Young Polish migrants in Norway: Education, work and settlement choice[1]

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Since Norway became a popular destination of labour migrants at the turn of the century (Friberg et al. 2014), the phenomenon of Polish migration to the country is thus relatively recent. Among all migrant groups in Norway, Poles represent the largest ethnic minority, constituting 14% of those foreign-born and born to immigrant parents in this country (Statistics Norway 2015). In fact, the number of the registered individuals with Polish background grew rapidly in the recent years, from just 7,580 persons in 2004 to almost 100,000 in 2015 (ibid).

By placing the focus on this particular cohort, both the age-disaggregated and age-relevant statistics (Iglicka & Gmaj 2014), as well as the broader-scope research conclusions from other contexts (White 2011a, 2011b, 2014a, 2014b), suggest that young Polish migrants and their families are increasingly choosing to settle abroad and they no longer comply with the temporary/seasonal patterns assumed for labour migrations. Not only do these combined factors make them potential long-term members of the Norwegian society (and highly active in the labour force), but they also render this group as a target audience or addressees of the Norwegian welfare state's policies towards workers and families.

In the increasingly saturated field of Polish migration research, there are multitudes studies that focus on what is referred to as "young and educated" migrants, both in quantitative (e.g. Fihel & Kaczmarczyk 2004; Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2008; Fihel & Piętka 2007; Kaczmarczyk & Tyrowicz 2008) and qualitative research (White 2011a, 2011b; Ignatowicz 2011; Fomina 2009; Botterill 2011). Simultaneously, the operationalization of 'youth' and 'young

migrants' as concepts is rarely explicitly stated in migration research. A dearth of empirical material concurrently suffers from the underrepresentation of young people, often attributing their absence to the reduced research accessibility of this group, which is due to, for instance, this group's reduced ties to the local community; its isolation, which is linked to parenting small children; and its heightened preponderance for multiple internal and international mobility projects.

This article provides a general description of the Polish migrants younger than 30 years of age, both within the context of the pre-existing and comparable numbers for Poland and Norway, and, predominantly, through the lens of quantitative data gathered from the Transfam study (Huang et al 2015). We discuss what levels of education and which types of employment conditions and occupational diversity observed among these young migrants. We elaborate upon their plans for settlement and their plans for return to home country in this context. Further, we draw comparisons along the axis of examining the similarities and differences between those under- and over 30 years of age in our sample.

Brief background on the migrant Poles

When thought about in a comparative context, Poles, as an ethnic group, should be understood as a perspicuously and atypically mobile nation. For instance, while a general estimate points to the fact that migrants represent only 3% of the global population (Castles 2010), the proportion of Poles living outside of Poland is double at 6%, even by cautious estimates. In actual numbers, the current population of Poles residing abroad for a period longer than 3 months over the last 12 months is at a record high in the history of registered flows and stands at 2.32 million citizens (out of 38.48 million of the total population; GUS 2015). The focus on young people is crucial, for the Polish National Census data testify to the relatively young age of Polish migrants – approximately 62% of those leaving the country are between the ages of 20 and 39 years old.

The economic perspectives of the Polish youths in Poland are rather dreary; young Poles have never been as well educated while currently suffering from annually decreasing labour market opportunities. The unemployment rate for 15 – 24 -year-olds stood at 23.9% in 2014 while 53.5% of the employed young workers are on temporary contracts (Eurostat 2015) and they often are poorly paid (Jelonek & Szklarczyk 2012). The lack of stable employment and the prospect of poor

salaries translates to a practical inability to apply for a mortgage (e.g., to finance housing), and this makes it extremely hard for the young people to gain residential independence. Consequently, a high proportion of youth continue to live with their parents – in fact, 60% do so between the ages of 25 and 29 years, and 30% do so from 30 to 34 years of age (ibid). The average age of leaving the parental home is 28.3 years (compared to 26.2 years in the EU) – 29.4 years for males and 27.2 years for females (Eurostat 2015). Recent statistics show that 35% of people aged 25 – 35 years in Poland consider emigration and 31% of university graduates declare of being mobility-ready while 59% of people who are generally considering emigration have zero income (EPMPF 2014). Again, in the study examining young people who remain outside the labour market, Poland was classified as a country with structural problems in young adults' transitions from the education system to the labour market, where females are at a disadvantage when compared to young men (Eurofound 2012). However, there are large disparities between rural and urban areas and between eastern (more at risk) and western (better-off) Poland (Jelonek et al. 2015), by the fact that certain regions have become the predominant "generators" of migration outflows (e.g. White 2011a).

Data and methods

We report descriptive analyses of data obtained from the Transfam Web-survey on Polish families (Huang at al. 2015). The Transfam project is a research cooperation between four institutions from Poland and Norway focusing on issues of migration flow between Poland and Norway. We planed the survey at the second calendar year of the Transfam project, strategically after four qualitative studies on Polish migrants and their families in Norway conducted during the first calendar year of the project. Taking inspirations from preliminary results of the qualitative studies, we designed the questionnaire first in English then translated into Polish language. The Web-survey was pre-tested in the spring of 2015, with responses being collected from May 25th to June 30th that same year.

It must be noted that the Web-survey aims only to reach Polish families that have a relation to Norway. The respondents had to be of legal age (18 years and older) and they had to either 1) reside in Norway with a partner/spouse (childless couples and those with children under the age of 18 years), or 2) reside in Poland, but have a partner /a spouse in Norway. The respondents had to answer questions on background information (gender, birth year, birth country, education,

occupation, working status, migration trajectory) for both her/himself and her/his partner. In addition, we invited Polish single parents living in Norway to participate in the survey. Although with several advantages such as low cost, accessing large number of respondents and anonymity, we have to admit one major limitation of the Web-survey is that we could not implement sampling procedures. This limits our analysis and interpretation of the data only to those Polish people who responded the Web-survey and we can not make generalisation on Poles in Norway based on the survey data. However, we try to bring in for comparison other existing relevant data on the general population in Norway and in Poland in order to display some similarities and differences between those Polish couples who responded our Web-survey and other Poles who did not participate the survey.

Eventually, the web-survey received 648 completed responses, among which, there were 633 couples (97.7%) and 15 single parents (2.3%). We focus our analyses on 198 young couples (30.5%), where at least one partner was below the age of 30 years. The sub-sample of young families included over one-half (n=107) of families with one member of the couple between the ages of 18 and 30 years at the time of the survey, and 91 families where both of the couple's members were at this young age. While the average age of a respondent in the whole survey is 36.5 years (SD = 8.4 years), the average age for the young group is 28.4 years (SD=3.4) years for the respondents and 30.4 years (SD=4.6) for their partners. Here, it must be noted that the sample is feminized, with the proportion of men to women at 40% to 60% among all survey respondents, while 30% of respondents were men and 70% were women among the young families.

In the following section, we first report descriptive analyses of variables measuring characteristics of the families. Those descriptive analyses include family structure (with or without children), living arrangements, the civil status and ethnic origin of the partners, as well as the migration trajectories of the families. We then look into the distributions of levels of education attainment among the couples, as well as the partners' occupation and employment status in relation to age and gender. Finally, we present the employment status of young Polish people in relation to their Norwegian language proficiency and settlement decisions.

Characteristics of the young Poles and their families

Among the 198 young couples, the majority had a co-residential living arrangements where both partners lived in Norway (n=173, 87%), while the remaining

young couples (n=26, 13%) had alternative living arrangements, e.g., they divide their lives into two locales or engage in transnational commuting. Meanwhile, nearly one-third (31%) of families where both partners are older than 30 years have alternative living arrangements; in these cases, the couples do not live together in Norway. This finding may suggest that migrating together is more popular among young couples, who are also, to a lesser extent, constrained by family situations or labour market positions, for example.

In addition, there seems to be a high preponderance for the formalization of life in coupledom, as over half of young couples (n=126, 63.6%) and the majority of couples over the age of 30 years (n=356, 79.3%) are married or in formal partnerships (i.e. *samboerskap* - 10% for each group). Meanwhile, as opposed to 25.8% of partners in young couples, only 5.3% of older couples are *de iure* single. Conversely, it is quite telling that slight over one-half young couples already have children (52.5%), although this finding is consistent with the fact that couples over the age of 30 years are about 20 percentage points more likely (74.2%) to have children. Moreover, the young couples are predominantly intra-ethnic, with homogeneous Polish–Polish partners accounting for 94.4% of the group, while one in ten of the partners of those couples over the age of 30 years is not Polish-born.

Migration Trajectories

Among the families living together in Norway, nearly one-half (45%) of the young couples arrived in Norway together (within the same year), while only over one-quarter (28%) of the couples over the age of 30 years did so. As was expected, having children that were already born and residing in Poland diminishes the likelihood of immediate joint migration (Ślusarczyk and Pustulka 2015). Norway is the first migration destination for about 62.3% of the young couples (n=124) and 52.8% (n=237) of the couples over the age of 30 years. In other words, one-third of the young couples (37.7%) and near one-half of the couples over the age of 30 years (47.2%) have a family migration history in which either themselves, their partner, or both have moved to another country prior to coming to Norway. This may be an example of so-called 'fluid migration', where the destinations changes and the migration pathways become less and less predictable (Grabowska-Lusińska, Okólski 2009). Similarly, this finding may be explained by the delayed effects of the global financial crisis in Norway, in the sense that Polish workers in Ireland and the United

Kingdom (which were hit the hardest immediately in 2008) decided to change their destination locale to Norway.

The data on migration pathways illustrate that over half of the young couples first arrived in Norway for a period longer than 3 months after the year 2010. This suggests that our study discusses the most dynamic and most current migration flow. The findings of our study indicate that migrants between the age of 24 and 26 years were most likely to arrive around this date. This coincides with the age at which students complete their university studies in Poland. In comparison, over one-half of respondents and their partners in older families (those over 30 years of age) first arrived in Norway before 2008, and they were, on average, 31 – 32 years old upon arrival.

Levels of education and types of occupation

The data on education shows that young people of both genders in the sample are generally better educated than their counterparts in the older generation, especially with regard to the prevalence of higher education at the university level and above (see Figure 1). In fact, the young Poles in Norway appear to be better educated than the general population in Poland, while 58.3% of women and 37.3% of men in the young couples in our study hold a university degree, 50.2% of women and 34.2% of men between the ages of 30 – 34 years in Poland hold a corresponding tertiary (or greater) education (Eurostat 2015). However, young Poles in Norway have education levels that are similar to the Norwegian youth, among which 62% of women and 42.6% of men aged 30 – 34 years have tertiary or higher education levels (Eurostat 2015). In addition, results in Figure 1 demonstrate how female partners from both family age groups are more likely to have university degrees overall, consistently with phenomenon of the feminization of higher education in Poland (Kotowska 2007; Youth 2011). Moreover, we find a stronger positive 'intra-couple' correlation of educational levels among the couples over the age of 30 (0.39) than that correlation among the young couples (0.29). This suggests that educational gender gap in Poland has been increasing and more Polish women form educationally discrepant partnerships, as has already been discussed in recent research (Połujańska 2009:52).

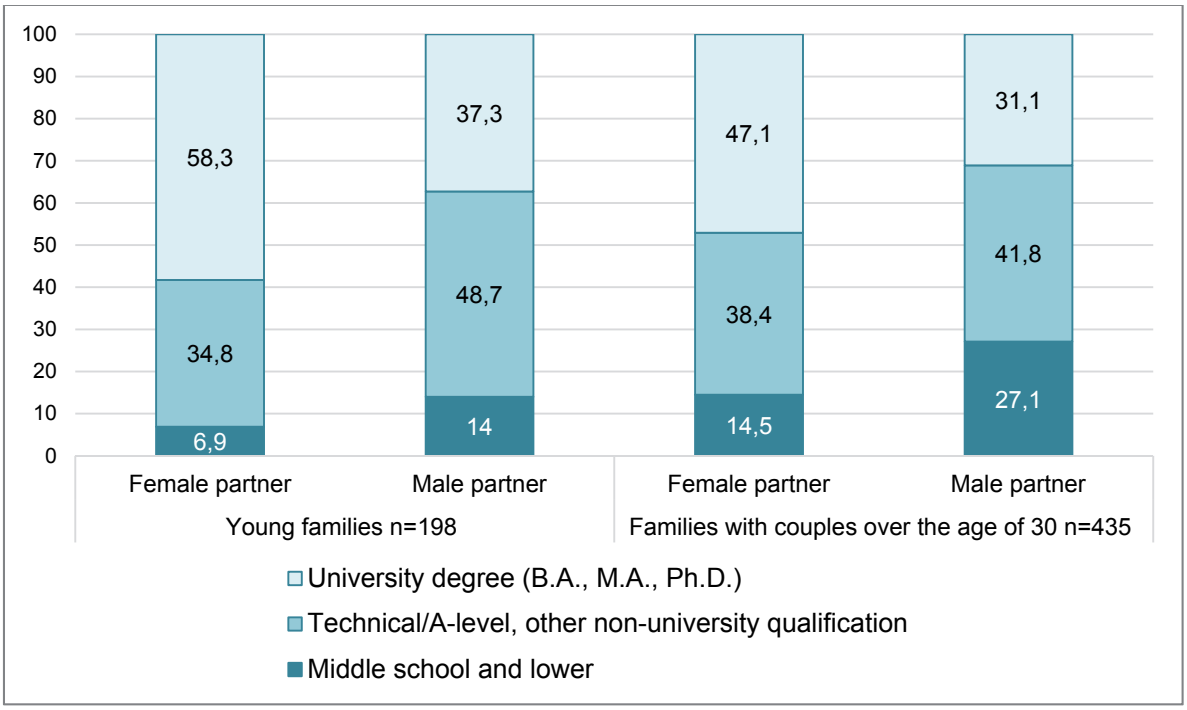


Figure 1. Distribution of education levels between couples in young families and families of couples over the age of 30 years, % by gender

Table 1 presents the distribution of the current occupations held by the Polish migrants, and divided it by gender and family types. We present also in the table the corresponding levels of education and skill levels for the occupational categories (International Labour Organisation 2012) for descriptive purposes. It appears that gender equality in one's occupation is present only in jobs demanding the skills of the highest-level (i.e., public officials and specialists), since only this group displays parity of female and male partners occupying these coveted positions. Across most of the occupation categories presented, we find a clear gender division in labour force participation by job type and status associated with the position. More specifically, there are more men than women working as technicians, more female than male employees in the service sector, and more females and males holding jobs for the unskilled workers. This coincides with findings from other studies indicating that Polish migrant women have more often engaged in professions such as domestic and care work (Friberg 2010; Napierała 2010). Men clearly dominate the industry and construction work; these sectors have already been quite well-documented from the labour market studies (Napierała &Trevena 2010, Friberg 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Bratsberg & Raaum 2012). In parallel, women display much higher rates in the category of 'currently not employed /seeking work'.

Table 1. Occupations of men and women in Polish families (cross-tabulation, column percent)

ISCED-97 education levels	ISCO skill levels	ISCO categories of occupation	Females %		Males %		Total
			Young families	Families with couples over the age of 30	Young families	Families with couples over the age of 30	
University degrees	4	State representative/government official, top public servant, executive manager	1.2	2.1	2	1.1	1.6
		Specialist (professional, engineer, scientist, teacher, medical doctor, nurse, lawyer, architect, artist)	15.5	21.7	16.7	12.3	16.6
Short tertiary/ college	3	Technician (electrician, mechanic, laboratory assistant, teaching assistant, sales representative)	2.6	5.7	8.5	13.7	7.6
Secondary and non-tertiary education	2	Administrative worker (office management/service, bank teller, reception, warehouse manager)	9.1	10.2	5.2	3.1	6.9
		Personal service and sales employee (customer service, hairstylist, waiter, cook, house manager, security guard)	16.2	12	8.1	5.5	10.5
		Farmer, garner, worker in fishery, forestry	0.7	0.8	3.1	3.2	2.0
		Industry labourer, craftsman, construction worker, carpenter, plumber	1.5	4.2	36.3	45.2	21.8
		Machinery operator and installer, driver, miner, sailor	0	0.7	12.6	8.3	5.4
Elementary education	1	Unskilled labour, domestic worker, cleaner, house keeper, messenger, farm worker, assistant worker	24.9	20.3	5.4	3.7	13.6
		Others	0.4	0.5	0.7	1.3	0.7
		Currently not employed/seeking work	27.9	21.8	1.2	2.5	13.4
Total			100	100	100	100	100

A differently conceived cross-tabulation in Table 2 takes the skill level performed in a given occupation and places it in the analysis with gender and educational attainment. According to the skill structure of various occupations (as shown in Table 1), achieving an education level equal to the acquisition of a university degrees should be associated with ISCO skill levels 3 and 4. If we take the average on the percentages of male and female partners with university degrees in the last two columns from the right of Table 2 (i.e., ISCO skill levels 3 and 4), only less than one-quarter of the Polish migrants with higher education have achieved a high-level skilled occupation. Over one-half of highly educated Poles in our sample in Norway

obtain occupations that are not aligned with their skill demands. We also find that there is a positive correlation between levels of education and skill levels in occupation among the couples, where the correlation coefficients are moderate among couples over the age of 30 years (0.35 - 0.43) while this correlation is weak among young couples (0.19 - 0.25).

Table 2. Discrepancy between levels of education and skill levels performed in occupations among Polish couples (cross-tabulation, row percent)

	Gender	Levels of education attainment	No occupation or seeking jobs	ISCO skill level 1	ISCO skill level 2	ISCO skill level 3	ISCO skill level 4	Total
Young families (n=198)	Female	Lower than university	29.4	27.5	32.3	3.2	7.7	100
		University degree	24.5	24.3	26.5	4.6	20.2	100
	Male	Lower than university	2.7	4.6	76.7	8.5	7.9	100
		University degree	8.2	6.1	45.1	11.7	29.2	100
Families with couples over the age of 30 (n=435)	Female	Lower than university	34	26.3	27.6	5.4	6.8	100
		University degree	22.8	13.9	21.4	8.4	33.7	100
	Male	Lower than university	7.3	2.6	74.7	13.2	2.4	100
		University degree	4.8	6.2	46.5	12.5	30.2	100

Interestingly, the analyses provided in Table 1 and Table 2 show that age is very important factor in labour market performance, which may also be an indicator of the length of time staying in Norway. Older migrants seem to have gained better work positions and they make better use of their education in the Norwegian labour market. This discrepancy is further accentuated in terms of gender, as the female partners in the two groups of families are faring differently. It seems that migration from a country with less gender equality to one with higher gender equality (Global Gender Gap Report 2014) does not alleviate the gender disparity within the employment of migrants (Pustulka 2015).

Employment contract and precarity

Table 3 presents the employment status of the Polish migrants in couples; we see that over one-half (56.9%) of all partners have a full-time work with a stable contract, while 10.6% of them have a part-time work with a stable contract. About

one-tenth of the respondents and their partners have a 'precarious working situation', which includes holding hourly paid and temporary jobs. Table 3 shows that male partners from both family groups are clearly more successful in landing full-time employment with a stable contract (75.6% of young men versus 76.4% of older men), which can be compared to the female partners (29.3% of young women verses 46.1% of older women). While there is no difference in employment for male partners from both age groups, female partners from the older age group are characterized by more stable employment situations.

Table 3. Employment status of Polish couples by gender (cross-tabulation, column percent)

	Female partners		Male partners		
	Families with couples over the age of 30	Young families	Families with couples over the age of 30	Young families	Total
Full-time work (unlimited/stable contract)	46.1	29.3	76.4	75.6	56.9
Part-time work (unlimited/stable contract)	16.2	19	2.1	5.2	10.6
Hourly paid and agency work	3.4	4.5	9.6	5.4	5.7
Self-employed	6.8	7.1	5.8	7.5	6.8
Temporary employment (limited contract)	2.9	8.4	0.4	0.4	3.0
Rotational employment (e.g. 2 weeks at work, 2 weeks off)	0.9	0	2.6	2	1.4
Other or not applicable	23.7	31.7	3.1	3.8	15.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The gender differences within families and the differences between female partners across the two family groups are statistically significant at $p<0.05$ level. N=633.

We find no statistically significant correlation between levels of education of the couples and their employment status in terms of holding a stable contract among any of the partners in the couples. Conversely, we find a significant correlation between Norwegian language proficiency and a stable contract among the respondents (see Table 4). As illustrated in Table 4, the percentage of those employed with stable contracts increases in association with language proficiency level. This holds true for the respondents in young families and those in families with partners over the age of 30 years. However, there is no significant difference in the levels of Norwegian language knowledge between the two age groups, which implies that the length of staying in Norway (or age) seems to have no effect on Norwegian language proficiency among the Poles.

Table 4. Level of the Norwegian language knowledge and contract employment (cross-tabulation, column percent)

Which of the following statements best describe your level of Norwegian language knowledge?	Respondents of couples over the age of 30			Respondents of young couples		
	Other working status (n=133)	Full-time or part-time unlimited stable contract (n=302)	Total (n=435)	Other working status (n=76)	Full-time or part-time unlimited stable contract (n=122)	Total (n=198)
No knowledge	17,3	4,0	8,0	13,2	2,5	6,6
Beginner (ability to communicate in simple situations)	30,8	17,9	21,8	34,2	21,3	26,3
Basic (ability to talk about daily topics, understanding commands at work)	22,6	20,2	20,9	14,5	21,3	18,7
Intermediate (ability to communicate in various situations without full fluency)	19,5	26,8	24,6	27,6	28,7	28,3
Advanced/fluency (no problem communicating at work, institutions and social situations)	9,8	31,1	24,6	10,5	26,2	20,2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: The differences in contract types among the levels of Norwegian language are significant at $p<0.05$ level.

Settlement plans

A question that is of special interest to many politicians and researchers is: what will happen with Polish migrants as time passes (in other words, will they stay or will they go back?). Our survey data show that approximately one-half of the respondents plan to settle in Norway. Unlike what was found in earlier studies on Polish migrants seen through the prism of "intentional unpredictability" – a purposeful choice not to make a decision about settlement and return (Eade et al 2007: 34), only one-third of the families in the sample claimed to have no precise settlement plans. Furthermore, 15% of the families said 'no' to the question about plans to stay in Norway permanently. Table 5 presents the reasons for planning to settle in Norway for those who replied 'Yes' and 'Not sure' to a questions about plans to settle in Norway.

Apparently, the most common reasons for staying in Norway are 'better working conditions in Norway' and 'higher living standards in Norway', followed by the (mirrored data-wise) reason of 'no prospects in Poland'. One-third of the couples over the age of 30 years chose the reason of 'children started school in Norway', while only 15% of the young couples did so. This indicates that the settling process is initiated for some couples when their children reach schooling age, which is aligned with qualitative research's findings on this matter (Ślusarczyk & Pustułka 2015). However, none of the particular factors (age, childlessness, financial situation) seems to significantly differentiate respondents with respect to their decision to settle.

Table 5. Main reasons for settling in Norway (% of agree and completely agree on the reasons)

Please indicate the main reasons for settling in Norway:	**Yes to settle in Norway (n=319)**		**Not sure (n=221)**	
	Couples over the age 30 (n=217)	Young couples (n=102)	Couples over the age 30 (n=152)	Young couples (n=68)
I like the cultural/religious/social climate in Norway	26.3	21.6	19.0	16.2
Relationships with family in Poland did not persist (I have nobody to go back to)	2.8	1.0	1.3	2.9
My children started school in Norway	36.4	16.7	30.7	13.2
Better working conditions in Norway: higher income, stable contract, etc.	77.0	85.3	73.2	89.7
No prospects in Poland	60.4	66.7	52.3	58.8
Higher living standards in Norway	53.5	70.6	58.8	63.2
Better access to welfare state's assistance in Norway (social and family benefits)	14.7	16.7	17.0	19.1
My family members (e.g. partner. children) want to live in Norway	15.2	0	14.4	11.8

Conclusions

The study shows that the young Polish migrants in our sample arriving in Norway present with high levels of education. We observe a 'mismatch' between qualification level and the job preformed, as well as between the highly gender-segregated migrant experiences in the labour market in Norway. On the one hand, this finding is particularly stark among the Polish women, who tend to have fewer attachments to the professional realm in Norway. On the other hand, we observe some impact of age on the match between skills and job. Those who are older tend to display an association between skills, education and employment.

We also observe a strong desire among these young Polish couples to settle in Norway. They voice issues connected to the labour market as those decisive reasons for their future settlement plans. The young Poles acknowledge the better conditions in the Norwegian labour market and the generally poor situation in Poland. As their transitions to adulthood seem to start abroad rather in their country of origin, we can suspect that these individuals' opinions about labour market hardships are somewhat skewed, reflecting the general climate and public discourse in Poland, rather than their own experiences.

However, drawing on earlier research on deskilling and career progression of Poles in Germany and the United Kingdom (Nowicka 2012, 2014a, 2014b;

Trevena 2013; Pustułka 2015) and in European countries in general (Krzaklewska 2009), we can devise two scenarios regarding the precarious positions of young Polish migrants in Norway: a pessimistic scenario and an optimistic one. The pessimistic scenario suggests that migrants would stay in the worse job positions for their entire time in Norway, no matter how long (Trevena 2013). The more optimistic view implies that, in time, these individuals' situations will improve due to their improved language skills, wider social networks, and their understanding of the work culture in Norway (Nowicka 2014a, 2014b).

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