

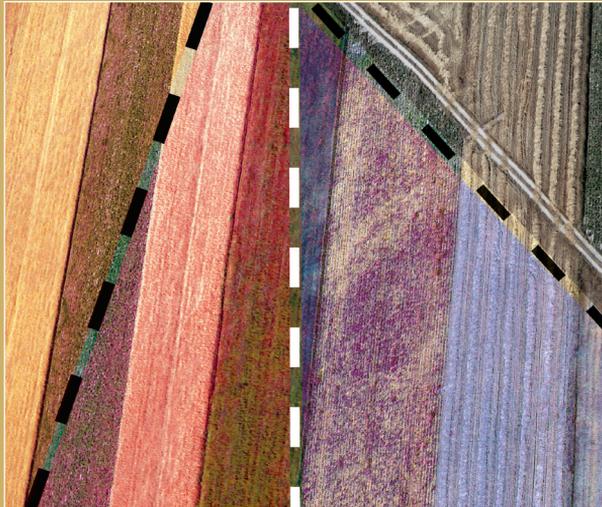
INSTITUTE OF  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# VANISHING FRONTIER

NEW POLISH MIGRATION TO GERMANY – LOCAL PERSPECTIVE  
MAIN CONCLUSIONS

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*Contents*

***Main conclusions***

*Agnieszka Łada, Justyna Segeš Frelak*

***Introduction***

*Justyna Segeš Frelak*

***Polish economic migration to Germany after 2004***

*Justyna Segeš Frelak, Agnes Kriszan (cooperation)*

***Characteristics of the Polish-German borderland and local communities covered by the research***

*Agnes Kriszan, Magdalena Szaniawska-Szwabe*

***New Polish migration to Germany in borderland local communities – German perspective***

*Hanna Bojar*

***New Polish migration to Germany in borderland local communities – migrants' perspective***

*Agnieszka Łada*

***Opening of the labour market, Polish immigrants and integration of Poles presented in the press read in the region***

*Agnieszka Łada, Justyna Segeš Frelak*

***Vanishing frontier – summary***

***Authors' bios***

***Appendix 1. Map of the borderland region***

***Appendix 2. Characteristics of respondents***

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## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- Opening of the border stimulated the development of various cross-border relations in northern regions of the Polish-German borderland. One of the most important results of that process is **the appearance in this region of a “new” Polish migration to Germany and in consequence an increasingly more noticeable presence of Poles in German borderland local communities.**
- Migration of Poles to the German borderland was greatly influenced by opening of borders after 1989, Poland’s accession to the European Union and abolition of border control in 2007, but **complete liberalisation of the German labour market introduced on 1 May 2011 has not significantly changed the extent and nature of migration of Poles in the studied region.**
- Apart from Polish re-emigrants from West Germany who settled near the border with Poland, **new migrants usually do not have any migration history in other countries.**
- **Most migrants come from the Pomerania region and have a history of contacts with Germans.** Often, that is not equivalent to having advanced intercultural skills and knowledge of the neighbouring country. Many new migrants do not speak German or have only rudimentary knowledge of that language. That is one of the reasons for their reserve and difficulty in social integration.
- What is characteristic for the studied borderland region – apart from the “traditional” complete migration – is **the pattern of partial migration whereby the essential spheres of life (such as work or family life) are divided between the country of origin and the country of migration.** Such a migration pattern means that migrants travel between Poland and Germany on everyday basis. As

a consequence, **some of those people do not build strong social relations with Germans** and form their own isolated communities.

- A significant part of migration is of hybrid nature – it is based on the possibility of **combining advantages of functioning in two social and economic systems, at the same time without any physical border that would hinder travelling** between the two systems. Depending on their social, cultural and economic capital, migrants choose specific elements of the two systems, making their own life strategies out of them.
- **The most powerful factor which allures migrants from Poland is an attractive residential offer on the German borderland.** That is caused by, above all, real estate prices which are significantly lower than in Poland and a wide offer as well as advantages resulting from a short distance to their mother country.
- **Migrants from Poland perceive German institutions as strongly formalised, yet more effective than Polish ones.** They see difficulties connected with formalised procedures as a typical feature of the German system and not as manifestation of prejudice of officials towards incomers from Poland.
- **Difficulties in relations with German institutions are experienced by, above all, those migrants who do not speak German and do not understand the specific nature and complexity of German procedures.** A positive role of an intermediary in contacts with German institutions is played by consultation and advisory centres, informal migration networks of Polish relatives and German acquaintances as well as – employed increasingly more often in German public and commercial institutions – Polish-speaking officials.
- **Possibilities of migrants entering the German labour market on the borderland are rather limited.** The basic way is employment

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- particularly in public institutions and local offices - of highly qualified specialists with a good command of German, development of local infrastructure of services addressed to Poles and carrying out of individual business activity.

- **Unemployment in the region and high requirements concerning professional qualifications make it difficult for Poles with low qualifications and poor knowledge of German to find employment.**

- **German as well as Polish and German schools and kindergartens become an increasingly more important area where new positive patterns of social relations between Poles and Germans are developed.** Experience of migrants concerning the German system of education is generally positive. What should be underlined are good relations of children with their peers and operation of educational facilities which take into account needs of Polish children and encourage their parents to cooperate.

- **A growing number of Polish children in schools located on the German borderland is, however, an important challenge for the German system of education.** Better integration of migrants in the school environment could be achieved by introduction - to a greater extent than currently supported by local authorities - of intercultural and bilateral education programmes addressed to schoolchildren, which would bring closer both cultures, and programmes increasing competencies of teachers in the field of working with Polish students.

- **An important condition of successful social integration between incomers and a local community is creation of atmosphere for private direct contacts.** Migrants who established close personal relations with inhabitants of their own locality have a very positive opinion of Germans. Similarly, Germans who often

come into contact with Polish neighbours or co-workers perceive Poles positively. Entering into close personal contacts between neighbours changes initial the stereotypical attitude and mistrust, and favours mutual interest in the culture of hosts and migrants.

- **Very good neighbour relations between inhabitants and migrants are usually established in small rural communities and tenant communities in urban tenement houses**, traditionally occupied by an older generation of Germans, which is liked and respected.
- **Negative experience and conflicts are most often provoked by relations between residents of post-communists blocks of flats.** Blocks of flats are the place where more often than anywhere else meet German people who suffer most the effects of economic marginalisation of the region with migrants of poorer language skills and lower social and cultural capital, sometimes equally economically marginalised in Poland. Those factors do not facilitate building openness and entering into social relations.
- **The basic obstacle to intensification of contacts and deepening mutual understanding is always the inability to speak the language of the neighbour.** The more fluent in German Poles are, the easier it is for them to integrate in local communities and the better they are perceived.
- **Actions of the National Democratic Party of Germany on the German borderland**, although perceived as a factor that hinders overcoming the distance, **constitute only a margin of everyday positive relations between migrants and members of local communities.** Populist demagogy of the radical right-wing party affects lower social strata, unemployed or poor retired people, who perceive Poles as competition for desired positions and social privileges.

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- The past and difficult experience which are characteristic for Polish and German relations are not forgotten, but **today's relations between migrants and inhabitants of the German borderland are dominated by** a pragmatic approach and **focus on the present and on the future**. The common tragic history is not a taboo, on the contrary – it even strengthens the bond due to common past of Poles and Germans.
- **Low involvement of migrants in political activity** stems from a belief that a difficult economic situation of the region and political tensions resulting therefrom do not favour now social approval of political activity of Polish migrants. A significant number of Germans accept per se political activity of Poles in the region, provided that such activity is beneficial for the Polish and German dialogue, and is not focused on Polonisation of borderlands or controlled by politicians from Poland.
- **The balance of the cost of living of Poles on German borderlands**, despite significant limitations on the German labour market, **is positive**. Attractive prices of rental and purchase of real estate and the system of German social benefits, with regular income derived from work or pension, allow reaching a standard of living higher than in Poland, which is a pulling factor for permanent settlement in this region.
- **The German borderland derives economic and social benefits from the presence of Polish migrants in this region**. Those include, among others, recapitalisation of residential infrastructure and reversing negative demographic trends – owing to migration of Polish families with children.
- **The presence of active and entrepreneurial migrants from Poland becomes the factor which gives dynamism to the region**, in

the future it may facilitate changes of rather inactive attitudes of original inhabitants of the region.

- Particular attention should be paid to **designing programmes for systemic actions**, which not only (although it is very important) **help new migrants to develop language skills, but also provide knowledge of the culture of the environment** in which those people began to live. On the other hand – **similar programmes bringing closer the culture and language of migrants should be addressed to inhabitants of local communities**. While most German clients positively assess expanding the local service offer due to the existence of Polish companies and shops, some German entrepreneurs and representatives of lower social strata fear competition from Poland and protest against alleged favouring migrants by local authorities over local inhabitants.
- **A very positive role in favouring cooperation is played by Poles and Germans who are deeply rooted in both cultures and build – often outside formal structures – bridges between migrants and a local community**. Deeming their civil initiatives an important element of systemic actions designed and executed by local authorities, it is recommended that their activity be supported in terms of organisation and financing.
- **Press read in the region has a positive attitude towards Poland and integration of Poles in Germany**. The image of Polish migration and integration presented by the press points to **normality of Polish and German coexistence**, particularly on the borderland.
- **“Nordkurier” regional daily was for many years in favour of complete opening of the labour market for Poles as they were sought employees** (as specialists and farming aids). They were not expected to flood the German labour market. The daily saw a chance for development of the region in the accession of Poland

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

to the EU, although it initially also emphasised risks connected therewith. Following Poland's accession to the EU, "Nordkurier" presented the proximity of Poland as an advantage for the region.

- **Presenting Polish and German relations, the regional daily focused on their local nature** and was anxious to report as well anti-Polish slogans of the National Democratic Party of Germany. The image of Poland and Poles presented in "Nordkurier" was positive. The newspaper also focused on intensification of Polish and German relations and an ongoing process of integration of Poles in the region.

- **"Die Welt" pan-regional daily was in favour of complete opening of the labour market for Poles and presented a positive image of a Polish employee** and Poland itself as a well-developing country.

- **"Pasewalker Nachrichten", a local monthly** published by the local administration, was most often focused on the regional dimension of Polish and German relations and **emphasised amalgamation of borderlands**. It described events connected with Polish and German meetings in the town and its region, presenting them in a positive light. It did not publish texts unfavourable to Poland.