

# Why do Polish healthworkers want to work abroad?

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**Abstract** — The goal of the research was to analyze the factors affecting the desire to find a job abroad among young Polish health care workers on the basis of determining the emigration plans of students and trainees of Medical University of Warsaw.

Empirical studies were based on a survey distributed among undergraduate students and graduates of MUW. The biggest impact on the willingness to seek employment in another country are higher wages, better working conditions, greater opportunity for professional development, positive feedback from health professionals and a lack of job stability in Poland. The strength of individual factors for emigration varies between representatives of different faculties (students of medicine, nursing, midwifery, dietetics, public health, physiotherapy and pharmacy). The percentage of people who consider leaving is higher among people from better-off families.

**Keywords-** emigration, migration from Poland, healthcare worker, brain drain

## I. INTRODUCTION

Investigation into the causes and effects of human territorial mobility was subject of interest for researchers for many decades. The first subject was taken already in 1885 by Ernest Ravenstein. He saw the relationship between decision to migrate with other factors, such as nuisance law in his country, high taxes, an unattractive climate or even inappropriate social environment [1, 2, 3].

Since the publication of Ravenstein's work, many researchers undertook attempts to analyze the causes of population mobility. Particular attention was paid to migration movements of high-skilled workers (including, in particular, health care workers).

Factors that influence the decision to migrate and the choice of destination country migration are varied. Many reports and publications published around the world present the subject of the causes of migration of health workers with regard to different systems of classification.

The research in causes of migration movements of medical staff is currently undertaken by many organizations related to the health sector in the world, including the World Health Organization (WHO). According to WHO the factors related to work organization include heavy workload, unsatisfactory pay, high risk work, poor personnel management practices (authoritative decision making, favoritism of particular employees), inadequate and limited access to medical equipment, lack of opportunities for professional development

(i.a. access to and exchange of expertise) and social respect for the medical professionals.

The reason for the decision to leave their home country is also irresponsible human resource management policy (including lack of migration policy aimed at retaining health professionals in the country) or its weak implementation. Environmental factors consist of: bad condition of the national economy (high inflation), relatively lower growth opportunities compared with those of the host country, a sense of security in their home country (war, violence) and climate.

Determinants that may affect the decision of going abroad are also the young age and marital status (singles). The WHO defines individual and family reasons for the migration of health professionals as: a higher level of education, transfer of knowledge and skills, knowledge of the target language country of emigration, positive reference from friends and relatives who live abroad. The scale of emigration of health professionals is influenced as well by other factors that are not included in the previous groups, such as the activity of headhunting companies, labor legislation, immigration policy and the system of recognition of professional qualifications in the host countries [4, 5].

Factor that has significant impact on the direction of migration is the geographical and language proximity of countries. For example, the Austrian doctors frequently work in Germany, and the increasing number of German students plans to start education in Austria. The interest in studying medicine at Austrian universities become so large that the Austrian authorities posed restrictions on the number of foreigners admitted to college, reserving 75% of the Austrians, 20% of EU citizens and 5% for third-country nationals [5].

A different concept for classification of people's motives to leave their home country was established in the theory of Everett Lee in 1966. The theory is known as the "push-pull action" takes into account two group of factors: one that pushes outside the country (push factors) and the second one that attracts people to settle down (pull factors). The push factors include factors relating to the place/country of origin. This group may include: economic conditions, high unemployment in the country of origin, as well as the necessity of the repayment of the debt. Pull factors, on the other hand, refer to the place/country of destination, and provide incentives to settle immigrant. Lee's model presupposes the existence of another factor, the so-called indirect barriers (interfering obstacles) called frictional factors. These include those arising from cultural differences, distance and associated costs of

moving, as well as instruments immigration policy in the host country [3,9]. Valuing the push and pull factors is subjective in nature and often differs from reality. While the place of residence and his environment is well known, the perception of target place of emigration is often based on incomplete information and with great uncertainty [6].

Push-pull theory explains the phenomenon of migration as the sum of pushing and pulling factors that can be related to migration of health workers [7,8,9]. Undoubtedly the key incentive to leave (pull factor) is the remuneration of employees, which significantly differs between individual states. Occupational migration to developed countries, in addition to the possibility of obtaining a higher income also allows the moving person to develop their professional skills. [10] Next to the unsatisfactory earnings important push factor which drives Polish doctors to seek work abroad, is difficulty in making medical specialties [11, 12].

The variety of factors that influence the decision to leave the homeland is determined as well by the features of the country of ones origin.

In 2003, the WHO Regional Office for African States published a report on the migration of health professionals in six countries of the continent. The study involved 2,364 workers in the health sector at various levels - from the nurses to specialist doctors. The conclusions of the research showed that apart from determinants of individual workers the causes of emigration exhibit characteristics typical for the each country [13]. For example, in Cameroon obstacles to career development, low standard of living and a desire to acquire new skills were the factors that often influenced the decision to emigrate in more extensive way than higher wages offered by the host country [14, 15]. Meanwhile, among the medical staff of Uganda and Zimbabwe better financial condition were the most important motives to work in another country [16, 17].

Higher wages and a desire to improve the living conditions are factors, which very often determine the emigration of health professionals. This factor positively correlates with the difference in wages between home country and the host country. The analysis of the research conducted by Vujicic shows that the income a doctor or nurse in Africa may be several times lower than in Europe or the United States, even when taking into account differences in the cost of living among the countries [2].

The reasons underlying the decision on permanent migration and labor are diverse and often difficult to grasp. Motives for emigration of health professionals often merge into each other, connect, but sometimes camouflage. It is therefore very difficult to select one reason that leads health care workers to look for a work outside the country.

#### A. Aim of the study

The goal of the research was to analyze the factors affecting the desire to find a job abroad among young Polish health care workers on the basis of determining the emigration plans of students and trainees of Medical University of Warsaw.

#### B. Materials and methods

The survey was addressed to a group of 3,026 last year students and alumni of the Medical University of Warsaw throughout the 4 academic years of 2007/2008, 2009/2010 and 2010/2011.

Once verified, there were finally 2007 fully completed, valid questionnaires, which amounts to 68% of the targeted population.

For statistical data analysis researchers used specialist statistical software package SPSS 17 and Statistica 9.0.

### II. RESULTS

The key research issue of the study was to explore the determinants of willingness to seek work abroad. Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of given factors: better remuneration, better working conditions, greater opportunity for professional development, positive reference from other health workers, better interpersonal relationships in the workplace, lack of job stability in Poland, family reasons, etc. Factors were assessed in a five-point ordinal scale (Table I).

TABLE I. TABLE I. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND AVERAGE RANK OF VARIABLE: FACTORS INFLUENCING SEEKING WORK ABROAD

Factors influencing seeking work abroad	n	Mean	Standard deviation	Average rank
better remuneration	1 993	4,80	0,553	5,90
better working conditions	1 993	4,51	0,754	5,38
professional development	1 980	3,99	0,992	4,44
positive reference from other health workers	1 977	3,62	0,972	3,75
better interpersonal relationships in the workplace	1 982	3,07	1,094	2,84
lack of job stability in Poland	1 983	3,47	1,231	3,62
family reasons	1 980	2,31	1,269	2,07
other	16	4,50	1,095	

Source: own study

Analysis conducted with Friedman test showed that the average rank assigned to each factor differ significantly ( $\chi^2 = 5623.73$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p = 0.0001$ ). According to the respondents higher remuneration has the greatest impact on the willingness to look for work in another country (average rank of 5.9). Other factors followed in order of importance were: better working conditions (average rank 5.38), greater opportunity for professional development (average rank 4.44); positive reference from other health professionals (average rank 3.75), lack of job stability in Poland (average rank of 3.62.) Far less important for respondents in the decision to seek a work abroad are such factors as: interpersonal relationships in the workplace (average rank 2.84) and family reasons (average rank of 2.07.)

The next step was to examine whether the strength of individual factors for emigration vary between representatives of different fields of study (students of medicine, nursing, midwifery, dietetics, public health, physiotherapy and pharmacy).

The analysis shows that the specific fields of study differentiate factors affecting the strength of the desire to seek work abroad (Table II). For medical students of the most important factors were the favorable conditions of work and the opinions of health professionals employed abroad. The greatest impact on the desire to seek employment abroad among nursing students have financial benefits and interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Students of midwifery found unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships and lack of job stability in Poland as the strongest factors that determine abroad job search. For future dietitians major determinant of migration were greater opportunity for professional development in a foreign country. For future managers of public health (public health faculty) and physiotherapists the strongest factor were the lack of stability in the Polish labor market. Trainees for the pharmaceutical industry pointed to greater opportunity for professional development as the most important factor influencing their desire to look for a job abroad.

TABLE II. TABLE III. AVERAGE RANK OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE WILLINGNESS TO SEEK WORK ABROAD VS. FIELD OF STUDY

	Field of study	n	Average rank	Chi2 (α = 0,001)
better remuneration	medical	680	1007,72	50,619
	nursing	375	1067,09	
	midwifery	101	1023,12	
	dietetics	87	1062,60	
	public health	335	905,92	
	physiotherapy	83	1058,64	
	pharmaceutics	332	947,23	
	total	1 993		
better working conditions	medical	680	1045,90	61,570
	nursing	376	1060,62	
	midwifery	101	1093,44	
	dietetics	87	1067,10	
	public health	335	834,21	
	physiotherapy	83	1025,49	
	pharmaceutics	331	934,03	
	total	1 993		
professional development	medical	676	972,74	40,351
	nursing	373	955,44	
	midwifery	101	965,84	
	dietetics	86	1212,53	
	public health	333	895,82	
	physiotherapy	83	1074,72	
	pharmaceutics	328	1091,16	
	total	1 980		
positive reference from other health workers	medical	671	974,14	41,300
	nursing	375	1112,70	
	midwifery	100	1112,03	
	dietetics	87	1011,37	
	public health	335	877,81	
	physiotherapy	81	909,72	
	pharmaceutics	328	967,66	
	total	1977		
total	medical	675	993,82	70,997

	Field of study	n	Average rank	Chi2 (α = 0,001)
	nursing	375	1138,84	
	midwifery	101	1176,17	
	dietetics	87	1037,28	
	public health	335	853,29	
	physiotherapy	81	845,79	
	pharmaceutics	328	926,40	
	total	1 982		
lack of job stability in Poland	medical	673	921,72	38,759
	nursing	375	994,51	
	midwifery	101	1152,14	
	dietetics	87	1199,19	
	public health	335	1047,72	
	physiotherapy	83	1084,19	
	pharmaceutics	329	948,96	
	total	1 983		
family reasons	medical	676	890,73	75,336
	nursing	374	1170,75	
	midwifery	100	1116,89	
	dietetics	87	1052,37	
	public health	334	1012,10	
	physiotherapy	82	984,95	
	pharmaceutics	327	914,82	
	total	1 980		

One of the research issues was the importance of the financial situation of the family of the respondents as one of the factors determining migration plans for students and trainees of the Medical University of Warsaw. Therefore one of the analysis examined whether the desire to find a job abroad is higher among students and trainees who receive any scholarship or other forms of financial aid and benefits from the University.

The analysis showed that the percentage of people who are thinking about leaving is higher among people who do not receive any form of financial assistance (Chi2=4,17; df=1; p=0,04). (Table III).

TABLE III. GETTING SOCIAL SCHOLARSHIP VS. LOOKING FOR A JOB IN ONE'S PROFESSION ABROAD

		Chi <sup>2</sup> =4,17; df=1; p=0,04	Willingness to emigrate		Total
			Yes	No	
Social scholarship	Yes	n	269	225	494
		% of social scholarship	54,5%	45,5%	100,0%
		% of willingness to emigrate	23,2%	27,2%	24,9%
		% of total	13,5%	11,3%	24,9%
Social scholarship	No	n	891	602	1493
		% of social scholarship	59,7%	40,3%	100,0%
		% of willingness to emigrate	76,8%	72,8%	75,1%

	% of total	44,8%	30,3%	75,1%
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Source: own study

Another aspect of the study of factors affecting the desire to find a job abroad was their variability over time (Fig. 1).

Kruskal-Wallis test showed that in only three cases, there were significant differences in the average ranks the intensity of factors depending on the year of the study:

- better interpersonal relationships in the workplace (Chi2 = 11.579, df = 2, p = 0.003),
- lack of job stability in Poland (Chi2 = 10.807, df = 2, p = 0.005) and
- family reasons (Chi2 = 19.293, df = 2, p = 0.0001).

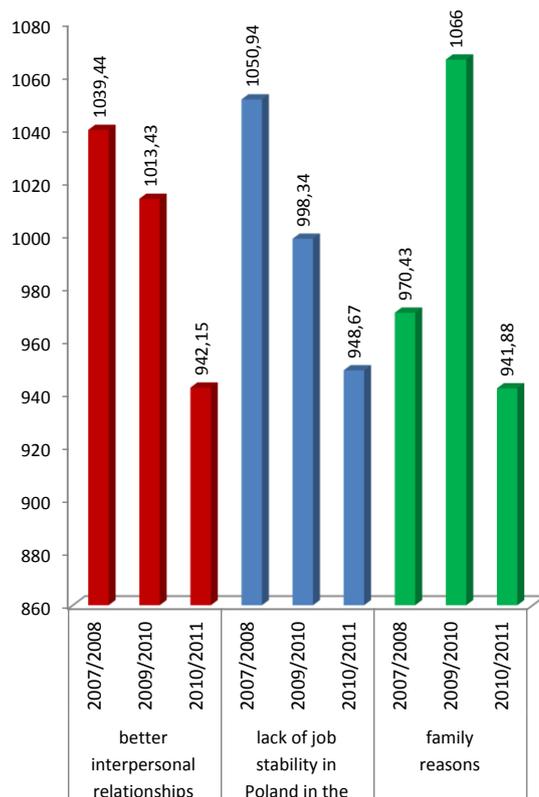


Figure 1. Average rank of factors affecting the willingness to seek work abroad vs. academic year of research

Source: own study

### III. DISCUSSION

According to the research results the main factor influencing desire to look for a job abroad among the students and trainees of Medical University of Warsaw is better remuneration. Interestingly, despite some discrepancies in terms of the scale of interest in traveling abroad observed in other Polish studies in this topic, when considering the causes of this phenomenon results from other studies are very similar [18,19,20,21,22]. In each of the cited studies economic factor was a key determinant of departure, acting from 73-100% of all the factors affecting the decision to emigrate.

The results of these studies confirm the discontent aroused by the financial situation in the Polish healthcare sector, particularly in relation to remuneration. The level of remuneration of Polish health workers in public health care is in fact not only disproportionately low compared to the salaries received by doctors overseas, but also in comparison with salaries in other sectors of the national economy.

Research conducted by M. Vujicic, suggest however that the differences in pay between health workers in developing countries and highly developed are so big that even an increase in salaries in the home country is unable to stem the tide of emigration of doctors and nurses. Therefore only focus on other determinants of decision of leaving their home country, such as working conditions, career opportunities can have significant impact on reducing the scale of emigration [23]. Labor migration is not merely focused on meeting the daily financial needs but also is a way to increase ones human capital, which in the future would help to increase their social status. Decisions are taken also due to the desire to improve their qualifications and work experience, language learning, learn a new culture etc. [24,25].

Although emigration refers mainly to increased income in the household, it is simultaneously a kind of non-economic calculation of profit, which may carry up job abroad. This fact is also confirmed by the analysis of this research, which shows that the desire to find a job abroad is reported more frequently by people who did not receive in the course of studying the material support (maintenance grants) than the students who received such assistance. It can therefore be concluded that migration potential among young health care workers is not a result of the financial situation of the family.

Similar observations can be drawn from the analysis of foreign studies, which show that, for the students of medical universities apart from higher wages very important migration factors are working conditions, career prospects and working arrangements offered by foreign labor markets.

It is also important that the reasons for which young health workers decide to look for work abroad are different for representatives of various professions. A study shows that for future physicians the most important factor is the favorable conditions of work abroad but among nursing students alongside economic conditions, interpersonal relationships in the workplace are as well very important.

Different reasons for the decision to emigrate give pharmacy trainees (greater opportunity for professional development), and physiotherapists (lack of stability in the Polish labor market). This inhomogeneity should be particularly taken into account by the authorities when considering design of future laws and strategy for restructuring of Polish health care. The main finding is the fact that the reasons for which representatives of various medical professions prefer to seek work abroad are different. All activities aimed at stopping excessive emigration among young health professionals should therefore consider these differences and respond to the needs of particular groups.

Increasing demand for medical staff, technology and demographic changes make the shortage of health workers a global problem [26].

The problem of excessive outflow of health workers, until recently affecting only sub-Saharan Africa, has become a serious threat to the sustainability of health care systems in all European countries. Therefore, Member States of the European Union face the need to take appropriate steps not only to train and develop, but also to prevent from leaving an adequate number of their own healthcare professionals. Otherwise, the passive approach of EU foreign policy will increase the negative effects of migration in both developed and developing countries.

#### IV. CONCLUSION:

The main factors influencing the willingness to look for work outside Polish borders are: more favorable financial terms offered by foreign markets, better working conditions and greater opportunity for professional development. Preventing migration of Polish medical workers therefore requires not only increase the salaries in the health sector but also to upgrade the working environment of young health workers in Poland.

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