

An abstract of the paper “Mobility of Polish health care workers in the context of Poland’s membership in the European Union”

The issue of workers’ mobility raised a lot of controversies during Poland’s negotiations for accession to the European Union. The old member states feared a mass inflow of workers from such states as Poland. At the same time societies of new member states feared the so called “brain drain”. This fear concerned mainly professions of medical doctors, nurses and midwives, that is those vocational groups whose professional qualifications are recognized without any problems. Eventually a negotiation compromise was reached, stipulating a two-year transitional period, with a facility to extend it for further 3+2 years, in relations between the old and new member states in the area of free movement of workers. Three member states – the United Kingdom, Sweden and Ireland - decided not to introduce any restrictions. The two years that have passed since Poland’s accession to the European Union have not corroborated the fears of either flooding of old member states by a wave of workers from CEECs or the danger of „brain drain”. Despite numerous incentives from other EU member states, a very small number of Polish medical doctors, nurses and midwives chose to emigrate. However, anaesthesiologists are a professional group which has recorded a significant migration growth. Since 1st May 2004 certificates enabling employment in other member states have been issued to approximately 8 % of all anaesthesiologists employed in Poland. Unfortunately, we do not know how many of them eventually gave up leaving Poland, or how many will undertake only temporary employment abroad without giving up permanent employment in Poland. At the same time social surveys indicate that a decisive majority of Polish health care workers quote low salaries and poor career opportunities as reasons for migration. Therefore one can state that Poland’s membership in the European Union affected migration attitudes of Polish health care workers only to a small degree. This is confirmed by managers of Polish health care facilities, who do not notify additional demand for workers.

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