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# Between right-wing discourse and liberal policy: the curious case of Ukrainian migration into Poland

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Populism in Central and Eastern Europe: Multidisciplinary Perspectives, Prague, 02.04.2022



“This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 765224.”

## PiS migration discourse: topoi and mythical features

- Security
- Us vs Them antagonism
- Demonising the EU
- Arguing autonomy
- Demonising the opposition
- Migrants as a threat/enemy
- Migration policy as a zero sum game
- Promising safety and salvation (missionary politics)
- Appeal to emotion

Politeja  
No. 63, EUROPE OF  
FATHERLANDS?  
(2019), pp. 177-195 (19  
pages)  
Published By:  
Księgarnia  
Akademicka



<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26919943>

## Realities of migration into Poland

- Starting 2014 - a large scale migration wave of Ukrainians coming to Poland, primarily for work
- As of October 2021, over 300K Ukrainian citizens held temporary residence permits (karta pobytu), according to Office for Foreigners (Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców)
- Overall, estimated over 2 million Ukrainians in Poland. No unified statistics, but Ukrainian citizens clearly dominate all statistics on entry and stay of foreigners in Poland

## Why Ukrainians?

### Push factors:

- Political
- Economic
- Conflict provoked
- Changing routes

### Pull factors:

- Economic growth, the EU and labour shortages
- Liberal employment regulations
- Geographical proximity
- Cultural and linguistic proximity
- Migration networks

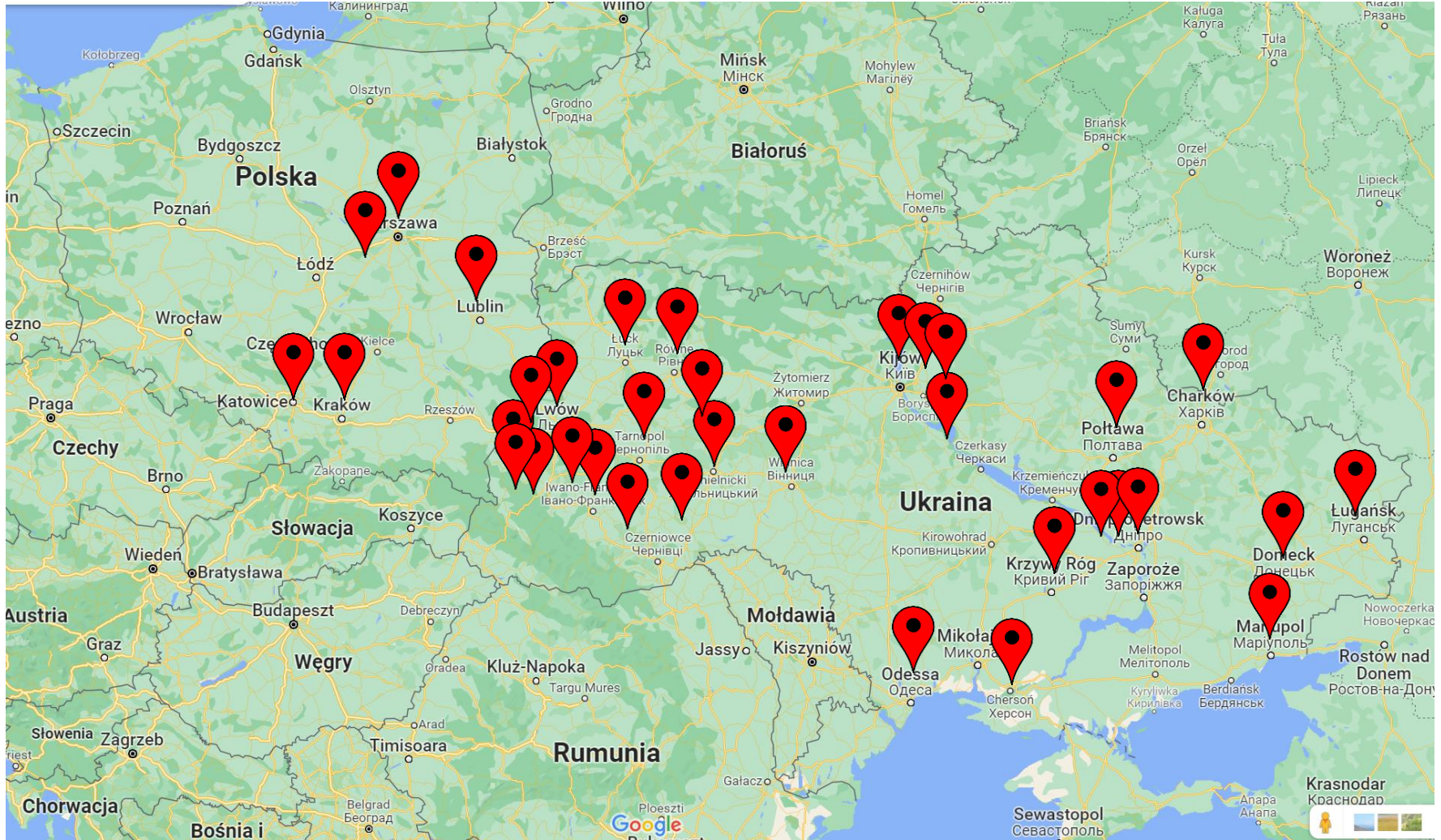
## Why Poland?

### Challenges:

- Diaspora/emigration policies in Ukraine
- Integration policy in Poland
- Mutual stereotypes
- Difficult shared history
- Anti-migrant rhetoric



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## Fieldwork observations

- Awareness of exclusionary discourse and anti-migrant sentiment
- Discourse contributes to anxiety, even in absence of personal negative experience

*"Maybe I was lucky?"*

- Snizhana (HR specialist, 21, in Poland for 4 years)

- Not identifying as immigrants
- Implied inferiority

*"Polak to Pan" and "szlachta nie pracuje"*

*"We are almost like them, yet it's so nice to have someone to look down at."*

— Inessa (lawyer, 29, in Poland for 7 years)

- Laying low and avoiding conflict

*"No, no, no [cultural pressure felt]. I don't act out, so that I would always have problems. I am, let's say, **an average person** (...) It's not that I walk around with the flag showing that I am Ukrainian (...) I don't stand out from the crowd."*

— Valeriy (warehouse worker, 28, in Poland for 6 years)

*"The most important thing is showing very strong respect to Poles, and to the culture, and the religion. For instance, I try **not to bring up certain topics** in order to avoid conflicts. I try not to discuss history, I try not to discuss matters of religion, cultural matters. So I will keep my disapproval to myself. (...) Not that I put on a mask and play a role. It's just that I always keep in mind that **I am in a different country.**"*

— Snizhana (HR specialist, 21, in Poland for 4 years)

*"**I am not a threat because I try to assimilate.** Ukrainians here don't unite, we are not as united as Georgians or Syrians. We cannot pose a threat to Poland because we stay apart."*

— Vasyl (architect, 26, in Poland for 8 years)

*"Yes, Ukrainians are second class citizens in Poland. But other migrants, Indians and Vietnamese, are jealous of us that at least **we can merge with the crowd.**"*

— Yelizaveta (lecturer, 35, in Poland for 11 years)

- Differences within the migrant population
- Fitting in Poland: hopelessness and uncertain future

*Why does Kaczyński hate Ukrainians so much?*

— Hanna (cleaner and seamstress, 51, in Poland for 17 years)

*"When I hear the discourse of "Polska dla Polakow" [Poland for Poles] I think to myself, what am I doing here?"*

— Kateryna (journalist, 35, in Poland for over 8 years)

Ever a true Pole\*?

*"A Pole is a Pole. (...) If they just hear my name, they understand right away that I am not a Pole. They have a bad word for it. When they don't like that a person has Polish citizenship, but he is Ukrainian, they call him "przepisaniec" [from "przepisać" — to reassign]. (...) They don't care which way you get it. It's just that you were not born a Pole, but got the documents some other way."*

— Valeriy (warehouse worker, 28, in Poland for 6 years)

*"The pure people for the government are those who agree with them"*

— Maksym (trader, 28, in Poland for 8 years)



## Policy implications

- Poland has received millions of migrants over a short period of time without being prepared and equipped for such demographic changes, which causes several existing and potential challenges.
- The issue is largely exacerbated by an anti-migrant rhetoric dominating Polish politics. However, economic necessity and labour shortages have pushed the government to adopt a 'liberal' approach to the grant of working permits and residencies.
- A comprehensive approach to migration and integration policies needs to be developed.

Post 24. February 2022



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**Thank you for your attention!**

**Dziękuję za uwagę!**

**Дякую за увагу!**

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