

**RESEARCH**

# 'This Is a Country To Earn and Return': Polish Migrants' Circular Migration to Iceland

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The problem under investigation in this article is circular migration of Polish men working in Iceland and its consequences for migrants' lives, as well as the lives of those who stay. The phenomenon is discussed on the basis of the research conducted among migrants and complemented by their wives' perspectives. The research was designed in two parts: one was conducted in Iceland with the migrants, and the other was conducted in Poland with their wives. The basic findings show how migrants physically and emotionally adapt to living in two locations and how they manage to settle in constantly changing schedules. The implications of the study are that, aside from financial stability, circular labour migration of male family members introduces rhythm, predictability, and a special set of rituals into the family life. All these become the household norm.

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**Keywords:** Circular migration; Labour migration; Rotation system; Stayers; Mobile livelihood

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## Introduction

Despite the growing volume of literature on circular migration, especially on circulation within Europe, still little is known about its realities (Triandafyllidou 2013). The focus is primarily on those who go and less on those who stay (Baldassar 2007; Helpert-Manners 2011; White 2016a), although they also participate in the circular migration project. The single cases of Polish circular migrants refer mainly to working conditions or national labour market regulations and employment laws in both countries and how these make the circulation possible (Sandberg & Pijpers 2016); some also touch upon the impact of migrant family on migratory practices (Nielsen & Sandberg 2014) or trends towards turning circulation into long-term migration (Friberg 2012). This article contributes to exploring these issues in a new context as it provides insights into motivations and consequences of migration decisions, as well as their 'translocal' (Appadurai 1995) dimension. It also reflects experiences and characteristics of lives lived in two locations, which may contribute to a better understanding of mobile livelihoods (Duany 2002).

## 1. Circular migration

In the European Migration Network (EMN) report, circular migration is defined as 'a repetition of legal migration by the same person between two or more countries' (EMN 2011: 14), which entails repeated separation from the sending community in favor of a limited duration stay in the host community. It is usually for economic reasons (i.e., the socioeconomic conditions abroad are more attractive than those at home). Circular migration stops when the offer abroad is no longer beneficial, just to start again when it becomes more attractive (Duany 2002: 356). Circular migrants move according to a specific schedule and trajectory—usually from country A to country B, and usually using the same route to come home. However, there is no unanimity on the definition of circular migration across the EU Member States (EMN 2011: 23–28). In the light of contemporary migration studies, circular migration shares many common points with other migration types. These are, among others, political and geographical conditions, seasonality, legality and the length of stay, permanency of settlement, policy and economic needs of the sending and receiving country, or rules for employing foreign workforce (e.g., special programs based on workers exchange or the rotation system). In this way, as long as repeated and not associated with permanent settlement movement, circular migration is a safe and flexible term to apply. It may even be synonymous with seasonal or temporary migration or transmigration: when migrants participate in the migration network (Triandafyllidou 2013: 4). They create and sustain social relations with their communities of settlement abroad and origin at home (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton 1995), and therefore their 'transnational experiences must be understood with reference to their families and households; their participation in political, religious and community organizations; and their relation to the national and international policy regimes within which transnational activities take place' (Levitt, DeWind & Vertovec 2003: 567). For all these reasons, circular migrants cannot be seen only as those who simply go back and forth across borders. Their activity may even qualify the term for a slight change to 'circular transmigrants' (Górny, 2017) to reflect the characteristics of today's phenomenon.

Circular migration engages three partners and may lead to the so-called 'triple win' situation (EMN 2011). The three 'winners' are the host country, the sending country, and the migrant, although the 'fourfold win' might also be an option if the stayers are considered a separate subject. However, it needs a mention that family life in a split-household is by no means a one-sided picture of stability and success (Bell & Bivand Erdal 2015), as well as that in circular migration projects there are those who do not gain satisfactory livelihood in either of the two countries (White 2016b:155). As the perspective of the two countries is not subject for discussion in this article, it is enough to say that circulation should satisfy the labour needs of both. For the migrants, and their families, the 'win' is definitely in that circulation is a workable solution to permanent settlement in the host country. Circulation enables them to take advantage of earning abroad and spending at home while reducing the time spent apart, as well as the emotional costs of separation (Dustmann & Görlach 2016). Mirjana Morokvasic (2004:11) calls these migrants 'settled in mobility', explaining that migration 'becomes their lifestyle, their leaving home and going away, paradoxically, a strategy of staying at home, and, thus, an alternative to emigration'. What is more, migration choices are made by the household members, and rarely by a single person (Jordan & Düvell 2003; Olwig 2003; Orellana et al. 2001; Taylor 1999), so those who stay are also part of the migration project, which becomes their lifestyle and strategy of staying together.

### 1.1. Polish circular migration

After World War II, as a result of the state migration policy, Polish borders were almost closed, but even then, some international migration took place (e.g., relocations, family reunification,

Jewish emigration, political and economic emigration, or touristic voyages that turned into emigration) (Stola 2010). All the while internal migration was taking place as well. Already in the 1950s and 1960s big Polish cities needed a workforce to recover from war losses and the country needed modernization, so the state, as part of the strategy of national development, organized internal circular migration. Inhabitants of rural areas and small towns easily found employment in big cities. Rarely did the migrants want to break away from the community in their place of residence; moreover, the cities were facing housing problems; therefore, commuting seemed to be the best solution. Thus, rural-to-urban migration became the dominant form of migration in Poland at that time (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2009). In the 1980s, due to liberalization of passport policy, limited international departures were allowed; permissions were required for exit, and private departures needed special invitations from a host abroad (Stola 2010). In the coming decade of the 1990s, lifted restrictions on cross-border traffic created new employment opportunities, departures were subject to no limitations, and no permits were required (but for work permits in EU countries). Migrants, usually supported by emigrant social networks, often chose to live their lives by earning there (abroad) but spending here (in Poland). Marek Okólski (2001:57) calls these particular movements across international borders 'incomplete migration' because they did not meet the criteria of the traditional definition of international migration. Incomplete migration lasted a few weeks at the longest and violated some laws of the receiving country (e.g., registration of domicile, work permit, income/corporate tax). Migrants took simple, but often heavy, physical jobs and accepted poor living conditions to reach their main goal: earning money. They migrated alone and chose to stay on the countries' periphery, maintaining contact only within their own migration network. Knowing that their stay was temporary, they did not try to enter the host society. Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 strongly influenced the illegal component. Today, as EU nationals, Polish migrants can move freely in the territory of EU countries, work without a work permit, and be subject to the same social security laws as all workers in a given country.

## 2. Polish Diaspora in Iceland

Polish diaspora in Iceland makes up 31% (own calculations based on Statistic Iceland 2019b) of the immigrant population, and it is the largest diaspora on the island. Statistical Bureau of Iceland noted that on 1 January 2019 there were 19,210 people born in Poland; whereas, almost 10 years earlier (in 2009), there were 11,611 Poles, and in 1999, only 1,137 people born in Poland lived in Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2019 b); in 2018 alone, 3,797 Poles arrived in Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2019a). In many ways, Polish migration to Iceland is different from Polish migration to other countries. It has a relatively short history; therefore, there is no 'old' versus 'new' immigration (Budyta-Budzyńska 2016; Raczyński 2013); there is not much information about circular migration to work in Iceland either. Four main periods in the history of Polish migration to Iceland (Wojtyńska 2011: 31–36) are marked by growth in the number of Polish immigrants to this country, motivated by Iceland's economic development, which resulted in a need for more workers—mainly in the construction and fishing industries. In May 2006, the Icelandic job market was opened to the new EU members, which brought an influx of Polish migrants; no work permit was required. The World Financial Crisis, which hit Iceland in 2008, also affected Polish immigration: many Poles lost their jobs, but still many decided to wait the crisis out in Iceland. The next, fifth, stage of Poland-to-Iceland migration started in 2012, when the island's economy began to recover from the crisis. Migration inflow has also been rising (Budyta-Budzyńska 2016), reaching the highest positive net immigration rate of 3,191 people in 2017 (Statistic Iceland 2019a).

The basic socio-demographic characteristics of contemporary Polonia in Iceland would be that of a young, mobile, and well-educated group of people, many of whom had no preceding migration experience (Raczyński 2013; Wojtyńska 2011). They came to Iceland mainly for economic reasons and planned to return after a year, two, or three, but they often stayed longer. This 'myth of return' (King 2000: 12) and planned temporary employment stopped them from entering into close relationships with individuals from the host society or from learning about its culture (Skaptadóttir 2011). Those who did not want to settle in Iceland chose to maintain contacts mainly with other Poles there, follow Polish customs, and surround themselves with Polish culture—also by means of electronic media and transnational communication with family and friends in the homeland (Raczyński 2013).

This article is based on research conducted with Polish circular migrants and their wives. The primary objective of the study was to portray migrants' lives in two locations and complement it with the stayer's perspective as well to understand how stability is achieved in a family that is regularly separated.

### **3. Method**

#### ***3.1. Research design***

The research participants live their lives in circular migration as a result of male legal employment in an Icelandic company. The company operates in the construction industry and employs workers from Iceland and from other countries. They are generally recruited through contact with the company's business office, but the research participants were mainly recruited through a network of family or friends who had already lived or worked in Iceland; one found the job online. The company employs about 80 people. Poles make up about 50% of the company workers. There are two Polish teams: when one of them finishes their shift, the other replaces them so that the work is continued.

The research was in two parts and in two locations: in Iceland and in Poland. Two different research techniques were applied. The first part, with the migrants, took place in Iceland in July 2018 during one work shift in order to reach in one place and time period all the members of the Polish crew. The interview questionnaire was semi structured; there were 19 open questions relating to the following issues: migrants' lives prior to their work in rotation system; motivations behind the decision to start circular migration between Poland and Iceland; characteristics of migrants' lives in both locations; the consequences of the decision for all involved; their future plans. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The second part of the research, with migrants' wives, was conducted in August 2018, in Poland, by means of a written questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions, including multiple choice and open-ended questions. The questions addressed the same issues as in the interview questionnaire, but more attention was devoted to the stayers' accounts and opinions on their lives with migrants physically present/absent from home.

The studied male group has a few features of a hard-to-reach population (Sadler et al. 2010) as, in some respects, it is a limited group: a majority was introduced to the group by other group members, also the camp localization, on the city outskirts, makes it more difficult to approach for an outsider like the researcher herself; in Poland it is no easier as men and their wives live in many distant locations. Moreover, migrants were reluctant to talk about their lives to a stranger, which made it more difficult for the researcher to approach them and engage in the study. It was possible only through the key informant—Mateusz—the man they respect and trust, and who agreed to cooperate with the researcher. He was asked to conduct the interviews. He was instructed on how to perform the task and followed the instructions closely. He used the interview questionnaire; sometimes he asked additional questions. The

men were informed about the scientific purposes of the research, and it was explained that participation was voluntary. The men agreed to participate. They were insured full anonymity, which was very important for them. The information about the Icelandic company comes also from the key informant.

### **3.2. Sampling procedures**

The male research participants are all members of one of the two Polish teams working for one company. This team makes up 18 permanent workers. At the end of the interview, those who were married or were in a relationship were given a written questionnaire for their wives/partners in Poland. The questionnaires were introduced with information about the research and its purpose. Men were asked to return the completed questionnaires the next time they were in Iceland. The women who voluntarily wanted to take part in the study completed the questionnaires, which were then passed along to Mateusz who brought them to Poland. This procedure was adopted because women live in different parts of Poland, which makes personal contact with the researcher limited. About half of the female group agreed to give answers to the research questions, and they were used for the study purposes. One woman refused to complete the questionnaire, explaining that she did not want to write about her life. Two women did not return completed questionnaires; others did not want to respond to the questions in writing even after they were additionally contacted by Ula, another key informant who also agreed to help the researcher. A majority of this group lives in the same region in Poland and are all somehow connected (e.g., through family relations).

### **3.3. Participants**

The male group ranged in age from 23 to 64 years (the median age is 33.5 years). A majority of the migrants obtained vocational education, one held a university degree. Migrants came from six regions in Poland, with half of them representing the same region. Ten men have worked in this company for less than 18 months, and others between 2 to 5 years. They all have similar job positions (carpenters and still fixers), which may explain why they seem to share one opinion on many matters related to their lives in circular migration.

There were 7 female participants of the study, ranging in age from 24 to 64 years (the median age is 33 years); a majority completed secondary education, two held a university degree. Women mainly circled the answers that identified their opinions best, few provided explanations. For this reason, their answers are included in this article as complementary to the general picture of mobile livelihoods given by the migrants.

## **4. Results**

The data were analyzed based on comparison of men's current lives as circular migrants and their previous migration experiences. Characteristics of migrants' lives in two localities are presented in reference to family life and complemented by the perspective of the women participants.

Migrants and their wives decided to live their lives in temporary separation for several reasons, including their financial situation, the opportunity of work in a job on rotation basis—unprecedented for them—and the set patterns of mobility in their families of origin. Before they arrived in Iceland almost all men had previous migration experience, which bears signs of the Polish incomplete migration. Before their first international migration, none of the men had a stable and relatively well paid job in Poland. Their CVs were full of contingent work; some of their wives/fiancées worked as well. They had their specific needs, such as mortgage, debts, everyday bills, or wedding expenses, which they were not able to satisfy.

Their financial situation also influenced their social status. They were outside their social group as they could not afford popular pastimes or objects. Their first international migration eased those problems by introducing relative financial stability to their households; however, it threatened the stability of the family life. A man who first migrated in 1985 lived outside Poland for four years, visiting his family once a month, or every two to three months, usually for a few days; others have similar experiences. When working closer to Poland (Austria, Germany, Check Republic), they could come home more often, every other weekend or for the weekend. A few men experienced internal circular migration, so their home visits were naturally more frequent: a 44-year old man said, 'We have been together for 13 years and I have been working outside home for these 13 years, I never stayed at home longer than a month or a few days'. The offer of work for an Icelandic company was not new to them in terms of the type of work or living conditions, but the new elements were mainly the fixed employment arrangements, regularity of payment and work schedule, and stability, which stems from these conditions. Many participants admitted that they had not been offered some of these in their previous jobs. Significantly, all the study participants, including the women, paid special attention to two factors: the contract and the rotation system. Men signed contracts of employment, which, as they see it, differed from other contracts in two ways. First, a contract is usually a fixed term and it ends when the project ends, but the migrants' contracts continue with a new project, and therefore it is permanent employment, not a fixed-term arrangement, they say. The second difference is the specific terms of employment: their work week is much longer than a standard one; it is distributed over six days (i.e., they work 2 weeks in 12-hour shifts, and they are entitled to a 2-week break). This is what they call rotation, or 2/2, or the system. The system itself is not a new solution in the labour market; business, services, and industry have applied it in the USA and Europe (Glickman & Brown 1974; Kindler 2011). The rotation concerns both the number of work hours a day and the number of days that an individual works before they have time off. It can be organized by the employees or the employer. In the former one, like in the studied group, employment is arranged into a sequences of duties, rest time between duties, and days off. The worker crews live in the base camp—their temporary settlement—and work in special, faraway locations. They return home when their planned time of work is over, but the work is continued by the replacement crew. The system is known as 2/2, but other rotation frequencies are possible (4/2, 6/2, 8/2, 7/7, or 12/9), although less common. Men's migration to Iceland had one goal: to maintain the financial and social status they managed to achieve for their families. Both migrants and their wives agreed that they would stay in mobility on these conditions for as long as possible, because this is the movement, rather than the settlement, that is their present and future source of security. Referring to their migration experience, the men admit today that so far Iceland has been the best country to work, earn, and return to spend the money at home. A few of the study participants recognize the opportunities the country offers to young people; however, they would not like to move there. As husbands, they are convinced that their wives would not accept the 'depressing', as they call it, Icelandic weather, and as fathers, they cannot imagine removing their children from their safe home environment to a new, strange one. None of the female participants considered moving to Iceland either—Poland is where they feel at home.

Aside from the obvious financial motivation reported by every study participant, another strong reason for choosing migration to Iceland as a solution to everyday problems were the set patterns of international migration in migrants' or their wives' families of origin. Some of the men grew up in families with migrating fathers and/or other male family members. Especially the children of migrants had to adapt somehow to the father's temporary absence from home, but they also learned that migration would result in a stable and satisfactory

financial situation for the family. As adults, they introduced this solution to the families they started themselves. Naturally, they took advantage of their relatives' migration experience and contacts. In the case of migration to Iceland, a majority of the men had their pathways charted: their brothers, fathers, or cousins made all the arrangements for them. Some study participants came from families with no migration experience, and they were guided by their wives, who grew up in families with migrating fathers or male family members. The women turned to them for help in arranging their husbands' migration, as well as reproducing a familiar family model. However, none of the men, when asked whose decision it was to migrate to Iceland, said that it was their wives'; they said it was their own, five men added that it was in consultation with their wives. This may be just another illustration of hegemonic masculinity still dominating Polish male migrants' narratives (Bell & Pustułka 2017). In Poland, traditionally, the man is the head of the family, and tradition is strongly observed in small towns or rural areas. A majority of the migrants come from such areas. Within this framework, it is the man's responsibility to provide for his family. This is reflected in the words of some of the interviewees: 'after all, my wife, she will not choose a job for me' (Male, aged 40) or 'from father to son, in Silesia women never worked' (Male aged 51). The further analysis of males' lives in two locations shows migrants also playing the roles of husbands and fathers, which constitute a distinct part of their lives in mobility.

Migrants see their lives in mobility as two different lives: the one in Iceland and the one in Poland. They are both defined by specific rituals and routines, which organize and simplify their day in both locations. These rituals are also one new thing about their overall migration experience.

#### **4.1. In Iceland**

Migrants' time in Iceland is unevenly shared between work and time off. Work is the central part of their day and central in their narrations. They work 12 hours a day and have 3 longer breaks. The interviewed men unanimously admit they like their work: their duties, the stress-free environment, the technology, the sense of security ensured by trade unions, the relationships they managed to create, but, above all, the money they earn and the rotation system. A few men add that the fact that they can speak Polish at work was another reason to choose Iceland as their work destination. On second thought, however, almost one third of the group commented that as much as they were satisfied with their work arrangements, if the rotation frequency was to become less favorable (e.g., 4 weeks in Iceland and 1 week in Poland), they would resign from this employment. Two weeks in Poland are acceptable minimum of time the men need with their families before they go to work abroad again.

Migrants' free time in Iceland amounts to a few hours after work and one day off (Sunday). The time after work is organized around certain repetitive activities: dinner, resting or socializing with other Polish workers, and contacting family in Poland. An important moment of the men's everyday lives in Iceland is when they get to their rooms at the campsite and cook dinner. They cook the food they bring with them from Poland, usually prepared by their wives for every day of their stay in Iceland. They came here with a plan to save, and these stocks allow them to save money in the first place and time when they return from work, and they bring the taste and smell of home. Some men admit, especially the single ones, that they do not self-impose strict spending limits, although they are careful with their expenses. After dinner, men like to meet in a common room just to chat and spend some time together. A majority of the participants are fond of the relations they managed to create at work. These are the source of the men's greatest strength and support abroad, contrary to popular stereotypes of the Polish deliberately competing for jobs and undermining each other (Ryan et al. 2007). This may be partly due to the fact that some of the participants are family or that they share similar

opinions, experiences, and attitudes; the campsite location also does not leave more options for spending free time other than engaging in common conversation or browsing the Internet.

Among the everyday rituals of all the participants are contacts with family in Poland. Asked about the most preferred form of contact, they answered it was via phone calls. Many men say they do not like using Skype because they do not have time for longer conversations during work breaks, and they do not need the visual part so much. Some men are simply not into technology and prefer traditional phone conversations; longer conversations with the family and via Skype are left for Sunday. For their daily phone calls, they choose the best moment during the day, respecting the time difference and everyday duties of the home dwellers, usually in the evening. Most often they talk with their wives, a little less often with their children or other kin. The closer the return, the more frequent the contact, and naturally, the contact intensifies when new circumstances occur at home: a child's illness, problems at school, technical problems at home, or dilemmas to be resolved.

When men think about their free time, they often joke that they have none, or they refer to Sunday. Most of them commented that the only thing they needed that day was to have a good rest from work. They spend it most like they would in Poland: some start the day by going to church; most of them cook, preferably Polish Sunday dishes; some relax, stay online with the family, and enjoy time together at the campsite. They are not much interested in spending this time sightseeing the country or venturing deeper into the town or socializing with the Icelanders. Physically staying at the camp, but surrounded by Polish fellows, family on the phone, Polish food, and following Polish Sunday rituals, they also stay emotionally connected to Poland.<sup>1</sup> In this way, in fact, they never leave Poland.

#### **4.2. In Poland**

The other part of the migrants' mobile livelihood begins when they arrive in Poland. There are two important moments: the welcome and the pre-departure preparations. First, they all go through a set of 'rites of passage' (e.g., they sleep off the trip or greet all their in-laws and have a welcome-dinner), and then they are ready to join the stayers' everyday lives. Except for the single migrants, men say that going home is not a holiday for them—it is quite the opposite; their duties simply change their character. They start their stay with some shopping, working around the house, handling the backlog of work that had built up during their absence: 'I get a list of problems to tackle for a start' (Male aged 55); a 44-year-old declares, 'I do not know what to start with – to cut the grass, or to fix broken stuff or to work in the garden – it is all waiting for me'. Only those who do not have children and/or are single say they take advantage of this time in Poland: they pursue their hobbies, do sports, go out with friends, or help their parents.

All men pay special attention to having quality time with their loved ones: usually with their wife and children, less often with other in-laws. This intense time is intended to make up for these two weeks apart and is filled with lots of activities: special dates with their wives, taking short trips somewhere in Poland, visiting relatives and friends, playing with kids, and especially, being a father. They take children to and from school, they go to parent-teacher meetings, they help doing their lessons, playing games, doing sports. They (re)introduce their own educational principles and draw consequences from going against them. They are convinced that children, subject to changes between a mother's (soft) and a father's (hard) rules quickly cease to enjoy their return. They noticed that little children need a few days to readapt to their presence at home. Teenagers seem to go through this stage more easily, acting like

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<sup>1</sup> Cultural aspects of migrants' 'translocality' are discussed more in Dziekońska, M 2020, 'Religious behaviors as a form of cultural identification. The case of Polish circular migrants in Iceland', *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, 4 (178): 97–114. DOI: 10.4467/25444972SMPP.20.040.12777.

they do not need daddy's talking and hanging around because they are busy with their own things and social lives. Women's answers confirm these observations.

The important moment of the men's stay in Poland is marked by the pre-departure arrangements. The last days of their stay in Poland are filled with various preparations: they prepare the house for their absence and do special food shopping, women do the cooking—this is the food they will take to Iceland—they make suitable trip arrangements, usually ahead of time, because this is not a simple journey to work. It is technically a two-day trip for a majority of the migrants who live far away from major Polish cities. They usually take a car, a bus, a train, or even a taxi from home to the nearest airport. Sometimes, when airline tickets are a bargain, they choose to go to much farther away airports. They generally decide on a joint car transport, and they split the gas and parking cost evenly—sometimes they travel in a group of three or four. The car is left in a car park until their return. Some even have a special airport car, which serves this purpose. The longest journey from home to the airport takes about 4 hours, while the longest journey from Poland to Iceland takes a total of about 12 hours. The overall monthly cost of such a trip to work varies depending on the price of the airline ticket (about 230 EUR on average).

Women participants also reported changes in their lives brought by their husbands' physical presence/absence from home. When men are absent, women need to perform their own and their husbands' home duties. If necessary, other family members, mostly grandmothers or friends, come to help them—only one woman has received no such help. This is also why women want to stay in phone contact with the men everyday—this is the only way to receive support, resolve problems, and go through some parts of the day together. Like the migrants, women also have certain routines that help them organize a smooth family life: 'I have my own rhythm, and I try to follow it, and when he comes back it's a little harder for a few days' (Female, aged 33). The man's return means that some aspects of family life will temporarily change. Home duties are split again; men also take some of their wives' chores; those women who have work duties can concentrate on them more now. This is one of the often-mentioned ways of making up for the time apart. And yet, from the women's perspective, the chores are not fewer, but they are different. When the migrant returns, he reintroduces a set of rituals related to his life in Poland, and the family goes through these rituals with him, so naturally, the household daily routines are also performed in a different manner.

Asked how they see today their decision about employment in such a faraway country, all men say the decision was the right one, and they all agree that its greatest asset is the money they earn, followed by the stable contract and the rotation system. Today, they are on time with their mortgage, they are able to save money, they provide higher living standards for their families, they make plans; they are well aware that they are earning their pension fund in Iceland, which is just another dimension of stability for them. All the men especially appreciate the fact that they can join their families in celebrating family occasions and holidays because now, when their schedule is known in advance, these are easy to arrange. One third of the male study participants, mostly older men with long experience of international migration, can see no disadvantages to their present work situation. They especially praise the rotation system for introducing balance to their marriages and turning their family lives into normal. Men are home on a regular basis, so 'it is a normal life now, there is simply no separation' (Male, aged 64); another one adds, 'I have been used to it for so many years, I do not feel like this separation lasts for two weeks' (Male, aged 60). They noticed that their wives also got used to this situation; their relationship is even stronger now, as they can be together more often:

[B]ecause too much time together, well, it's such a monotony, and yes, you will disengage from them for two weeks, there will be a little longing, and then the relationship

is always different [...] maybe it's better because of this system, because if I was to stay there for the whole month, that would make a complete mess of everything. (Male, aged 40)

These words may also suggest that the families who have built their lives from day one around male migration are now used to the man's absence from home; and although they miss being together, they also miss the time apart, as it is an important component of the family life.

The rest of the group, although satisfied with their current work-life situation, can point to some disadvantages. First and foremost is the lost time. A few younger migrants argue that their physical absence from home has a negative effect on the relationship, but they can see no way of changing it, they realize they will have to accept it:

It's no secret that it's changed, theoretically ... for the worse, because when I come home, I spend more time, I spend almost every spare moment with her, it's sort of making the best of this time, making up for these two weeks, but this time cannot be fully compensated and [he makes a long pause] I do not know what will be. (Male, aged 24)

Lost time also includes all the days young fathers missed their children growing up: the first words, the first steps, school performances. This time passes by quickly, and there is no way of making it up. They, and a few other men, still have difficulties accepting the fact that they are not there when the family needs them 'when everybody's things break: wife's at work, son's at school, daughter's in kindergarten – you are not there, and they always break when you are away' (Male, aged 40). Few other men also waste their time travelling to work, spending never-ending hours waiting at the airports. Based on the experience of older colleagues, they understand that they will come to terms with the situation one day and so will their family, as they all plan to live lives in the rotation system as long as possible. They all say that if the present arrangements should change, they would search for similar ones in another country.

The female study participants are also satisfied with the model adopted in their families. In the first place, it is because of the family's visibly improved living standards, followed by the men's frequent presence and unlimited availability at home. The women who have been married to migrants for several years praise circular migration for regulating and strengthening their marriages. Women can obviously see the downsides of living their lives in mobility: they are alone in Poland, they miss their husbands, they worry about the unexpected that might happen (e.g., an accident or illness), but they choose to concentrate on the positive sides, because they appreciate the present arrangements and want them to last.

## 5. Discussion

The main aim of the study was to take a closer look at circular migrants' lives regularly shared between two locations and to explore whether such arrangements enable people who are in constant motion to achieve stability for themselves and their families.

The research analysis presents a family engaged in circular migration as a fluid project (Evereti & Ryan 2011), with temporality as a familiar element of the migrants' family life organization and structure. It is split into three parts: a life together, a life apart, and a life together-apart, although the participants clearly see it only in two parts, marked by the migrant's physical presence/absence. In the life together, most valued and awaited, both partners share the same space and time. In the life apart, marked by physical separation, both migrants and stayers created their own, different worlds in which they got used to living.

The life together-apart takes place in some virtual space, which migrants managed to create for themselves and their families. New media are not cure for family separation (Medianou 2014), but both partners take major advantage of it as they go through their days together and thus build 'distant co-presence' (Baldassar et al. 2016). For the migrants, additionally, the life together-apart is one of the means of staying in Poland and thus preserving their Polish identity. Also, their 'ways of doing' and 'ways of being' (Bell & Bivand Erdal 2015) all point to them belonging to Poland, choosing Poland for their main destination.

All who participate in a circular migration project praise the solution for stability and financial security it provides. Yet, the longer the migration lasts the more they become dependent on regular income from abroad (Levitt 2001). Staying mobile is then the prevailing condition of financial, and thus emotional, safety of all involved. So far, circular migration has been the best migration arrangement for them as compared to their former international migration experiences. Similar to a culture of migration (Massey et al. 1998), the study participants managed to develop their own culture of circulation with its own rhythm, plans, and rituals. They learned to live their lives in this way, and they do not want to change it, for this is their normal life now. They are open to functioning in this culture of circulation regardless of geographical location of the host country.

The fact of male international migration in the migrants' or their wives' families of origin clearly influenced the participants' migration decisions. Those who grew up in families with migrating fathers (Halpern-Manners 2011) and/or other male family members followed suit. They gained from their relatives' and in-laws' experience and contacts. Additionally, the analysis demonstrates that the role of a father and a husband is very important for male migrants, but whether they are satisfied with their performance is conditioned on how well they play the role of a breadwinner in the first place. The work in rotation system enables them to play all these roles well.

The research is not without limitations. There were a few women who agreed to participate; they gave brief accounts of the stayers' lives. This may partly be the result of the research design itself, but it may also be connected with the women's apprehension towards disclosing details about their lives. This, plus the camp location in Iceland and participants' geographical dispersion in Poland, resulted in cooperation mainly through key informants. However, despite these difficulties, or, conversely, due to these difficulties, the presented analysis can still provide a valuable perspective on lives in perfect circulation.

## **Conclusions**

Arrangements adopted by the migrants and their families have so far resulted in the best alternative form of their lives in mobility. They allow the men to earn family financial security by working outside Poland but at the same time to stay within their local communities through the relationships they can maintain across the sending and receiving destinations on a daily basis. Moreover, this solution allows the family to regularly stay together at home and have face-to-face relations. For these reasons, it is unlikely that male circular migration turns into permanent settlement abroad, as well as that the men will be willing to stop the cycle themselves. Even if their contracts expire or a company goes out of business, they already know they will find a new one.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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