

POLISH WORKERS IN THE NETHERLANDS
A NEW WAVE OF PERMANENT LABOUR MIGRATION?

Inclusion and exclusion in contemporary European Societies

Challenges for a New Europe: In between local freeze and global dynamics

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1. Introduction

1.1 A long history

The Netherlands have a long history in dealing with migration. Already in the 16th and 17th century, the first immigrants came to The Netherlands. As a trading nation, a lot of people came to The Netherlands. Because of the freedom of religion, the country was seen as a tolerant country.

In the 20th century, The Netherlands has to deal with a series of 'waves' of migrants. There were the First and Second World War refugees. Especially a lot of Belgian (during WW I) and Jews (during 1930s) came to The Netherlands. Later on, during the late 1940s and the 1950s, there was a wave of migrants from former colonies. The Netherlands were heavily damaged during the Second World War, there was a high unemployment and a big shortage of homes. Therefore, the Dutch government did not pay much attention to these migrants.

1.2 From temporary to permanent migration

In the 1960s and the 1970s, there was a large wave of migrants coming from Mediterranean countries. Employers were in need of large numbers of unskilled workers at low costs, which were not available in The Netherlands. The idea was that these people, mostly men, stayed in The Netherlands on a temporary basis and that the employer took care of the housing (Trappenburg, 2003).

Since the first migrants arrived, 'almoners, social workers, academics, officials and others came forward to point out the "other" lifestyle of "the" guest worker, their alienness and the southern mentality, their difficulty in acclimatizing, and their problems of adjustment' (Rath, 1999: 160). By the government, these people were seen as guest workers. Therefore, little attention was paid to their process of integration.

But instead of going back, a lot of the migrants stayed which caused a lot of problems in The Netherlands. Although they were already for a long time in The Netherlands, they still had a poor knowledge of the Dutch language. Crime rates among migrants from Mediterranean countries are high¹. Therefore they have little prospects for the near future. Nowadays, these problems cause great tensions within Dutch society. As a result, an anti-migration point of view does well in political campaigns. This problem is not only applicable to The Netherlands, but to other West-European countries as well.

Since the enlargement of the European Union, a lot of East European guest workers came to The Netherlands, for, on first sight, exactly the same reasons as the Mediterranean workers in the '60s and '70s. Now, the overall feeling is that the Polish migrants are working in The Netherlands on a temporary basis.

1.3 Who are these Polish labour migrants?

In order to do research on Polish migrants, we should make a brief overview of these migrants: who are they and what are they doing (in The Netherlands)?

First, we should get an idea of their size. Statistics from the Dutch Bureau of Work and Income (CWI) show that there is a very large increase of labour migrants from Central and East European countries. Since the mid 1990s, the number of temporary working permits given to people from Central and

¹ For instance: in 2005, crime rates among Moroccan people aged 12-80 are almost 5 times as big as Dutch people of the same age group (CBS, 2008).

East European countries is increased from about 2000 permits in 1996 to more than 60.000 in 2006. Polish migrant workers always have been (one of) the largest among Central and East European labour migrants. The increase of Polish labour migrants almost doubled in the year 2006.

Second, we should get an idea of the jobs they are doing. Polish migrant workers are mostly active in agriculture/horticulture, production work and construction. In these years, the 'Polish plumber' has been able to change its image from an unskilled and more or less lazy labourer to a labourer that has great skills and excellent working ethics.

1.4 Main question and paper outline

But is the case of the Polish worker really different from the Mediterranean workers in the '60s and '70s? Or is the Dutch government making the same mistake twice?

Therefore, the main question that I would like to ask in this paper is:

How far do Polish migrant workers see The Netherlands as a temporary place to work?

First, I will introduce some theoretical concepts with which we can approach the problem described above. In chapter 3, I will give some empirical data with which we can formulate an answer to the question formulated. Finally, I will give a conclusion which gives an answer to the question from a theoretical as well as a empirical point of view.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 An era of increasing migration

In contrast to half a century ago, it is, due to new technologies, easier to go to another country. In the beginning, people went to, for instance the United States, to start a new life. Now, people go to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean for a two-week holiday.

Also for migrants, the world has become much smaller. Dale (1999) talks of the dawn of a new era for migration. He gives four arguments to state that the control of immigration is 'irrational outmoded' (1999: 2-3). First, he states that global movements of capital and goods are leading to a world without borders. Furthermore, he sees the nation states and nationalism becoming less important.

Second, the 21st century economy requires quick adaptation to satisfy today's costumers. According to Dale, immigrants (workers) can be crucial for sectors that need to be flexible.

Third, he states that the freedom of movement will increase and taken serious because of the widening of political liberalism.

Finally, he argues that the supranational model of the EU, with for instance the Euro, contributes to a further decline of the nation state and a freedom of movement throughout the EU.

2.2 A changing perspective on labour migration

The European Union is widening and deepening. Widening, because of the enlargement of the European Union. Deepening, because of the increasing number of policies that are written in Brussels. Polish labour migrants, whether they come to The Netherlands on a temporary or structural basis, should be seen from a perspective of a deepening and widening (WRR, 2001). From the perspective of widening, Polish citizens have increasing possibilities to work abroad. From the perspective of deepening, more and more EU-member countries now have a policy of general access of free movement towards labour migrants from new member states. Some

countries, like the UK and Ireland, already had a free movement policy. Others, like Germany and The Netherlands have a more restricted access: they have a transitional period.

Engbersen (2008) observes that, because of the widening and deepening of the EU, the perspective described above, labour migration has changed. He observes large migration flows, mainly coming from Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Latvia and Romania and Bulgaria. Polish labourers, in large numbers, seem go to the United Kingdom, Ireland, Norway. Instead of being a country from which people were migrating, the United Kingdom and Ireland are becoming destination countries. Romanians especially seem to migrate to Italy, Greece and Spain. Finally, he sees that Central East-European countries, like Czech Republic and Hungary, are becoming transit countries. Some are becoming immigration countries as well.

Apart of a change in the direction and the size of the flow, there is also a change in the migration flow itself. The Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy sees a shift in the way labour migrants are skilled. Labour migrants are no longer low skilled, but are nowadays also high skilled (WRR, 2001). Engbersen (2008) recognizes this view, among others, as well. Migrants no longer seek for wage labour and social security, but also for self-employment and crime. Engbersen (2008) combined these aspects in the following grid:

	Old migration	New migration
Geography	From former colonies Guest workers from Mediterranean	South-north East-west
Types of migration	Labour migration, family migration	Asylum, temporary labour, high skilled labour, irregular ²
Legal statuses	Citizens and denizens	No status, or temporary residence status
Income strategies	Wage labour Social labour	Temporary, self-employment

The grid clearly shows the differences between the 'old' and the 'new' form of migration. The Polish labour migrants that are working in The Netherlands should be seen in from this new perspective. From this new perspective, labour migration flows are temporary, short and unpredictable in size and composition.

Referring to the work of Bauman, Engbersen (2008) therefore talks of *liquid migration*. With liquid, he means transitory, legally stratified, and temporary patterns of trans-national work and settlement. In areas where there is liquid migration, the size, form and composition of migration flows change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines (Bauman, 2005 in: Engbersen, 2008).

2.3 Pendular migration

As I have argued above, labour migration can be seen as liquid migration. Because this migration is *liquid* it is difficult to 'grasp' and is therefore difficult to research. Yet, there are theoretical concepts, that on the one hand fit in this broad concept of liquid migration, and that on the other hand are easier made operable for research.

² Irregular migrants are migrants that are unwanted. Because the EU only wants the skilled people, they sometimes talk of 'Fortress Europe'

Pendulum migration, which is more often called pendular migration, is an example of a *liquid* type of migration, but in a more narrow sense than mentioned in the grid above. Pendular migration is based on the fact that migrants often switch back and forth from 'local' to 'transnational'.

'Local' herein means the ability to talk their own language, getting in touch with family and friends, etc. 'Transnational' herein refers to the possibilities is given to someone while being somewhere else, in another place. This place somewhere else gives, for example, the opportunity to have a job and to earn income, to trade, to travel, experience another culture in another country.

According to this theory of pendular migration, migrants are switching back and forth between being 'local' and being at 'another' place. Cohen (2006: 8) cites work of leading American sociologists who have 'found that new migrants are accomplished at "switching" between a transnational mode when they are with their families and "home" communities, and standard US idiom when they are seeking jobs, university admission or the social acceptance of neighbours from dissimilar backgrounds'. Migrants 'find their own point of balance and find themselves in a constant state of tension between the attraction of two poles of reference' (UNECE, 1998: 153). They are finding 'a balance in a way of behaviour and action that are grounded in one's local tradition and those with roots in the "Western" world". The power of attraction of both the former and the latter is equal' (UNECE, 1998: 153).

I recognize two aspects which make it easier to switch between the two poles described above. First, the information and communication technology, such as the internet and (mobile) telephone calls, makes it possible for people to stay in touch with the other pole, while being at the one pole.

Second, travelling possibilities have been increased as well. Better roads, more cars and low-cost airline carriers make it possible to physically go back and forth between these two poles too.

Therefore, typical pendular migration is about going to a certain country for a while (for example to work) and going back; then going to a country (which can be the same as before, but also another); etc.

In the light of the main question I asked myself in the introduction, this aspect of pendular migration is quite important. If Polish labour migrants find them identifiable in switching back and forth between these two poles, as well mental as physical, as is argued by the 1998 study of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, 1998), then this has a large influence on whether they will see The Netherlands as a temporary country to work or not.

2.4 Guest workers compared

In order to answer the main question of this paper, it is useful to have some more in-depth knowledge of the guest workers in the '60s and '70s that did stay. Of course, we can think of several reasons which caused Mediterranean guest workers to stay.

Literature research (see Trappenburg, 2003: 21-23) shows that there are three main reasons for guest workers to stay in The Netherlands. First, they did not go and they did not want to go. A lot of these workers already let their family come over, were single, or broke up with their family.

Second, employers did not want them to leave. Although a lot of work carried out by guest workers was low-skilled labour, guest workers gained experience throughout the years, and climbed the career ladder a bit.

Therefore, employers lobbied to the government for broader possibilities for family reunion and housing.

Third, throughout the 1960s, but during the 1970s as well, a lot of welfare associations started to worry about the position of the guest workers in The Netherlands. Guest workers got counselling and the welfare organisations also lobbied to the government for broader possibilities for family reunion and a permanent stay.

These aspects were adopted in 1970s bill *Foreign Employees*. Although the Dutch parliament was rather critical, the bill was passed. The essence of this bill was two-fold. First, there were possibilities for foreign people to keep their identity. Second, there were incentives to integrate them in Dutch society.

To compare the guest workers from the 1960s and the 1970s with today's Polish migrant workers, I will use the three aspects described above. Of course, this concept is based on a *ceteris paribus* -where all the rest stays the same- way of thinking which, of course, does not resemble today's society. Although we should be careful to generalize, it does give us a way to grasp the problem and to answer the main question formulated in the introduction.

3. Empirical data

3.1 Method

For this paper empirical research has been carried out. Empirical research on Polish migrant workers has some practical problems. First of all, there is the language. Polish is a language many researches do not speak. On the other hand, there are little Polish migrant workers who do speak Dutch or the more common English.

Second, if Polish migrant workers behave in a pendular migration type of movement, research must be carried out over a long period of time, in order to get a clear view of the movement characteristics of the Polish workers.

Therefore, a survey has been carried out amongst Dutch interim agencies, which focus themselves on Central and East European labour migrants. These agencies can not look in the heads of Polish migrant workers, but do have experience in and/or can give us an inside in work ethics, incentives to work and/or stay, length of stay, jobs they are doing, level of education, involvement of welfare organisations, whether employers want Polish migrants to stay, etc.

In the survey, there are questions included on the following topics:

- the reasons why Polish migrant workers come to The Netherlands;
- why Dutch companies employ Polish workers;
- Polish work ethics;
- the jobs they have;
- level of education;
- length of average stay;
- 3 reasons why former guest workers stayed:
 - o whether the Polish see themselves as temporary labour migrants;
 - o experience gained, job education and whether employers want Polish workers to work for their company
 - o role of welfare organisations

This survey has been carried out amongst 10 interim agencies. Of course this sample does not, scientifically, resembles the whole population of

interim agencies. Therefore, we should be very careful with generalising the outcomes of the survey. Yet, it does give us an idea, an inside, whether Polish migrant worker will stay or not and whether they fit in the pendular type of migration.

3.2 Survey outcomes

In this paragraph, the outcomes of the survey that is conducted will be shown.

First, Polish migrant workers mostly come to The Netherlands for economic reasons: where Poland has a large unemployment number, The Netherlands have job vacancies, especially in construction work and agri/horticulture. For Polish workers, where in Poland prices are lower, Dutch work is well paid. Moreover, Dutch companies employ Polish migrant workers because they fulfil jobs that Dutch employees do not (want to) fulfil. Finally, most of the interviewed interim agencies tell that they like Polish migrant workers because of their work ethics.

Second, the interim agencies tell that they mostly recruit low and medium skilled workers. Furthermore, they tell that they invest in education possibilities and that workers with more experience are more rewarded and that they therefore want them to stay. If we compare this with the guest workers from the 1960s and the 1970s, we see parallels. In the 1960s and 1970s, certain companies invested in their employees too and they were, according to the work of Trappenburg (2003) one of the reasons that caused Mediterranean workers to stay.

Third, questions have been asked what their average length of stay is within The Netherlands. There are, more or less, four lengths of stay. The first two groups are the biggest and more or less of the same size; the third and fourth is much smaller. The first group contains Polish migrant workers go back often. For a few weeks, they work in The Netherlands and they go back. After a few weeks they start working in The Netherlands again, etc. Within this group, there is a large frequency in going back and forth.

The second group contains Polish migrant workers who also go back and forth, but with a much lower frequency. This group only goes back for certain birthdays within the family, but often more important, Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide.

The third and fourth group are, as mentioned earlier, much smaller. These groups contain Polish migrant workers that only stayed for a small period of time and went back, and those who do not go back at all.

Fourth, literature emphasised the role of welfare organisations in The Netherlands during the 1960s and 1970s. The interim agencies that were included in this inquiry, did not speak of any welfare organisations that are anxious about the position of Polish migrant workers within Dutch society.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter I will give an answer to the main question of this paper which I have formulated in Chapter 1. Second, I will highlight some broader implications of this answer in the light of inclusion and exclusion, within the Polish but also within the Dutch society.

4.1 Polish workers in The Netherlands

In this paragraph I will formulate an answer on the question in how far Polish migrant workers see The Netherlands as a temporary place to work. This question came up from the notion that certain problems that came across in The Netherlands after neglecting Mediterranean guest workers in Dutch policy, could come across for a second time, now The Netherlands has another wave of temporary labour migrants.

Research on (labour) migration shows that we should approach migration from another perspective than most scholars has done in the past. Not only the direction of migration flows has changed, the flow itself has changed as well. The concept of *liquid migration* and pendular migration fit within this new approach. These theoretical concepts show that it is not likely that labour migrants will stay.

The small empirical data that has been collected show that the group that is likely to stay is very small. A large majority of Polish migrant workers in The Netherlands behave as pendular migrants: they switch back and forth between their local tradition (back in Poland) and their 'transnational' tradition. They work in The Netherlands for some time, and then go back to Poland. After a while, they go back to The Netherlands again to work, etc.

If we compare the reasons to stay with those of the guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s, we see that only one of the 3 reasons that caused Mediterranean guest workers to stay are applicable to the situation of Polish migrant workers. Firstly, most of them can not miss their local tradition, and therefore do not want to stay. Secondly, indeed, some of the employers to train their employees in order to let them stay. Yet, the competences Polish migrant workers develop within these trainings can be used in similar situations in other countries as well, and are therefore not a very 'hard' reason to stay. Thirdly, and finally, Mediterranean guest workers got a lot of help from welfare organisations which became anxious of the position of the guest workers. These welfare organisations do not seem to play a big role within the situation of the Polish migrant workers within The Netherlands.

Overall we can conclude that it is not likely that Polish migrant workers will stay in The Netherlands.

4.2 Consequences for inclusion and exclusion

The concepts of liquid migration and pendular migration have their consequences on inclusion and exclusion, both in Poland and in The Netherlands. In this paragraph, I will give an example for both countries.

In Poland, we see for instance an increase in divorces. Parents work separate for long periods of time. This causes certain tensions in marriages with a divorce as a possible outcome. A lot of children, therefore, grow up in split families. Moreover, they are often brought up by their grandparents, as their own parents both work abroad (on a temporary basis).

In The Netherlands we see the government, and especially local governments, struggling in making adequate policies for new labour migrants. Examples include the policy fields of housing and social security. Because size and composition of the migration flows have changed, and are continually changing, policy makers (on a local level) have difficulties in formulating the right policy programs.

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