

DOI: 10.24193/OJMNE.2020.33.05

## POLISH REPATRIATION POLICY AFTER 1989–CONDITIONS, COURSE AND FORECASTS

Paweł HUT, PhD

Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland

[pawel.hut@uw.edu.pl](mailto:pawel.hut@uw.edu.pl)

---

**Abstract:** This article describes the process of repatriation back to Poland originating in the former Soviet Union and contemporary post-Soviet republics that emerged after the fall of the USSR. Over 3 Mln. Poles were living in the USSR (mainly in Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine), as Polish communist authorities organized two waves of mass repatriation, accounting for over 1,5 Mln. Poles. By contrast, after 1989, more precisely between 1991 and 2018, only ca. 3,5 thousand Poles were subject to repatriation, a situation that needs to be analyzed in the context new migration opportunities opened up by Poland's EU accession.

---

**Keywords:** Poles in USSR, repatriation policy, repatriation, remigration, Polish Charter.

### Introduction

The regaining of sovereignty by Polish society at the turn of 1989/1990 was only a prelude to the regulation of various issues that had remained open since the end of the World War II in May 1945. One of them was the fact that many millions of Polish citizens remained outside the new borders of the Polish State in the Soviet Union (Csergo, Goldgeier 2004: 23).

Although internally very diverse due to its place of residence (from borderland Poles from the Grodna region to the forgotten Poles in Kazakhstan or Transnistria), the social status, living conditions and sources of income, this was not the researchers' subject of interest during the People's Republic of Poland period. The actual situation of persons of Polish nationality in the USSR was only provided by fragmentary studies of statistical yearbooks published by the USSR statistical office (Centralnoye Statisticheskoye Upravlyenye 1962: 184, Goskomstat 1988: 102) or memories of Poles from the USSR (Budzyński 1998, Budzyński 2006a, Budzyński 2006b, Archiv Presidenta Kazakhstan 2000). The first study that dealt with the issue of Poles in the Soviet Union as a whole was Julian Siedlecki's book published outside the Eastern Bloc, but it also contained a number of inaccuracies due to restrictions on direct access to information from the post-war period (Siedlecki 1987). The previous very short book or properly report about Poles in USSR was

published in London in 1983 (Plater-Zyberk 1983). The orientation of the scientific community, but also of the Polish society more broadly, on the actual situation in Polish circles in the USSR in the post-war period should be assessed as small and covering only the circulation of information within families. This state of ignorance has only began to change at the end of the 1980s, when a wider debate on the situation in the Soviet Union was allowed in the Polish research centres.

In studies published after 1989/1990, the problem of selecting the names to describe the process of post-war movements of Poles from the Soviet Union appeared. The used term “repatriation” did not really reflect the specificity of this process, but The European Council experts in own report used concept “repatriation” (Tinquy de, Hadjiisky 1997). As a result, researchers and publicists began to use various names to describe the post-war migration from the USSR to Poland, including: evacuation, population transfer, expatriation, impatriation (Hut 2002), resettlement, and less often, expulsion. These terms referred to the nomenclature used after the war in West Germany. Due to its presence in Polish regulations, the term “repatriation” has finally become established. Another problem is the question of the name of the group that is being repatriated. There is no doubt that in the 1940s and 50s, and even in the 60s, most representatives of this group could be called Poles, while due to integration with representatives of ethnically dominant groups, as well as the many years of separation from the Polish State, the term “foreign Poles” seems more precise (Hut 2014: 79 ff.)

The following part of the article will present the characteristics of Polish communities in the Soviet Union in the post-war period, and then the conditions of repatriation to Poland from individual countries that emerged after the fall of the USSR. Part of the consideration will be devoted to the situation of people who have managed to overcome a number of formal barriers and material problems and have settled in Poland. The last part of the article will contain a forecast of expected changes to the repatriation process. The article uses unpublished data from own research conducted in 2000 and 2011

<sup>1</sup>, as well as information obtained during the performance of the function of the Refugee Board’s adjudicator in 2004-2019 and in 2016-2018 the director of the Migration Policy

---

<sup>1</sup> National survey among repatriates conducted by the Institute of Social Policy of the University of Warsaw in 2000, research manager Paweł Hut.

National survey and in-depth interviews among repatriates conducted by the Institute of Social Policy of the University of Warsaw in 2011, research manager: Paweł Hut.

Department and then the Migration Policy and Analysis Department of the Ministry of Interior and Administration of the Republic of Poland. The article also uses information obtained from employees of the Department of Repatriation and Citizenship of the Ministry of Interior and Administration during the author's non-categorised interviews in 2016-2020.

### **Poles in the USSR and their post-war repatriations**

According to estimates, 14.5 million Polish citizens lived in the areas annexed by the USSR in 1945 before the war, including about 4.5 million Poles. As a result of warfare, natural migration, as well as forced Soviet deportations in 1940-1941, in this area in 1945. Poles constituted only about 2.5 million people.

Table 1: Poles in particular USSR republics, 1959-1979

<b>Republic</b>	<b>1959</b>	<b>1979</b>
Russian Federation	118422	99733
Ukrainian	363297	258309
Belarussian	538881	403169
Kazakh	53102	61136
Moldavian	4783	4961
Lithuanian	230107	247022
Latvian	59774	62690
Estonian	2256	No data

Source: own work, Centralnoye Statisticheskoye Upravlyenye 1962: 202-208; Goskomstat 1988: 101-105.

The most numerous groups of Poles lived in 1946 in Lithuanian SRS, Belarussian SRS, Ukrainian SRS, Federative Russian SRS, Latvian SRS and Kazakh SRS, however, due to war circumstances, groups of Poles also lived in other USSR republics. On the basis of the census data in 1959, it was found that over 1380 thousand people declaring Polish nationality lived on the territory of the Soviet Union, including over 900 thousand in agricultural areas (Centralnoye

Statisticheskoye Upravlyeniye 1962: 184, 196). As a result of the post-war mass resettlements to Poland, in 1979, there were as many as 1150 thousand Poles (Goskomstat 1988: 99).

An obvious organizational challenge during the post-war repatriation was the necessity of a different approach to Polish indigenous groups—living for generations in their “small homelands”, while separate actions were required by a group of Polish resettlers—people deported to the Asian part of the Soviet Union after the annexation of the eastern provinces of the Second Republic in September 1939 (Plater-Zyberk 1983: 5).

Faced with the challenges of resettling the Western and Northern Lands, the authorities of communist Poland were interested in enabling the resettlement of as many people as possible. As a result of bilateral Polish-Soviet arrangements, it was established that the right to leave applies only to Poles and Jews, omitting other ethnic groups that had Polish citizenship before the war. As early as in 1944, lists of people to leave were started and first transports were organized. More than 1.7 million people declared their willingness to leave their homelands and leave the former eastern provinces of Poland, which were incorporated into the Soviet Union between 1944 and 1949 (Hut 2002: 24). Some could not do so because of their situation, e.g. the long-term illness of their closest relatives or the serving of long-term sentences for “political crimes”. In spite of the agreements concluded, the Soviet authorities were reluctant to allow the departure of Poles from Soviet Lithuania (except for the capital Wilna). The resettlement from the Soviet Ukraine was carried out without major restrictions.

In order to facilitate this specific migration, in which repatriates were not only allowed to leave but also to take some of their belongings (furniture, bedding, tools, clothes), freight trains were organized. The transport route was organized in such a way that transports with Poles from the North (Lithuania) were settled in Pomerania, Varmia and Masuria, newcomers from Belarus arrived in Masuria and Lubuskie, while transports from Lwów (currently Lviv) were directed to Upper and Lower Silesia. After crossing the border, the visitors were directed to the staging points of the State Repatriation Office (PUR), which dealt with the overall post-war migration back to Poland, including the German Nazi concentration camps from the occupation zones in Germany and Austria (Kersten 1974: 37).

In the end, in the years 1944-1949, 1507 persons entered the “new” Poland. No separate records were kept to determine how the participation of individual ethnic groups in the repatriation process developed. On the basis of fragmentary data, it can be assumed that in the described period,

about 10 thousand Jews who later emigrated to Western Europe and the USA left the USSR (Szydzisz 2019: 16).

Another wave of repatriation began after the liberalisation of the political system in the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s. At that time, the right to travel to the homeland was granted to representatives of nationalities that had their ethnic states, including Germany, Hungary and Romania. According to the agreements concluded, almost 250 thousand people came to Poland (Hut 2002: 36). Importantly, the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland were also carrying out a repatriation campaign from the West at that time—but its effects turned out to be disappointing. Out of the multimillion-strong Polish community in the West, the decision to settle in the Polish People's Republic was made by only 8 thousand Poles. Such modest returns were probably influenced by the fact that a large group of potential repatriates from the West originated from the areas incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1945 and, in their understanding, repatriation would mean going to the Soviet Union.

Between 1955 and 1960, the most numerous repatriate groups from the USSR came to Poland in 1957 and 1958. As in the first post-war years, assistance to the newcomers was organised and institutionalised in this period as well—from staging points, through field administration, to the directors of the work establishments and state farms, where repatriates were immediately employed. The newly arrived could also count on medical assistance and help while settling in. Municipal or company apartments were at their disposal. Children were taken into compulsory schooling (Latuch 1994: 63, 97).

With the last few transports of repatriates, the possibility of settling in Poland has ended. For a long time, letters were sent to the embassy of the People's Republic of Poland in Moscow and various offices in Poland from people who did not manage to take advantage of the repatriation opportunities. However, these appeals did not have any effect. The authorities of the People's Republic of Poland and the USSR were of the opinion that anyone who wanted to leave the Soviet Union for their homeland was able to do so. This assessment was further strengthened by the fact that foreign Poles in the USSR were guaranteed the possibility of nurturing the Polish identity. In the post-war period, only the area of the Western Soviet republics had Polish language education. It was very limited—to the secondary school level; education in Polish was possible only in Lithuania and in two Lwów schools in Ukraine. What is important, there was no form of education in Polish in Soviet Belarus, where there were the most Poles (e.g. the Grodna Region). At that time

a Polish language daily newspaper, *The Red Banner*, the organ of the communist party, was also published in Wilna. The activities of folklore groups or the theatre (Lwów) had a symbolic dimension. The authorities of the Soviet Union deemed that the Polish population could meet all cultural, social or economic needs on an equal footing with representatives of other ethnic groups of the Soviet state and thus did not need new and unique opportunities for development to be created for it.

### **Repatriation from Kazakhstan and Lithuania after 1990**

It was not until the *perestroyka* and *glasnost* that initiated the democratic changes in the Soviet Union that the grassroots organization of Polish communities was allowed. However, this special time at the end of the USSR existence was not sufficiently exploited by the foreign Poles. There was a lack of courage, help and support in Polish institutions, but also time and material resources, which were very important at that time. In addition, the embassies in Wilna and Minsk were headed by people who were not conducive to the development of the Polish identity in these countries, considering that an over-strong Polish minority in Lithuania and Belarus would have a negative impact on the Polish relations with these countries. The disintegrating structures of the state, separatisms and nationalisms of the titular nations of the Soviet Union did not create the conditions for linking their future with their present living place. The brutal manifestations of nationalistic attitudes affected the Poles most in the two republics: Kazakh and Lithuanian. The situation in Lithuania resembled the specificity of the development of 19th century nationalist movements in Europe (Anderson 2006: 67-68).

In Kazakhstan, the activities of the indigenous population were aimed at “regaining” the state by the indigenous people, who were marginalised and considered backward in Soviet times. This damaging attitude triggered a reaction to restore the due position to the autochthonous population. Poles in Kazakhstan were considered to be “white”. As Christians or post-Christians, they also differed from the indigenous people by their religion. Like the Russians or Ukrainians, they were regarded as colonisers occupying their country. Together with other “white” people, Poles have started to look for possibilities to emigrate from this country. It is also worth emphasizing that they were forced settlers (*specposielyency*), who in the 1930s and 40s were deported from Ukraine and areas of Poland annexed by the USSR. The paradox was that these people were punished twice: first, they were forced to adapt to the harsh living conditions in the

northern part of Kazakhstan, suffering from poverty and hunger, and in the 1990s, a number of instruments were used to push them out of this hard-won “Asian homeland”. The social pressure, the political activity of the Kazakhs, but also the dramatic material situation caused a panicky search for opportunities to emigrate. Only a part of the forced settlers could count on the help of their national states. This group included the descendants of the Germans from the Volga region (Volga Deutschen), who were given a privileged way of acquiring German citizenship and were guaranteed extensive social assistance. Few Poles, as spouses of the Germans from the Volga region, experienced improvement of their situation by going to Germany. Desperation and migratory pressure were, however, so strong that some Poles tried to go to Poland on their own (Elrick, Frelak, Hut 2006: 9, Gawęcki 1994: 16, 47).

The spontaneous repatriation of that time, which began in 1990, was a huge disappointment for those few who managed to break through administrative resistance and overcome formal barriers, as well as incurring considerable costs of leaving Kazakhstan (Grzymała-Kazłowska, Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2014: 611). It should be remembered that the distance between Warsaw and the towns of northern Kazakhstan is about 3.5 thousand km. Due to the distance, family contacts between compatriots from the country and Kazakhstan were rare. This meant that the resettlement process was completely dependent on the socialists and enthusiasts of helping foreign Poles from the Asian part of the former USSR.

In the early 1990s, many political declarations were made about helping foreign Poles. A number of visits at various political levels raised hopes for a prompt departure to Poland. These promises, however, were not really covered. In fact, the legalisation of the stay and the first repatriates who came to Poland in the 1990s was based on court rulings and generally formulated provisions of the dated Polish-Soviet agreements from the 1950s and 1960s. As a consequence, the status of the repatriates themselves was unclear, including restrictions on access to the labour market and social security. No forms of aid were envisaged for integration into Polish society, from which the Kazakh Poles were separated by 2 or 3 generations. They did not know the Polish language or even the Latin letters. In large part, they were people with low professional qualifications, although at times, specialists. The labour market of the 1990s in Poland was characterised by a high rate of registered unemployment, which resulted from structural transformations in the national economy. This meant great difficulties in finding employment for uneducated people, with poor knowledge of Polish. Students who took up education in national

universities as persons of Polish origin were in the most convenient situation. After overcoming their initial difficulties, they were coping better and better and often decided to settle down in Poland permanently (Hut 2002: 152).

Resettlement from Lithuania, where Poles have always lived in their historical centres, and also constituted a dominant group (about 90% of the population in some districts), was slightly different. In Soviet times, there was an extensive network of Polish language education (both in the capital Wilna and in small towns), the communist Polish language press, and some Catholic churches were active.

After the end of mass resettlement in 1960, Poles in the Wilna Region constituted a specific group. The repatriations of the 1950s and 1960s were mainly left by representatives of the Wilna elite, intelligentsia and specialists who did not see a future for themselves in the Soviet state. Those who were left behind were most of all kolkhoz farmers (the farmland was taken over by the state) and workers. In this situation, there were no adequate human resources to oppose the depolonisation process carried out by Soviet officials and Lithuanian circles.

At the end of the 1980s, Lithuanian nationalist circles were increasingly emphasizing their willingness to gain autonomy and take over power in Lithuania. The Russians, but also indigenous Poles, were perceived by them as occupiers and opponents of independence. These attitudes aroused anxiety about the future among Poles (Jankowski 2010: 226).

In the early 1990s, when Lithuanian aspirations grew rapidly, Poles, in fear of Lithuanian nationalists, proposed the creation of an autonomous territorial unit in the Wilna region. This concept has led to the Polish-Lithuanian conflict outbreak in the region. The Polish circles were deemed to oppose Lithuanian independence (Kurcz 2005: 130, 138-140).

After the dramatic events in Wilna in January 1991 and the actual exit from the USSR, the authorities of the independent Lithuania started extensive Lithuanisational activities. These include dismissals of persons of non-Lithuanian origin, restrictions on the education of national minorities, as well as ownership transformations—including quasi-reprivatisation. These political and economic activities dramatically worsened the situation of Poles in the Wilna Region. The issue of returning the property to its pre-war owners was very emotional. In a travesty of any democratic standards, the Lithuanian side has done everything in its power so as not to return Poles' homes and land to them using ethnic criteria. The largest scale of these activities was achieved in the capital city of Wilna, where the real estate price was the highest (Kurcz 2005: 266-



270). However, the factors that preserved Polish identity include: being in a traditional place of settlement from several to several dozen generations back, the geographical proximity of Poland and the slow and tedious formation of the Polish elite. In the 1990s, the first generation of numerous Polish intelligentsia educated in the Soviet Union entered the labour market: teachers, engineers, doctors. It was they who decided about the growing ability of self-organization of Polish communities in Lithuania and they started to articulate their political and cultural aspirations more and more loudly (Kurcz 2005: 52, 219, 331).

Unlike Poles from Kazakhstan or Ukraine, Poles from Lithuania were not willing to leave their homeland. There were only 51 people in the repatriation procedure until 2000, 7 of whom were repatriated by 2000 (Hut 2002: 87). The scarce interest in settling in Poland was probably influenced by a number of reasons: the educational network, the possibility of religious practices in Catholic churches, the ownership of agricultural land, but also clear declarations of the Lithuanian authorities related to European aspirations.

Interest in repatriation in other republics was closely linked to the dramatic economic situation. At that time, it was common for workplaces to collapse and workers to be left destitute. Factories were being liquidated, kolkhozes were being dissolved, crime was increasing. The failure to meet the elementary vital needs has become a key push factor for emigration. Thousands of people were looking for any possibility of obtaining a visa to travel to another country.

### **Problems in the social group of repatriates from the 1990s after settling in Poland**

In the 1990s, repatriation to Poland was decided mainly by people who were of mobile working age, and their most numerous groups came from Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus. The above features of repatriates prove that they were determined, first of all, to break their ties with their country of origin and re-establish their life in their “external national homeland” (Brubaker 1996: 5). It was mainly women who decided to leave. Apart from the 7-17 age group, they dominated all the others, and in the 60+ seniors group, they even outnumbered men twice (Hut 2002: 91).

One interesting fact may be that repatriation visa applications were also submitted by people from Canada, Switzerland, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Bulgaria. As mentioned earlier, this was the time when any person who declared willingness to settle in Poland and was able to demonstrate a link with the Polish identity could apply.

Table 2: The voivodship of settlement for repatriates (1996-2000)

Voivodship	Number of repatriates
dolnośląskie (Lower Silesia)	158
kujawsko-pomorskie (Kuyavian-Pomern)	52
lubelskie	58
lubuskie	59
łódzkie	49
małopolskie (Lesser Poland)	87
mazowieckie (Mazovia)	146
opolskie	36
podkarpackie (Subcarpatian)	64
podlaskie (Podlachia)	35
pomorskie (Pomern)	48
śląskie (Silesia)	58
świętokrzyskie (Holy Cross)	18
warmińsko-mazurskie (Warmia–Masuria)	65
wielkopolskie (Greater Poland)	67
zachodniopomorskie (Western Pomern)	67
no data	3
<i>overall</i>	<i>1070</i>

Source: own work, based on the unpublished Ministry of Interior data for the years 1996-2000.

In the described period, the settlement of repatriates in Poland took place mainly due to family contacts between Poles from Ukraine and their relatives resettled in the 1950s and 1960s to the Lower Silesia. In Masovia, repatriates settled thanks to contacts made during their studies in Warsaw. It was similar in Lesser Poland, where Kraków's students from the former USSR had a

few years to find the local authorities who would invite them or their families. At the opposite pole were Holy Cross region and Podlachia region, where a small number of repatriates arrived. There were no strong academic centres in these regions at that time, their labour market was characterised by a high rate of registered unemployment and there were no strong historical ties between the repatriates who had come to Poland in the earlier years and their relatives from the former Soviet Union.

Formal barriers were a key problem in the resettlement process. Persons interested in repatriation had to travel hundreds of kilometres to the Polish consular post, they had to collect the necessary documents proving the Polish identity of their ancestors, other documents required expensive translations from Russian, as well as finding a local government that would take on the obligation to guarantee the repatriates' housing and livelihoods. After settling down in Poland, the next stage of formalities followed: the most difficult was the university diploma nostrification. Not all officials dealing with repatriates' cases were characterized by empathy and understanding that they talked to people with completely different life experiences and were not able to cope on their own with meeting deadlines, proper justification of the application, and often with filling in the form in Polish. In the 1990s, the appointment of a repatriate assistant was not even considered to help him with the formalities and support him in the initial period of adaptation to the new place.

The repatriates encountered great difficulties when trying to enter the Polish labour market. The paradox was that provincial governments in small towns that were willing to donate a flat for repatriates were struggling with high unemployment rates. It was easier to get a job in large cities, but again, housing there was very expensive and it was much more difficult to convince local government representatives from large cities to invite repatriates. As a consequence, for many Poles from the former USSR, coming to Poland meant a drastic deterioration of their social and professional position and, in practice, acceptance of employment below the qualifications and for the lowest salary. Entry into the labour market was also hindered by the lack of language skills, a common issue among repatriates. While Polish and Russian languages are similar and there is no problem with communicating at a basic level, a very good knowledge of the language is required, for example, in the teaching profession, as well as on clerical positions. This part of the labour market was shut from the repatriates.

Poverty was a shared experience of all repatriates from the 1990s. Deprived in Soviet times of their own farms, real estate and even family heirlooms, they came to Poland in hope of

improving their living standards. Unfortunately, low-paid work did not make it possible to reach the standard of living of their neighbours. Large families lived in substandard apartments, which they accepted only because of the formal requirement to have accommodation to obtain a repatriation visa. This resulted in a lower level of life than in the country of origin. Most of the repatriates—especially those from Kazakhstan—enjoyed the civilisational advancement, which pulled them out of provincial kolkhozes and other places with no life prospects. Very often they understood their decisions to emigrate to Poland as an investment in the future, their own and their children's.

Especially among the repatriates of the 1990s, worsening health was common. People coming to Poland because of stress and anxiety about the future, as well as nostalgia for the “tame world” of their country of origin, experienced health deterioration. Repatriates from Kazakhstan also had difficulties in getting used to the Polish climate, which is different from that in the northern part of their country of origin.

In the second half of the 1990s, work was only just beginning to prepare a repatriation system and a privileged mode of acquiring citizenship. Nevertheless, it was immediately decided that resettlement would take place on an individual basis, with a minimum involvement from state institutions. Despite formal changes, this formula has been maintained to this day. First of all, a person interested in settling in Poland had to obtain an invitation from the commune and a guarantee to ensure their livelihood and housing conditions. According to studies carried out in 2000 and 2011, these were the requirements that actually hindered the resettlement process. Due to the passage of time, geographical distance, severing family ties and financial limitations, it was very difficult to establish contacts between communes from all over Poland and Poles in the former USSR. Moreover, the economic changes that were taking place in Poland at that time and their consequence, among others, the high rate of registered unemployment—in some regions, exceeding 25-30%—hampered the readiness of local authorities to issue invitations to Poles from the former USSR. The repatriation law adopted in 2000 not only did confirm these principles, but also limited repatriation to the Asian part of the former Soviet Union. The applications of persons wishing to resettle in Poland from Latvia or Lithuania were refused since 2001, unless the applicant lived in the Asian part of the USSR until 1991.

### **The repatriation process after 2001**

The legislation adopted at the end of 2000 aimed at improving the resettlement process and favouring repatriation from the Asian part of the former Soviet Union. The legislators were based on the conviction that people living mainly in Kazakhstan and Siberia are in a more difficult situation and thus, in a way, lose in the competition for invitations from communes in Poland. In order to improve the resettlement process, the IT system RODAK, managed by the Ministry of Interior, was organized, collecting information on persons interested in repatriation from the Asian part of the former USSR and Polish local governments interested in receiving a repatriate. However, this system has proven to be a failure. In the first 15 years, the number of communes willing to accept repatriates did not exceed 20 per year; additionally the inviting party could determine the professional competence of the invited repatriate. As a result, local government officials sought to solve their own local problems by accepting specialists, e.g. English philologists or doctors. Of course, such qualifications occurred incidentally in the group of repatriates.

After the adoption of the Act on Repatriation in 2000, the process of resettlement to Poland faded. Although in 2001 as many as one thousand people arrived, this was the result of an accumulation of applications submitted before the entry into force of the new regulations, and already in 2002-2010 each year there were fewer repatriates—in 2009 it was only 214 people (Hut 2014: 187).

Resettlement after 2000 took place under different socio-economic conditions. The initial differences between the standard of living in Poland in the 1990s and the post-Soviet states began to diminish. The times when workers were paid in kind (e.g. sanitary ceramics at work or agricultural products at kolkhozes) are gone. The Russian Federation and Kazakhstan have embarked on a path of economic development. Many descendants of Poles from Kazakhstan instead of Poland decided to go to the Russian Federation, where they had no problems with acquiring citizenship, diploma nostrification, document translation or the lack of language proficiency. Undoubtedly, with the improvement of the economic situation in these countries and the information about the problems penetrating from the repatriates of the 1990s, interest in repatriation was decreasing.

Over the next decade, interest in repatriation continued to decline until the regulations were changed. These included, above all, the organisation of the adaptation period on the Polish territory

and greater financial involvement from the state institutions. This has resulted in a clear increase in the number of people arriving from 2016 onwards.

Table 3: Number of repatriates in Poland in the following years.

Year of arrival	Number of repatriates
2010	147
2011	193
2012	123
2013	163
2014	165
2015	200
2016	239
2017	488
2018	756
<i>Total</i>	2474

Source: own work, based on the unpublished Ministry of Interior data for the years 2010-2018.

Repatriation after 2016 was already taking place under the changed conditions. Firstly, it incidentally concerned people who had Polish citizenship before 1939 and was addressed mainly to the descendants of those forcibly deported by the Soviet authorities to the Asian part of the USSR. Their emotional connection with their historical homeland was and is much weaker than that of their ancestors. They spent their entire lives in the Soviet Union and the republics formed after its break-up. For them, repatriation was not a restoration of the original state of normality, they were not forcibly uprooted from the Polish identity by war circumstances, but were adapted to live in a sovietised and Russified environment. They treated the trip to Poland as a way to improve their own life situation. It is worth stressing that it is not only about improving the material situation, but also about a sense of advancement to a “better, western world”.

The assumption in 2016 that state institutions should become more deeply involved in the repatriation process was correct. If similar legal solutions had been introduced with the adoption

of the Act on Repatriation as early as 2001, many critical life situations among repatriates would have been avoided, as well as the re-repatriation to the country of origin. The issue of “withdrawal from repatriation” still remains indescribable in the literature due to the non-disclosure of such cases by those concerned. Occasionally, one can hear about a family that has returned to its home country due to an adaptation failure.

The real and unknown scale recognized issue is primarily the repatriates’ further emigration from Poland. It concerns young people, most often after graduating from Polish studies, who, having already had Polish citizenship, can enjoy all the rights of a European Union citizen—including the right to free movement, residence and employment. So far, no instruments have been developed that could limit the emigration of repatriates from Poland after acquiring the Polish citizenship. So far, the findings have shown that this issue has not been addressed by the state authorities in charge of the resettlement process.

The legal changes introduced in 2016 did not only include material support for repatriates, but also the arrangement of their affairs in the state's administrative structure. First of all, a repatriation plenipotentiary has been appointed, a position customarily held by the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Interior and Administration. He is responsible for monitoring the resettlement process. In addition, a Repatriation Council has been established to settle disputed repatriation issues and to provide an advisory body for the resettlement process. However, it should be stressed that both bodies have rather symbolic meaning and their activity is unnoticeable in the public space. These are authorities with a marginal position in the administrative structure, e.g. in comparison with authorities dealing with the immigration of foreigners from third countries.

### **Problems in the repatriates’ social group in Poland after 2001**

In the first decade after 2001, the difficulties faced by the repatriates were no different from those experienced by the repatriates of the 1990s. These were: problems with finding housing, work below qualification or household income below the subsistence level. Expensive translations were still required, and officials from the poviats labour offices or social welfare centres did not have enough patience to provide support to repatriate households.

Paradoxically, the repatriates’ situation began to improve with Poles’ progressing mass emigration to the wealthy EU countries. Between 2004 and 2010, the domestic labour market started to change in the face of the labour deficit. Both large companies and small local service

providers have faced the outflow of workers and their growing wage aspirations. Repatriates of working age benefited from this change. The requirements for professional competences to enter the labour market have been lowered—language problems, which a decade earlier seemed to be a major barrier to taking up employment, are no longer an issue.

The change described above has not caused the problems in the labour market to disappear, but has nevertheless led to a fundamental change. The earlier, often desperate search for any kind of employment for at least one person in the household has given way to more “strategic” career planning and the search for an employer with better working conditions. The increase in employee mobility is also worth noting. With the increased availability of flats for rent, it was much easier to take up employment outside the place of residence than in the 1990s. The market for the rental of cheap employee accommodation has been developing rapidly, and in view of the increase in residential construction (more than 100,000 apartments delivered annually), the supply of cheap individual rentals has increased. Information on the recruitment process by offices and companies has also become widely available on the Internet. These conditions have determined the widespread employment of repatriates of mobile age.

Diagnosed in the 1990s, poverty so prevalent in repatriate households began to change its face in the mid-2000s. It no longer had an objective dimension. However, the repatriates subjectively assessed their situation as worse than in their friends’ households. The income earned by the young generation of repatriates was small and thus they increased the precariat count in the national labour market. And it was that group that often decided to emigrate to Western European countries. However, exceptions are worth noting! The people who have made a career in the public sphere in Poland include without the slightest doubt in the period 2018-2019 the former Minister of Finance – prof. Teresa Czerwińska, who repatriated from Dyneburg (Daugavpils) in Latvia, and the famous actress Joanna Moro, who was born in Wilna. Others, however, have not found enough determination to achieve comparable success.

Health problems were no longer as severe as in the 1990s. The resettlement procedure and the emigration to Poland itself did not tear people out of their tame reality so brutally—they could maintain contacts through video connections with relatives and friends in their country of origin, in a way still retaining a connection with their place of birth and the known environment. Over time, the repatriates were also losing people who paid with health for the inhuman policy of the



Soviet deportations. Destroyed by the living conditions, they no longer had the strength to benefit from repatriation to Poland.

For repatriates arriving under the Act on Repatriation of 2001, climatic conditions in Poland were no longer a problem. Although they occasionally pointed out some inconveniences (e.g. related to the winds blowing in Warsaw), they did not consider the air humidity different from that in Kazakhstan or higher average monthly temperatures than in Siberia as a problem.

In conclusion, it should be observed that the 1990s repatriates' problems were objectively the most severe. Later, their intensity weakened and took on a subjective dimension. It is likely that by improving the involvement and effectiveness of social service, the scale of problems in repatriate households could be further reduced. Undoubtedly, it is a paradox that in the 1990s, when social support for repatriation was very high and involved moral and emotional responsibility for the compatriots who were victims of Stalinist deportations and collectivization, the Polish authorities failed to perform a repatriation operation.

The current repatriation operation takes place in another organisational, social and economic dimension. In the administrative structure, the resettlement process is based on cooperation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, as well as the Repatriation Plenipotentiary and the Council for Repatriation. Their activities are supported by NGOs and social services throughout the country. Undoubtedly, the organisational improvement fosters the correctness of the resettlement operation, but this is a marginal activity which, unlike in previous years, did not even appear in the parliamentary election campaign in 2019, and in 2020, this topic did not appear in the initial presidential campaign weeks. These signals coming from the world of politics demonstrate the actual position of repatriation and repatriates in the hierarchy of importance of matters in Poland.

### **Repatriation process assessment and 2020-2030 forecasts**

The repatriation campaign after 1990 should be regarded as a missed opportunity to put in order the unresolved issues since the end of the Second World War and to obtain a demographic resource for depopulated areas. During the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the formation of the authorities of the post-Soviet republics, there was a great interest in emigrating to Poland. Many pre-war Polish citizens scattered over the vast territory of the former USSR were also alive by then. At the moment the Polish authorities had housing infrastructure, jobs in state-owned

enterprises or a strongly centralised state administration at their disposal at that time—did not decide to carry out mass resettlement. In this situation, repatriation took on a lively character, abounding in numerous human dramas and disappointments.

A map of the repatriates' settlement provides a lot of information about the course of repatriation over almost 30 years. The repatriates reached mainly three provinces: Lower Silesia, Varmia-Masuria and Pomerania. It was there that thanks to family contacts, which survived many years after the new borders were established, relatives invited Poles from the former USSR. Indirectly, thanks to studies for Poles from the former Soviet Union, financed by the Polish authorities, the repatriates reached Mazovia, the Lublin region and Lesser Poland. Although it was assumed that graduates in Poland would strengthen Polish circles in the post-Soviet space, in fact a significant group of graduates at the end of their studies initiated a repatriation procedure, which in time also included their parents and siblings.

Actions to improve the repatriation process after 2000 were started three times. In 2006, a task force was established in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister to develop assumptions, administrative procedures and adjust the administrative structure to the challenges related to the arrival of repatriates. The result of the team's work was the later so-called "civic bill on repatriation", which has never reached the Sejm plenary. For the second time, in view of the drastically decreasing scale of arrivals in 2011, the government took the initiative. The changes at that time were superficial and did not increase the number of repatriates. The repatriation procedure reform in 2016 was in fact the implementation of some of the measures planned as early as 2006 and resulted in the government administration taking over the responsibility for the adaptation process in Poland. In practice, this involves organising competitions for NGOs to provide social services and living conditions for repatriates upon their arrival in Poland. Currently, the repatriates are staying in two adaptation centres: in Pułtusk and Środa Wielkopolska. Experience demonstrates that the adopted system works and does not require major changes. However, it is difficult to get rid of the impression that it is temporary and reactive.

When forecasting the scale and directions of repatriation to Poland, one should take into account first of all the Polish demographic stock in the former USSR, the economic and social situation in the post-Soviet republics and the economic and social situation in Poland.

The most probable option seems to be an influx of about 1000 repatriates per year. This is due to the demographic and economic conditions in the countries of origin. This level will be

maintained for about 5 years and will start decreasing to 200-300 people per year. There is also a likelihood of a significant increase in the number of repatriates, but only if the regulations are changed and the North and South American Polonia is included in the procedure. The extent of repatriation may also be influenced in the future by supporting the repatriation of descendants of post-accession migrants who left Poland after 2004 and settled in the UK, Germany or Benelux.

Taking into account the specificity of modern migration processes—and despite its uniqueness, repatriation is a part of migration—it would be advisable to start studies on the preparation of new legal solutions. The reduction in the number of people interested in permanent settlement in Poland in favour of circular migration should be seriously considered. This applies above all to the largest concentration of Polish population near the eastern border—the Grodna region in Belarus. The second such area with Polish population directly adjacent to the border is the Lwów region. If cross-border flows from these two areas are liberalised, circular migration will be under the strongest pressure.

## References

1. Act of 09 November 2000 on Repatriation (Journal of Laws 106, item 1118).
2. Anderson B. 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nation*. London,-New York: Verso.
3. Archiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazachstan, 2000. *Iz istorii Polyakov v Kazachstanye (1936-1956 gg.) Sbornik dokumentov*. Almaty: Kazakstan.
4. Brubaker R. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Budzyński A. (Eds.), 2006a. *Pamiętniki Polaków na Wschodzie: Białoruś, Ukraina, Kazachstan – losy pokoleń*, vol. I, Warsaw: IGS SGH.
6. Budzyński A. (Eds.), 2006b. *Pamiętniki Polaków na Wschodzie: Białoruś, Ukraina, Kazachstan – losy pokoleń*, vol. II, Warsaw: IGS SGH.
7. Budzyński A. (Eds.). 1998. *Pamiętniki Polaków na Litwie 1945-1995 – losy pokoleń*. Warsaw: IGS SGH.
8. Centralnoye Statisticheskoye Upravlyenye pri Soviete Ministrov SSSR, 1962. *Itogi vsesoyuznoy perepisi nasyelyenya 1959 goda; SSSR (svodnyy tom)*. Moskva: Gosstatizdat.

9. Csergo Z, Goldgeier J. 2004. Nationalist Strategies and European Integration [in:] *Perspective on Politics* Vol. 2 Iss. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10. de Tinquy A., Hadjiisky M. 1997. Repatriacja osób w wyniku zmian politycznych w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. *The European Council, CDMG (97) 13E*.
11. Elrick J., Frelak J., Hut P. 2006. Polen und Deutschland gegenüber ihren Diasporas im Osten / Polska i Niemcy wobec rodaków na Wschodzie. Warszawa: Instytut Spraw Publicznych.
12. Gawęcki M. 1996. *Kazachstańscy Polacy*. Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Ekonomiczne.
13. Goskomstat–Nacyonalnyy Komitet SSSR po Statistiki, 1988. *Nasyelyenye SSSR 1987; Statisticheskyy Sobornik*. Moskva: Finansy i Statistika.
14. Grzymała-Kazłowska A. & Grzymała Moszczyńska H., 2014. The Anguish of Repatriation: Immigration to Poland and Integration of Polish Descendants from Kazakhstan. In: *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. Vol. 28, Issue 3. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications.
15. Hut P. 2002. *Warunki życia i proces adaptacji repatriantów w Polsce w latach 1992-2000*. Warsaw: IPS UW.
16. Hut P. 2014. *Polska wobec Polaków w przestrzeni poradzieckiej: Od solidaryzmu etnicznego do obowiązku administracyjnego*. Warsaw: IPS UW.
17. Jankowski A. 2010. *Polskie uczenie. Wspomnienia Antoniego Jankowskiego*. Wilno: Scripta Manet.
18. Kersten K. 1974. *Repatriacja ludności polskiej po II wojnie światowej. Studium historyczne*. Wrocław-Warszawa-Gdańsk-Kraków: Ossolineum.
19. Latuch M. 1994. *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR w latach 1920-1960*. Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Demograficzne.
20. Plater-Zyberk K. 1983. *W obronie Polaków w ZSRR*. Toronto-Londyn: Free World Polonia.
21. Siedlecki J. 1987. *Losy Polaków w ZSRR w latach 1939-1986*. London: Gryf Publications.
22. Szydzisz M. 2019. *Spółeczność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku w świetle działalności Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce w latach 1950-1989*. Wrocław–Warsaw: IPN.