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**RESEARCH**

# Downward Professional Mobility among Poles Working and Living in Norway

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This article explores the diverse trajectories of downward professional mobility as experienced by skilled Polish migrants living in Norway. On the basis of 30 in-depth qualitative interviews with Poles who have worked below their level of competence after migrating to Norway, I outline (1) how they tend to channel themselves into low-skilled employment at the initial stages of migration as they commonly assume it is inevitable when migrating, and (2) how they interpret and respond to remaining in low-skilled jobs after settling in Norway, often explaining it as a result of racialising and discriminatory practices against them. By bridging concepts of habitus and field with hierarchies of desirability of national migrant groups, I propose a notion of a ‘transnational field of national hierarchies’. I argue that the downward professional mobility is both an individual and collective social practice guided by what I call ‘the national component of the habitus’ and embedded in the transnational field, where different national identities are hierarchically positioned.

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**Keywords:** Skilled migration; Downward professional mobility; Polishness; Norwegianness; Power relations

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## Introduction

Guided by two research questions—(1) why do skilled and highly-skilled Poles take up low-skilled jobs in Norway; (2) how do they explain remaining in low-skilled jobs?—this article sheds light on downward professional mobility among Polish migrants living and working in Norway. The wide scale of downward professional mobility among this group has been recognised by some quantitative studies (Friberg & Eldring 2011; SSB 2017); however, less scholarly attention has been given to the experiences and perceptions Polish migrants have towards working below their level of competence. This article recognises and analyses migrants’ views on the problem and thus provides new insights and understanding to the body of knowledge concerning migrants’ participation and exclusion in the European labour markets.

Downward professional mobility affects migrants worldwide irrespective of their origin, educational background, profession or work experience more often than the non-migrant population, and this also applies to the Norwegian labour market (OECD 2018: 88–99). Research conducted on Poles living in Oslo in 2010 revealed that Polish women (58%) tend

to be employed in cleaning services and Polish men (84%) in the construction industry, although a significant percentage of them had worked in other, diverse sectors of the labour market prior to migration (Friberg & Eldring 2011: 17, 37). A more recent study conducted in 2016 (SSB 2017) confirms that Poles are overrepresented in manual labour, particularly in the construction industry and cleaning services, and underrepresented in managerial and academic jobs when compared to the non-migrant population in Norway. It is noteworthy that the proportion of highly educated Polish women living in Norway does not differ significantly from the whole female population in Norway, whereas the proportion of highly educated male Polish migrants is 13 percentage points lower than among the host society members (Vrålstad & Wiggen 2017: 99). These significant findings, showing a large scale of downward professional mobility among Poles in Norway, are derived from numerous quantitative results provided by these studies, however, none of them aimed to investigate this specific problem qualitatively.

Some qualitative studies on downwardly mobile Polish migrants have been conducted in the UK (Nowicka 2012; Trevena 2011) showing that, generally, Poles devalued their education and qualifications from Poland. Both authors pointed to the popularisation of higher education and so-called devaluation of higher diplomas in Poland, resulting in a supersaturation of the Polish labour market with highly qualified individuals looking for work. Trevena (2011) argued that higher incomes in the UK compensate for the low-skilled employment and the related losses. However, focusing mainly on migrants who devalued their education from Poland, the study left a knowledge gap about Polish migrants who value their education and would like to continue their careers after migration. It is also crucial to note that Trevena's research drew on a sample comprised exclusively of young and single migrants, who in majority had not entered the labour market prior to migration (Trevena 2011). Although Polish migrants have been a rather well-researched migrant group (Erdal & Lewicki 2016; for an overview see: White 2016), fewer studies have focused on how meanings attached to Polishness and East-European origin influence migrants' professional career choices. A recent study by Czapka (2019) shows that Polish women in Norway perceive working as kindergarten assistants to be a significant promotion from working as a cleaner, although their education does not correspond with any of these jobs. This finding suggests that Polish migrants' perceive their labour market opportunities in Norway as limited, which invites further investigations into the reasons for such perceptions.

The Norwegian labour market suffers, rather, from underqualification (OECD 2017: 93). At the same time, studies show that potential employers respond less frequently to job applications from people with non-Norwegian surnames (Birkelund et al. 2014; Larsen, Rogne & Birkelund 2018). The obvious waste of human capital in the form of migrants' skills is of particular importance. Working below one's level of competence, aside from being a loss at the macro-level, is also disadvantageous for individuals, who may suffer from psychological and social distress (Moussaoui & Agoub 2011: 102).

In the following sections, first, I discuss the construction, positionality and hierarchies of Eastern and Western identities. Then, I outline the study's theoretical and analytical framework, which draws on concepts of habitus and field and hierarchies of desirability of migrants. The further section describes the study's method and sample. The subsequent analysis is divided into two principal parts. The first part focuses on the initial stage of migration and addresses the question of what reasons skilled migrants have for taking up low-skilled jobs. The second part investigates explanations and meanings the participants attach to remaining in low-skilled jobs. The last section discusses the research findings and draws the main conclusions.

### **Social Constructions of Polish Migrants**

Poland has a long-standing tradition of intense emigration dating back more than two centuries (Okólski 1994: 51) and is therefore often considered as an exemplification of an emigration country in present-day Europe. Intra-European migratory movements from Poland have been embedded in the discourse of the European East-West dichotomy, demarcating the boundaries of 'otherness' between the Western and Eastern European identities (van Riemsdijk 2013; Young & Light 2001). Eastern Europe has been perceived as ideologically distanced from an idealised West. The constructions of otherness of Eastern Europeans based on discourses of their incomplete Europeanness (Buchowski 2006; Loftsdóttir 2017; van Riemsdijk 2013) have influenced the positionalities of migrating individuals. The nation states have generated and maintained the construction of opposing, but at the same time mutually constitutive, identities of the country's citizens (the insiders) and migrants (the Others) (Bendixsen 2018: 163–164). Whereas Western European migrants are perceived as privileged 'free movers' and 'lifestyle migrants', Eastern Europeans are still perceived as 'target earners' (Lulle & King 2016).

Polish migrants have been moving in large numbers to Western European countries since the nineties. While Poles have become an increasingly large national group in many countries in Europe (there are currently an estimated 2.5 million Poles living in other European countries), the widespread image of a Pole, more than any other European nationality, has been reduced to the most prototypical labour migrant and an object of discrimination both in Scandinavia (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017; Loftsdóttir 2017) and in other regions of Europe (van Heuckelom 2013; van Riemsdijk 2010). The stigma of 'otherness' of Polish migrants has been also identified by a wide range of research on media coverage (e.g., Drzewiecka, Hoops & Thomas 2014; Taylor & Śliwa 2011; van Heuckelom 2013). Van Heuckelom (2013) noticed that cinematic portrayals of Poles present them as intruders from the uncivilised outskirts of Europe and that these portrayals therefore bear the marks of orientalisation (van Heuckelom 2013: 218)—a discursive practice through which the West structures the imagined East socially and politically (Buchowski 2006: 463). The Norwegian newspapers identify Polish migrants in particular as hard-working manual workers living and working in bad conditions (Dyrlid 2018).

The major migration flow of Poles to Norway began after the accession of Poland to the UE in 2004 and has become particularly intense since 2006 (SSB 2018). Nowadays, in the Norwegian labour market, Polish migrants are associated with cheap and effective manual labour, eager to take the jobs that Norwegians no longer want to apply for. Norwegian employers perceive Poles as not suited for professional roles requiring independent decision-making and direct communication with customers (Friberg & Midtbøen 2017: 1472–1473). Dyrlid (2018) emphasises that the term 'polakkarbeid' (*EN: Pole's job*), in common parlance in Norway, refers to low prestige manual jobs.

### **Theoretical Framework: Positioning of Migrants in the Transnational Field**

My analytical framework bridges Bourdieu's conceptual dyad of habitus and field (Bourdieu 1990) with the recent conceptualisation of hierarchies of desirability of national migrant groups (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017; Loftsdóttir 2017). Scholars studying migration recognise that habitus and field theory are especially applicable in analysing how migrants' positioning in complex power structures affects their practices (Joy, Game & Toshniwal 2018; Nowicka 2015). I draw a link between the positionality of national migrant groups with their professional decisions and choices upon migration. Through what I call 'the national component of the habitus', migrants perceive the accessible positions that have been

ascribed to their nationality. By the national component of the habitus I address three elements: (1) the dispositions of individuals socialised by them in the course of upbringing and education within a particular national culture, (2) national identity and the self-identification with the nation and co-nationals and (3) construction of and meanings attached to particular nationality within a certain field. Nationality understood both as citizenship and identity is incorporated into the habitus and strengthens the feeling of affiliation to an imagined community among co-nationals (cf. Anderson 1991). Individuals tend to gravitate towards positions in the fields that match dispositions ascribed to them (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990); therefore, I see the actions of the study participants as deeply influenced by the positionality assigned to the nationality they illusively represent. I approach the channelling into specific, low-skilled positions as individual and collective social practice guided by the national component of the habitus and conditioned by the transnational field of national hierarchies.

Fields are structured spaces of positions, determining power relations among the agents (Bourdieu 1993: 72–73). The migrants' transnational ways of life create a new kind of sociocultural configuration and lead to the creation of European transnational fields (Moskal 2013). My analysis focuses on three intersecting and overlapping fields: (1) a transnational field of national hierarchies, (2) a field in which migrants' habitus and national identity have been shaped and (3) the Norwegian labour market. The second and the third fields are subfields of the first one. The dialectic between habitus and field allows for agency and choice; however, habitus recognises that choices are limited and shapes the vision of subjective expectations of objective probabilities. In opposition to rational choice theory, where individuals choose the opportunities that increase their profits the most, theory of practice allows the understanding of the less favourable choices, as for example gravitating towards low-wage and low-skill job positions.

The theory of practice aims to investigate how relations between privilege, disadvantage, domination and subordination are produced through the interplay between habitus and field. Habitus, being a set of internalised, structured and structuring dispositions—thoughts, perceptions, behaviours and beliefs (Bourdieu 1990: 52–65; Bourdieu 1993: 73)—facilitates better understanding of how these dispositions are translated into practices when individuals operate within a specific field. As an aggregate of individual and collective trajectories, habitus shapes the vision of what is probable from a limited range of possibilities (Bourdieu 2000). Therefore, I propose to understand the national identity as a component of habitus playing a key role in shaping migrants' choices and perceptions of themselves as 'Poles' in the Norwegian labour market.

This article also employs a concept of 'cultural' and 'differentialist' racism, which replaced biology with culture (Back & Solomos 2000; Balibar 1991; Eriksen 2012) and race with immigrants (Balibar 1991) and refers to exploitation of social groups on the basis of cultural differences. Racialisation is a process that places migrants into hierarchies (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017; Loftsdóttir 2017). It is the process of categorising people on the basis of their alleged cultural differences, reinforcement of these differences and legitimisation of power relations on the basis thereof (Keskinen & Andreassen 2017: 65); Racialisation inscribed in the fields works twofold: it influences both how migrants of certain national groups are perceived and perceive themselves within the transnational fields as members (not) belonging to a specific national group (Gullestad 2004).

The ongoing interplay between the structure of the transnational field and agency of the involved actors reproduces racialised identities, privileges and discrimination. Polishness and East Europeanness are underprivileged, stigmatised and racialised identities both in the transnational field (van Riemsdijk 2010; van Riemsdijk 2013) and in the Norwegian labour market (Friberg & Midtbøen 2017; Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017),

and, as I shall demonstrate in the final part of the analysis, the participants of this study showed great awareness of being racialised and discriminated against.

### **Method, Data and Sample Characteristics**

The analysis draws upon data collected from 30 qualitative interviews conducted in Norway between September 2017 and February 2018 with Poles who have lived in Norway for at least a year and who have worked below their level of competence after migration. In order to comprehend the complexity of downward professional mobility among Polish migrants in Norway, I employed the strategy of maximum variation sampling, which is based on the logic of searching for significant, common patterns within the variation of cases (Patton 1990). I recruited 25 study participants by publishing an invitation to participate in my study in 4 Facebook groups relevant to Poles living in Norway—*Poles in Norway*, *Poles in Oslo*, *Poles in Bergen* and *Poles in Bodo*—at the time of publishing my invitation, numbering almost 50 thousand members in total. The other five participants were recruited by snowball sampling through my network of contacts. Among the 30 interviews, 19 were face-to-face interviews conducted in Oslo, Bergen and Bodø, while 11 were conducted online via video conversations with study participants living in different rural and urban localities in Norway. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. They varied in length from 50 minutes to 2 hours and 40 minutes. The average length of the interviews was 1 hour and 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Polish, the study participants' and my first language; therefore, the quotes presented in the article are translations of participants' statements into English. When conducting the interviews, I was employed by the Norwegian university. In Poland, being a doctoral student rarely equals being employed by the university, as is the case in Norway; thus, I did not explain this difference until they asked about the character of my job. I considered the role of student a safe position. Moreover, I wanted to focus as much as possible on participants' experiences and to reveal the minimum of information about myself. This strategy worked, as my participants provided me with rich data material; whereas, they asked rather little about me.

The names of the study participants have been changed to preserve their anonymity. In order to make the participants' gender more visible through their names, I have chosen names ending with letters different than 'a' for the male participants, while all the names ending with 'a' are female ones.

I interviewed 18 females and 12 males, aged between 24 and 59 years. At the time of the interviews, the participants had been living in Norway from 1 year up to 15 years, 17 of them having lived in Norway for more than 5 years. All the participants held various educational degrees from Poland: 5 vocational or professional certificates, 9 bachelor's degrees, 15 master's degrees, and 1 doctorate. They had performed and been qualified to perform a variety of professions including physiotherapist, military officer, bank advisor, midwife and surveyor; however, after moving to Norway, 26 of them channelled themselves into one of the four labour market sectors: 9 into cleaning services (7 females, 2 males), 9 into gastronomy (5 females, 2 males), 7 into construction (1 female, 6 males), and 3 (all female) into working as a kindergarten or school assistant. The remaining four persons took up jobs as a security guard, oil platform employee, personal assistant and grounds maintenance worker.

Almost all (27) of the participants had entered the labour market in Poland or other countries prior to migrating to Norway. Three participants, who had not entered the labour market at all, migrated to Norway right after or during their studies. The other three participants, who migrated right after graduation, had been performing diverse jobs when studying. The professional careers of 18 of the participants prior to migration corresponded both to the field and level of their education: 7 of them had been performing a specific job for more than

**Table 1:** Characteristics of the sample (30).

Characteristics	Category	Number of participants
Age	24–39	25
	40–59	5
Gender	Female	18
	Male	12
Education	Vocational	5
	Bachelor	9
	Master	15
	Doctoral	1
Length of residence in Norway (years)	1–5	13
	≥5	17

10 years, and their careers had progressed. The remaining six study participants had been performing other jobs than those they had been qualified for.

The following section addresses the material collected from the migrants' narratives, with particular attention given to two aspects: decision-making processes and perceptions guiding their decisions to take up low-skilled work after moving to Norway and interpretation of and respond to remaining in low-skilled jobs.

### Channelling into Low-Skilled Jobs

Although the participants expressed their desire to improve their professional and economic situation through migration and taking up employment in Norway, prior to migration, they had rarely taken actions that would enable them to develop—or at least continue—their professional careers in Norway. Norwegian language is a basic skill necessary to apply for most of the positions available in the Norwegian labour market. However, only two of the study participants had started learning Norwegian before moving to Norway. From the whole sample (30), 23 study participants revealed that they had assumed it would be necessary to take up low-skilled work right after migration to Norway. The most common plan among the participants was to find a low-skilled job right after migration, settle down, take a Norwegian language course and only then get a proper job. Equally common was the assumption that getting a job in one's profession would take up to a year. Marlena described her plan in the following way:

My idea for myself was just that I'll learn Norwegian and I'll be able to work normally, as it was in Poland, in an office in some company, to continue what I had been doing. I had known, that I'd clean at the beginning, but I explained to myself that I need to have money for a language course.

The majority of the participants also admitted that, prior to migration, they had had little knowledge about the Norwegian labour market and the qualification systems in Norway. For example, few of them had heard about the agencies that verify diplomas and qualifications from abroad, such as the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Registration Authority for Health Personnel (SAK). While it is not necessary to formally

recognise higher education diplomas from abroad in Norway, it may be of advantage when applying for jobs (NOKUT 2019b). In the case of vocational education, formal recognition corresponding to the Norwegian 'fagbrev' or 'svennebrev' (*EN: craft certificate*) is required in certain professions (NOKUT 2019a). Health personnel wishing to practise their profession in Norway have to be registered and hold a license or authorisation (Helsedirektoratet 2019). Most of the study participants learned about these issues only after arriving in Norway. When making their decisions about migrating, paradoxically, they rarely reflected on their further professional careers. Their decisions to move to Norway were often spontaneous and their emigration unplanned, although the majority of them had been considering a long-term stay or permanent settlement. Kaja moved to Norway soon after she graduated as a surveyor. When I asked Kaja what idea she had about her prospective career in Norway while making her decision to migrate, she answered: 'Now, I don't know exactly, perhaps I was not thinking about that too much. It was spontaneous.' Lack of specific plans for professional career development in Norway was also common among those with stable professional positions and long-term work experience in Poland. As a result, the vast majority of the study participants made migration a point of intersection for their professional careers. Ada, having 2 master's degrees in 2 disciplines, psychology and pedagogics, and 10 years of professional experience, provides us with an insight into how prospective careers in Norway might be seen:

Now, I think I was moving [to Norway] with such an idea, because I even remember such talks with my friends—me saying that I would take any kind of a job, anything, perhaps in a café... To earn and settle down in a way, to learn the language... I feel that I kept repeating, you know, such common opinions, and then when I came here, I didn't really want to work in a café.

The quotation demonstrates how common opinions and knowledge about the inevitability of taking up low-skilled jobs when migrating influenced Ada's perspectives on her career prospects in Norway. She reflected on these perceptions only after migrating, when she imagined the fruition of what she previously 'kept repeating'. Similar opinion is again visible in Natalia's words: 'It is commonly known, that you arrive to Norway and you really start again from scratch'. When study participants reflected on the job positions potentially available to them, they constructed their perspectives through perceptions of jobs performed by Poles in Norway, as exemplified by Marlena's statement: 'Simply said, a Pole can either clean or be a carpenter here, or, at best, work in a kindergarten. (...) There is no chance; there are little chances for it [getting a proper job]'. Marlena's response shows not only the importance of job positions typically ascribed to Poles, but also the strong self-identification with Polishness. When looking at professional possibilities in Norway, study participants ascribed greater significance to their Polishness than to their professional qualifications. Perceptions of positions accessible to migrating Poles influenced the decisions and actions the study participants had (or had not) made prior to and right after migration. To explain the commonness of these views and patterns of navigating professional careers onto downward trajectories, we have to analyse the conditions that might have shaped them. As previously discussed in the background section, the socio-political discourses have been maintaining positionality and meanings attached to migrating Eastern Europeans including Poles—'target earners' and 'manual workers'. According to Bourdieu (1990), what appears to us as likely becomes what we actively choose. National component of the habitus shaped the range of likely and necessarily limited opportunities available to Poles in the transnational field of national hierarchies. On the contrary, the most improbable practices (in this case, continuity of the professional career when migrating) became excluded as unthinkable (cf. Bourdieu 1990).

These perceptions are also transmitted through social networks and media. Nowadays, it is nearly impossible to find any Pole who does not have a family member, friend or acquaintance living abroad; therefore, some images and perceptions of emigration are part of everyday knowledge among Poles. Migrating from Poland and taking low-skilled jobs has become such a common social practice that hardly any of the participants of this study seemed to reflect upon its reasonableness. As Bourdieu (1990) pointed out, practices tend to reproduce regularities, and this does not necessarily occur with the consciousness of social agents. The habitus being embodied history—firstly internalised as a second nature and afterwards forgotten as history—also becomes the past active in the present, shaping individual and collective practices (Bourdieu 1990: 56).

The picture of the Polish migrant has also been present in media discourses. Dzięglewski (2015) analysed 172 journalistic articles from Polish weekly magazines published in the period between 2004–2012. In the articles, he identified stories of 394 international migrants from Poland, and he found out that from the perspective of standardised classifications, the vast majority of these stories were concerned with downward professional and social mobility. However, in the subjective perceptions of the articles' protagonists, their stories were not necessarily stories of failure (Dzięglewski 2015: 180–182). These views may result from perceiving migration from Poland itself as a kind of success, especially during the nineties and the first decade of the new millennium. Migration was imagined to be a step towards the more developed and wealthy West and indicated economic and social advancement. Of minor significance was the type of job performed by Poles in the West; it was a status that mattered.

The image of a Pole migrating to Norway, as well as to other European countries, to take up a low-skilled job has been naturalised and internalised by prospective migrants from Poland in the form of common knowledge. This image still determines positions ascribed to them and their own perspectives on and trajectories of professional careers when they migrate.

### ***Being channelled into low-skilled employment***

As I have illustrated up to this point, Poles tend to channel themselves into low-skilled jobs, guided by the stereotyped image of jobs typical for Polish migrants and through positioning themselves as Polish migrants and workers. However, employment service institutions may also contribute to channelling Polish migrants into certain sectors of the labour market. To complement the picture, I will hereby introduce a significant minority of my overall sample: two cases in which the study participants had begun learning Norwegian prior to emigrating; therefore, they were able to communicate in Norwegian after their arrival in Norway. Beata holds a doctoral degree in archaeology specialising in archival science. In Poland, she used to work as an academic assistant and later as an assistant professor for a total of over 10 years. Tomek is a certified welder with several years of professional experience in Netherlands. His welding certificates were recognised in Norway. Both Beata and Tomek had applied for jobs in Norway before migrating; however, their applications remained unanswered. After arriving in Norway, they contacted potential employers. Additionally, Tomek contacted several recruitment agencies, while Beata contacted NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration), which also provides job seekers with employment services. Interestingly, although they had applied exclusively for jobs corresponding to their professions and work experience, job positions offered to them were far from the field of their expertise. The recruitment agency offered the position of tiler to Tomek, and NAV advised Beata to apply for the position of cleaning lady or shop assistant. The cases of Beata and Tomek show that recruitment agencies and public welfare agencies (NAV) may play a role in channelling Polish migrants into low-skilled employment in Norway, being guided by maintained gender stereotypes of Polish women working in cleaning services and Polish men working at construction sites. Tomek

told how it happened that he ended up as a tiler despite the fact that he had applied for the position of welder:

They came for me, it was a Polish recruitment agency, a Norwegian picked me up, and while traveling to the place of work it turned out that it was not about welding but about laying tiles, right? I said, 'listen, okay, but I haven't had anything to do with anything like that so far'.

Tomek also motivated his decision for accepting the unsought job offer: 'At that time, I started to struggle with kind of depressive feelings as I was applying for jobs for another day in a row and there was no response'. Taking a job in Norway is a free decision; however, most migrants put all their savings into moving to and settling in Norway, at the same time, leaving behind their lives in Poland or other countries and quitting their jobs before migration. Migration, in effect, is a one-way journey for them, and the extended period without an income increases their feeling of insecurity. Therefore, numerous migrants like Tomek, without many other options, decide to accept any job offer presented to him, which again contributes to maintaining the common perception of taking a low-skilled job as an inevitable part of migration. Beata expressed greater astonishment and indignation regarding the job positions offered to her by NAV. In her own words

Just one question bothers me, how many Norwegians holding PhDs work as cleaners? I'm not sure if it's so common here that someone does a PhD, and then s/he cleans a hotel.

Beata clearly links the types of job offers she received with her Polish nationality and the stereotypes of the jobs typically held by Poles in Norway. She also states that the job offers presented to her would not be given to a person of Norwegian origin holding the same qualifications.

### **Remaining in Low-Skilled Employment**

The study participants assumed that they would perform low-skilled jobs only during the initial phase of their stay in Norway; however, in most cases this presumed 'temporary' situation lengthened into years. They remain in such jobs for extended periods of time, despite the majority learning Norwegian, getting their qualifications recognised by relevant institutions and searching intensively for job positions corresponding to their professional qualifications. At the time of conducting the interviews for this study, only three participants worked in the professions for which they were qualified; however, even in these cases, the time that had elapsed before they found such employment was longer than they had expected.

Based on cross-case analysis, I identify three types of downward professional mobility trajectories the participants usually followed after their settlement in Norway: (1) adaption to a low-skilled job; (2) reskilling; (3) struggling to get work in one's profession. Below, I will expound these trajectories, respectively.

The first trajectory—adaption—relates to 10 of the participants of this study, who, after spending some time in low-skilled jobs, found their work satisfactory, especially in terms of good wages and working conditions. Furthermore, some of them found learning Norwegian too challenging to achieve the level of language proficiency required to perform more skilled professions. The second trajectory—reskilling—was a trajectory relevant to five participants of the study. They decided to qualify themselves for other professions in order to quit low-skilled employment, including four who went on to establish their own businesses. The

third trajectory—struggling to get work in one's profession—applies to 15 participants who persistently struggled to get their desired job and intensively applied for jobs throughout months and years. Concurrently, they have consistently worked towards improving their language skills.

Among the 10 participants who followed the first trajectory and have adapted to performing low-skilled jobs, some expressed an ambivalent attitude towards the value of their education. This finding corresponds to the research conducted by Nowicka (2014a) and Trevena (2011), who found that Polish migrants in the UK devaluated their skills acquired through education in Poland. The adaptive trajectory includes five participants who had worked in jobs different from the field of their education already before migration to Norway (six such cases in the whole sample), thus it might be concluded, as suggested by Nowicka (2014a), that they had devaluated their education already before migration and, consequently, had developed a tendency to adapt to performing other jobs.

The participants following the 'adaption' trajectory accepted low-skilled job positions in Norway more easily than the participants following the second and the third trajectory. They also often do not perceive their professional position as degraded in contrast to those following the second and third trajectory and construct positive narratives on the work they perform, often by comparing themselves to other Poles, who, in their views, have to perform worse work. Nina—an employee in a grocery store at the time of the interview—reflected on this issue by asking herself a question: 'Do I feel degraded? Probably not as much as my [Polish] friends, who have to clean for example and who have higher education'. It shows the relative character of the perception of success and failure (Nowicka 2014b).

The second trajectory—reskilling—was followed, among others, by Natalia, who holds a bachelor's degree in management studies. During her two-year employment as a cleaner, she decided to take a postgraduate course in cosmetology, which she had been always interested in. She travelled to Poland on weekends to participate in the course. In her own words

I've recently established my own business, a beauty salon, because I won't get a chance to work in management [in Norway]. So, I opened the doors to the future where I won't have to clean for the rest of my life.

Natalia assumed that gaining new skills and establishing her own beauty salon was an alternative to the only other possibility available to her—being employed as a cleaning lady. When I asked her why working in management would be beyond her reach, she explained that certain sectors of the labour market, including higher-level and managerial positions, are reserved exclusively for Norwegians. She also added, 'There are certain workplaces where only Norwegian will be promoted'. Similar opinions are echoed by Dawid, a surveyor working as a wall painter at construction sites:

In Norway, there's a lack of highly educated people in general, professionals let's say. There's a lack of professionals. And they admit professionals from all over the world very willingly because someone has to perform work. Up to a certain point, this foreigner has opportunities for development, is provided with help, is treated well. However, when a foreigner starts to be higher in a hierarchy than a Norwegian, a problem arises.

The narratives of foreignness and national hierarchies touched on by Dawid were common among the participants who follow the second and the third trajectories (20 participants altogether). Their stories depict the existence of an invisible, yet encountered, barrier, a glass-ceiling excluding unprivileged nationalities from participation in the desired sectors of the

Norwegian labour market. Lack of response from potential employers has led to frustration and distress. Prolonged periods of being stuck in low-skilled jobs and intensive, yet ineffective, job-seeking have strengthened their feelings of being discriminated against in the recruitment processes and their perceptions of exclusion practices in certain sectors of the labour market. In Beata's words

No one responds to the applications I send, or even if they do respond, they simply say: 'No, just because.' And this includes archives, museums, and all the Norwegian research centres, which, in my opinion, block me just because I'm a Pole. If I was a Norwegian... Because I have master's degrees in history and in archaeology as well as a doctorate approved by Nokut, my education corresponds to the Norwegian system, but nevertheless, the situation is pretty hard.

Beata highlights that, in her understanding, it is not her qualifications that matter in the job-seeking process but her Polishness and non-Norwegianness blocking her access to the desired jobs. Racialisation include not only the personal quality of non-Norwegianness but also related attributes, like for instance, a lack of professional experience from Norway. Piotr's account indicates that professional experience from Poland is not valued equally to the experience from Norway: 'When I had been applying for jobs corresponding to my qualifications, and later I asked why I didn't get a job offer, they answered that I lack professional experience from Norway'. Some study participants like Marek explicitly expressed a feeling of discrimination and racism toward Poles and East Europeans:

There is massive amount of racism towards Eastern Europeans. (...) I've been always telling and will keep telling to the faces of Norwegians, even if I were to go to Stortinget [the supreme legislature of Norway]: 'you're racists, and once again racists. You don't have tolerance for the Eastern Europe. You've just made Eastern Europe your cheap workforce'.

The quotation shows a great awareness of being racialised and the positionality and meanings ascribed to Eastern European migrants. Ela, another participant who established her own business in order to quit her job as a cleaning lady, referred to racism towards companies run by non-Norwegians:

Now I have encountered this Norwegian racism. I mean, racism, maybe I said too strongly, but with this different treatment of companies run by foreigners and Norwegians. I will tell you, we are all equal before the law, but we are not equal in fact.

Study participants experience racialisation against their qualifications and businesses, which can be identified as Polish, East-European and non-Norwegian. In this way, the Norwegian labour market becomes a field of struggle for those who are not equipped with the 'right' and desired capital, which can be defined as Norwegianness. This is something they permanently lack. Norwegianness equals a privileged position; whereas, Eastern Europeanness and Polishness equal positions of marginality. Therefore, a Polish name and surname, being visible attributes of Polishness in the job application process, are perceived as reducing the likelihood of being invited to a job interview. As Piotr stated: 'Nationality has a meaning, and even a surname has a meaning', whereupon he recalled a story of a Polish friend of his, whose job applications had remained unanswered for a year until he changed his name and surname in his job applications to Norwegian ones.

Response to the downward professional mobility depends on the course of interaction between the habitus and field. The national component of habitus of those who 'adapted' to low-skilled jobs fitted into the field it entered. As they occupied and accepted positions typically ascribed to Poles in the Norwegian labour market, they have not had an opportunity to experience the struggles encountered by the participants persisting in their efforts towards improving their work positions. Habitus of those who followed the second and the third trajectory was subjected to more intensive and explicit interaction with the field. As a result, they dealt with the power relations and processes (exclusion and racialisation) working in the field. The national component of the habitus, which guided their actions channeling them into low-skilled employment at the initial stage of migration, through interaction with the field, exposed them to the experience of disadvantageousness of being a Pole and motivated their actions into improving their positions. The workings of the field, however, proved to be more impactful than the actions taken, and the majority remained in the low-skilled jobs, where their habitus had originally guided them. Paraphrasing Bourdieu's words, practices, guided by the habitus, in a dialectic with a field reproduced regularity (Bourdieu 1990: 56–57).

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Previous studies have shown that potential employers respond less often to job applications of candidates with non-Norwegian surnames than they do to those of candidates with typical Norwegian names (Birkelund et al. 2014; Larsen, Rogne & Birkelund 2018). Furthermore, Norwegian employers ascribe certain characteristics to potential workers based on their national origin and perceive Polish and East European migrants as manual workers not suitable for non-manual jobs (Friberg & Midtboen 2017). This study has completed the picture by revealing migrants' own perspectives on the issue and their high awareness of being discriminated against and racialised in the job-seeking process in Norway. Polish migrants believe the specific meanings and stereotypes attached to their nationality play a significant role in limiting their access to the Norwegian labour market.

This study also showed how migrants themselves internalise power relations inscribed in the structure of transnational fields and, thus, how these structures and positionality influence and shape their agency. Previously, scholars have studied the disadvantageous meanings ascribed to Polishness in Norway (Dyrlid 2018); this article drew a direct link between these meanings and migrants' decision-making when migrating and their post-migratory professional careers. The article showed how Polish migrants' understanding and interpretation of how they are perceived in Norway lead them to conclude that their prolonged low-skilled employment is a result of discrimination and racialisation.

The analysis looked at the diversification of professional careers of migrating Poles and identified three alternative post-migratory downward professional trajectories: adaption, reskilling and struggling to get work in one's profession. This analysis contributes to the literature on Polish migrants, which up to this point has focused on Polish migrants who devalued the education they received in Poland (Nowicka 2014a; Trevena 2011). By exploring experiences of migrants who value their education highly and struggle to improve their professional positions, the article revealed that migrants interpret their continued lack of success as a result of prevalence of national hierarchies.

The proposed theoretical framework bridged the concepts of habitus and field (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1990) with hierarchies of desirability of national migrant groups (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017; Loftsdóttir 2017), offering a notion of a transnational field of national hierarchies. Future research can benefit from adapting this framework for other labour markets and contexts. An interesting avenue for future research

on the professional trajectories of migrants would be to investigate what strategies are developed by those disadvantageously positioned migrants who continue or advance their professional careers upon migration. This would allow us to examine how the conditions of the constrictive field can be overcome.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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**How to cite this article:** Przybyszewska, A. 2021. Downward Professional Mobility among Poles Working and Living in Norway. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(1), pp. 35–49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.377>

**Submitted:** 06 September 2019    **Accepted:** 10 August 2020    **Published:** 22 March 2021

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