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## POLISH MIGRANTS' CHILDBEARING IN THE UK

### INTRODUCTION

Post-2004 Polish migration to the United Kingdom has had a major impact on the British and Polish populations and on these countries' labour markets. Yet, there is considerable uncertainty about whether recent Polish settlement is permanent or will be reversed, as migratory decisions are always subject to a complex set of factors. In this paper we focus on the childbearing behaviour of Polish migrants, a factor that has not been analysed thoughtfully to date, and we argue that childbearing decisions are a crucial factor in determining settlement decisions.

Despite the broad literature on Polish migrants in the UK, analysis of the fertility behaviour of Polish migrants is still scarce. Some studies, for instance Trevena (2009), White (2011) and Zumpe *et al.* (2012) suggest that, given the young age of migrants compared to the average age of the UK population, we can expect a high number of children born to Polish mothers in the UK over the coming years. In addition, as children born to Polish mothers constitute a large share of all children born in the UK, this topic may grow in importance in the policy discussions in the UK over the coming years.

The childbearing behaviour of Polish migrants in the UK is analysed by reviewing relevant scholarly and popular press articles and by analysing the birth register data. We provide analysis of the trends in births to Polish mothers in the UK between 2004 and 2011. Based on this analysis, we discuss some of the main impacts of these trends for Poland and the UK.

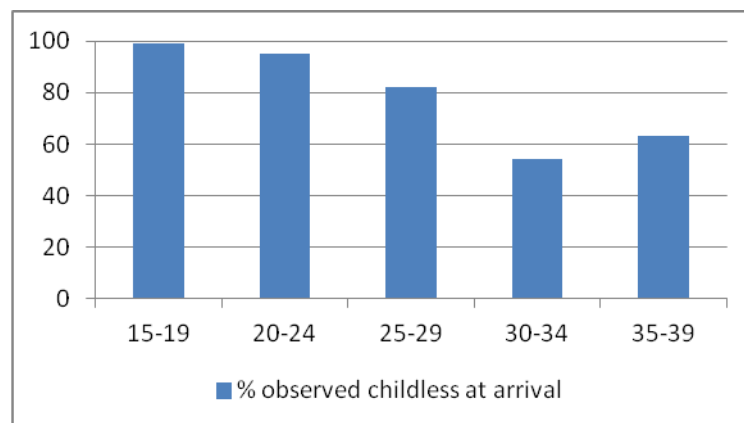
LITERATURE REVIEW – PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON POLISH MIGRANTS’  
CHILDBEARING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM  
SCHOLARLY PAPERS

Academic papers on fertility trends to Polish migrants are quite scarce. Below we provide a short review of two papers<sup>1</sup> identified in our literature review.

A recent scholarly article by Waller *et al.* (2012) has focused on migrants arriving in the UK after 2001, including Polish migrants, and the context within which migrants' childbearing and family formation occurs. The authors found that almost all Polish women aged between 15-19 and 20-24 are childless upon arrival in the UK. The proportion of childless women at arrival decreases with age up until 35, with 82% of 25-29 year olds and 54% of 30-34 year olds arriving in the UK without children. Then, for 35-39 year olds the proportion of childlessness at arrival increases to just over 63%, suggesting that some Polish women might be leaving their older children in Poland. This finding is consistent with that of qualitative research by White (2011).

Figure 1.

Percentage of Polish women arriving to the UK without children.



Source: Adapted from Waller *et al.* (2012).

Note: Based on UK Labour Force Survey. Data for females aged between 15-39 years at arrival who arrived up to five years prior to the survey data, between 1996-2010.

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<sup>1</sup> Janta (2013) article also discusses fertility of Polish migrants in the UK. It provides analysis of Polish migrants' fertility behaviour in a broader context for years 2004-2010. This paper is a revised version of Janta's previous study providing analysis for years 2004-2011.

Analysing the Age-specific fertility rates (ASFR), the authors found that Polish fertility is similar to the fertility levels found in Poland. The study also suggests that there is no evidence of fertility increasing in the period after 2004 and that the high number of children born to Polish women "is likely to be attributable to the size of the Polish population" (Waller *et al.* 2012: 19).

Waller *et al.*'s research has also explored whether migration and fertility are interrelated. They found that the percentage of Polish women who had a child within three years of arrival in the UK is small (around 10-20% for different age groups. However, analysis of the births within five years of arrival show that nearly 40% of childless Polish migrants aged between 20-24 and between 25-29 at arrival have had a child in the UK. The authors conclude that the recent increase in births to Polish women could be explained by childbearing of the more established Polish migrants. They also suggest that the longer their duration of residence in the UK, the higher the probability of their having children in the UK.

Polish migrant childbearing has also been analysed by Zumpe *et al.* (2012). The study is based on the analysis of the birth registration data combined with the Annual Population Survey (APS) data. The authors investigate fertility rates of UK-born and migrant women using the general fertility rate (GFR); that is, the number of births in a year to 1,000 women aged 15-44. They found that there was an increase in the GFR for women from Poland. In 2007 Polish migrants had a GFR of 93, which increased to 106 in 2010 and decreased to 93 in 2011. These figures were significantly higher than the GFR of UK-born women of around 60 in both 2007 and 2011. The authors found that women born in Poland have a distinctively different age distribution compared with other migrant women and with UK-born women. There was a much higher concentration in the age group 25-29, and much smaller proportions of women over 30 years old. The authors suggest that the changes in the size of different age groups of Polish women across recent years have highly influenced their changing GFR. The authors conclude that Polish migrants' fertility may have an important effect on the measurement of the total fertility rate of non-UK women.

#### POPULAR PRESS ARTICLES

Polish migrants' childbearing was also subject of popular press articles, mostly based on the Office for National Statistic (ONS) press releases. These newspaper articles

do little more than provide a few facts on births to Polish migrants. Examples of such articles are included in

Table 1.

Table 1.

British and Polish press articles on births to foreign and Polish mothers.<sup>2</sup>

"The Polish Baby Boom: Fears for NHS and schools as 1,000 Polish children are born EVERY month", <i>The Daily Mail</i> , 26 November, 2007.
"Baby Boom Drives British Population to Record High", <i>The Independent</i> , 28 August, 2009.
"The New Baby Boom", <i>The Guardian</i> , 29 August, 2009.
"UK – the place to give birth" [Jak rodzić, to na Wyspach], <i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i> , 11 March, 2011.
"Polish Women in the UK are Having Babies at a Faster Rate Than Those in Poland", <i>The Daily Mail</i> , 15 March 2011.
"More children in Britain born to Polish mothers than those from any other foreign country", <i>The Daily Mail</i> , 19 September, 2011.
"Polish Baby Boom but not in Poland" [Polski baby boom, ale nie w Polsce], <i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i> , 19 May, 2012. As of 23 October, 2013: <a href="http://wyborcza.pl">http://wyborcza.pl</a> .
"Poland's British Baby Boom", <i>New Poland Express</i> , 25 May, 2012
"Every fourth child born by a Polish women in the UK has father of other nationality", [Co czwarte dziecko urodzone przez Polkę w Wielkiej Brytanii ma ojca innej narodowości], <i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i> , 28 August, 2012.
"Poles Head List in Record Total of Babies Born to Foreigners", <i>Metro</i> , 30 August, 2012.
"Record Number of Babies Born to Foreign-born Mothers", <i>The Telegraph</i> , 30 August, 2012.
"Polish women give birth in the United Kingdom" [Polki rodzą na Wyspach], <i>Rzeczpospolita</i> , 18 September 2013.

Source: Author's own compilation of articles.

Some articles report births to Polish migrants as part of a wider trend of births to migrants, for instance articles from *The Independent*, *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. Other articles focus solely on birth trends to Polish mothers, like articles from *The Daily Mail* and Polish newspapers. Some articles provide objective reporting on birth statistics but in many articles provided information is not always factually correct and might be misleading. Common errors include: referring to a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of all foreign-born women in the UK as a TFR of Polish women in the UK, comparing the TFR of

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<sup>2</sup> When compiling this list of articles, the author tried to provide representative examples of articles that were published in respective Polish and UK newspapers. Translation of Polish headings into English is the author's own.

women in Poland with this alleged TFR of Polish women in the UK and stating that Polish women are more likely to have children than British women or women in Poland.

## DATA AND METHODS

### BIRTH REGISTRATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The aim of this article is to provide robust analysis of birth trends to Polish parents in the UK. This study is based on the analysis of the birth registration data from England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup>. Birth registration is an administrative high quality data source providing information on all births in the UK. As parents are required to register their child shortly after the birth date, the birth register holds the most accurate information about all births in the UK, including the child's sex, date and place of birth, parents' occupations, marital status and address. Birth registration data also include each parent's country of birth, which makes them an excellent source of data to analyse birth trends among specific (first generation) migrant groups in the UK<sup>4</sup>.

In this article we present analysis of the birth registration data for years 2004 - 2011. We selected this timeframe as 2004 is the year of Poland's accession to the European Union. At the time of writing this article, the latest available birth registration data were for 2011.

Data was obtained from the Office for National Statistics for England and Wales, and combined together with data from the Scottish and Northern Irish statistical authorities.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### THE PROPORTION OF BIRTHS TO POLISH MOTHERS IS INCREASING

The birth registration data gathered by national statistical authorities in the UK show that births to Polish mothers constitute a significant and growing proportion of all births in this country. Until 2004, births to Polish mothers constituted a very small

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<sup>3</sup> There are three statistical authorities in the UK, a common authority for England and Wales, and independent bodies for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> For the discussion on the limitations of the birth registration data, see Janta (2013).

proportion (below 0.2 per cent) of all births in the UK<sup>5</sup>. Since 2004, the share of births to Polish mothers has increased significantly each year.

Table 2 provides details of: (1) the total number of births to Polish mothers and the proportion of these births relative to the total number of births in the UK, and (2) the total number of births to both Polish parents and the proportion of these births to the total number of births to Polish mothers.

Table 2.

Live births (numbers and percentages) to Polish-born mothers in the UK, and births to both Polish parents (numbers and percentages), 2004 – 2011.

Year	Births to Polish mothers	% of all births in the UK	Births to both Polish parents	% of births to Polish mothers for which the father is also Polish
2004	1,870	0.26%	859	46%
2005	3,560	0.49%	2,103	59%
2006	7,171	0.96%	4,953	69%
2007	13,333	1.73%	9,992	75%
2008	18,326	2.31%	14,040	77%
2009	20,560	2.60%	15,929	77%
2010	22,242	2.76%	16,918	76%
2011	23,004	2.85%	17,398	76%

Source: ONS, personal communication with the ONS

There were 1,870 births to Polish mothers in the UK in 2004 and this numbers has increased substantially to just over 23,000 births to Polish mothers in the UK in 2011. Looking at the proportion of Polish births to the overall number of births, in 2004 children born to Polish mothers constituted 0.26 per cent of all children born in the UK, rising to 2.85 per cent of all births in the UK in 2011 (personal communication with the ONS). Since around 2009, there is a lower rate of increase in the number of children born to Polish mothers compared with previous years. The high initial post-2004 increase in the

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<sup>5</sup> The earliest data on births to Polish mothers in the UK held by UK statistical authorities goes back to 1995. In this paper the author provides analysis of data from 2004 (the year of Poland's EU accession). Data for earlier years is provided in Janta (2013).

number of births to Polish mothers is probably related to the high inflow of Poles to the UK, thus the increase in the total number of Polish migrants living in the UK. However, despite the smaller number of Poles coming to the UK in recent years, we still observe the increasing total number of births to Polish women. This can be explained twofold: (1) there is some time delay between migration and childbearing, (2) Polish migrants were young on average and it is only now that they are entering the highly reproductive age group.

Since 2005, Poland has been in the top ten on the list of mothers' countries of birth for non-UK born mothers giving birth in the UK, and since 2010 Polish-born mothers have topped this list (personal communication with the ONS). Poland is the most common maternal country of birth for all UK countries, and in London (Zumpe *et al.* 2012).

#### PROPORTION OF CHILDREN BORN IN THE UK WITH TWO POLISH PARENTS IS INCREASING

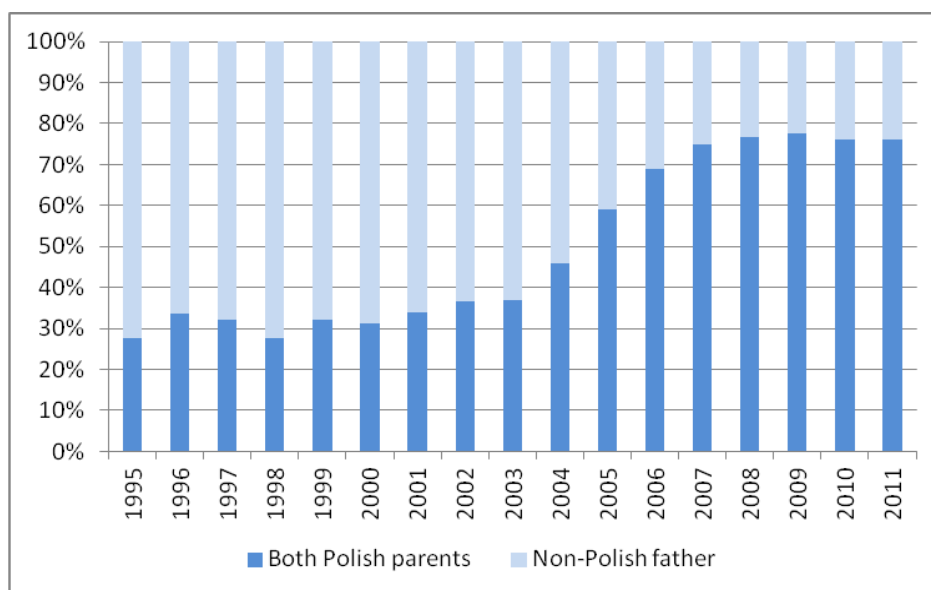
As shown in

Table 2 and

Figure 2, over recent years, the proportion of children with both a Polish mother and a Polish father has increased significantly. In the era preceding Poland's EU accession, only around one in three children of Polish mothers also had a Polish father, but this proportion increased considerably from 2004 onwards. Overall, from around 2007 approximately three in four children born to Polish mothers also had a Polish father. This translates to 82,192 children with two Polish parents being born between 2004 and 2011 in the UK.

Figure 2.

Proportion of children born in the UK with two Polish parents, 1995-2011.



Source: ONS, personal communication with the ONS.

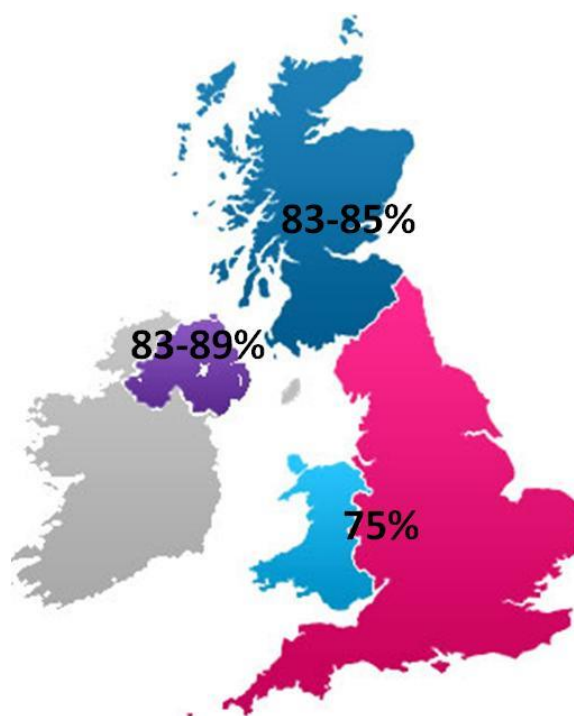
The proportion of children with two Polish parents varies between UK countries (see

Figure 3). Between 2008 and 2011, the highest share of two Polish parents families is found in Northern Ireland, with around 83-89 per cent of children born to a Polish mother also having a Polish father. In Scotland, this proportion is also high, ranging between 83-85 per cent in the same period. In England and Wales, the corresponding proportion is around 75 per cent.

Figure 3.

Proportion of children with two Polish parents in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, average from years 2004 - 2011.





Source: ONS, personal communication with the ONS. Author's own compilation of data.

It is worth noting that the increase in births to Polish mothers has been substantial throughout the UK. There were 1,830 births to Polish mothers in England and Wales in 2004 and this figure had increased to 20,495 births in 2011. In Scotland, 31 children were born to Polish mothers in 2004 and by 2011 this had increased to 1,791 births. In Northern Ireland, there were only 9 births to Polish mothers in 2004 and 718 births in 2011. Overall, during the analysed period, between 2004 and 2011, there were 110,066 children born to Polish mothers in the UK.

It is worth noting that the proportion of births to Polish mothers in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland from around 2007-2008 closely reflects the relative proportion of the total UK population living in these countries; that is, around 89 per cent of births to Polish mothers take place in England and Wales, around 8 per cent in Scotland and around 3 per cent in Northern Ireland.

#### POLISH FATHERS MOSTLY HAVE CHILDREN WITH POLISH PARTNERS<sup>6</sup>

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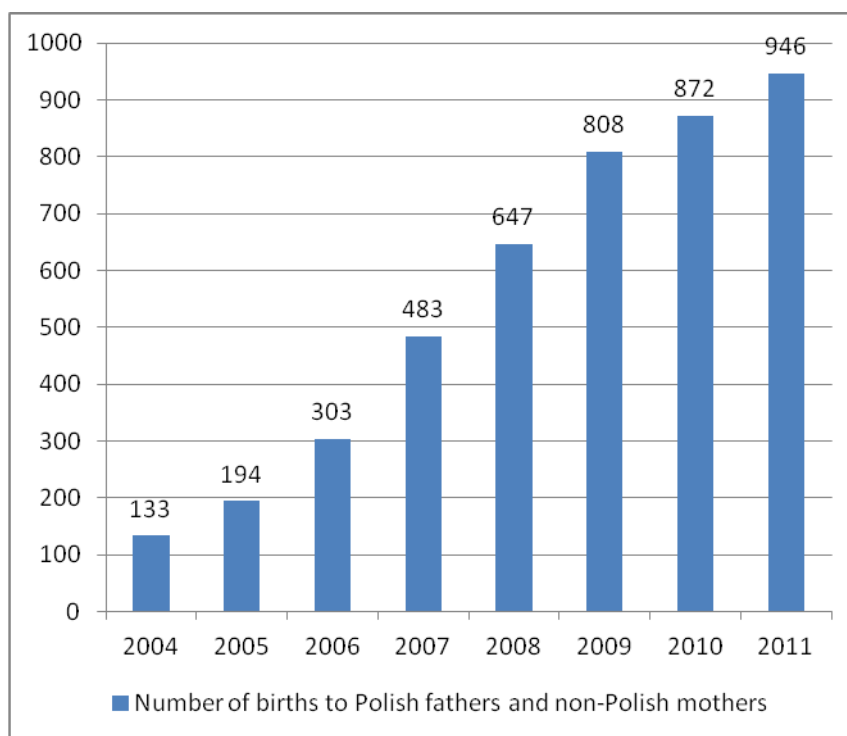
<sup>6</sup> Data on births to Polish fathers have some limitations, with some records on births registered solely by child's mother missing data on child's father. Therefore, it is possible that there were more births to Polish fathers than were reported by the children's mothers. Yet, taken the overall small number of births to Polish fathers and non-Polish mothers, we assume this number would be very small.

The number of children born to Polish fathers is significantly lower than the number born to Polish mothers, despite the fact that the male to female ratio for Polish migrants is almost equal in the UK.

Although the number of children with a Polish father and a non-Polish mother is increasing, the rate of increase is much smaller than in the case of Polish mothers. In general, the proportion of children with a Polish father and a non-Polish mother is small; between 2004 and 2011, on average around 93-96 per cent of children with a Polish father also had a Polish mother. Nevertheless, the increasing total number of children to Polish fathers and non-Polish mothers has to be noted as it indicates an increase in the number of Polish fathers sufficiently committed to the relationship (i.e. married or in a stable relationship) to be named on the birth certificate. It can also indicate an increase in the number of permanently settled Polish men in the population, due to migration, since this figure was virtually unchanged year-on-year prior to 2004.

Figure 4.

Number of births to Polish fathers and non-Polish mothers, 2004-2011.



Source: ONS, personal communication with the ONS. Author's own compilation of data.

## DISCUSSION

The rate of increase and the total number of births to Polish mothers in the UK is on an unprecedented scale. Not only is Poland now the most common country of birth for non-UK born mothers, but this has occurred over a short period of time. It is difficult to predict how the trend in Polish mothers giving birth to children in the UK will develop in the future. So far, we have observed an increase in the total number of births to Polish mothers each year between 2004 and 2011. Nevertheless, the rate of increase was slowing down in the last 3-4 of these years. Given the young age profile of Polish migrants in the UK, we can estimate that over the next few years, we will continue to observe a 'Polish baby boom', with the total number of children born to Polish mothers continuing to increase or staying at the current high level.

This high number of births to Polish mothers in the UK poses a question about the importance of the socio-economic context for childbearing. For instance, analysis of the Polish migrant parents' behaviour can provide insights on the importance of issues related to family and child-related policies, childcare opportunities, possibilities to combine

childbearing with employment as well as aspects related to the availability of the social support and benefits system.

Migrants' fertility also poses questions regarding the impact of migrants' childbearing decisions on demography and labour markets in Poland and in the UK. For Poland, migrants' fertility relates to an imminent potential population loss due to migration and children being born abroad. Contrary, for the UK, Polish migrants and migrant children are a population gain. The large number of people of childbearing age emigrating from Poland to the UK (and to other European and non-European countries) has led to fewer children being born in Poland in recent years. As Hoorens and colleagues conclude (2011: 41): "it is almost certain that emigration had led, in absolute terms, to fewer children being born in Poland in recent years than would have been in the absence of migration, through the removal from the resident population of substantial numbers of women of childbearing age". And "this removal of women of childbearing age may be important for the population structure of Poland" (Hoorens *et al.* 2011: 41) if Polish migrants decide to emigrate permanently.

In regard to the labour market, Polish migrants' decisions have significant consequences in both the short- and long-term. The large number of Polish migrants belongs predominantly to the working age population, making a substantial positive contribution to the overall size of this demographic group in the UK, and resulting in a considerable reduction in its size in Poland. This can have important consequences, for instance for the publicly- funded pension and benefit system. In addition, if children born to Polish mothers in the UK stay abroad, it would have long-term consequences for population structure and the size of the working age population in Poland in the long run.

This complex relationship between Polish migrants' decision making regarding childbearing and the duration of their stay in the UK, as well as their potential for returning to Poland presents challenges for the future. The likelihood of moving back to Poland for Polish migrants is highly uncertain, as in the case of Polish migrants it is not clear whether settlement decisions follow childbearing decisions, or vice versa. As White (2011: 177) observes, the arrival of a baby is a factor that further "enhances a sense of being at home in the English home", therefore the birth of a child can be an indication of plans to stay in the UK for a longer period of time. On the other hand, we do not know to what extent the large number of children born to Polish mothers in the UK is simply a consequence of the large number of Polish migrants being in an highly reproductive age group. For couples where both parents are Polish, potential return to Poland seems easier than for couples where only

one parent is Polish, for instance due to the lack of linguistic barrier. Taking into account that around three in four children born to Polish mothers also have a Polish father, the prospect of moving back to Poland within a few years of the birth of a child is still possible for these couples.

On the other hand, having a child in the UK can also be seen as an indication of a settlement decision. Then, we can conclude that there is little likelihood of migrants who have done so returning to Poland after a period of working abroad. Similarly, in the case of nearly one-fourth of children born to non-Polish fathers, it is likely that many of these children will not be coming back to Poland in the coming years as there is evidence that Polish mothers tend to settle in the country of residence of their child's father.

The unpredictability of Polish migrants' behaviour is a challenge for policymaking and for future planning and resource allocation. As we do not know people's rationale for migration or for decisions about settlement abroad, it is not clear how British, Polish and European Union policies could address the needs of Polish migrants. Yet, Polish migrants have an important impact on the welfare system and public services in both countries. The large number of Polish migrants in the UK increases demand for public services (i.e. healthcare, housing). The growing proportion of children born to Polish mothers has an important impact on child-related service, in particular on future demands on the publicly funded education system. The unpredictability of Polish migrants' settlement decisions makes it very difficult to plan for efficient service provision, as discussed here, and as a result policies might not adequately respond to Polish migrants' needs. Further research on the challenges to the policymaking in Poland and the UK as related to the Polish migrants childbearing in the UK is however beyond the scope of this paper.

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