern Policy Programme in 2000-2003) and the Centre for International Relations. Professor Iglicka has presented papers to more than 80 international academic seminars and conferences. She was a key-note speaker and served as a theme convenor and session organiser in the area of international migration. Works published by Krystyna Iglicka include 10 academic books, nearly 40 research papers/articles in academic journals published mainly in the USA, UK and Poland and numerous policy oriented expertises, reports and analysis.

Center for International Relations (CIR)

CIR is an independent, non-governmental, 12-year old think-tank, dedicated to the study of international relations and those foreign policy issues, which are of crucial importance to Poland, Europe and transatlantic relations in both the long and the short-term.

CIR carries out its own research projects, prepares reports and analyses and participates in international projects in cooperation with similar institutions in several countries.

CIR has also founded the Foreign Policy Club – an influential forum for foreign policy analysis and debate, involving hundreds of leading politicians, diplomats, civil servants, local government officials, academics, students, journalists and representatives of other NGOs.

Our goals are:

- to create a Polish 'foreign policy community', involving politicians, civil servants, diplomats, scholars, business people and journalists, who by force of arguments influence the thinking about foreign affairs in Poland and abroad,
- to deepen the knowledge of international relations in Polish society,
- to influence the understanding of the goals of Polish foreign policy among the political and diplomatic elites in other countries as well as to make Polish leaders aware of foreign policy objectives of other countries.

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