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## Polish Labour Force in Ireland and Its Benefits for Both Nations

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## **Polish Labour Force in Ireland and Its Benefits for Both Nations**

### **Introduction**

For centuries, Ireland remained a country to emigrate from, yet towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, owing to dynamic economic growth, it became a haven for job seekers from other countries. Following Poland's accession to EU structures on 1 May, 2004, and Ireland opening its labour market for the Polish, the country became a preferred destination for those who sought either short- or long-term employment. High unemployment rates recorded between 2000 and 2006 (15-20% average, and over 30% in certain areas), drove employable Polish labour force to look for sources of income abroad. Estimates have it that Ireland has become the third major destination for job seekers, (the UK being the first having over 700,000 Polish immigrants, and Germany the second with some 500,000) now being a haven for between 200–250,000 workforce. Despite the economic downturn hitting both EU and Ireland, the country is still seen as a very attractive place to live and work, much more than the job-seekers homeland, Poland. This can result from the following factors:

- 1) despite the crunch that has affected both Poland and Ireland, it is still easier for the Polish to find employment in Ireland than in Poland.
- 2) while wages are higher in Ireland, and so are costs of living, one can put aside more money than in Poland.
- 3) social security is better in Ireland.
- 4) an Irish employer is typically friendlier to a Polish employee than his Polish counterpart.
- 5) Irish employers seem to appreciate Poles' adaptability to changing environments.

Apart from the above mentioned motives, immigrant workers from Poland want to explore the country, experience different professional relationships and improve their language skills.

A considerable proportion of Poles working in Ireland for a few years, particularly those in the construction sector, return to Poland, yet the

influx into Ireland continues and the newcomers are prepared to take jobs that are unattractive to the Irish. Unfortunately for the comers, such jobs are far less demanding, usually below the newcomer's qualifications and expectations at the time of departing Poland. What seems to be the main force still driving Poles to Ireland is not simply finding better employment and thus source of maintenance, but the opportunity to make substantial savings to subsequently invest them, as the 2008's survey carried out amongst Poles living in Ireland shows. The sample group was not numerous (only 104 persons, 41 men and 63 women), yet it gives a picture of the Polish on the labour market in Ireland. The objective of the study was to obtain information about the nature of jobs, incomes, savings made and tentative plans to extend the stay on the Emerald Island.

## **Profile of Respondents**

Before the authors move on to present the findings of the poll carried out in October, 2008, they briefly describe the population of the respondents in the survey.

The majority of the comers from Poland are young people: 70% of the male, and 60% of the female respondents are under 30 years of age, whereas only 10% of the male and 5% of the female respondents were over 40 years old. Consequently, 30% of men and 33% of women were single (i.e. never married). The proportion of legally married men was 38%, for legally married women the figure was 40%. Some 30% of men and 25% of women lived with a partner (concubinate/ common law marriage). 20% of men and 25% of women held academic qualification, and a negligible 2% completed elementary schools. The above statistics prove that that the incoming Poles can boast high professional/ academic qualification. Prior to coming to Ireland 18% of the polled were residents of rural areas.

## **Reasons for Leaving Poland**

The decisions to move outside the homeland have to be looked at not only in the bearings of what attracts and pushes away, but also in what restrains and repels a would-be migrant. The restraining factors can be e.g. the family, close ties with the local community, while the repelling factors can be the new, in fact, alien social environment of the target country, distances and the risk of not finding employment. However, the factors that push away a potential migrant are usually those prevailing in his/her community, e.g. shortage of jobs, low wages or, more and more often, difficult

relationships between colleagues in the workplace, or within his/her family. Yet these factors play a role when for the potential migrant there is not only an opportunity to find any job, but a better-paid one. In addition, there is excitement to meet new environments, both social and natural, and for a considerable number of leavers there is the chance to improve language skills and gain new experience. Before leaving for Ireland, just over a half of the respondents had employment (58% of men and 53% of women), one in four men, and one in eight women were jobless, and 17% of men and 34% of women only just graduated from a university. For them, the main reasons to emigrate were high unemployment in Poland at the time, low wages (some 30% gave these reasons), little if any perspectives for personal and professional development resulting in finding an interesting and challenging job (28%). Occasional stronger family attachments caused that a number of Poles left for Ireland to live with a close relation.

### **Sources of Information on Possibilities of Leaving**

Since the main reason for migration to Ireland was perspectives of employment (92% of respondents), the pivotal factor was information about opportunities and ways to get there. 55% of respondents said that for them the key source of such information were friends and acquaintances, for 29% it was the more distant family/ relatives, 8% trusted the Internet and another 8% researched the press. The first job in Ireland was usually found with the help of friends, acquaintances (for 47%), but 39% found their first job on their own.

### **Duration of Stay, Type of Employment and Job Satisfaction**

Half of the respondents have stayed in Ireland for between one-and-half to three years, the next 11% for over three years, the same figure is for those who have stayed less than six months, and another 11% represents those whose duration of stay ranged between six months and one year. Generally, men have stayed longer than women, as they were the ones to blaze the trail, and once their situation became stable, they were joined by their spouses (often bringing the children), or partners.

One in four of those in employment had some clerical jobs (more women than men, though), 16% worked in food and beverage services, 5% looked after children (as babysitters) or accompanied and assisted elderly persons (OAP's). Another 7% were self-employed, but the most (46%) did labour jobs, including menial ones. At the time of the survey, half of the

respondents were in different type of employment than their first one, on arrival in Ireland. 23% were very satisfied with their jobs, 50% were just satisfied, only 8% expressed some comments indicating dissatisfaction, and the remaining 19% were unable to give a definite opinion. Also the professional relationships in the workplace were assessed as either good or positive. For 33% the atmosphere at the workplace was very good, for 50% it was good, for 13% it was satisfactory, and only 4% voiced negative opinions. 73% of the respondents were happy to be in Ireland, and only 3% were disappointed. Some 24% were unable to give a definite response.

### **What are Poles Particularly Pleased With?**

First and foremost, the source of satisfaction is the wages and the type of work done. Apart from these, the following reasons are mentioned:

- 1) life in Ireland is easier than in Poland, basically because it is far simpler to set up and incorporate one's own business, to obtain and register a car; the office personnel are really helpful, and the tax return procedures are clear and easy to follow.
- 2) while in Ireland, they feel that during one year there they have achieved more than they would have achieved in Poland for several years.
- 3) opportunities for personal and professional development are wider.
- 4) interpersonal communication and work relationships are friendlier.
- 5) Life is generally easier, and less stressful.
- 6) in case of a failure in business, the state provides better social and economic security.

### **Respondents Companions**

Those who have stayed in Ireland for over a year are usually accompanied by their families, relations, friends or acquaintances. This prevails in the female part of the Polish community in Ireland. The household patterns are:

- 1) 33% men and only 12% women live alone.
- 2) the whole nuclear family (spouses+children) 8% men 4% women
- 3) with the spouse 16% 29%
- 4) with siblings 8% 19%
- 5) with parents 3% 2%
- 6) with relatives 3% 16%
- 7) with fiance / fiancée 8% 7%
- 8) with friends/ acquaintances 21% 11%

Over 73% of respondents keep in close contact with their compatriots in Ireland, while only 26% rarely meet up with other Poles.

## Intentions

As many as 13% percent of respondents have decided to stay in Ireland permanently; the group consisted of more women than men, as Polish women tend to marry Irishmen more often than Polish man marry Irishwomen. Over 70% percent of the respondents intended to stay in Ireland for at least a year or longer, while 17% either have different plans, or are undecided. The opinion poll carried out in February, 2009, when the economic downturn was already hitting Ireland, showed that almost 67% of respondents had already been affected in terms of shorter hours of work, loss of jobs, or lower pay, yet they still intended to stay in Ireland saying that it is a safer and more stable place than Poland.

## Income, Cost of Living and Savings Made

As the main objective of Polish migrants in Ireland is employment that enables them not only to maintain themselves, even in the reality of comparatively higher costs of living, but also to make savings, it is worth looking at the incomes earned by the polled ones, and subsequently, use the findings to formulate more general conclusions related to the transfer of money from Ireland to Poland. Although, culturally, an open question about a person's income is considered to be a sensitive issue, in this research all the polled ones who were in employment did not hesitate to provide information on their net incomes that they, or their families have at the disposal.

Out of the 104 surveyed, 95 were in work and marked their income in the brackets given in the questionnaire. 57 family members staying in the same household as the polled ones were also in work. Most respondents (44%) and their family members (30%) earned an average monthly income of between € 1,501 and € 2,000 , but there were also some receiving less than €1,000 or even more than €4,000.

Information obtained in the survey made it possible to estimate net monthly incomes of 95 respondents and stands as follows:

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1) 95 respondents, approximately                            | € 174,700 |
| 2) income of 57 members of their families                   | € 135,900 |
| total:  | € 310,000 |
| 3) cost of maintenance (food, accommodation, transport etc) | € 110,000 |
| 4) savings made (rounded)                                   | € 200,000 |

Average monthly income of a respondent was € 1,839; for men it was € 2,115, for women €1,646, and for the family members of the respondent it was € 2,384 and € 2,150 for men and women respectively. Average monthly savings made by a person in employment was € 1,320. Out of the polled, 84% declared that they have savings, and 15% of the group sends part of their savings to Poland on a monthly basis, 45% do it every, now and again, and only 5% said they cannot afford to transfer any savings.

The respondents intend to allocate their savings to:

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1) buying a flat or a house      | 63% |
| 2) buying land (or property)     | 5%  |
| 3) setting up a private business | 12% |
| 4) buying a car                  | 2%  |
| 5) education                     | 5%  |
| 6) wedding reception             | 2%  |
| 7) travelling                    | 5%  |
| 8) other                         | 8%  |

Let us now try to estimate net annual income of Poles residing in Ireland in two versions. Version One - 150,000 are in work, Version Two - 200,000 in work and their average net monthly income is € 2,000.

For Version One:  $150,000 \times € 2,000 = € 300m$ ,

For Version Two:  $200,000 \times € 2,000 = € 400m$ .

Thus annually:

For Version One:  $€ 300m \times 12 = € 3,6 \text{ bn}$

For Version Two  $€ 400m \times 12 = € 4,8 \text{ bn}$

If savings account for only half of these amounts, they should be € 1.8bn, or € 2.4bn respectively. If we assume that at least half of the savings is transferred to Poland, i.e. € 900m or € 1.2bn, respectively, and the average rate of exchange of the zloty to the euro stands around 4 to 1, it yields PLN 3.6bn or PLN 4.8bn per year. The total of the savings can provide sufficient support for between 250,000 and 300,000 people in Poland. The other half of the savings can be allocated to investments such as a house or a flat. The PLN 3.6bn is enough to acquire ca 515,000 sq.m of living area at the average PLN 7,000 for a square metre. Assuming that a typical flat is about 70 sq.m, some 7,300 flats could be purchased with this money. In view of the fact that a considerable proportion of Polish migrants to Ireland has stayed there for four years one can easily imagine the size of the daily flow of money from Ireland to Poland, and how these financial not only means stimulate the domestic demand in our country, but also generate demand for transport services (air, road and telecommunications).

## Conclusions

There is no doubt that Polish workforce in Ireland contributes to the increase in the GDP of this country, and by stimulating local demand for goods and services, let alone renting accommodation, it also helps to mitigate the impact of the economic downturn. Without this numerous population of migrants from Poland, and the demand it generates, the Irish would perish much harder. Even though some Irish see Poles as competition on the local job market, occasioning some hard feelings and prejudice, the managerial and executive personnel say that Poles are more creative than the local population and prefer to employ them. This gives grounds to some conflicts. However, the issue should be looked into in more thoroughly and from various angles.

Without Poles working in Ireland, this country would be poorer, and without employment opportunities for Poles in Ireland, so would be Poland.

If we assume that in 2008 Ireland's GDP stood at € 180bn, and it was produced by 2.63m of workforce, then the contribution of an average worker to the GDP was € 68,000. This means that the output of the 150,000 Polish workforce was about € 13bn, of which only € 3.6 bn was retained by Poles. The remaining part, constituting twice as much as the proportion retained, remained in the hands of the Irish. We can therefore state that output of Polish workforce in Ireland contributes far more to the increase in the wealth of Irish citizens than it does to Poland, as 62% of the GDP remains in the hands of the Irish state.

The final conclusion is that bilateral co-operation is crucial for both nationalities as Ireland, being the richer, facilitates the flow of capital into Poland, and the Irish, in turn, become owners of businesses, service companies, banks, or land, let alone property developers and traders. In this way the two countries, so distant not so long ago, are now becoming closer. This is best reflected by increasing numbers of new Polish-Irish friendships and marriages, not to mention the travel.

## **Praca Polaków w Irlandii i płynące z niej korzyści dla obu narodów**

### **Streszczenie**

Na podstawie przeprowadzonych badań ankietowych w 2007 i 2008 roku wśród Polaków pracujących w Irlandii i Londynie autorzy przedstawiają:

– powody wyjazdów z Polski,



- źródła pozyskiwania informacji o możliwościach wyjazdów do Irlandii i W. Brytanii oraz otrzymania tam pracy,
- cel pobytu i charakter wykonywanej pracy,
- ocenę pobytu w Irlandii i w Londynie w świetle wypowiedzi respondentów,
- przyszłe zamierzenia odnośnie do pobytu i powrotu do Polski,
- wysokość otrzymywanych dochodów, kosztów utrzymania, oszczędności i ich przeznaczenia.