

## Fertility potential and child benefits questioned: Polish migration in the UK and changes of family policies in Poland.

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### Abstract

*This paper presents a discussion about evaluating and using “migrating fertility” potential as a useful approach for designing and implementing pro-natalist and family policies, which may play a significant role in managing migration processes, especially in the context of low fertility in European countries. The analysis presented in the article is based on a pilot empirical study conducted in the UK in 2017 and 2018. The aim was to capture the views of migrants who have been staying in the UK for several years on the “Family 500+” fertility-boost financial aid program introduced in Poland in 2016. A critical aspect of the adopted approach is the inclusion in the analysis of future demographic trends and the fertility potential of those who emigrated from their home country, which is often underestimated in migration studies. The study results, which were conducted shortly after the program’s launch, clearly indicate that the new child benefit is not the only decisive factor for Polish migrants. Therefore they are not necessarily eager to return to their home country despite the new pro-family policy.*

**Keywords:** *migrating fertility; the return of migrants; assessment of movement; pro-fertility policy; migration from Poland*

### Introduction

In the last 15 years (since Poland and nine other countries joined the European Union in 2004), the phenomenon of migration has significantly changed its social structure. Perhaps more importantly, this movement will substantially impact demography in the long-run, causing severe transformations in the country. It is worth mentioning here that Poland is a country of outgoing migration. This has to do with the lack of independence in the 19th century and the 20th century with migrations and refugees to the West from countries behind the Iron Curtain. After the fall of communism in 1989 and the political transformation, Poland had a negative migration balance, and the scale of departures after the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 accelerated.

When it comes to Poland’s population, it is shrinking due to migration and changes in marital and family life, which have led to a structural decline in fertility since the 1990s and the acceleration of this process after 2004. Poland, similarly to many other EU countries, is in a complex situation. While the number of older people over 60 years of age will increase, the working-age population’s share will drop (Potrykowska 2016). This is likely to cause a serious demographic challenge, especially with the fertility rate (1.43 in 2019) remaining below the replacement level (2.14) for more than 30 years. As a result, it is anticipated that by 2050,

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Poland will have a severe depopulation problem. It is estimated that the number of citizens will have decreased by around 4.5 million (from 38.4 million in 2019). Therefore, Poland's issue of migration and the prospects for migrants' return ought to be analyzed in the context of low fertility rates in Poland instead of higher fertility rates among Poles who have migrated to the United Kingdom. For example, the total fertility rate of Polish women living in England and Wales is 2.13 (Golata 2016). Simultaneously, the same indicator has not exceeded 1.6 for Polish women in Poland in recent years. Since the social climate around starting a family is an essential criterion in the migrant's decision whether to return home or stay abroad, this study was also established on the assumption that migration should be analyzed from two perspectives: first, in terms of the migrants' return potential and impacting factors; second, concerning the opinions and preferences of migrants in terms of family planning as well as their views on Poland's current pro-fertility policies. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the family policy in the country of origin can be a significant, though often neglected in migration research, factor for migrants' decision whether to return to their home country.

This paper explores a range of factors that could be potentially convincing for migrants in deciding whether to return to Poland and explicitly focused on the relatively new policy of the "Family 500+" program. This policy, launched in 2016, aims to *"increase the fertility rate, increase the number of children in families, and improve the general well-being of families with children"* (Sowa 2016). The introduction of a universal child benefit of 500 PLN (about EUR 120), available to all families regardless of their income or number of children under 18, has been well received by society in Poland. Initially, the benefit was granted only for the second oldest and subsequent children, while from July 2019, it has also been available for the eldest child. According to the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS), 71% of Poles believe that it is important to increase Poland's fertility rate, while only 23% claim the opposite. The new policy benefits include improved conditions for children from low-income families, improved relations for couples, a decreased gap between births in a family, and an increasing number of families with more than one child (Paradysz 2018).

In the context of migration, it is necessary to mention that Poland's residence is the basic condition for receiving a child benefit. Therefore, the benefit is not granted to parents who live abroad, even though they have their Polish citizenship and/or are formally registered in Poland (MRPiPS 2018). Neither is an individual entitled to the child's benefit if their family claims similar benefits abroad (see: Powroty 2020). Hence, if parents with children reside in one of the EU, EEA countries, or Switzerland, they are eligible for family benefits according to the country of residence; thus, no benefits from Poland are granted. The exception is when one of the parents lives with the children in Poland and the other works abroad in another EU, EEA country, or Switzerland. The right to parental benefits is then determined by EU regulations on the coordination of social security systems (MRPiPS 2019). In England and Wales, women born in Poland have been the largest non-UK born group of mothers since 2010, overtaking mothers of Asian origin (ONS 2017). The rate remains fairly high (e.g., 2.9% of all live births in 2018) and includes mothers of all age groups (ONS 2018). Therefore, in the context of the "Family 500+" program in Poland, it is worth exploring whether Polish migrants in the UK consider returning to Poland to raise their families there or prefer to stay in the destination country.



## Context of the study

In this field research study, we collected data from 453 Polish migrants in the UK who participate in various social, cultural, and religious activities organized by Polish religious centers in England, Wales, and Scotland. Some of these activities are run by Polish priests and nuns of the Polish Catholic Mission. The study's main focus was on young-adult people, married or planning a wedlock and a family, and those who already have children or have near-term plans for children. The aim was to investigate the attitudes, motivations, and opinions of singles and married people or those who live in informal relationships. We intended to show the image of Poles of reproductive age who decided to migrate for various reasons. We focus on their opinions and preferences regarding the conditions and requirements of entering into marriage, starting a family, and having children. The research problems that we address in the study concern (1) the opinions of migrants about their situation, as well as (2) factors influencing the decision of whether to remain abroad or return to Poland, and (3) the opinions regarding factors influencing marital and parental decisions.

This article presents an analysis of empirical data and attempts to identify return triggers based on socio-demographic data and migrants' self-evaluation of their circumstances in the migration context. The main focus of the analysis in this study was migrants' perception of the pro-family policy represented by the "Family 500+" program. At the start of the study, the aim was to reach a specific sample, i.e., a group of attendees at pre-marital courses organized in Polish parishes. In this way, using the concept of the rites of passage, we intended to capture a group of respondents who were about to undergo potentially significant changes in their lives (marriage preparation meetings). We intended to explore the extent to which migrants considered the option of returning to their home country as an element of a significant change in their personal lives and social status. This was tested in individual interviews with experts who organize various religious, charitable, and socio-cultural activities for Polish migrants in the UK.

Hence, this study offers a chance to access the opinions, preferences, and attitudes of representatives of the Polish community, who may constitute a community potentially interested in returning to Poland due to their long-term stay abroad and relatively young age. Due to the difficulties in reaching a scattered and very mobile community such as the migrants, there is little research on this population's characteristics (cf.: Lesińska and Pszczółkowska 2018). Therefore, when recruiting participants, we tried to reach Polish migrants through the institutional centers of Poles' cultural, religious, and social lives in the UK. The organization of Polish socio-cultural life around religious centers has been discussed in the literature on Polish post-accession migration (see White 2017, or Gallagher and Trzebiatowska 2017, Wódka et al. 2020). It corresponds with a Western European trend identified in a research study by PEW Research Centre in 2018. Religion is perceived as a tool for transferring norms and values, while the Church is seen as an institution that supports people in need and the poor.

In Poland, a secular country, the Catholic Church has a culturally stronger position than in many Western European countries, which is confirmed by numbers of the Sunday mass attendees in some regions (50% - 70% weekly, in the South-East of the country in pre-Covid-19 times). It also needs to be noted that religion, mainly Catholicism, has been historically embedded in Polish cultural heritage, even though the country is secular. This phenomenon

is rooted in the vicissitudes of Poland's history as at times the Church served as the main depository of the Polish culture, tradition, and collective memory of the nation, e.g. during and after the times of the partitions of Poland between 1772-1918 (Stetkiewicz 2013). Hence its position in society is strongly related to the legacy of the 19th and 20th-century struggle for independence and national and cultural identity preservation.

Therefore, even for non-practicing Catholics in Poland, a church wedding can manifest a mature marriage attitude due to this extraordinary position of religion. Concerning the migration context, Polish migrants in the UK filled the churches across the country, instigating media speculation of religion's revival (cf. Gallagher and Trzebiatowska 2017, Bates 2006). Therefore, it is important to note the peculiar and significant role of religion in Polish society and, consequently, for this study's participants and ways of accessing them for this research project.

### **Family support policies in Poland and other European countries**

To contextualize the pro-fertility policy launched in Poland in 2016, it is necessary to explain the program's demographic reasons. They seem to be the first comprehensive attempt to tackle negative demographic trends identified at the beginning of the 1990s. The Polish society's age structure results from a systematically decreasing birth rate in 1983-2002 and the lowest-low fertility rate. Hence, Poland's demographic potential is likely to stay at a low level, which will result in relatively small numbers of potential parents (Billari 2005).

About the above new family policy in Poland, it is noteworthy that other European countries have also successfully implemented various instruments comparable to the new Polish approach. In France, for example, the family policy has been systematically developed from the first half of the 20th century and resulted in the increase of fertility rate from 1.78 in 1990 to 2.02 in 2010). Other European countries that managed to increase their fertility rate include Estonia (an increase from 1.32 in 2001 to 1.72 in 2010), Russia (an increase from 1.29 in 2001 to 1.75 in 2014), Ukraine (an increase from 1.08 in 2001 to 1.53 in 2012), Hungary (an increase from 1.29 in 1999 to 1.41 in 2014), United Kingdom (an increase from 1.63 in 2002 to 1.92 in 2012) and Sweden (an increase from 1.5 in 1999 to 1.98 in 2010). In those countries, apart from financial aid, comparable to the Polish program "Family 500+", there have been various other instruments to encourage parenthood. These include, for example, lengthy parental leave, considering the number of children in a family when deciding on the level of financial support (i.e., Denmark, Netherlands, Poland, Romania), observable preference for families with at least two children (i.e., France, Ireland), flexible working hours for parents (i.e., UK) or freedom to choose the form of child care within financial aid provided (i.e., Ireland or Luxembourg). Tax credits granted depending on the number of dependent children (e.g., Germany, Slovenia, or Spain) or linking the pension system with pro-family policy (e.g., France, Great Britain, Sweden, Estonia, or Hungary) become increasingly common (all data: PWC 2017).

### **Migrating fertility: benefits and costs**

Poland's situation's above demographic aspect is significant for the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe. As indicated in the literature (cf. Steinfuehrer et al. 2010, Cook 2015), since the 1990s, demographic changes in the region have followed different patterns than those in Western Europe (see: Duszczyk et al. 2014). In the 1990s, CEE countries experienced



severe demographic depression due to phenomena such as an unprecedented rapid decrease in fertility in women below the level of replacement rate (e.g., 1.43 in Poland, 1.37 in Slovakia, 1.32 in Hungary and Romania in 1998), the gradual growth of the age of marriage and childbearing among women (in the years 1997-1998: 25-27 years), and a relatively high level of emigration, and harmful natural growth level (cf. Central Statistical Office [GUS] 2000, pp. 45-46, 65-66, Eurostat).

Regarding the decrease of population due to migration, in 2016, 2.2 (out of 38.4) million citizens (6% of the total population, according to Central Statistical Office [GUS] 2017, p. 8) lived outside Poland. Hence, Poland's introduction of the universal child benefit, together with a gradual change in the social attitude towards fertility (cf. Mynarska 2013) and the evolving attitude towards migration and migrants related to Britain's exit from the European Union have created a unique situation, in which Polish post-accession migrants may be inclined to return to Poland more than ever before. This has also been emphasized by one of the participating experts who commented: "*After the decision about Brexit, meaning the UK leaving the EU, had been made, quite a large proportion of Polish migrants consider return [to Poland]*" (male, 57 years old, London, in the UK since 2003).

### Returning 'home'

The effects of migration and migration are viewed differently depending on the individual or social, short or long-term. Many authors that investigated this phenomenon (cf. Iglicka 2010, Ryan and Sales 2011, Janukowicz 2014, Młyński & Szewczyk 2012, Kławsuń-Zduńczyk 2014, Kozielska 2014, Moskal and Tyrrell 2016, White 2017) used data from various sources and mixed methods to answer questions about the reasons for migration as well as the factors influencing the decision to return (see Rovetta Cortes 2016). The latter is of particular interest here. Other authors who discuss the return of Poles from migration in response to the changing economic conditions and the consequences of the global financial crisis estimate the scale of returns from, for example, Ireland as one-third of those who settled in that country over the past few years (Goldin et al. 2011, p. 114). White (2017) explicitly states that there was no actual confirmation of numbers of returning migrants in the United Kingdom. While there was some considerable observable speculation in the media, there were no such information in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) resources in the UK.

The issue of return migration occupies a prominent position in migration studies due to the potential application of research results and recommendations. This is perhaps the most crucial research area in the study of contemporary Polish migration. Among the declared reasons for leaving, migrants who have returned to Poland above all name higher wages (29.3%) and being delegated to work abroad by employers (15.5%). Difficulty in finding a job in Poland is listed much more rarely (10.5%), along with the desire to keep the family together, cited by 15% of migrants as a reason for departure. Reasons for return include the termination of the employment contract (12%, compared to 35% of migrants before 2002) or missing family (26% of indications) (see Greco 2018). However, it is worth noting that the percentage of professionally active people in 2011 among migrants was above the national average (74.2% compared to 55%). Interestingly, the same was true for the unemployed percentage (17.3% compared to 12% for the national average; all data - National Census of Population and Housing in Poland 2011).

In this context, we are interested in what we call the potential for Polish post-accession migrants' return. If migrants chose to return, they could significantly reduce the likelihood of a demographic crisis with potentially grave social and economic consequences. If it turns out that the majority of those who left will remain abroad with their children, then it is expected that in 2035 the population of Poland will have decreased by an additional 7% about the forecast of the Central Statistical Office (GUS), which amounts to slightly more than 2.5 million people. As a result, the processes of depopulation and aging will intensify. As can be seen, the subject we are dealing with has a significant demographic component. Research shows that post-accession migrants are mainly representatives of the age group with the highest childbearing potential.

### **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

The data were collected between March 2017 and March 2018 from six city locations of Polish migrants in the United Kingdom (London, Peterborough, Glasgow, Lancaster, Accrington, Blackburn, and Carlisle). To collect data, we also conducted 12 in-depth interviews in the places where on-site research was conducted, with experts who work in Polish migrant communities. Their unique role involves the animation of community social life and support for individuals in a difficult situation. During the data collection period, we surveyed 453 respondents on-site. The questionnaires were collected with the assistance of representatives and volunteers from Polish religious institutions and communities (e.g., priests, nuns, and teachers) working with the Polish migrants in the UK. This sampling choice is due to religious people attaching greater importance to society's reproductive function (Peri-Rotem 2016). Also, the higher fertility of Catholics compared to, for example, Protestants are often seen as the result of pro-natalist Catholic teachings (McQuillan 2004). Based on the survey, we examined the relationship between the impact of the "Family 500+" program and such variables as individuals' assessment of the legitimacy of the Program, factors impacting future decisions concerning the number of children (e.g., housing, work, state support, religious beliefs), number of children, expected duration of the stay abroad, duration of stay abroad to date, as well as the assessment of living conditions elsewhere. Variables were selected based on our substantive knowledge of the phenomenon. To determine the strength of relations between the variables, we used the  $\chi^2$  independence test and Pearson's contingency coefficient "C" (Aczel 1993).

Since the study was exploratory, we used non-probability sampling due to a limited reliable randomization tool (Szreder 2010). The studied population is inconstant, and the numbers of migrants have been changing dynamically since the last Census. Because the main aim of this study was the identification of opinions about the program "Family 500+" in the context of a potential return to Poland, we decided to use the snowball sampling technique (Szreder 2010) to reach migrants who satisfy the chosen criteria: individuals who were born in Poland emigrated not more than 15 years ago, and participated in one of the events organized by Polish religious or cultural centers in the UK. Therefore, the respondents consisted of individuals involved in the activities of Polish pastoral centers in the UK. It should be noted that many of these activities are not strictly religious and include, for example, various forms of social aid, community integration, charity, education, and culture (e.g., ballroom dance courses, choir ensembles, theatre and art groups, charity events and various ad hoc initiatives addressed to members of the Polish community). Therefore, as Gallagher and Trzebiatowska



(2017) observed, these institutions attract not only those migrants who unambiguously identify themselves with these centers' religion but also are religiously unaffiliated.

The questionnaire included questions prompting opinions about living conditions and work in the UK and potential return triggers, maintaining contacts with friends and relatives in the home country, and views on Poland's current family policies. Experts were asked similar questions, i.e., about life and work conditions of Poles in the UK and related issues and challenges, e.g., integration with local communities or problematic matters at work. We obtained information about a broader socio-economic context of Polish migrants in the UK from the participating experts. This was possible due to the non-religious role of Polish parishes, priests, nuns, teachers, trainers, and other animators of social life, who are often seen as points of support in case of difficulties experienced by migrants or places of social exchanges. One of our experts summarised this unique role by saying that *"apart from the church and the Polish Saturday school there are no other organizations where Polish migrants socialize... The Polish House was sold three years ago"* (male, 43 years old, Peterborough, in the UK since 2011). The fact that priests run the centers selected for this analysis does not limit their religious migrants' operation scope. Theoretically, it could be seen as a barrier for less- or non-religious people. The participating experts emphasized that Polish parishes are often perceived as an enclave of Polishness, and social life migrants know Poland. Therefore, although Polish parishes operate in the UK social and labor conditions, which are noticeably different as noted by migrants, they are often treated as replicas of the home country's communities. This corroborates Gallagher and Trzebiatowska's (2017) findings and earlier studies (cf. Levitt 2004). Many migrants depend on and have trust in faith-based organizations in the process of settling in a host society.

Another significant feature of Polish parishes mentioned by the participating experts is the "buffer zone". In other words, Polish religious communities are safe places where migrants receive support in cases of personal problems or temporary crises, such as job loss, the breakup of a relationship, or difficulties in contacting family in Poland. This view is supported by a comment of one interviewee who stated that *"the level of integration of Polish migrants with local people is not very high even though the relations between different waves of Polish migration vary and are not always satisfactory"* (male, 39 years old, Milford, in the UK since 2009).

## Results and Discussion

This study presents the views of a relatively homogeneous sample. The survey was carried out among Polish migrants, the vast majority of whom lived in the UK for several years and were considered a group of potential return migrants. Most of them (almost 62%) have been living abroad for seven or more years; those who have lived abroad for a year or less constitute only 3% of respondents. A significant number of the respondents are childfree (almost 30%) or have one (23,6%) or two children (32%) (see Appendix 1.).

On the one hand, an extended stay abroad seems to be a clear indicator of the migrants' functional integration into the local labor market. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that the majority of respondents declare a good and excellent command of English (see Appendix 1.); 45% of respondents said they were satisfied with their job abroad, and 37% of respondents had a job that was in line with their qualifications.

**Table 1.** Opinions about the “Family 500+” Program and the respondents’ structure according to a number of children, planned and actual migration duration, and assessment of working and living conditions.

	Work according to qualifications	Satisfaction with working abroad	Satisfaction with living conditions abroad
YES	25.7%	25.6%	17.4%
yes, but not sure	11.6%	18.9%	26.7%
don't know	17.5%	28.2%	25.1%
no, but not sure	11.3%	15.8%	16%
NO	30.8%	8.4%	8.2%
N/A	3.1%	3%	6.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100%	100%	100%

The percentage of unsatisfied people with their appointment was 24%, while 42% reported working below their skills level. Similarly, most people stated they were satisfied or delighted with the living and working conditions abroad (double the number of skeptics, see Table 1). In most cases, the respondents were pleased with the working and living conditions abroad. However, the relatively high percentage of people who were not happy with these conditions is also worth noting. Among the respondent families with children, nearly half (46%) have two offspring and a third - one, which is in reverse to the reported situation in Poland, where slightly more than half of families have one child. In comparison, 35% of families have two children (GUS, 2016). A third of the respondents assume that they will stay abroad permanently. Even with a relatively high percentage of childless people in the sample, the respondents’ reproductive plans went far beyond the group’s actual fertility rates. Over 93% of respondents indicated that they would like to have at least two children. Half of the respondents stated that they would like to have three or more children (see Appendix 1). On the other hand, answers to the planned stay abroad duration suggest that the migrants are planning a long-term stay. It should also be emphasized that only 3.3% of the respondents declared that they did not want to have children, while in reality, 29.8% of respondents in our sample were childfree. Having multiple children (three or more) was considered the optimal family size by more than half (50.3%) of respondents; in reality, only 14% have more than three children (see Appendix 1).

Only one in nine respondents declared their intention to return to Poland (answers ‘yes’ and ‘yes, but not sure’); 7.5% preferred to stay abroad for less than a year, more than half intend to stay longer, and nearly 1/3 of the respondents declared their intention to remain in the UK permanently. Factors that may play a significant role in making decisions about a possible return are both external (situation on the labor market in the UK and Poland, change of legal regulations after Brexit, the situation on the labor markets in other countries, as well as Covid-19 consequences) and personal (subjective feeling of satisfaction with one’s economic and professional status, knowledge of the current situation on the labor market in Poland). One of the participating experts noted that *“Polish migrants in the UK notice the economic growth in Poland,*





*better employment opportunities, the program “Family 500+” or family support in child-raising”* (male, 43 years old, Peterborough, in the UK since 2011). Besides, most respondents in the survey consisted of marriage preparation courses, i.e., persons planning to start a family or formalize their relationship. This may have affected the declared length of stay abroad and the desire to return to Poland. The results may constitute a concern from Poland’s perspective as the respondents may have a negative opinion about life in their home country. Yet, there is a clear indication of the respondents’ intended stability in both family and professional life.

One in four respondents stated that the introduction of the “Family 500+” program impacted whether to return to Poland. 44% of respondents were of the opposite opinion. For further analysis, options ‘1’ and ‘2’ have been merged into one “has no impact” and options ‘4’ and ‘5’ into “have an impact.” Option ‘3’ was treated as neutral and was not included in further analysis. Nearly 70% of people who acknowledged the legitimacy of introducing the “Family 500+” program stated that it would not, however, affect their decision whether to return to Poland (see table 2.). The correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$ , but Pearson’s contingency coefficient is 0.24, which means the relationship is weak. A higher percentage of respondents (more than 2/3) stated that housing availability was necessary for deciding on the number of children (see table 2). However, the same percentage - 66% of them asserted that the introduction of the “Family 500+” program did not influence their choice of whether or not to return to Poland. The correlation between these factors is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), but Pearson’s contingency coefficient of 0.27 indicates a similarly weak relationship, as mentioned before. From the results, it is apparent that housing is one of the key issues related to the decision about the future family’s size. Relatively high property prices and high rental costs can be a serious obstacle to living a balanced family life. Therefore, it is interesting to observe that there is a relatively high proportion of participants for whom housing issues are important in terms of family size and who, at the same time, find the program “Family 500+” less important for the decision to return to Poland. However, this could be explained by a relatively low level of governmental support than the overall cost of housing.

One of the interviewed experts clearly stated that one of the problems of Polish families in the UK is lack of support in childcare as the family members who usually help parents, e.g., grandparents, live in Poland. Therefore, their availability is limited (male, 43 years old, in the UK since 2011, Peterborough). According to 77% of respondents, work has an enormous impact on their reproductive plans; however, only 32% of those who indicated work was a significant factor believed that the “Family 500+” program impacted on their decision to return to Poland. This low proportion can be explained through a relatively low level of support available in the UK compared to UK wages. Although child benefits in the UK are only slightly lower than in Poland (i.e., GBP 20.70, about PLN 100, per week for the first child and GBP 13.70, about PLN 65, for subsequent children (GOV.UK 2018) in comparison to PLN 500 per month in Poland), wages in the UK are often considerably higher. Thus, there seems to be hardly any incentive for Polish migrants to return. In this case, the correlation is significant at  $p < 0.02$ , and Pearson’s contingency coefficient is 0.18, which means a weak relationship.

Seventy-one people believed that the “Family 500+” program influenced their potential return to Poland. The correlation between these variables is significant at  $p < 0.01$ , and Pearson’s contingency coefficient is 0.42, which means a rather weak relationship. The majority of respondents (63%) stated that balancing parenthood and work was a significant factor in

deciding on the number of children. However, only one in three people in this group considered the “Family 500+” program as necessary in the context of their possible return to Poland. The correlation was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), but Pearson’s contingency coefficient of 0.34 indicates a weak relationship. One hundred thirty-eight people (38%) believed that state support plays a significant role in deciding on children’s numbers. More than half would be willing to return to Poland thanks to introducing the “Family 500+” program. The correlation is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ); in this case, Pearson’s contingency coefficient is 0.57, indicating a relatively stable relationship. One hundred forty-seven participants stated that raising children together by both mutually supportive parents was a significant factor in deciding on the number of children. Nearly half of this group (46%) believed that the “Family 500+” program could impact their decision whether or not to return to Poland. Correlation between these variables is significant at the level of  $p < 0.01$ , but Pearson’s contingency coefficient is 0.46, which means a rather weak relationship (all data see Table 2.). Those who expected to stay abroad for a shorter period were more likely to state that the Program was likely to positively impact their decision whether or not to return to Poland (see Table 3.).

**Table 2.** The number of respondents according to the assessment of the impact of the “Family 500+” program on their decision to return to Poland and assessment of other aspects related to the functioning of the program, as well as fertility along with an assessment of the relationship between the examined features (C - Pearson contingency coefficient, data in numbers)

Items		The functioning of the “Family 500+” program affects your decision to return to Poland				<i>p-value</i>	C
		Yes		No			
Answers		Yes	No	Yes	No		
<i>Was the decision to launch the “Family 500+” program the right one?</i>		84	3	190	38	$<0,01$	0,24
<i>Does the fact of having children influence..</i>	<i>housing matters?</i>	88	17	168	94	$<0,01$	0,27
	<i>the work matters?</i>	90	15	194	68	0,02	0,18
	<i>access to childcare?</i>	71	34	87	175	$<0,01$	0,42
	<i>balancing parental and work?</i>	86	19	146	116	$<0,01$	0,34
	<i>state support?</i>	75	30	63	199	$<0,01$	0,57
	<i>mutually supportive parents?</i>	73	32	84	178	$<0,01$	0,46
	<i>religious beliefs?</i>	61	44	35	227	$<0,01$	0,59

Such an opinion was declared by 19% of respondents who expected to stay abroad for up to 3 years, but only 6% of those who planned to stay abroad permanently. The assessment of the impact of the “Family 500+” program on the decision whether or not to return to Poland is significant at the level of  $p < 0.03$ , with Pearson’s contingency coefficient at 0.25, indicating a low relationship. 45% of people who spent less than one year abroad believed, while out of



people who had been abroad for more than seven years, only 24% agreed that this was the case (see Table 3.). On the other hand, work was considered somewhat more critical in determining the number of children.

**Table 3.** Number of respondents according to the assessment of the impact of the “Family 500+” program on decisions to return to Poland and selected characteristics of the respondents

Items		<i>Does the functioning of the “Family 500+” program affect your decision to return to Poland?</i>	
		YES	NO
The number of children (p-value=0,86, C=0,07)	none	13	71
	one	8	56
	two	11	77
	three or more	7	34
<i>How long are you planning to live abroad?</i> (p-value=0,03, C=0,25)	up to 1 year	4	19
	1 to 3 years	11	46
	3-5 years	11	36
	5-7 years	4	40
	permanently	6	88
<i>The time of respondents’ stay abroad</i> (p-value<0,01, C=0,27)	up to 1 year	22	27
	1-3 years	22	25
	3-5 years	13	40
	5-7 years	17	19
	more than 7 years	53	16
<i>Perception of living conditions abroad*</i> (p-value<0,01, C=0,36)	1	3	50
	2	4	76
	3	11	60
	4	10	31
	5	7	10
*1 – very positively, ..., 5 – very negatively			

The opinion regarding a possible positive impact of the “Family 500+” program on the decision to return to Poland is strongly affected by the respondents’ assessment of living conditions abroad (Table 3.). Those with a negative opinion on the living conditions elsewhere

were more likely to agree with this statement. This result seems to be justified as a positive evaluation of the living conditions in the destination country where migrating individuals think salaries are much higher than in their home country; it is rather unlikely that migrants decide to return to Poland for the “Family 500+” benefits. Here, the correlation is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), and Pearson’s contingency coefficient is 0,36, which means that the relationship is relatively stable.

**Table 4.** An Evaluation of the inclination to return to Poland due to the introduction of the “Family 500+” program, in total and by selected features (1 – no influence at all, 5 - enormous influence). The number of analyzed questionnaires  $n=441$  is lower than the overall number of respondents (453) as we analyzed full responses only.

Feature	Inclination to return	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2.34</b>	
Sex/Gender	Female	2.31
	Male	2.39
Education	<b>middle school or lower</b>	<b>3.39</b>
	secondary school	2.27
	university degree (at least a BA)	1.83
Religiosity	very religious	1.92
	moderately religious	1.95
	religiously neutral (agnostics) and atheists	1.36
Number of children	none	1.88
	1	1.95
	2	1.89
	3 or more	1.89
Marital status	<b>single</b>	<b>2.79</b>
	with a partner	1.84
	married	1.84
Satisfaction with living conditions abroad	strongly agree	1.43
	agree	1.57
	neutral	2.06
	disagree	2.27



	<b>strongly disagree</b>	<b>2.69</b>
Satisfaction with work conditions abroad	strongly agree	1.57
	agree	1.86
	neutral	1.95
	disagree	2.19
	<b>strongly disagree</b>	<b>2.39</b>
Working in line with one's qualifications	strongly agree	1.77
	agree	1.90
	neutral	1.78
	<b>disagree</b>	<b>2.35</b>
	strongly disagree	1.92

To evaluate the level of respondents' willingness to return to Poland as a direct consequence of the introduction of the "Family 500+" program, weighted arithmetic mean was calculated from the responses to the question "To what extent does the introduction of the 'Family 500+ program' can influence your decision to return to Poland?", where 1 means 'no influence at all' and 5 - 'enormous influence' (see Table 4). The identified indicator allows for a general assessment of migrants' inclination to return; yet, it enables identifying groups among whom the tendency to return is higher. In general, the level of willingness to return is relatively low - 2.34 on a 1-5 scale. Among those with a higher tendency to return, there are three noticeable groups: respondents with a lower level of education, those who are dissatisfied with the conditions of work and living abroad, and respondents who do not have a long-term life partner or not in a stable relationship.

The above data indicate that the participants' declared willingness to return to Poland is insignificant, regardless of their level of integration with their host community. Equally unattractive is the "Family 500+" program, the main element of this study of the potential return triggers for Polish migrants. A majority of the respondents perceive this kind of family support as insufficient in Poland's socio-economic context.

## Summary

In our research, we managed to reach a relatively large and diverse sample of respondents. After conducting a literature review, we piloted the study and then collected questionnaire data and interviews. The respondents' rather long average time in the UK and only partial integration with the local communities indicates a return potential within this group. Similarly, the unclear political situation related to Brexit in 2017 and 2018 when the research was conducted and its consequences or the consistent implementation of social programs promoting fertility in Poland is conducive to the same option. However, the path to mass returns of migrants to Poland is more complicated and depends on various factors. This text draws attention to a broader context of the opportunities and obstacles faced by migrants. It is noteworthy that most of them are relatively young. The decisions about a possible return

or a prolongation of their stay abroad taken after a few years of living overseas may constitute one of the essential choices shaping their future destiny. From the perspective of the sending country, it is also a question of a certain amount of human and social capital, which will affect the whole country's future in terms of its economic development.

The presented results show that many migrants still might not feel at home abroad even if they have lived overseas for a considerable time. Having emigrated many years before, they have become well adapted to the British labor market; however, their participation in other dimensions of social, cultural, political, or religious life (also in its social aspect) is limited. Despite the relatively high proportion of individuals satisfied with their working and living conditions in our sample, many migrants are considering returning to Poland. Postponing the decision to have children is shared, likely due to the situation in the labor market. We believe that migrants are engaging in comparing their material situation with a subjective perception of Poland's situation rather than the actual possibility of achieving a sense of stability in their home country. The survey showed that a modest proportion of respondents are not satisfied with the UK's working and living conditions.

An additional external factor that significantly influences the migrants' assessment of their current and future situation in the UK is the ongoing negotiation process regarding Britain's exit from the EU and the related uncertainty and fear for migrants living and working in the UK. The introduction of adequate family policies coupled with a broadly understood social and economic policy may be an opportunity for migrants to return and start a new life in Poland after successful adaptation to the existing social conditions. Nevertheless, whether there is a relationship between fertility and the migrants' willingness to return remains resolved. The results of our survey allow us to estimate the number of our respondents potentially interested in returning to Poland at the level of one-fifth of the surveyed population, based on such data as the difference between the current and desired number of children, lack of satisfaction with living and working conditions in the UK, and answers to other questions about factors motivating people to return to Poland. This study could constitute a pilot to a larger project embracing dynamic social changes, a high emigration rate in Poland, the introduction and modifications to the "Family 500+" program. It could also support and offer an insight necessary for the development of effective communication and other social policy tools oriented at convincing Polish migrants to return and fulfill their family and fertility plans in Poland.

Our research shows that the respondents are quite aware of Poland's pro-family policy tools, including the "Family 500+" program. This does not, however, translate into increasing their intention to return. Nonetheless, the results can be treated as one source of knowledge about assessing pro-family policy by migrants abroad. The study also explores an important area of seeking and enhancing the demographic potential and the subsequent evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing family policy tools. Therefore, the results may be of interest and use to policymakers and institutions responsible for implementing demographic and migration policies. When the pandemic is under control, and the lockdown and travel restrictions between countries are lifted, this knowledge may be important in analyzing the return migrations.

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**Appendix**

Appendix 1. The structure of the respondents according to gender, time of stay abroad, English proficiency, possessed and planned a number of children, and plans for a stay abroad and return.

<b>Sex/gender</b>		
females	57.3%	
males	42.7%	
TOTAL	100%	
<b>Length of stay abroad</b>		
	reality	plans
up to 3 months	1.4%	2.1%
up to 1 year	1.7%	5.4%
up to 3 years	12.3%	23.5%
up to 5 years	15.4%	16.9%
up to 7 years	6.7%	16.9%
7 years or permanently	61.8%	35%
N/A	1.7%	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	100%	
<b>English proficiency</b>		
none	1.1%	
basic	13.2%	
modest	26%	
good	28.8%	
professional	27.4%	
N/A	3.4%	
TOTAL	100%	
<b>number of children in respondent's household</b>		
	reality	plans
none	29.8%	3.3%
one child	23.6%	3.3%
two children	32%	42.9%



three children	10.9%	37.6%
four children or more	3.1%	12.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	100%	100%
<b>plans for the future: return to Poland</b>		
YES	4.6%	
yes, but not sure	6.4%	
don't know	21.2%	
no, but not sure	29.6%	
NO	38%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	100%	
<b>To what extent does the functioning of the 'Family 500+' program has an impact on your decision to return to Poland?</b>		
1 - has no impact	44%	
2	15.4%	
3	16.8%	
4	10%	
5 - has enormous impact	13.8%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	100%	