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## *Dilemmas Faced by Polish Migrants in the UK Concerning Brexit and Return Migration*

**Abstract:** This paper presents the results of an original quantitative sociological study conducted in Autumn 2019 on a sample of 620 Polish migrants living in London, Oxford, and Swindon. The study was conducted using a group-administered questionnaire. It was primarily to address the question of whether they intend to return to Poland and when. We identify some significant factors influencing their choices. Those are the length of stay in England, their financial situation, their knowledge of English, their ability to assimilate culturally, their relations to the families in Poland, homesickness, and better religious education of children. Religious issues, although mentioned, are less critical; however, a deeper statistical analysis allows to understand the religious background more broadly, to provide a clearer image of the respondents' deep motivations.

**Keywords:** Brexit, Polish migrants, economic migration, religiosity of migrants, Polish parishes.

## Introduction

There have been many studies and analyses of the post-accession migration of Poles, especially to the UK. Even so, few empirical studies have estimated how many people would be returning from Britain to their country of origin in the aftermath of Brexit. This sociological study focuses on Polish immigrants to the United Kingdom, with particular attention on post-accession migrants. We have chosen Poles living in three areas in England with diverse demographic and cultural backgrounds for this study. Swindon is a typical working-class town; Oxford, an example of a university city; and London, the largest urban area with a distinctive size and diverse social, economic, cultural, and technical and infrastructural characteristics. The aim of this paper is to describe the diversity of remigration trends, based on the migrants' current place of residence (Swindon, Oxford, London) and to explore the motivations behind the decision either to return to Poland, for those who plan to return soon, or for those who are undecided or who consider remigration a possibility in the future. All respondents were reached through Polish parish centres, around which many Polish communities' lives in the UK are concentrated. It is important to note that cities and towns account for the largest share of the population in the UK. A document by the UK Department for Environmental Food and Rural Affairs from January 2019 shows that in late 2017/early 2018, only 9.5 million people—i.e., 17.0% of the country's population—lived in rural areas, while about 495,700 people, or 0.9% of the British people, lived in rural settlements in a sparse setting [Government Statistical Service, 2019: 15]. Even though the studied sample was selected based on purposive sampling, the above facts do not make it more challenging to draw reasonable conclusions about the general population of Polish post-accession migrants to the United Kingdom and to construct future scenarios for economic migration developments: on the contrary, they make it far more manageable.

## Poles in the United Kingdom, in the light of recent social studies

Office for National Statistics data published in 2018 shows that the estimated number of Poles living in the United Kingdom is 905,000; 832,000 were born in Poland. It is necessary to note that these figures constitute a severe underestimate, as they fail to account for people who have not registered anywhere or who work with no legal authorization. Furthermore, over 12,000 Poles acquired British citizenship last year and therefore are not included in these statistics. The figures reported in late 2018 (905,000) are lower by 116,000 than those from late 2017 [Ceglarczyk 2019]. UK statistics clearly show that this drop in the number of Poles has been the first such dramatic decrease since the opening of the borders

for free trade and movement of people when Poland joined the EU in 2004. It is important to note that before Poland acceded to the European Union, there had been about 70,000 Poles living in the UK. In 2013, this number increased nearly tenfold.

In both Polish and British academic sources, publications have sought to keep up to date with the situation of migrants in the context of rapid changes in political decisions and postponement of the Brexit date, which could be observed back in the autumn of 2019. One of the most influential publications on this topic is “And then came Brexit: Experiences and plans of young EU migrants in the London region” [2017] by Aija Lulle, Laura Moroşanu, and Russell King. The authors conducted sixty in-depth interviews among students and young employees, both skilled and unskilled, from Ireland, Italy, and Romania, who moved to London in late 2015 or early 2016, just before the referendum. A further 27 interviews were carried out after the referendum. The study showed that, in the study group, Brexit made people feel uncertain about their plans and unsure whether to stay or go back home or perhaps emigrate elsewhere [Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018: 9]. A new sociological notion that has emerged in connection with this situation is Duncan Scott’s “the tactics of belonging: the idea is becoming more and more popular, and Brexit can only contribute to its popularity” [Scott 2013].

There is also a study by Louise Ryan, in which she relies on Mark Granovetter’s theory of embeddedness to study Poles in London to explore how these migrants are negotiating attachment and the sense of belonging as dynamic temporal, spatial, and relational processes? Ryan advocates adopting the concept of differentiated embedding, which can provide a frame of reference for studying how EU migrants living in the UK respond to Brexit [Ryan 2018]. In her publication “Security of Polish economic migrants in Great Britain in the light of Brexit”, Katarzyna Gierczak from the University of Wrocław claims, supported by a detailed analysis, that economic factors, such as an increase in prices, the depreciation of the pound, socio-cultural factors, and an increase in discrimination and xenophobia will constitute some of the key factors influencing the sense of security among Polish migrants following Brexit [Gierczak 2018: 33; Rzepnikowska 2018], thus strongly influencing their decisions about where to live and work.

Brexit reflects a political strategy designed to achieve a national reawakening and restore social solidarity among British people, something at least some of its advocates seem to believe. It certainly suggests that some changes are about to

occur, not only in the UK but also in continental Europe. In terms of security, it may have severe consequences for social solidarity throughout Europe as a whole [Frerichs and Sankari 2016]. Therefore, considering the broadly defined community of European countries, including the UK, whatever the consequences of Brexit turn out to be, there is another issue we wish to emphasize in this study. This problem is the considerable uncertainty faced by migrants about their social and other rights, including their right to work. This has been described in sociology as the precariat, theoretically developed and popularised by Guy Standing [2011]. Regarding Brexit, the concept of the precariat has been analysed by Duda-Mikulin [2018], who focuses mainly on the situation of women in the UK labour market. Polish migrants represent an illustrative example of large-scale economic migration under the new structural conditions of intra-European migration. Migration involves a specific risk, and migrants are likely to face uncertainty regarding working and living conditions. Duda-Mikulin has identified a perception that seems to affect British society at large and migrants in particular—an all-pervasive feeling of uncertainty, not only about work but indirectly about virtually all areas of human activity [Duda-Mikulin 2018: 10]. Regarding Brexit, the precariat is, without question, a new ethical and social problem.

The situation of Poles in the UK has also been examined in a recent study by Kate Botterill and Jonathan Hancock. Based on original qualitative data collected in Edinburgh following the referendum, those authors read the spatial identities and practices of Polish nationals living in Scotland. They use data they collected during biographical narrative interviews to determine how the referendum's outcome has impacted immigrants' attachment to place and nation. Their study provides some fascinating insights, one of which is that Polish nationals are in the process of rethinking their spatial identities following the Brexit vote. The study demonstrates the complexity of the spatial uniqueness of Polish migrants: they are not fixed but involve multiple scales of belonging, from subnational to supranational or post-national. The data had been collected to reflect the immediate reactions of Poles living in Scotland to the decision for Britain to leave the EU. The authors of that study argue that the immediate aftermath of the vote gave rise to a range of conflicting emotions and complex strategies of resistance [Botterill and Hancock 2018: 8]. The Glasgow and Edinburgh study is interesting, not only in sociological but also in historical terms. It captures a certain mood among Polish migrants right after the publication of the referendum results.

Given the subject matter of this article, a publication that seems crucial is a 2016 qualitative study by Derek McGhee, Chris Moreh, and Athina Vlachantoni from the University of Southampton, UK [2017]. They collected data online over the four months preceding the referendum, in a questionnaire running from 11 March 2016 to 23 June 2016. Using a sample of 894 Polish respondents, they examine the attitudes of Polish emigrants towards the referendum on Britain's membership in the EU and its impact on their lives. Considering the timeframe of that study, it can be used for comparative purposes, as the findings presented in this study are from October 2019.

All the mentioned sources present the importance of Brexit and the uncertainty of migrants who arrived in recent years and have adapted to the incoming changes. One of their main dilemmas was whether to stay there anyway or to arrange a return. To determine their opinions and doubts, we followed the field research process described below.

### **Data and Methods**

Using quantitative research methodology, we conducted an empirical study using "Poles in the United Kingdom in the face of Brexit", a survey questionnaire designed for a larger project that relies on the knowledge, opinions, and behaviour of people living in the UK concerning the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. As part of this empirical project, between September and October 2019, we surveyed 620 people. For sociological testing, we used the group-administered questionnaire method, the sample being selected based on how easy it was for us to meet with and survey the respondents. As a result, we decided to conduct the sociological study on the most extensive available communities of adult Poles in the UK, namely those in Polish parishes and Polish Saturday schools (teachers, office clerks, parents, and carers). This made it far easier to conduct the quantitative empirical study in the immigrant diaspora community, who were not easy to contact. Information regarding the survey and the collection of questionnaires was carried out around Polish Catholic parishes, led by priests as part of the Polish Catholic Mission in Great Britain and Wales in these cities. These centres record not only religious matters but also the social and cultural life of the Polish diaspora. This has been the case since the time of the historical Polish migration after World War II. Even so, after the mass post-accession migration in 2004 and subsequent years, the number of migrants increased significantly.

### **Intention to stay or to return**

It is important to note that this sociological study coincided with “Brexit fever”. In the last quarter of 2019, it looked as if the so-called Brexit scenario—a clean break from the EU—would be implemented by the House of Commons in the British parliament. This would lead to several consequences for both the EU and the UK. Consequently, it became front-page news in British and global mass media. Therefore, it seemed reasonable for us to ask respondents, “*Do you intend to return to Poland (and if you do, when)?*”

The percentage of respondents interested in returning was the highest among respondents with primary education (60.4%), people working physically (61.5%), assessing their financial situation as “average or bad” (61.4%), and declaring a poor proficiency of the language English (66.7% of respondents declaring a willingness to return to Poland declared deficient or no language knowledge). On the other hand, the desire to return to Poland in the coming years (reported in total by 23.5% of the respondents) was the highest among people with secondary or higher bachelor’s education (26.1% and 26.5% respectively), and blue-collar workers – (29%). Interestingly, people assessing their financial situation as “clearly good” were also more likely to return faster (30.7% chose this answer). Similarly, a greater tendency to contemplate a quick return was found amongst those staying in the UK for the shortest time (34% among those staying less than five years, compared with 10.3% among those waiting for 20 years and longer). On average, every seventh respondent decided to remain in the UK permanently. Logistic analysis showed the key factors influencing these attitudes. A relatively greater desire to return to Poland was declared by people who remained in the UK for a shorter time, were more involved in the activities of Polish diaspora organizations, and those who work physically (including those who are unemployed).

Logistic regression models were used for analyses, and, in this context, it was necessary to transform selected dependent and independent variables under the assumptions of the analysis. Affirmative answers to this question (i.e., within a year, within a few years, in an indefinite future) were further decoded as “1-desire to return to Poland”, while negative and undecided (i.e., never, hard to say) answers were recoded as “0-no desire to return”. Such defined willingness to return was expressed by half of Swindon respondents (48%), over 55% of Oxford respondents, and almost 60% of respondents in London. One in five respondents in Swindon (20.5%) and one in four from Oxford and London (25.1% and 25.5%, respectively) declared a wish to return to Poland in the near future; the average answer to this

question for all three locations amounted to 53.8% expressing a desire to return to Poland, and 23.5% expressing a desire to return in the coming years.

Table 1. *Do you intend to return to Poland (and if you do, when)?* [data in %]

		<i>Willingness to return to Poland</i>	<i>Willingness to return to Poland in the coming years</i>
Total		53.8	23.5
Sex	<i>Men</i>	58.7	27.1
	<i>Women</i>	50.6	21.0
Age group	<i>Below 30 years</i>	54.4	27.9
	<i>30-34</i>	62.7	27.7
	<i>35-39</i>	46.9	20.1
	<i>40-44</i>	52.3	21.2
	<i>45-49</i>	59.3	20.3
	<i>50 years and more</i>	57.6	27.3
Place of residence	<i>Swindon</i>	48.0	20.5
	<i>Oxford</i>	55.4	25.1
	<i>Londyn</i>	59.6	25.5
Education level	<i>basic or basic vocational</i>	60.4	14.6
	<i>general, technical or post-secondary</i>	58.0	26.1
	<i>higher vocational (bachelor's)</i>	53.8	26.5
	<i>higher master's or doctoral degree</i>	48.9	21.5
Professional activity	<i>Blue-collar</i>	61.5	29.0
	<i>White-collar</i>	47.1	18.4
Financial status	<i>Average or poor</i>	61.4	23.8
	<i>Satisfactory</i>	45.6	19.0
	<i>Good</i>	54.5	30.7
Religious practices	<i>occasional or non-practicing practitioners</i>	50.4	22.2
	<i>practitioners rarely</i>	63.9	27.8
	<i>practicing irregularly</i>	54.9	24.1
	<i>practicing regularly</i>	50.4	21.9
Knowledge of English	<i>Poor or no knowledge</i>	66.7	28.2
	<i>Communicative</i>	63.9	31.6
	<i>Good</i>	56.0	24.4
	<i>Fluent</i>	43.3	17.0

<i>Involvement in the activities of Polish organizations</i>	<i>No involvement</i>	47.5	14.4
	<i>Low involvement</i>	57.7	26.1
	<i>Moderately involved</i>	56.6	30.1
	<i>involved</i>	60.8	28.4
	<i>Very involved</i>	50.7	21.1
<i>Length of stay in the UK</i>	<i>Less than 5 years</i>	65.0	34.0
	<i>5-9 years</i>	65.6	33.3
	<i>10-14 years</i>	50.8	20.3
	<i>15-19 years</i>	44.3	17.2
	<i>20 years or more</i>	37.9	10.3

To sum up, even though the central variable does not produce statistically significant differences between the answers, it seems reasonable to observe that one in every four respondents intends to return to Poland within a year or in the near future. More than a half of respondents want to return eventually. An interesting group is represented by the undecided, since it is they who will determine how the future of post-accession migration to the UK plays out, whether they join the ranks of those who have already decided to stay in the UK or follow those who have resolved to remigrate.

The dilemma of whether to stay or return is primarily a question of the financial situation of the respondents. There are two powerful trends among immigrants. Those who had improved their families' financial situation as a result of personal advancement were twice as likely to say they wanted to stay in the UK, or at least postpone their decision to return to Poland until some unspecified time in the future, compared with those who, having achieved sufficient financial independence, wanted to return to Poland within the next few years. Therefore, one trend is that, as the economic situation deteriorates, there is an increase in the number of people who want to return to Poland at some unspecified time in the future (financially very comfortable 54.5%; relatively comfortable 45.6%; average or poor 61.4%). There is also a further contrary trend regarding the decision to stay in the UK: the better the financial situation of the respondent, the more likely they are to say they want to remain (financially very comfortable 20.5%; relatively comfortable 16.9%; average or poor 7.6%). The sense of security provided by financial well-being is sufficient and satisfactory for those respondents not to consider returning to Poland or postpone this decision to some unspecified time in the future. Returning to Poland within the next year is considered by every tenth respondent who is very comfortable in the UK (10.2%) and by half as many



of those who described their financial situation as relatively comfortable (5.3%). About one in fifteen respondents who described their financial situation as average or poor do not see any future in a continued stay abroad and intend to return to Poland within a year (6.6%). The decision to emigrate within the next few years proved to be nearly twice as likely among people who are satisfied with their financial conditions (financially very comfortable 20.5% or relatively comfortable 13.5%) than those who consider their situation not satisfactory (average or poor 17.1%). The most substantial number of people who had decided whether to stay or leave was found in the group who described their financial situation as relatively comfortable (36.8%). Indecision over this was reported by three in ten people who expressed their financial concern as average or poor (30.8%, and one in four who considered themselves very comfortable (25.0%).

Plans to leave the UK in the near future were reported by almost one in three men and a slightly lower number of women (M=27.1%; W=21%), predominantly the youngest immigrants (<30 years 27.6%), followed by those who during the study were 30–34 (27.7%), or over 50 (27.3%), while people between the ages of 35 and 39 (20.1%), 40–44 (21.2%), and 45–49 (20.3%) were the least likely to have such plans. Almost half as many people with primary or vocational education considered an early return compared with holders of a Bachelor's degree (14.6% vs. 26.5%), and by about one in five people with a Master's degree (21.5%) or secondary or post-secondary education (26.1%). Such a decision was reported almost twice as often by people involved with Polish community organizations than those who were not (28.4% vs. 14.4%), and by one in five people closely involved in Polish community organizations (21.1%).

One in every six women (16.0%) and one in ten men (10.6%) had not decided whether to return to Poland. Such an intention was declared by one in five of the youngest immigrants (<30 year-olds 20.6%), a slightly lower number of the oldest (>50 year-olds 18.2%), and far fewer people from the other age groups (45–49 year-olds 11.9%; 40–44 year-olds 12.9%; 35–39 year-olds 12.8%; 30–34 year-olds 10.7%). The highest levels of indecision (represented by the answer "It's hard to tell") were found in four in every ten respondents aged between 35 and 39 (40.0%), one in three people aged 40–44 (34.8%), a slightly lower number of people aged 45–49 (28.8%), over one in four people aged 30–34 (26.2%), and a slightly lower number of the youngest immigrants (25.0%). In contrast, the lowest levels were represented by people aged 50+ (24.2%). In terms of involvement with Polish community organizations abroad, such an answer was given by one in three closely involved

respondents (31.0%) and almost as many moderately (30.8%) and uninvolved people (28.9%), as well as those actively involved (28.4%).

While this sociological study does not indicate that intellectual competence in English is a strong predictor of staying abroad, there is a noticeable trend where the better the respondents' knowledge of the language, the less likely they are to leave (poor or no English language skills 38.5%; working knowledge 32.1%; intermediate 31.3%; fluent 26.1%). An intention to return within a few years was expressed by every sixth person fluent in English (17%). This sentiment was shared by nearly twice as many respondents who considered themselves intermediate language speakers (24.4%). A similar decision was made by one in three people who had a working knowledge of English (31.6%), and by more than one in four of those who had poor or no English language skills (28.5%).

The UK's immigration policy has existed for many years. It dates back to the late nineteenth century, from the time of a liberal immigration regime for immigrants from Europe and former British colonies, to active efforts to help integrate migrants from refugee camps in the aftermath of World War II; and then from the strict policy in the 1960s, associated with the seemingly endless influx of foreigners into the UK, to the "zero immigration policy" of the 1990s, to a complete reversal of the immigration policy in 2004 caused, for example, by rapid economic growth and a workforce shortage [Fihel and Piętka 2007: 5–6]. These shifts in immigration rules, especially over the last several decades, seem significant here. Having assessed the research data collected, we decided to adopt length of stay in the UK as the independent variable. We identified five periods, whose distribution approximates perfect normal distribution and corresponds to historical developments in the global economy and the UK's migration policy. The groups we identified were as follows: Polish immigrants who arrived in the UK before 1999; those who arrived in the UK between 2000 and 2004 (2000 was the year the Treaty of Nice was drafted to allow the European Union to admit the new Member States); the first wave of economic migrants immediately following Poland's accession to the EU (2005–2009); the second wave of economic migrants (2010–2014), which started right after the global financial crisis, which was symbolized by the collapse of the American investment bank Lehman Brothers; and the most recent Polish migrants who came to the UK after 2015. An intention to return to Poland at an unspecified time was declared by more men as women (M=58.7%; W=50.6%), with slightly more people over fifty (57.6%) compared with other age groups (45–49 year-olds 59.3%; 40–44 year-olds 52.3%; 35–39 year-olds, >30 year-olds 54.4%).

The age group of 30–34-year-olds was most likely to return to Poland, however with no detailed plans: 62.7% declared a generalized will to return.

### **Motivations behind the decision to remigrate**

The next question asked in our survey questionnaire was about the declared motivations behind returning to Poland. Statistical analysis was used both for the respondents who had already decided that they would leave the UK and for those who had not yet made up their minds but expressed some opinion on the matter.

More than half of the respondents from London and Oxford reported separation from family and weakening family bonds (65.2% and 63.6%, respectively) as the main reasons for returning to Poland. This opinion was shared by a slightly lower number of people living in Swindon (62.4%). The most popular motivation behind returning to Poland was nostalgia or homesickness (London 45.2%; Oxford 42%; Swindon 43%). Improvement in the quality of life in Poland encouraged more than one in three people living in London (37.8%), one in four living in Oxford (28%), and one in five living in Swindon (25.5%) to consider remigration. Weakening connections with Polish culture, customs, and traditions as the motivation behind the decision to remigrate was slightly more frequent among people living in Oxford than among those from Swindon or London (28% vs. 24.8% and 24.4%, respectively). One in every five Poles living in the UK (Oxford 25.9%; London 24.4%; Swindon 24.2%) might consider leaving due to the lack of acceptance of multiculturalism and ideological diversity. The argument for a better religious education for children in Poland compared with the UK was given by almost twice as many respondents from Oxford (22.4%) as from London (12.6%), and by one in every five Poles from Swindon (18.1%). The argument concerning children's religious upbringing was also more often given by those participating in the religious life of the parish. Better quality and accessible religious education in Poland is more likely to be an argument for leaving for men than for women (M=21.8%; W=14.8%); for thirty-somethings (30–34 year-olds 2.4%; 35–39 year-olds 18.3%) rather than for forty-somethings (40–44 year-olds 11.5%; 45–49 year-olds 9.5%); and for similar numbers of the youngest (<30 year-olds 21.3%) and oldest immigrants (>50 year-olds 20.4%). Health issues were the least popular reason for returning to Poland from the UK. Health was cited by similar numbers of men and women (M=3.2%; W=3.8%), more often, unsurprisingly, by persons aged 50+ (10.2%), and least often by thirty-somethings (30–34-year-olds 1.6%; 35–39 year-olds 2.5%) and those younger than 30 (2.1%).

Table 2. What are your main motivations for returning to Poland? [data in %, numbers present percentage of respondents in various categories who answered positively]

		Separation from family / weakening of contacts with family	The disappearance of Polish culture, customs, and traditions	Injury to health	Improving the quality of living in Poland	Guarantee of the religious education of children	Longing, nostalgia for the country	A multicultural dispute in the UK, ideological incompatibility
<b>Total</b>		<b>63.7</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>43.3</b>	<b>24.8</b>
Sex	Men	54.5	25.6	3.2	36.5	21.8	42.9	28.2
	Women	69.6	25.1	3.8	26.2	14.8	44.1	23.6
Age	below 30 years	72.3	34.0	2.1	27.7	21.3	34.0	21.3
	30-34	68.8	32.8	1.6	21.9	23.4	40.6	26.6
	35-39	70.0	26.7	2.5	28.3	18.3	40.0	30.8
	40-44	65.5	23.0	3.4	32.2	11.5	49.4	26.4
	45-49	45.2	11.9	2.4	40.5	9.5	50.0	31.0
	50 years or more	55.1	18.4	10.2	34.7	20.4	55.1	6.1
Place of residence	Swindon	62.4	24.8	1.3	25.5	18.1	43.0	24.2
	Oxford	63.6	28.0	4.2	28.0	22.4	42.0	25.9
	London	65.2	24.4	5.2	37.8	12.6	45.2	24.4
Level of education	basic or basic vocational	48.6	27.0	5.4	32.4	16.2	35.1	8.1
	general, technical or post-secondary	69.3	27.3	3.3	33.3	22.7	42.7	26.7
	higher vocational (bachelor's)	55.1	25.6	2.6	29.5	15.4	46.2	28.2
	higher master's or doctoral degree	66.9	22.9	3.2	27.4	14.0	45.2	24.8

Professional activity	Blue-collar	63.0	28.2	3.2	33.8	22.7	45.4	24.5
	White-collar	65.2	22.5	2.8	24.7	10.1	42.1	25.8
Financial situation	Average or poor	66.5	23.0	5.0	37.3	19.9	47.2	28.0
	Satisfactory	62.7	22.9	1.2	25.9	12.7	43.4	20.5
	Good	59.3	25.4	3.4	22.0	20.3	33.9	30.5
Religious activity	occasional or non-practicing	58.4	22.1	1.3	31.2	9.1	41.6	16.9
	practitioners rarely	73.3	32.0	6.7	28.0	16.0	57.3	17.3
	practicing irregularly	66.4	24.8	3.5	33.6	15.9	38.1	27.4
	practicing regularly	60.9	24.4	3.2	27.6	23.7	41.7	31.4
Knowledge of English	Poor or no knowledge	71.0	25.8	3.2	32.3	29.0	45.2	25.8
	Comunicative	60.6	22.1	5.8	32.7	16.3	46.2	22.1
	Good	61.1	28.2	1.3	28.9	22.8	44.3	28.9
	Fluent	67.4	23.9	4.3	29.7	10.1	39.9	22.5
Involvement in the activities of Polish organizations	No involvement	66.4	19.6	1.9	22.4	17.8	43.0	17.8
	Low involvement	63.4	30.7	2.0	30.7	14.9	45.5	32.7
	Moderately involved	65.7	24.8	2.9	35.2	18.1	41.9	26.7
	involved	64.2	34.0	9.4	35.8	20.8	39.6	28.3
	Very involved	54.3	21.7	6.5	26.1	19.6	50.0	17.4
Length of stay in the UK	Below 5 years	65.0	28.8	1.3	21.3	20.0	33.8	20.0
	5-9 years	72.4	31.6	3.9	25.0	22.4	42.1	31.6
	10-14 years	63.5	22.8	2.4	32.9	16.8	48.5	28.7
	15-19 years	64.0	26.7	8.0	32.0	13.3	44.0	22.7
	20 years or more	31.3	6.3	6.3	62.5	6.3	56.3	6.3

Isolation from family as the primary reason for returning to Poland was reported more often by women (W=69.6%; M=54.5%) and by people aged 34 or less (<30-year-olds 72.3%; see Table 2. for details), and less frequently among those respondents with primary or vocational education (48.6%) than the more highly educated (see Table 2). Simultaneously, the proportions were similar between those working in blue-collar jobs and those in white-collar jobs (63% vs. 65.2%, respectively). Regarding the independent variable financial situation, the less affluent the respondent was, the more they seemed to miss their family (very comfortable 59.3%; relatively comfortable 62.7%; average or poor 66.5%). Compared to those who considered themselves fluent or intermediate in English or with a working knowledge of English, those with poor language skills were more likely to feel cut off from their family (67.4%, 61.1% vs. 71%, respectively). Involvement with Polish community organizations abroad was slightly more likely to make up for the lack of contact with loved ones among people who were closely or actively involved, compared to those with moderate, low, or no involvement (54.3% and 64.2% vs. 65.7%, 63.4%, and 66.4%, respectively). The intention to leave the UK and return to Poland because of separation from family was much more often declared by those respondents who arrived in the UK between 2010 and 2014, and the most recent immigrants who had been in the UK for up to five years (72.4% and 65%, respectively), compared to those who immigrated before 1999 (31.3%). A longing for one's close relatives was expressed by more than half of respondents who had been living abroad for 10–14 years (63.5%) or slightly longer (15–19 years 64%). It should be noted that for Poles in the UK, family is still one of the most important arguments for returning to Poland if emigration has forced separation from family members. If parents have children who were born in the UK and for whom English is the first language, they often think about staying in emigration for the sake of their children (Fel, Kozak and Wódka 2022: 97-121).

A sense of nostalgia for their homeland was felt by more than one in three men (42.9%) and slightly more women (44.1%), usually by the oldest participants in the study (>50 year-olds 55.1%; 45–49 year-olds 50%); by only one in three of the youngest immigrants (<30 year-olds 34%), usually with a Master's degree (45.2%) and least often with primary or vocational education (35.1%). Being homesick was more frequently reported by blue-collar workers than white-collar ones (45.4% vs. 42.1%), those who were not that proficient in English (working knowledge 46.2%; poor or no English-language skills 45.2%; intermediate 44.3%; fluent 39.9%), and those who had arrived in the UK before 1999 (56.3%) in contrast with those who had lived there for up to five years (33.8%). We also observed that the

less affluent the respondent was, the more homesick they seemed to feel (financially very comfortable 33.9%; relatively comfortable 43.4%; average or poor 47.2%).

The recent improvement in the quality of life in Poland encouraged one in three men (36.5%) and one in four women (26.2%) to consider returning. This was more often true for older immigrants to the UK (>50 year-olds 34.7%; 45–49 year-olds 40.5%) than for younger thirty-somethings (35–39 year-olds 28.3%; 30–34 year-olds 21.9%), usually moderately involved with Polish community organizations (35.8%) and less frequently showing no involvement whatsoever (22.4%). Those were twice as likely to be people who had been living in the UK the longest (62.5%) compared with those who had immigrated up to five years ago (21.3%). What was unsurprising was that an improvement to the quality of life was more likely to be cited as their motivation for returning to Poland by respondents who were less comfortable financially (very comfortable 22%; relatively comfortable 25.9%; average or poor 37.3%). A further noticeable trend was that more educated people were less likely to return to Poland because of the improvement in the quality of life there (primary or vocational education 32.4%; secondary or post-secondary education 33.3%; Bachelor's degree 29.5%; Master's degree 27.4%). Those who were more proficient in English were less likely to consider returning to Poland because of its improving quality of life (intermediate 28.9%; fluent 29.7%) compared with those who believed themselves to have a working knowledge of English, or who admitted to being unable to speak the language (32.7% and 32.3%, respectively).

A decline in Polish culture, customs, and traditions as the answer to the question about respondents' motivations behind returning to Poland was almost equally popular among men and women (M=25.6%; W=25.1%). Those were the least likely to be forty-somethings (45–49 year-olds 11.9%; 40–44 year-olds 23%) and most likely to be people aged 34 or under (<30 year-olds 34%; 30–34 year-olds 32.8%). They were more often people with poor or no English language skills, compared with those who were fluent (25.8% vs. 23.9%); least often people with no involvement in Polish community organizations (19.6%); and most often those who considered themselves actively involved (34%). A decline in their culture, customs, and traditions proved to be the least disturbing for Polish immigrants to the UK who arrived there before 1999 (6.3%), and for one in four of those who came in the first decade of the new millennium (2000–2004 26.7%; 2005–2009 22.8%). Those who were the most worried about this were the most recent immigrants, who came to the UK in 2010–2014 (31.6%) or after 2015 (28.8%).

Multicultural issues might be one of the many arguments for returning to Poland for 28.2% of men and 23.6% of women, more often aged 45–49 (31%) and less often aged 50 or more (6.1%), and less often with primary or vocational education (8.1%), compared with those with secondary or post-secondary education (26.7%), a Bachelor's degree (28.2%) or a Master's degree (24.8%). These were divided almost equally among people working in blue-collar jobs and with white-collar jobs (24.5% and 25.8%, respectively), and least frequently concerned those who were comfortable financially (20.5%), and most often concerned those who were very pleased (30.5%), or average or poor (28%). Regarding involvement with Polish community organizations, ideological issues are least likely to be a reason for returning to Poland for two groups of respondents at opposite extremes (no involvement 17.8%; close involvement 17.4%), and most likely for people with low participation (32.7%). Multiculturalism is an issue for 6.3% of people who arrived in the UK before 1999. This number is nearly five times smaller than that for respondents who came to the UK in the first half of this century (2010–2014: 31.6%).

### Conclusions

The years 2004 and 2020 mark crucial moments in history, regarding political, social, and economic transformations and migration. One of the EU's steps towards greater spatial mobility was the liberalization of its border control policy and the opening of labour markets in Western Europe to immigrants from other parts of Europe, including Poles. The great unknown associated with Brexit and its consequences raises questions about whether to carry on with or to adjust the European scenario. Fifteen years after 1 May 2004, when Poland joined the EU and Member States such as the UK opened their labor markets, it seems reasonable to revisit questions about the sense of stability and the gradual social adaptation of those immigrants who wish to remain in the UK; on the other hand, Brexit could be considered by immigrants as the definitive end to the dream of the “promised land” meaning that their prospects of an improved financial situation and better future are ruined.

To sum up our analyses, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Immigrants do not share clear and unanimous views about returning to Poland or staying in the UK. However, it is essential to note that there are no statistically significant differences between people living in different areas (Swindon, Oxford, London). At least 25 percent of Polish immigrants can be expected



to return soon, if not within the next twelve months, then certainly within the next few years, and with long-term forecasts, this may be true for up to 50 percent of Poles currently living in the UK. An interesting group are the “undecided”. Virtually identical levels of indecision characterize Poles living in the English areas covered by the study. An intention to stay was most likely to be given by people living in Swindon, a working-class town; it was least likely among those living in Oxford, a university city, but this difference was not significant. This might be associated with the costs of living, which are far higher in the smaller university city than in a relatively sizeable working-class town with some 200.000 people.

2. Blue-collar workers are more likely than white-collar workers to return to Poland across all periods, whether within the next twelve months or later. More long-term forecasts can be produced based on data available from Statistics Poland (GUS). Between 2004 and 2010, the sharpest increase in salary levels was recorded in groups such as technicians and other middle-level specialists (55.9%), and in two of the lowest-level professional groups, salespersons and people working in services (54.8%) and unskilled workers (53.3%) [Zgliczyński 2013: 105]. This suggests that blue-collar workers, having experienced labour market fragility in Poland a few years back and not having moved up the social ladder, do not risk a great deal by returning home, having better prospects in their homeland now than before they emigrated.
3. For persons who are more comfortable financially, there are two opposing trends. The first can be considered in terms of change, the other in terms of continuity. It appears that some of those who wish to leave the UK immediately include people who consider themselves to be very comfortable or (somewhat) comfortable financially. On the other hand, almost the same proportion of people, who are either rather or very pleased financially, do not intend to leave the UK. It seems likely that the above-described trends are based upon the differences in personal objectives motivating the former decisions to migrate to the UK. Those in the first group may wish to return to Poland because they have improved their financial situation. Those in the other group may want to stay because they see opportunities to further improve their finances.
4. The proportion of people who intend to return to Poland at some unspecified time in the future increases in proportion to the decline in respondents' wealth. This can be explained as follows: those who have failed to achieve their expected

level of financial independence abroad still want to return to Poland at some point therefore, they have postponed their return, believing that their chance of changing their financial situation is still better in the UK than in Poland. This is a noticeable trend where one in every four respondents considers themselves very comfortable. One in three who regard themselves as (relatively) comfortable or in an average or poor financial conditions is undecided about whether to leave or stay. Migrants of this kind often have no clear purpose behind their economic migration [cf. Szymczak 2018]. As a result, on the one hand, some of the most affluent Polish immigrants to the UK are planning to return immediately; on the other hand, almost the same proportion of such comfortably-off people intend to stay in the UK. Therefore, the future of immigration will not be determined by the richest or by the poorest, but by the undecided immigrants, and those who have postponed making their decision.

5. People who are less proficient in English are more likely to consider leaving the UK, which is hardly surprising. Not knowing the language, they cannot integrate and bridge the gap between the immigrant community and the native population, let alone blend in [Włodarczyk 2005: 5]. On the other hand, a more significant proportion of undecided people regarding their return to Poland has been recorded among more fluent English speakers. This could mean that language proficiency is not a substantial reason for staying abroad, which is also confirmed by the conducted logistic regression analyzes.
6. The time spent abroad is also an essential factor. Around 30 percent of respondents who have been in the UK for the shortest time, representing the last three periods, said they would return to Poland at some unspecified time in the future (<5 years 34%; 5–9 years 33.3%; 10–14 years 20.3%). These were people who do not have any specific plans for the near future and have not decided to return home no matter what. They are the ones who will determine what the Polish community in the UK looks like in the future. It is important to note that one in every three of those immigrants who have been in the UK the longest are planning to return to Poland. Only one in ten of the most recent immigrants say they are never going to return.
7. The primary reason for leaving the UK is missing one's family. This finding is supported by other sociological studies, which clearly show that family continues to be among the top values in the axiological systems of the Polish people. A report by Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (a Polish analytical

institution), in a sociological survey conducted in January 2019, shows that a happy family continues to be among the dominant values held by Poles in their everyday lives. In that survey, this was true for four in every five respondents (80%) [Boguszewski 2019: [1]. In this study, 63.7% of respondents (M=54.5%, W=69.6%) gave missing one's family as a reason to return to Poland.

8. What proved to be most interesting was the correlation between immigrants' current wealth and the motivations behind their decision. Those who were better off seemed not to miss their families so much, while those who were less comfortable were more likely to want to return to Poland because they missed their families. Perhaps this reflects some rationalization. Unsatisfactory quality of life in Poland, a gap between one's expectations and reality, and not wanting to accept the bleak prospect of any improvement in one's situation all undoubtedly help rationalize respondents' perspectives on remigration, and consequently show that they do not seem to feel homesick. An opposite trend can be observed among those people who seem disappointed by their emigration, which failed to be worth their while by, for example, improving their financial situation. It is hardly surprising that the people who are less comfortable in the UK are more likely to cite the improvement in the quality of life in Poland as their motivation. We also observed that people were more likely to feel homesick as their financial situation deteriorated, making it a severe argument to remigration, particularly among those respondents who found themselves disappointed by the prospects offered by life abroad. This further shows how solid economic reasons are. Financial reasons tend to be more important than emotional ones, such as homesickness.
9. What is also important to note is the acculturation and assimilation of immigrants into their new community abroad. Poor or no knowledge of the local language contributes to how much they miss their loved ones back home. Not being able to assimilate into the new environment, they develop a sense of being rejected by the local population. This shows the role of Polish community organizations abroad. People involved with such organizations are the least likely to miss their loved ones back home, and, as people spend more time abroad, they are less likely to feel that the culture and customs related to Polish traditions are in decline. This can be attributed to assimilation.
10. One more important observation follows from the research: representatives of the younger generation (people under 30) perceive their place in exile in a manner significantly different than older ones. They are more attached to

the national culture, customs, and traditions (even while staying abroad) than the 40- and 50-year-olds. More often than not, older people believe that it is desirable to return to their home country sooner or later. The reasons for this attitude are not clear-cut. They may result from several factors, ranging from a shorter period of stay in exile to a different moment of departure (Poland's increasingly more favorable economic situation than the economies of the old EU countries) or others.

It is undeniable that Polish people continue to be among the most recognisable national minorities in the UK. While no massive remigration should be expected, it seems highly likely that up to 50 percent of Polish emigrants will eventually be returning home. In this respect, a critical role will be played by the contemporary precariat, meaning undecided people who are torn between the current uncertainties associated with professional stability in Poland and the UK. They find themselves in a precarious situation, with no reasonable prospects and unable to plan their future because of the uncertainty they feel and the unpredictability of tomorrow, which, in a sense, makes them feel vulnerable to social downward mobility [Standing 2014: 19, 155, 175]. Such people continue, if not in geographical, then at least in psychological terms, to seek stability and balance in life and a sense of security [Trąbka and Pustulka 2020]. Moreover, the possible consequences of Brexit are hard to anticipate. It might be considered a threat and an opportunity for immigrants to the United Kingdom from a critical perspective. The plans to limit immigration following the UK's withdrawal from the European Union might mean, contrary to what might be expected, new long-term opportunities for people living in the UK. What is certain is that this series of developments will pose new challenges for those Poles who are now part of the Polish community in the UK.

The following most popular motivations for returning to Poland were nostalgia or homesickness; the third was the subjective belief that the quality of life in Poland has improved. Other reasons for returning to Poland were the decline in Polish culture and customs, issues related to multiculturalism in the UK, and better religious education in Poland. It is also worth mentioning that religious people also had a greater tendency to get involved in the parish life and have a greater interest in its confessional activities. Therefore, religious issues in deciding whether to return are not of primary importance. Although they are given more often by younger respondents who have recently stayed in the UK, this argument is mentioned as important by only one in five of them. The data collected in the study show that the religiosity of the respondents is essential for the declared

willingness to return to Poland. The indicators of religiosity that were taken into account included: declarations of participation in religious practices, activity in Polish organizations and associations, and declared religiosity. Non-religious respondents are twice as willing to stay in the UK as religious ones. One of the side effects of parish activities is, at least in the respondents' declarations, maintaining ties with the country of origin. With its religious and social activities, the parish can be defined as an extension of contact with Polishness, by cultivating holidays and customs deeply rooted in the national culture.

Another question may be raised, which factors do not affect the willingness to return? Apart from the subjective perception and self-definition of one's situation in emigration as favourable, primarily economically, it seems that one can say that migration is treated as a kind of a plan or career path. After achieving the expected effects—even if it is a sufficiently high amount of money savings—it is desirable and planned to return to the country and place of origin. However, factors such as knowledge of the English language and subjective satisfaction with the economic situation do not play such a role (logistic regression analyses showed no statistically significant correlation, cf. Table 3). Therefore, is religious motivation primary? Not at this time; however, it should not be underestimated in the relatively religious sample in this research. Ongoing contact with religious services in the Polish language might be an additional trigger with return motivations.

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