

Chapter 7

Ukrainian Migration to Poland: A “Local” Mobility?

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7.1 Introduction

Poland has a long history of ties to the territories of contemporary Ukraine dating from the fourteenth century, when parts of Ukraine were ruled by the Kingdom of Poland. Before World War II approximately five million Ukrainians lived in Polish territories. By the late 1940s only 200,000 were left, mainly due to the shift of the Eastern border after the war, but also as a result of forced displacement carried out by the Polish military (Motyka 2000; Hałagida 2002). The contemporary flow of migrants from Ukraine to Poland started in the 1990s. As researchers have pointed out, a new, distinct migration space was formed in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) at that time (Council of Europe 1992; Castles and Miller 1993; Rudolph and Morokvasic 1993; Frejka et al. 1999; Stola 2001; Stola and Wallace 2001; Grzymała-Kazłowska and Okólski 2003; Okólski 2004).

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Okólski (2004) points to at least three historical developments that shaped the migration trends in CEE: relative economic and institutional underdevelopment, a relative wealth of labour and the instability of state borders. A diversification in terms of economic performance occurred, with growing wage disparities between the countries within the region. Poland, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, became an attractive destination for Ukrainians escaping the deteriorating living conditions at home (see Chap. 3). In contrast to fears voiced in 1989, migrants from CEE did not head for Western Europe, but primarily remained within the region. The reasons for this were entry restrictions to the Schengen Area, higher travel and stay costs (and thus higher risks) in the West compared to CEE, fast development of migrant networks within the region, cultural proximity and overall familiarity of migrants with a common post-socialist reality (Okólski 2004). As a result, a new migration space was created, with migration between Ukraine and Poland having the character of local forms of mobility between neighbouring countries. Local forms of mobility from Ukraine to Poland can be viewed as being predominantly temporary and reflect highly repetitive cross-border movement, seen by the migrants as relatively attractive earnings-wise and posing low risks. Today, Ukrainians represent the largest and most diverse migrant group in Poland. Moreover, this group is becoming more and more diversified due to changes in mobility patterns and legalization strategies.

For over two decades Poland did not have an articulated migration policy, and attitudes toward migrants entering Poland were rather reactive. The entry of foreigners was seen as having a positive impact on the economic development especially of border regions as well as on the improvement of social relations between societies with previously restricted mobility. The liberal approach to foreigners entering Poland has slowly been curtailed with Poland's process of joining the European Union. Visas for Ukrainian nationals were introduced in 2003, just before Poland's accession to the EU, and a more complex visa system was introduced upon Poland's joining the Schengen zone in 2007. However, over time, new facilitations for visa applicants from Ukraine were proposed. Poland's migration policy, elaborated by several ministries, was accepted by the government in 2012 and became the main framework for further administrative plans regarding migrants. It gives precedence to certain types of migrants, including labour migrants from specific countries with close cultural and geographic connections, such as Ukraine (MIA 2012). Thus, Poland's migration policy mainly addresses spatial and cultural proximity: local mobility between neighbouring countries, as well as groups that will potentially easily adapt in Polish society. The priority is to increase the scale of legal employment of foreigners with skills required by the Polish labour market. Among other measures facilitating this, Poland has liberalized employment and legalization procedures, extended the validity of temporary residence permits and signed a bilateral social security agreement with Ukraine.

This chapter focuses on the migration of Ukrainians to Poland that followed the development of a new migration space in the 1990s within Central and Eastern Europe (see for example Stola 2001), arguing that the post-2014 political developments in Ukraine have led to a weakening of this local mobility, with migrants arriving from new places of origin. The chapter critically presents the existing state of

knowledge on contemporary Ukrainian migration to Poland, including available data sources and basic data on its nature and scale. Using official statistical data and available estimates, it outlines migrants’ socio-demographic characteristics, their regions of origin and destination, and the type of work they engage in. A brief overview of literature on Ukrainian migration to Poland is also provided.

7.2 Ukrainian Migrants’ Characteristics

Where do Ukrainian migrants to Poland originate and where in Poland do they go? Data from household surveys point to Western Ukraine as the main place of origin of Ukrainian labour migrants in Poland – from over three-quarters of migrants in 2005–2008 to over 90% in 2010–2012 originated from that region (UCSR and Ukrstat 2009; ILO 2013). This concentration of places of migrant origin along the Ukrainian-Polish border is an argument in favour of treating Ukrainian migration to Poland as a particular form of mobility – a local movement between neighbouring states. However, since 2014 a diversification of places of origin has occurred, with Central and Eastern Ukraine also starting to play a role.

As regards places of residence in Poland, according to the Office for Foreigners data, as of 9 December 2014, 37% of Ukrainian nationals resided in Mazowieckie province, the majority of them in Warsaw. Large urban centres provide more work opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy as well as allowing irregular or semi-compliant migrants from Ukraine to remain “invisible”. However, rural areas also are an important destination for seasonal workers from Ukraine as they attract workers to the agriculture sector. Ukrainians also chose regions in the south and east of Poland: Dolnośląskie and Małopolskie (10 and 9%, respectively), Lubelskie (8%), Podkarpackie (6%) and Śląskie (5%) provinces. A similar picture with regard to regional distribution emerges from the 2011 population census (see Fig. 7.1): the Mazowieckie province takes the lead, followed by Lubelskie and Dolnośląskie provinces. The relatively high numbers of Ukrainian migrants in eastern and southern Poland are a result of the nearness to the Ukrainian border, the attractiveness of large urban centres and initially also the presence of the Ukrainian minority (Polish citizens of Ukrainian ethnicity), a legacy of (forced) repatriation from the former Soviet Union (mainly Soviet Republic of Ukraine) after World War II (Górny et al. 2010).

7.2.1 *Ukrainian Migration in Numbers: Large Inflows, Little Settlement?*

This section presents various data on the inflows and stock of Ukrainian migrants in Poland. It should be noted that the data sources showing the scale of both inflows and residence have certain drawbacks, with the population census and data sources on residence permits underestimating the actual number of migrants staying in

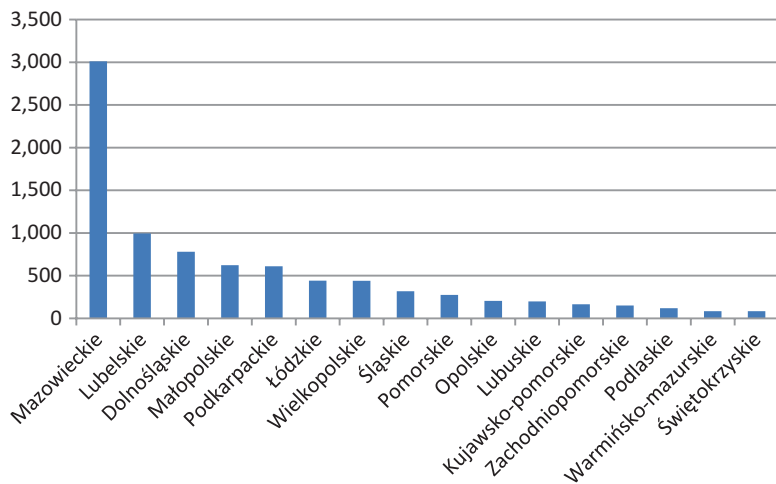


Fig. 7.1 Ukrainian migrants staying over 3 months in Poland by province, 2011 (Source: CSO (2011) Population Census, table 3)

Poland. This is because not all migrants entering and staying in Poland apply for residence cards – the majority stay based on visas. Moreover, the inflow data count the flows and not people, and the same person may cross the border or be granted a visa more than once a year. Nevertheless, the available data on the scale and intensity of flows combined with the limited scale of settlement point to the local character of Ukrainians' migration to Poland.

As far as inflows are concerned, in 2014, Polish consular services issued over 556,500 visas to Ukrainian citizens (predominantly Schengen visas). Since 15 September 2012, Ukrainians no longer have to pay for national visas if they intend to stay in Poland for between 3 months and 1 year.¹ Since July 2009, the Agreement on Local Border Traffic between Poland and Ukraine has been in force. Based on this agreement, Ukrainian nationals residing in the border zone – the area extending 30 km from the border – do not need visas, but only local border traffic permits entitling them to multiple crossings of the Polish border. The number of border crossings by Ukrainian citizens under a local border traffic agreement has been increasing each year (13 to 40% depending on year). It amounted to 10,734,959 in 2015 (Border Guard Statistics 2015).

Compared to the inflows of Ukrainian migrants, the stock of Ukrainian migrants is much lower. According to the Office for Foreigners, on 3 September 2015 Ukrainian nationals held less than 62,000 valid residence cards in total (including almost 26,000 permanent residence permits, almost 3000 EU long-term residence permits and over 33,000 temporary residence permits). Although this number is considerably lower than the number of visas issued, it still constitutes almost 27%

¹Previously only selected categories of people were exempt from the fee. This is a step towards visa liberalization for Ukraine.

of the total population of foreigners in Poland captured in official statistics.² According to the 2011 population census, Ukrainian citizens constituted the largest group of foreign permanent residents in Poland (13,400, or 25%).

Data on Ukrainian labour migrants also provide examples of differences between a large pool of mobile, temporary labour force, entering on the basis of a simplified employment procedure (the so-called employer’s declaration system implemented in 2007)³ for up to 6 months during twelve consecutive months without a work permit, and migrant workers employed on the basis of work permits. However, it should be emphasized that neither statistics on work permits nor employer’s declarations account for all Ukrainian migrant workers, for the following reasons. First, there are many categories of foreigners who do not need additional documents to work in Poland. These are, for instance, EU long-term resident’s permit holders, permanent residence permit holders, graduates of Polish educational institutions and spouses of Polish citizens. Thus, information on their involvement in the labour market in Poland is not reflected in the statistics on work permits or employers’ declarations. The second reason is that a considerable share of Ukrainian nationals work unofficially, especially in some sectors, such as domestic work, agriculture, construction (for an extensive analysis of the undocumented work status of Ukrainian migrants in a number of countries, see Chap. 4). The third reason relates to the way the employers’ declarations are used: for Ukrainian migrants they may facilitate receiving a visa to enter Poland, but often they do not follow this up by starting work for the employer who registered the declaration. Moreover, one Ukrainian may possess more than one declaration. This means that the number of declarations does not translate into the number of seasonal workers (see also Chap. 4).

7.2.2 Main Sectors of Employment for Ukrainian Migrants in Poland

Although the statistics on employers’ declarations and work permits do not reflect the real scale of Ukrainians’ involvement in the labour market, they seem to capture the general trends as regards the main sectors of employment and types of jobs held.

The majority of Ukrainian migrants work in the so-called secondary sector of the labour market. This is confirmed by a number of data sources. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy data (MLSP 2014), in 2014 work permit holders were employed mostly by private households, in construction, transport, retail and wholesale trade. According to data on employers’ declarations of intent to employ a foreigner, in 2014 the majority of Ukrainian nationals were registered in

²Followed by Germans (11%), Russian nationals (6%), Belarusians (5.5%), Vietnamese (5%) and Italians (3%).

³The facilitated procedure for employment of seasonal workers had already been introduced in 2006, but it only concerned employment in agriculture for a maximum of 3 months within 6 months.

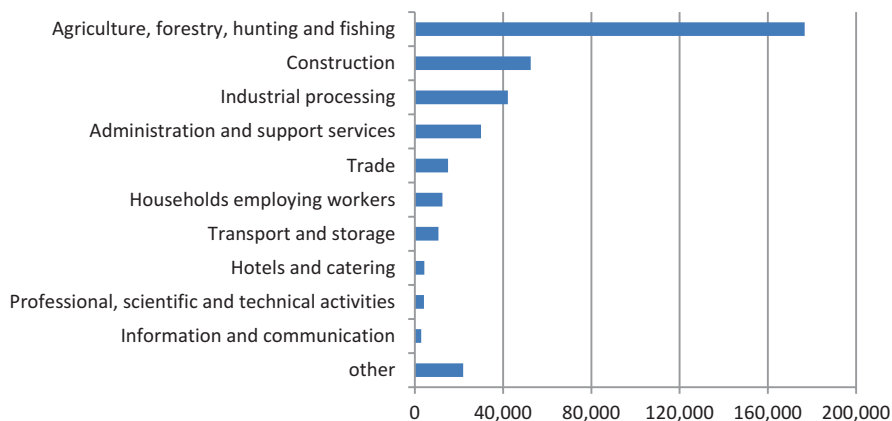


Fig. 7.2 Declarations of intent to employ a Ukrainian citizen registered by county labour offices in 2014 by main labour market sector (*Source: Based on MLSP (2014a)*)

agriculture, followed by construction, industrial processing, administration and support services (see Fig. 7.2).

Household surveys conducted in Ukraine in 2008 and in 2012 (UCSR and Ukrstat 2009; ILO 2013) reveal that the majority of Ukrainian migrants in Poland work in basic occupations. These survey results show a considerable number of Ukrainian migrants in the category of “skilled workers using specific tools” (16% and 11% for 2008 and 2012 surveys, respectively) and “workers in services and sales” (12% and 28%, respectively). Importantly, less than 7% of Ukrainian workers in Poland in 2010–2012 had jobs that reflected their level of education (ILO 2013), which suggests a process of deskilling among Ukrainian migrants.

While the majority of Ukrainians in Poland work, they are also present among students: in the academic year 2013/2014, there were 15,123 Ukrainian students out of a total of 35,983 foreign students (Perspektywy Education Foundation 2013). Between 2012 and 2015 the number of temporary residence permits issued to Ukrainians for educational purposes (including studies), has also increased: from 2351 in 2013, 3798 in 2014 to 4553 in the first 8 months of 2015.

7.2.3 Recent Trends: Effects of the Military Conflict in Ukraine or Change in the Law in Poland?

In November 2013, political protests against the Ukrainian government’s anti-EU stance started in Ukraine. The events that followed made some researchers and policy makers anticipate a wave of political refugees from Ukraine to the EU, including Poland. However, Jaroszewicz (2014) argues that rather than seeking refugee status, Ukrainian nationals will continue to circulate for work, with young people seeking opportunities to settle. She concludes that only a continuous crisis would lead to an

increase of settled migration among Ukrainians and a change in their mobility patterns. We argue that currently those applying for refugee status and those engaging in circulation are different groups of migrants, with the number of Ukrainians increasing with regard to all entry channels to Poland.

Since the escalation of the armed conflict in Ukraine, Polish offices have experienced higher numbers of Ukrainian applicants for residence permits. In 2013, 1694 permanent residence permits, 408 EU long-term resident’s permits and 9795 temporary residence permits (valid for up to 3 years) were issued to Ukrainians. In the following years, these numbers increased significantly to 3484,⁴ 590 and 17,103, respectively in 2014, and 4570, 426 and 21,872 between 1 January and 2 September 2015 (Office for Foreigners 2015a). There has thus been a steady increase of positive decisions on issuing permanent and temporary residence permits. The number of registered declarations and work permits is also increasing. While in 2014, 372,946 employer’s declarations (96% of all declarations)⁵ and 26,315 work permits (60% of all work permits) were issued to Ukrainians,⁶ by the end of June 2015, the number of registered declarations and work permits already exceeded the number of declarations from the previous year. In 2015 there were 762,700 declarations registered to Ukrainian nationals.

Moreover, significantly more Ukrainians applied for international protection in Poland in 2014 and 2015. 2318 and 2298 Ukrainian citizens applied for refugee status in 2014 and in 2015, respectively,⁷ compared with 46 persons in 2013. Ukrainians have become the second-largest nationality, after Russia, among applicants for refugee status in Poland, constituting about 34% of all asylum seekers in 2014 and about 19% of all applicants in 2015. Nevertheless, only six Ukrainians were granted subsidiary protection and 11 a tolerated stay permit in 2014. In 2015, these numbers were 6 and 6, respectively. In the second instance, the Council for Refugees granted refugee status to two Ukrainian nationals and subsidiary protection to 18 Ukrainian nationals (Office for Foreigners 2015b). Because this channel proves ineffective, as the refugee status criteria are not fulfilled by most applicants from Ukraine, many potential asylum seekers choose alternative ways to legalize their stay in Poland, for example, using the simplified employment scheme or applying for the Polish Charter (*Karta Polaka*). The Polish Charter is a document confirming the holder belongs to the Polish nation, which among other rights provides access to work without having to apply for a work permit, the right to study in Poland and a shorter route to a permanent residence permit or Polish citizenship.

⁴In May 2014, with the implementation of the Act on Foreigners of 2013, settlement permits were replaced with permanent residence permits, whereas temporary residence permits replaced fixed-term residence permits. Since the nature of the permits did not change substantially, the numbers for 2014 sum up the permits of a given character: a permanent and a temporary one, respectively.

⁵Other nationalities were citizens of Moldova (6331), Belarus (4017), Georgia (2103), Russia (1227) and Armenia (774).

⁶Data on work permits and employer’s declarations are taken from official statistics of the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy available at: <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/analizy-i-raporty/cudzoziemcy-pracujacy-w-polsce-statystyki/>

⁷Data from the Office for Foreigners; the numbers include renewals of the asylum procedure.

The dynamics of the inflow and stock of Ukrainian citizens in Poland may also be a result of changes to the law on foreigners, which came into effect in May 2014. The changes introduced a number of facilitations, such as the possibility of staying and seeking work for up to 1 year after completing studies in Poland,⁸ a procedure concerning applying for a work and stay permit (“single permit”), extending the maximum validity of temporary residence permits to 3 years, and an entitlement to legalize stay in Poland on humanitarian grounds. Access to permanent residence permits for persons with documented Polish roots or a valid Polish Charter also became easier. All these factors could have influenced the flow and stock of Ukrainian migrants in Poland (for more on the legal and policy context see Chap. 4).

Finally, to some extent, the quantitative changes observed in the statistics on temporary and permanent residence permits issued between 2013 and 2015 may be explained by the expiry of temporary residence permits issued in the 2012 regularization programme to 1500 Ukrainian nationals who had previously stayed in Poland irregularly (for more on regularization programmes see Chap. 4). Most of these people applied for a renewal of their residence permits between 2014 and 2015. Altogether, the increase in the number of Ukrainians applying for long-term residence permits indicates that although the predominant trait of Ukrainian migration continues to be temporariness and circularity, a particular form of enduring local mobility, we argue that the role of temporary mobility to Poland may decrease in the near future.

7.3 Research on Ukrainian Migrants in Poland: Overview

In the 1990s, major research topics included small-scale trans-border trade, and the casual and seasonal work of migrants from the former Soviet Union (see Wallace et al. 1997, 1998; Wallace 1999; Wallace and Stola 2001; Iglicka 1999, 2000, 2001). So-called “false tourists” were mainly engaged in trade or casual work and entered Poland on tourist visas. Research was concerned with how rules of reciprocity, trade and economic behaviour are developed and regulated in a society undergoing rapid social change. Studies estimated the volume of trade activity in bazaars and the functioning of informal markets (Wallace 1999; Iglicka 1999, 2000, 2001). According to Wallace et al. (1997: 13), “shopping tourism merges into trading when shoppers would buy goods for other people as well as themselves or buy goods to re-sell at home”. These flows resulted in the expansion of new trade networks, supported by semi-official organizations providing information about travel and documentation (Wallace et al. 1997). In the second half of the 2000s, small-scale trade became a less prominent research area (see Szulecka 2007), due to the decreasing role of the open-air markets and increasing role of foreign investments in large

⁸ However, due to specific requirements related to this permit, such as proof of having stable source of income or sufficient financial means, this law has been not effective.

supermarkets. Although frequent cross-border travel still occurs, it is aimed at shopping rather than selling goods brought from Ukraine (apart from excise goods from Ukraine, such as cigarettes). The topic is still analyzed in research conducted in border areas and border crossing points (Fomina and Konieczna-Salamatin 2012; Fomina et al. 2013; Józwiak 2014). By the mid-1990s, many Ukrainians pursuing for-profit activities in Poland had started to exchange small-scale trade for labour migration.

A study by Golinowska (2004) was the first attempt to estimate the demand for workers generated by households in Poland. The analysis includes socio-demographic characteristics of households employing workers and preference for nationality/country of origin of the workers to be employed. Although the study covers the undeclared employment of foreign workers, their residence status is not included. According to this survey, carried out in 2001, one in every ten Polish households employing a worker employed a foreigner, usually a Ukrainian. The types of work carried out by the employed foreigners were: cleaning (34%), child care (6%), care of the sick or elderly (10%), gardening/farming (19%) and renovation (11%) (Golinowska 2004). According to the studied employers, the main reasons for employing a foreigner were low costs (no taxes or insurance contributions) and high quality of work (strong motivation of foreigners to work). Flexibility and willingness to work for less money than native workers would accept were also important to the employers. A more up-to-date estimate of the household demand for foreign labour was made by Grabowska-Lusińska and Żylicz (2008). Their results are based on a representative household survey carried out in 2007, according to which approximately 80,000 Polish households – that is 6% of all households in Poland – had employed foreign workers both officially and unofficially in the 2 years preceding the survey. Compared to other sectors, the demand observed among households employing domestic workers was assessed as relatively high. The study by Grabowska-Lusińska and Żylicz (2008) also confirmed that Ukrainian migrants were the leaders in the numbers, reflecting the alleviated demand for foreign work in Poland, especially in case of medium and small-scale companies. One-third of foreigners employed by Polish companies were Ukrainians.

Studies that focus on migrant domestic workers, mainly Ukrainian women, are predominantly qualitative in nature (Kordasiewicz 2010, 2011, 2015; Kindler 2008, 2011; Kindler et al. 2016). Kordasiewicz (2015) analyzes the problematic nature of the labour relationship in the domestic work sector, involving both Polish and migrant domestic workers and focusing on the under-researched employer’s perspective. Migrant domestic workers have also been studied from a socio-cultural risk perspective (Kindler 2011). Based on her qualitative study, Kindler (2011) argues that the spatial and cultural distance between Ukraine and Poland, as well as entry to Poland, are perceived as acceptable risks or as non-risky.

As discussed in the context of other countries (see Chap. 4), Ukrainian migration to Poland is often defined in studies by its irregular status, mainly due to migrants working unofficially. The ILO 2013 household survey showed that in 2010–2012 only 28% of Ukrainian labour migrants in Poland had a fully legitimate status (both in terms of stay and employment). Since the survey estimated the overall number of

Ukrainian labour migrants in Poland at 168,400, this means that over 120,000 of them (72%) should be treated as irregular migrants as either their stay or their employment did not comply with the law. Among the causes of Ukrainian migrants' irregular work status, the large size and structure of the informal economy in Poland have been highlighted as the main ones (see for example Bojar et al. 2005; Bieniecki et al. 2008; Kicingier and Kloc-Nowak 2008; Górny et al. 2010). Szulecka (see Chap. 4) reviews the few qualitative studies, which addressed the effect of legal obstacles on the everyday life of individual migrants (such as costly and time-consuming registration procedures (until 2007) or the requirement to prove sufficient financial standing before being allowed to enter Poland, and the strategies they employed to overcome them). She also refers to Polish studies on how irregularity is linked to migrants' work status and how informal employment provides very few rights to workers, as well as the risk of abuse and potential instability without any guarantees for the future. Ukrainian migrants experience such forms of exploitation, as being cheated by intermediaries or employers, not being paid adequately or having no contract despite being promised one. However, they usually do not exercise their rights formally, since they perceive it as too costly and time-consuming, and – having no employment contract – they usually assess their chances of success as low. Lack of trust towards institutions in Poland may also be a reason for not reporting cases of abuse (FRA 2011).

Well-developed migrant networks provide information on job offers and recommendations that reduce the dangers of exploitation, unemployment or lack of protection resulting from involvement in the informal sector (Kindler and Szulecka 2013; Stefańska and Szulecka 2013). Several studies have investigated the role of social networks as informal channels of recruitment, but also informal safety nets (for example, Grzymała-Kazłowska et al. 2008; Kindler and Szulecka 2010; Górny et al. 2010). As these works reveal, developing a closer relationship with employers in the case of domestic workers allowed migrants to improve their social capital. A migrant who had access to resources in the form of the employer's social network provided other migrants with information about jobs and was an important link between the employer's friends (e.g. searching for a domestic worker) and other migrant women. Having access to several reliable employers increased the migrant's chances of finding ways to enter and stay in Poland legally (Kindler and Szulecka 2010; Kindler 2011; Kindler and Szulecka 2013).

Research rarely addresses the role of migrant institutions in Ukrainian mobility. An exception is the analysis of the role of the *vodiy*, which in Ukrainian means driver. This person uses their own car to drive migrants for a fee from their home to their workplace and back again, reducing some of the risks related to not being able to enter Poland (Kindler 2011). Kindler's study showed that the drivers shared information about work in Poland and controlled knowledge about the risks related to migration, but they had no interest in revealing it because they wanted labour migration to continue. Their involvement changed the context of crossing the border, helped migrants "act out" the credibility of their journey's aim and in one way or another supported their financial standing for a stay in Poland.

As we saw in Chap. 6, numerous studies have recognized circulation as the key form of migration of Ukrainians to Poland, which the migrants themselves plan to continue engaging in (Górny et al. 2013). This results on the one hand from factors facilitating trips to Poland, such as spatial and cultural proximity, relatively easy entry (especially until 2003), size and accessibility of the informal labour market, as well as migrant networks and informal infrastructure (such as drivers bringing people to work) (Wallace and Stola 2001; Górny et al. 2010; Kindler 2011). On the other hand, Poland provides limited legal opportunities for stays exceeding 1 year; these are restricted by formal requirements, which can easily be fulfilled only by certain groups of Ukrainian migrants, including those with a stable source of income, documented legal employment in Poland, Polish roots or Polish spouses. In other cases, the requirements hamper long-term migration.

Studies addressing the role of family, social networks and the degree of neighbourhood embeddedness in the transition from circulation to more permanent forms of residence are addressed by Górny and Kindler in this volume (see Chap. 6). As Brzozowska and Grzymała-Kazłowska (2014: 24) write, “close cultural distance between the Polish and Ukrainian societies as well as the volume and density of relations between Ukrainian immigrants and Poles (including very frequent mixed marriages) predominantly led to assimilation”. Marriage to a Pole is one of the principal reasons for settlement among Ukrainian nationals (Brzozowska and Grzymała-Kazłowska 2014; Fihel 2006; Fihel et al. 2007; Górny and Kępińska 2004). According to Brzozowska and Grzymała-Kazłowska (2014), Ukrainians, both those married to Poles and those married to Ukrainians, were actively developing their bridging capital in establishing limited but strong ties with Poles. 60% of Ukrainians in mixed marriages saw their economic situation as similar to that of Polish families. Although Ukrainians in mixed marriages had entered the primary labour market and enjoyed stable working conditions, they did not have high economic status because they often worked in the public sector (such as education or health care) where their salaries were no higher than those of average Ukrainian labour migrants.

Ukrainian migrants rarely engage in social activity in Poland and do not see the need for institutionalization of the group mainly due to the temporary nature of their migration (Biernath 2012; Grzymała-Kazłowska et al. 2008). Studies have analyzed how Ukrainians adapt to the legal and institutional migratory framework in Poland. For example, Stefańska and Szulecka (2013) analyzed how progression in their administrative status, which is regulated strictly by the law on entry, stay and work in Poland, of two distinct groups (Ukrainians and Vietnamese) influences the economic adaptation of migrants. Their analysis shows that many Ukrainians did not take advantage of their rights and worked in the secondary sector below their qualification levels. This could be caused, however, by the lack of cultural capital (e.g. imperfect knowledge of Polish) or by potentially discriminatory attitudes in the primary sectors. Although the migrants’ economic status did not always improve along with the improvement in their residence status, Ukrainians aimed at prolonging the validity of documents authorizing them to stay in Poland. This gave them a sense of security, even if they worked in the informal economy (ibid.).

Several researchers have also explored the changing attitudes of Poles toward Ukrainians in Poland, and the growing acceptance of Ukrainian nationals. According to the Public Opinion Research Centre's (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, CBOS) annual public opinion poll on the attitudes of Polish nationals toward other nationalities (including Ukrainians), there is a general increase in the openness of Poles towards others (CBOS 2015a). One in three respondents declares sympathy toward Ukrainian nationals. A similar picture emerges from the poll on attitudes toward Ukrainian immigrants in Poland, with three-quarters of Poles declaring that the presence of Ukrainian migrants in Poland is something positive (CBOS 2015b). However, these attitudes fluctuate and are influenced by ongoing events, with Poles having opened up to Ukrainian nationals during the Orange Revolution, while with the economic crisis, which has only recently become visible in Poland, Poles were already more in favour of restricting access to the labour market for Poland's eastern neighbours than in 2008 (CBOS 2010). It should also be noted that Ukrainian migrants continue to be associated with low-skilled occupations: in the 1990s with petty trade and by the mid-2000s with irregular and unskilled labour in sectors such as domestic work, construction and farming (Okólski 1997; Konieczna 2002; Mrozowski 2003; Kofta 2004; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2007).

7.4 Conclusions

Much research on immigration to Poland starts with an apologetic disclaimer that overall Poland still is primarily an emigration country. This is true, if mainstream definitions of migration and official data sources only are used. However, such an approach misses a crucial factor – the large-scale mobility of Ukrainians, who not only play an important role in the Polish labour market, but also affect changing attitudes in Polish society. The summary of data and the literature overview on Ukrainian migrants in Poland cited above create a picture of a particular form of mobility, here termed local mobility. This type of mobility has several characteristics.

First, it has been characterized by continuous large inflows and outflows of Ukrainian citizens since the early 1990s, and by still limited settlement. Among a number of reasons are spatial proximity and opportunities for seasonal labour migrants to access the labour market legally, combined with limited possibilities of settling in Poland legally. Although the extent to which the employer's declaration system actually enables Ukrainian citizens to leave the informal economy is debatable, it is a unique solution in the rather restrictive policy environment toward hiring third-country nationals in the EU labour market. Still, limited settlement opportunities are one of the key determinants of the highly temporary and repetitive nature of Ukrainian mobility to Poland.

Second, migrants coming to Poland predominantly originate from Western Ukraine, the closest area geographically and the most exposed both historically and contemporarily to cultural and social Polish influences. The main destinations for these migrants are the provinces that offer the best work (not necessarily settlement) opportunities, with Warsaw in the lead.

Third, social networks that have dynamically evolved since the 1990s play a crucial role in shaping the mobility patterns of Ukrainians. Migrant networks create not only opportunities for mobility, providing access to particular resources (information flow, support in finding work, accommodation etc.), but also the rules of action and exchange. The “local” character of these networks stems primarily from the fact that Ukrainian migrants were familiar with the post-socialist reality and conditions of the early “wild capitalism” present both in Ukraine and in Poland in the 1990s. These cultural rules and norms included an acceptance of semi-compliance with the law in the form of unofficial work or street-level corruption and determined the specificity of the current social networks, which are mainly based on weak ties with other migrants and a few strong ties with “gatekeepers”, often Poles.

Data covering Ukrainian migrants’ travels, stays, documentary and economic history from studies such as respondent-driven sampling (RDS) surveys (for an elaboration see Górný and Napierała 2011, Górný et al. 2013) give great opportunities for studying the factors potentially influencing changes in administrative status and the migrants’ position in the labour market of the receiving state (especially from the legal perspective). Both external and individual factors may affect migrants’ trajectories. While this has often been analyzed in qualitative studies, quantitative data could shed more light on the impact of particular factors that condition migration patterns, especially if such data cover a long-term perspective and include more observations gathered in a standardized way.

Although the local, circular character of Ukrainian migration to Poland is still dominant, the nature of this mobility is becoming more complex. The relatively small number of settled migrants is growing. This change has been especially visible since the beginning of the military conflict in Ukraine, but it is also an effect of administrative solutions providing incentives for a long-term stay, among others, through facilitated access to the labour market for specific categories of migrants (such as students, graduates of Polish universities and Polish Charter holders). In order to identify the determinants of changes in mobility patterns, the reasons for the changes observed in mobility and legalization patterns since 2014 should be studied. Investigating possible shifts in mobility patterns as well as the reasons for the increasing scale of long-term migratory plans requires in-depth qualitative material, preferably supported by survey data.

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