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To cite this article: Izabela Grabowska & Agata Jastrzebowska (2019): The impact of migration on human capacities of two generations of Poles: the interplay of the *individual* and the *social* in human capital approaches, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2019.1679414

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1679414>



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Published online: 23 Nov 2019.



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## The impact of migration on human capacities of two generations of Poles: the interplay of the *individual* and the *social* in human capital approaches

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### ABSTRACT

The article explains the impact of working and living abroad on informal human capital of two generations of Poles: the 'Generation of Change' who was born in 1970s and the beginning of 1980s and the 'Generation of Migration' who was born in mid-1980s and at the beginning of 1990s. Our contribution to this Special Issue brings the umbrella concept of *human capacities* with the interplay of its *individual* (cognitive and intrapersonal) and *social* (interpersonal) domains. We use data from quantitative (migrants = 4040; non-migrants = 67,174) and qualitative studies (n IDI = 160). In the qualitative data, we found out that international migration has the strongest impact on human capacities of the 'Generation of Change', mostly born 1968–1972. In general, the effects of migration on informal human capital connected to employment persisted in birth cohorts born till the symbolic 1989. We also established that the younger cohorts were, the more the work abroad impacted on their *individual*, rather than *social* domains of human capacities. Especially for young Polish migrants, working abroad went far beyond the impact on formal qualifications and competences connected to work and employability only. It related to human capacities connected to life skills of self-making, being, communicating, relating to people and understanding society.

### KEYWORDS

Informal human capital;  
human capacities;  
generation; birth cohort;  
post-accession migrants

## Introduction

After the biggest expansion of the European Union (EU) in May 2004, when Poland joined the community, Poles started migrating spontaneously and massively, mostly to work abroad. The Statistics Poland (2017) assessed that between 2004 and 2015, more than 2.5 million people left Poland for more than three months. Every third Pole who migrated after May 2004 had a higher level of education. In 2007 nearly 70 per cent of the post-accession stream of migrants from Poland was young, below 35 years of age (birth cohorts born around 1970 and younger): 27 per cent in the age cohort of 20–24; 26 per cent 25–29; and 13 per cent 30–34. Next, 15 per cent was below 45 years of age (35–

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44) (Grabowska-Lusinska and Okolski 2009). Based on, for instance, the UK Labour Force Survey, we know that despite having relatively high educational attainments (higher than the indigenous), migrants from Poland found work mostly in low-paid jobs and far below their formal qualifications (Drinkwater, Eade, and Garapich 2009; Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2015). It was hoped that these formal mismatches would decrease over time as a result of newly acquired skills and, especially, as migrants mastered the English language. As research shows, that in 2015 this has not been the case, and a large proportion of post-accession migrants in both the UK and Ireland continued to work in casual low-paid and low-skilled jobs (Barrett and Duffy 2008; Voitchovsky 2014; Kaczmarczyk and Tyrowicz 2015). According to Voitchovsky (2014), the persistent poor labour market performance, underutilisation of formal education and a sense of being overeducated among post-accession migrants deserve further research attention.

The above brief overview suggests that the relationship between international migration, education, qualifications, skills and competences is not an obvious one, even though conventional social mobility indicators suggest that Polish migrants abroad largely experience formal occupational downgrading, with just a small proportion able to get high-skilled jobs, and just a few cases of spectacular careers. With 15 years which have passed since the EU's expansion with Poland, we can justifiably attempt to assess this unclear relation between the international migration of Poles and the informal human capital – beyond formal educational attainments – connected to so-called soft skills of various birth cohorts, with special focus on generations born before and after 1989.

This article aims to provide evidence about the impact of international migration on human capacities as informal human capital of migrants, commonly known as soft skills, primarily on those born between 1970s and 1990s. The birth cohorts under the focus of this article were labelled by Szewczyk (2015) as the 'Generation of Change' (born in the 1970s and early 1980s) and the 'Generation of Migration and Opportunities' (born in mid-1980s and beginning of 1990s). In her study, Szewczyk ascertained that the first group experienced multiple transitions: from communism to democracy, to adulthood, to open foreign labour markets. They even called themselves the 'post-communist generation'. For them, both the breakdown of communism in 1989 and the accession to the EU in 2004 were very important social caesuras. The members of the second group, the 'Generation of Migration and Opportunities', do not remember communism from personal experience and were fully educated in the democratic system. They were taking their secondary school final exams when Poland acceded to the EU in May 2004. Open borders and unrestricted access to the labour markets of the European Economic Area (EEA) were as obvious to them as breathing. They were also the generation who experienced: the growth of unemployment in Poland over the first decade of 2000, reaching double digits (the older generations were already employed in more established jobs), precarious working conditions, and significant labour force surpluses on the labour market due to the influx of young graduates of baby boomers. Around the time of the 2008 global financial crisis and later they experienced greater labour market uncertainties, which contributed to their non-linear, accidental lives and labour market routes. What the two demographic groups have in common is the persistence of change (Szewczyk 2015).

Therefore the central question of this article is what impact has migration had on the human capacities of different birth cohorts of both generations? Has migration been especially important for birth cohorts belonging to the 'Generation of Change' because

they were dealing with new radical changes, or is that more visible among members of the 'Generation of Migration' who were more socialised to migration and they could experience mobile transitions to adulthood in the space of the EU freedom of movement? Are there also differences between these separate categories with regard to the nature of human capacities? After all, human capacities can relate to both *individual* dimensions of informal human capital connected to the cognitive and intrapersonal domains and *social* connected to the interpersonal domain. This brings us to the key objectives of this article: (1) to explain and interpret the relation between working abroad and informal human capital in a comparative perspective between migrants and non-migrants of various birth cohorts; and (2) to interpret the interplay between the *individual* and the *social* domains of informal human capital theoretically captured here as *human capacities* of young Polish migrants. Briefly, *human capacities* are about being and acting in social world. They offer the conceptual umbrella to the informal components of human capital called commonly as soft skills. These dimensions are continuously interconnected or even conflated between self and social environment, between agency and structure, and working and living abroad might enhance them.

### Migratory human capacities approach

In this article, we develop a theoretical umbrella framework where we consider the impact of working and living abroad on the informal human capital. We discuss how international migration affects both the *individual* and the *social* domains of human capital.

We go beyond the standard approach in labour economics, which views human capital as a set of usually formal qualifications that increases a worker's productivity. The concept of human capital is not one-dimensional, since there are many dimensions and sets of skills which are highlighted in the introduction to this Special Issue.

We consider human capital with a special focus on the human rather than the capital factor. We treat the human as an agent-creator, maintainer and user of knowledge and skills (Armstrong 2006; Archer 2007) which are relevant for reinforcing human capital. People with their agency acquire but also enhance knowledge, skill, competency, capacity and experience (Kwon 2009).

In order to understand the impact of working and living abroad on the informal human capital we bring in *migratory human capacities approach* and we consider them as both the *individual* and the *social* domains of human capital. These capacities are human dispositions that have their locus both in the *individual* features and in the *social* features constituted by an interplay of structural, cultural and agential factors (Archer 2007). Human capacities are socially situated and manifest our thoughts, desires, attitudes, aspirations and activities; they drive what we do, want and do not want to do (Frankfurt 1971). Therefore they are about being and acting in social world. Various sets of *human capacities* mean that we are radically heterogeneous as subjects, even though we may share objective social positions and have similar social outcomes. The set of human capacities is dynamic, because we modify our goals in terms of their contextual feasibility and our experience of contextual disjuncture.

International migration is not the be-all and end-all of the acquiring and enhancing of human capacities but can create significant non-formal social learning situations that clear the way for new non-material components of the informal human capital.

Human capacities conflate two domains: *individual* with cognitive and intrapersonal components and *social* with interpersonal components (c.f. National Research Council 2012). The *individual* domain relates to cognitive aspects of reasoning, knowledge and creativity, and also involves critical thinking, information literacy, argumentation and innovation as well as to intrapersonal capacity to manage one's emotions and behaviours to achieve goals, including learning; it also relates to flexibility, initiative, appreciation for diversity and reflexivity. The *social* domain covers more interpersonal and relational aspects of expressing ideas, interpreting and responding to messages from others, and also involves communication, collaboration, responsibility and conflict resolution.

There are many studies measuring the impact of migration on the standard parameters of the human capital of migrants, such as level of education, or formal qualifications correlated with age, gender and duration of migration (e.g. Poot, Waldorf, and Van Wiessen 2009). In economic human capital models of migration, the focus is mostly on the individual's decision to move and the decision is conditional upon the return he/she expects to receive from moving as compared to staying (e.g. Khwaja 2002). It is especially visible in the classical economic models of Sjaastad (1962) and Harris and Todaro (1970). Economists still continue to treat the decision to move from one labour market to another as being primarily a kind of human capital investment. For instance, Yankow (2003) argues that it is the highly educated movers who achieve the highest gains with a lag of about two years before the gains are visible. Thus, there is an increasing evidence that the returns to migration investments are focused on a sub-set of movers; younger migrants, the more skilled, and moves that explicitly involve changing jobs (Korpi and Clark 2017).

There are, however, very few sociological and psychological studies measuring the impact of migration on informal human capital.

Williams and Baláz (2005, 453) analysed the Slovak migrants to the UK and argued that 'international migration or mobility is not an automatic gateway to enhance status and jobs'. Nevertheless, migration may create significant learning moments for individuals (Williams 2007a, 2007b), also for those working under their formal qualifications, in unskilled jobs, that open the way to acquiring universal and transferable skills and competences of interpersonal skills, self-confidence and the role of social recognition (Williams and Baláz 2005). In a recent study (also in Lulle et al. 2019), the YMOBILITY research team argued that international migration affects formal qualifications and acquisition of new skills and helps to build up language skills and self-confidence and to overcome adversity (Janta et al. 2019). They also found out that the number of movements and the duration of migration matter for acquiring new social skills and enhancing existing ones. They showed that 3–6 months is optimal for the acquirement of formal skills, but 12 months is a significantly better duration for the acquirement of new and the enhancement of existing social skills.

Sandu (2010), for instance, analysed relations between migratory experience, behaviours and values. He found out that return migrants to Romania bring with them particular forms of 'modern man syndrome', which include openness to new experiences, favouring the planning of time, and supporting science and information. Former migrants, much more than non-migrants, noted that migrating had changed their way of thinking about work-life strategies, social life and sociability.

Hagan, Hernandez-Leon, and Domonsant (2015) studied Mexican migrants to the USA and return migrants to Mexico and argued that we classify too easily people as skilled or unskilled along the lines of formal qualifications while the picture is far more complex. People often acquire skills which are not validated and certified and migration might play a crucial role in the process of social learning. They found out that migrants acquired skills in specific occupational settings: customer service skills, new ways of approaching work, new work habits, initiative-taking, self-confidence, leadership skills, team work and follow through (Hagan, Hernandez-Leon, and Domonsant 2015, 32).

Grabowska (2018) analysed post-accession migrants from Poland and argued that social skills can also be treated as components of bundles of social remittances. Social remittances are understood to be all non-monetary aspects, e.g. norms, values, practices and social capital, that migrants circulate in transnational social spaces (Levitt 1998). Three categories of social skills were distilled with post-accession returnees to Poland: (1) the capability for cross-cultural communication; (2) the capability for dealing with emotional labour and (3) the capability for taking initiative and acting independently. The study analysed situations of disjuncture as a result of migration which led to learning, non-learning and alienation. By bringing migration to the forefront, it was claimed that social skills can enhance, facilitate and contribute to social remitting.

Both the theoretical framework of *migratory human capacities* and the above literature review bring us to the key research question of this article: What is the impact of working and living abroad on human capacities of two generations of Poles: the 'Generation of Change' (1968–1982) and the 'Generation of Migration' (1983–1993)?

We assume that the migratory experience of working and living abroad combined together or individually with: contextual disjuncture (Archer 2007; Jarvis 2007), social learning (Hagan, Hernandez-Leon, and Domonsant 2015), bifocal perspective of origin and destination (White et al. 2018), and mobile transitions (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018) impact on the acquisition and enhancement of human capacities and reinforce synergies between the *individual* and the *social* domains of human capital to different degree in birth cohorts of the 'Generation of Change' and the 'Generation of Migration'.

## Data sources and methodology

In order to capture the impact of working and living abroad on *human capacities* of different birth cohorts we use two data sources: quantitative and qualitative which do not come from the same samples of participants but complement and speak to each other. By combining the quantitative and qualitative data we would like to see both the scale and the depth of both the impact of migration on human capacities but also how they were acquired and enhanced.

First, the quantitative analysis is built on the integrated dataset of *Human Capital in Poland 2010–2014* representative surveys. The project was one of the largest human capital, competences and labour market surveys in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The research programme was conducted by the Polish Agency for Entrepreneurship Development in collaboration with Jagiellonian University in Cracow. The results of the project allow the comparison of some aspects of human capital between migrants and non-migrants across different birth cohorts. Admittedly in these surveys, the question

about migration was very limited,<sup>1</sup> and no information is available about the time of migration and of return and about human capacities before migration. In this article, we analyse data obtained from 71,214 respondents: Poles who worked abroad at least three months ( $n = 4040$ ; 5.7 per cent of the total survey population) and who did not report having worked abroad ( $n = 67,174$ ; 94.3 per cent).

The classification of competences offered in *Human Capital in Poland* study is based on ISCO-08 international, universal classification. The study distinguished 11 general categories of competences – cognitive, mathematical, technical, ICT, artistic, physical, self-organisational, interpersonal, administrative, managerial and flexibility – as well as 29 sub-categories indicating a given competence. With the help of theoretical framings of human capacities, we were able to cluster the competences captured in the survey as rough quantitative social indicators of human capacities, comprising of the *individual* (cognitive and intrapersonal – being in social world) and the *social* (interpersonal – acting in social world) domains. They were self-reported by respondents and counted as a medium value of all detailed categories.

Second, in order to learn in-depth about the acquirement and enhancement of human capacities with special focus on the assumed contextual disjuncture, social learning, bifocality and mobile transitions we complemented the analysis with extensive qualitative data from the *Peer-groups & migration*<sup>2</sup> research project ( $n$  IDI = 111, first wave and  $n$  IDI = 50 s wave). Our target birth cohort in the qualitative study was born between 1984 and 1993, comprising mostly the ‘Generation of Migration’, which was under-explained by the survey data. At the time of submission of this article we have managed to interview these people in two out of three waves planned for this project. In the first wave, we reconstructed their educational and labour market sequences with a special focus on education-to-work transitions ( $n$  IDI = 111). In the second wave we managed to re-contact 50 of these individuals for more narrative interviews. The interviews were conducted in Polish and transcribed. The data was coded in Atlas.ti.

### Findings: the impact of working abroad on human capacities of the ‘Generation of Change’ and the ‘Generation of Migration’

Based on *Human Capital in Poland 2010–2014* integrated datasets, we managed to perform a three-step quantitative analysis which will be complemented by qualitative analysis of data obtained in the *Peer-groups and migration* qualitative research project.

In the first exploratory step, we conducted factor analysis, in which we performed the reliability analysis and checked loadings of selected behavioural sub-dimensions of both *individual* and *social* domains of human capacities which we managed to identify and conceptualise in the theoretical part of this article. In step two, we conducted the model of multiple regression predicting the level of *human capacities* where work abroad was one of the key variables. In step three, we conducted detailed multiple regression separately for the *individual* and the *social* domains of *human capacities* as informal human capital.

In step one, we also conducted a reliability analysis along with factor analysis, checking the loadings of factors comprising the theoretical domains of both *individual* and *social* human capacities. We assumed that *individual* human capacities relate to cognitive competence – information searching, analysis and concluding; and intrapersonal competence

– self-organisation, taking initiative and being on-time. We also assumed that *social* domain of human capacities relates to contacts with other people, managerial skills and work organisation.

Twelve sub-dimensions of behaviours were situated into factor analysis (see Table 1), which evidenced acquiring one of three groups of competences – cognitive, interpersonal or intrapersonal. In order to grasp these human capacities we used medium value of the Likert scale: low/ basic/ medium/ high/ very high.<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this analysis we used the PCA method of extraction and VARIMAX rotation. The sampling adequacy of the data is high (KMO = 0.944<sup>4</sup>). As a result, there were extracted two factors – first was named *social* domain of *human capacities* and second *individual* domain of *human capacities* (see Table 1). Three sub-dimensions of behaviours –independent decision-making, solving conflicts between people and resilience to stress – were taken out of this part of analysis, due to the difference between factor loadings which was less than 0.1. The reliability coefficient for the four sub-dimensions included in *social* domain of *human capacities* is  $\alpha = 0.895$  and for the five sub-dimensions included in *individual* domain of *human capacities* is  $\alpha = 0.878$ . Factor loadings for each sub-dimension are high or very high (0.66–0.86) (see Table 1). With these analyses, we justified the categorisation of *individual* and *social* domains of *human capacities*.

In step two, we conducted the general linear regression with *human capacities* and birth cohorts (Table 2), where we predicted the general impact of international migration on the level of *human capacities*, next to other socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, educational attainment, and labour market situation. In our multiple regression model the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was between 1.00 and 2.71, so there was no risk of collinearity of predictors. We performed seven multiple regressions by different birth cohorts: 1968–1972, 1973–1977, 1978–1982, 1983–1987, 1988–1992 and 1967 and older where we were able to grasp both the ‘Generation of Change’ (1968–1982) and the ‘Generation of Migration’ (1983–1992).

**Table 1.** Factor analysis of individual and social human capacities.

Behavioural sub-dimensions*	Factor loadings	
	<i>Social</i> domains of human capacities $\alpha = 0.895$	<i>Individual</i> domains of human capacities $\alpha = 0.878$
Ease in establishing contacts with colleagues and/or clients	<b>0.866</b>	0.237
Cooperation within the group	<b>0.849</b>	0.217
Being communicative and sharing ideas clearly	<b>0.817</b>	0.327
Timely completion of planned actions	<b>0.681</b>	0.403
Independent decision-making	0.587	0.565
Solving conflicts between people	0.532	0.447
Resilience to stress	0.505	0.446
Quick summarising of large volumes of text	0.119	<b>0.828</b>
Logical thinking, analysis of facts	0.317	<b>0.767</b>
Continuous learning of new things	0.340	<b>0.734</b>
Creativity (being innovative, inventing new solutions)	0.493	<b>0.676</b>
Entrepreneurship and showing initiative	0.490	<b>0.660</b>

\*Formulations presented to respondents.

*Bolded* – significant factor loadings for behavioural sub-dimensions taken into analysis in each dimension; *Non-bolded* – not significant factor loadings for behavioural sub-dimension.

Source: Own elaboration based on *Human Capital in Poland* 2010–2014 combined dataset.



**Table 2.** Multiple linear regression with human capacities and birth cohorts

	1988–1992		1983–1987		1978–1982		1973–1977		1968–1972		before 1967	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Constant	3.614***	0.020	3.539***	0.021	3.515***	0.025	3.386***	0.026	3.292***	0.030	3.229***	0.017
Sex (ref = men)	0.082***	0.015	0.014	0.013	0.005	0.013	0.015	0.013	0.044*	0.015	0.089***	0.008
women												
Education (ref = other than high)	0.394***	0.024	0.421***	0.013	0.487***	0.014	0.523***	0.015	0.591***	0.018	0.697***	0.013
High												
Place of residence (ref = city)	−0.094***	0.014	−0.086***	0.013	−0.130***	0.013	−0.178***	0.013	−0.171***	0.015	−0.252***	0.009
village												
Labour market situation (ref = unemployed)	0.035	0.020	0.121***	0.020	0.135***	0.024	0.255***	0.026	0.272***	0.029	0.240***	0.017
employed	0.079***	0.022	0.003	0.026	−0.117***	0.031	−0.076*	0.033	−0.116*	0.038	−0.174***	0.018
inactive												
Self-employed (ref = no)	0.172***	0.038	0.150***	0.022	0.138***	0.019	0.146***	0.017	0.120***	0.018	0.102***	0.012
yes												
Work abroad (ref = no)	−0.025	0.030	0.085***	0.024	0.049*	0.025	0.059*	0.028	0.130***	0.032	0.098***	0.020
yes												
Adjusted $R^2$	0.057		0.128		0.175		0.200		0.203		0.225	

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Own elaboration based on *Human Capital in Poland 2010–2014* combined dataset.

In general, people born before symbolic 1989, with higher education, city dwellers, employed and/or self-employed, who experienced international migration had higher levels of human capacities than others (see Table 2).

While comparing particular birth cohorts, we observed the most significant impact of working abroad on *human capacities* of birth cohorts born in 1968–72 ( $\beta = 0.130$ ) – the oldest part of the ‘Generation of Change’, the cohort of testimonials of system transition (Mach 2003). The impact of working abroad persists also in older cohorts born before 1967 ( $\beta = 0.098$ ). Working abroad impacts also on the older birth cohorts of the ‘Generation of Migration’ (1983–1987,  $\beta = 0.085$ ). Smaller significant impact of migration experience is observed in birth cohorts 1973–77 ( $\beta = 0.059$ ) and 1978–82 ( $\beta = 0.049$ ). In birth cohort 1988–1992 there is no impact of work abroad.

To sum up this part, the impact of international migration on *human capacities* connected to work and employability persists in birth cohorts born before the symbolic 1989 which relates to all cohorts of the ‘Generation of Change’ (1968–1982) and older birth cohorts of the ‘Generation of Migration’ (1983–1988) (see Table 2). It ceases among those born after 1989 which can be explained by qualitative findings.

It is important to note, however, that this survey produced imperfect data and some of the variables were measured in the situations of return mobilities (labour market status, self-employment, *human capacities*) and one cannot differentiate between their values before and after migration. Migration is a selective phenomenon and it is possible to have a higher probability for migration for those that had higher *human capacities* at the starting point which would confirm partly so-called *Matthew effect* (Merton 1968): rich get richer in competences. This is also consistent with Hobfoll’s (1989) conservation of resources theory according to which the more resources human has, the easier is to multiply them. The nature of the data does not allow to distinguish between selectivity of migration and migration experience effects. It is also connected, however, with the fact that many migrants from Poland, especially young, worked abroad below their level of education which shows that although their formal human capital has not been so much enhanced, their informal human capital has been developed which might compensate the formal underperformance in the labour market. It clearly shows that migrants from Poland were overeducated but not over-skilled.

In step three, we conducted detailed multiple regression model, separately for the *individual* and the *social* domains of *human capacities* (Tables 3 and 4), in which we also predicted the impact of international migration on the level of *human capacities*, next to other socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, educational attainment, and labour market situation. We performed 12 multiple regressions – 6 with *individual* and 6 with *social* indicators of *human capacities* by different birth cohorts.

Analysing the influence of migration on *individual* domain of human capacities we see that the bigger significant impact is in groups born in years 1968–1972 ( $\beta = 0.108$ ) than in younger birth cohorts. In a group born in years 1988–1992 there is no influence of migration on *neither* dimension of *human capacities* connected to work.

During the analysis of predictors of *social* domain of *human capacities*, we noticed (Table 4) that the influence of migration is higher in the birth cohort born in 1968–1972 ( $\beta = 0.146$ ) than in birth cohorts 1983–87 ( $\beta = 0.065$ ) or 1973–1977 ( $\beta = 0.065$ ). The experience of migration has no impact on *social* dimension of *human capacities* of people who were born in years 1988–1992.

**Table 3.** Multiple linear regression with *individual* domain of human capacities and birth cohorts.

	1988–1992		1983–1987		1978–1982		1973–1977		1968–1972		before 1967	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Constant	3.432***	0.023	3.340***	0.023	3.290***	0.028	3.113***	0.029	3.041***	0.033	2.906***	0.018
Sex (ref = men)	0.128***	0.016	0.038*	0.014	0.037*	0.015	0.038*	0.015	0.055**	0.016	0.112***	0.009
women												
Education (ref = other than high)	0.509***	0.027	0.543***	0.015	0.623***	0.016	0.670***	0.017	0.737***	0.020	0.885***	0.014
High												
Place of residence (ref = city)	−0.122***	0.016	−0.113***	0.014	−0.161***	0.015	−0.211***	0.015	−0.218***	0.016	−0.278***	0.009
village												
Labour market situation (ref = unemployed)	0.051*	0.023	0.147***	0.022	0.156***	0.027	0.313***	0.028	0.320***	0.032	0.304***	0.018
employed	0.129***	0.025	0.029	0.029	−0.113**	0.034	0.001	0.037	−0.060	0.041	−0.100***	0.019
inactive												
Self-employed (ref = no)	0.244***	0.043	0.200***	0.024	0.176***	0.021	0.199***	0.019	0.177***	0.020	0.157***	0.013
yes												
Work abroad (ref = no)	−0.021	0.034	0.099***	0.026	0.067*	0.027	0.068*	0.031	0.108**	0.035	0.103***	0.021
yes												
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.078		0.164		0.215		0.237		0.237		0.249	

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Own elaboration based on *Human Capital in Poland 2010–2014* combined dataset.

**Table 4.** Multiple linear regression with *social* domain of human capacities and birth cohorts.

	1988–1992		1983–1987		1978–1982		1973–1977		1968–1972		before 1967	
	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE	$\beta$	SE
Constant	3.868***	0.023	3.799***	0.024	3.803***	0.028	3.739***	0.029	3.646***	0.034	3.639***	0.019
Sex (ref = men)	0.105***	0.016	0.051**	0.015	0.036*	0.015	0.052***	0.015	0.085***	0.017	0.113***	0.010
women												
Education (ref = other than high)	0.295***	0.027	0.328***	0.015	0.370***	0.016	0.381***	0.017	0.449***	0.021	0.516***	0.014
High												
Place of residence (ref = city)	−0.058***	0.016	−0.041**	0.014	−0.085***	0.015	−0.155***	0.015	−0.127***	0.017	−0.235***	0.010
village												
Labour market situation (ref = unemployed)	0.028	0.023	0.103***	0.023	0.112***	0.028	0.186***	0.029	0.190***	0.033	0.167***	0.019
employed	0.042	0.025	−0.031	0.030	−0.136***	0.035	−0.162***	0.038	−0.202***	0.043	−0.262***	0.020
inactive												
Self-employed (ref = no)	0.055	0.043	0.078**	0.025	0.070**	0.021	0.072***	0.019	0.052*	0.021	0.018	0.014
yes												
Work abroad (ref = no)	−0.027	0.034	0.065*	0.027	0.026	0.028	0.065*	0.031	0.146***	0.036	0.092***	0.022
yes												
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.029		0.065		0.091		0.108		0.112		0.143	

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ .

Source: Own elaboration based on *Human Capital in Poland 2010–2014* combined dataset.

An interesting difference between *social* and *individual* domains of *human capacities* concerns self-employment. According to our analyses, people who were self-employed had a higher level of the *individual* component. This might be explained by the fact that the majority of freelance businesses in Poland are micro, single-person enterprises in which interaction with other people in the workplace is very limited.

To sum up, comparing migration-affected both *individual* and *social* domains of *human capacities*, we found out that the impact of migration on both dimensions was the strongest in the ‘Generation of Change’ (1968–1982), especially in birth cohorts 1968–1972. We established that the younger birth cohorts were, the lower the impact of migration was on their *social* domains of *human capacities* and more impact was found on their *individual* domains of the informal human capital. This means that in older birth cohorts born mostly in 1970s working abroad impacted predominantly on the communication skills, making contacts with people and sharing ideas which was mostly roughly connected to the deficits of the communist and transitional educational systems while in younger birth cohorts born mostly in the 1980s working abroad affected learning new things, being creative and taking initiative.

### **Findings: the migratory acquisition and enhancement of *individual* and *social* human capacities embedded in mobile transitions**

Above we managed to establish and predict relations between quantitative social indicators of *human capacities*, international migration and socio-demographic variables but we still do not know how they were acquired and enhanced. Therefore we decided to complement the quantitative analysis with the qualitative findings obtained from people in mobile age from middle-towns in Poland who were born between 1984 and 1993. They are the ones from the latest migratory flows where we can understand better the acquisition and enhancement of *human capacities* also beyond work, embedded in their mobile transitions (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018). It is necessary to integrate both personal life and work dimensions, but also to interlink structural conditions of both origin and destination and human agency (King 2018). Thanks to this comprehensive approach, we can observe how young people, as they experience mobile transitions, acquire, enhance and make synergies between *individual* and *social* domains of *human capacities*. This is also connected to the fact that – as mentioned in the introduction – after the accession of Poland to the EU in May 2004, young Polish people working abroad primarily performed jobs that lay outside the scope of their formal education, or took up jobs that they would never consider in their domestic labour market. The labour market situation abroad, where they experienced in many cases formal downgrading but also they needed to organise their own living conditions outside of parental homes, encouraged them to consider more broadly what working and living abroad has given (or not) to them.

Mobility has long been used as a resource to make the transition to adulthood (Thomson and Taylor 2005), but the social and economic conditions experienced by the birth cohort 1984–1993 intensified these connections. As Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar (2018) pointed out ‘the transition conditions may be “stretched” across borders or normative transition pathways may be transformed by mobility – resisted, disrupted or redirected through delays, accelerations or protractions’. Our participants from the

*Peer-groups & migration* project argued that international migration enhanced transitions to adulthood. The narratives are expressed in plural which may suggest some generational experience which in this article we referred to as the ‘Generation of Migration’ (1983–1992).

[Work abroad] impacted on us ... it was combined with a period of our development as adults. (female, born in 1991)

Further, we asked in our analysis of qualitative data how migration impacted them as humans and adults. In the following part of this article we consider it also in two domains of *human capacities* applied in the quantitative analysis: *individual* and *social*. The *individual* domain is considered in relation to the development of self and the *social* domain is considered in making and embedding into relations with others.

The *individual* domains of *human capacities* enhanced by migration and connected to *self* were grasped by self-confidence, mental independence from parents and self-control but also by self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), the perception of self-efficacy increases the motivation to act in life and impacts on competences. All these aspects of building young *self* through migrancy constitute mobile transitions (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018) and ‘making the way through the world’ (Archer 2007) which relates also to developing aspirations. Through the migratory contextual disjuncture (Jarvis 2007) meaning the lived differences between the context they left and the context they entered, they were forced to confront with their own *self* socialised in Poland undergoing the intense system transitions in 1990s and early 2000s with booming higher education and reflect on their personal borders and limitations from the perspective of crossing the geographical borders.

Thanks to migration, I have developed my personality and I have fought my fears, and have learnt crossing own borders. (female, born in 1989)

Self-confidence definitely increases in this context [migration]. (female, born in 1992)

(...) This going abroad was strongly developing me, simply. I have had to gain and regain the control over my life. (female, born in 1990)

Some of our interviewees argued that because they chose to migrate, their post-graduation years were different from their sedentary peers. These years brought great changes, and did not form a straightforward state of linear transitions to the next stage of life. It was processual, complex and non-linear and connected to organise one’s life without parental support and instructions, working long hours below formal qualifications in diverse workplaces, in the foreign language, not always well-comprehended, often changing jobs, feeling lonely with no easy access to well-known friends left behind in Poland. It differed for the referenced peers as they, especially those who stayed in the home town, but also to a certain degree for those who went for university to a big city, went for more linear, supported and facilitated transitions, with gradual leaving parental home, seeking for more stable jobs according to more than less formal qualifications.

Overall, migration has given me an independence. I left after high school graduation. I left for abroad. Well, that is definitely a big change. When somebody goes to a full-time program and move somewhere else to another city [in Poland] it is different than going abroad, where one is alone – it is totally different life abroad (...). (male, born in 1993)

Among the human capacities for *being* in social world, we identified: the capacity for life orientation and giving meaning to life, for pursuing other, alternative solutions and experiences in life, for being able to do something, compared to a sense of inability before migration, for being fearless in life.

Yes, I travelled a lot, I have made a lot of acquaintances. I changed because I was abroad, I have become more open, I am not afraid anymore because I made it there. I think I owe a lot to my sojourn abroad, where I am now. I am fearless. I started simply believing in myself because when I made it in London, I will make it everywhere (female, born in 1988).

I became independent. I can do a lot of things myself. There, I was alone on my own. If I knew the language better at the beginning. But the problem was, for example, telephone calls. I was like a jelly on a plate speaking English on the phone. I could not make it. I have always asked someone in the office to talk on the phone on my behalf. Now there is no thing that I would not make myself. I am so much bolder. I do not need anyone's assistance to do something more official. I do not feel so official that I will go into a suit and sign a contract for million dollars. I think I would be able to do it now. I am also more open to people. (female, born in 1991)

The *social* domain of human capacities can be established in relation to two analytical categories: communicating with and relating to people; understanding society people are embedding in.

The first category, communicating with and relating to people (Grabowska 2018), includes capacities for communicating with other people, encounters with other cultures, linguistic boldness, treating people kindly in order to foster human relationships, not being too quick to judge others. All in all, it also means mobile transitions into adulthood, to growing up in own undertaken migrancy.

I have grown up. I changed. I changed my point of view. I do not judge people. I have got to know a different culture, that is cool. Once I was able to judge people and it was not so cool. Now I do not do it at all, because every person is different, really. (female, born in 1991)

Acquiring the capacity for communicating with people does not mean speaking a foreign language only. It is connected with opportunities of expressing own views, linguistic boldness but also social sensitivity and behaviours among people from other cultures. This is also connected with the following capacity for understanding or at least trying to understand societies people are embedding in.

(...) [being abroad] has given me a cultural knowledge, how to communicate, and it is not about the language itself, but also how to behave in different cultures. (female, born in 1992)

The second analytical category, understanding society, includes capacities for bifocal orientation through obtaining a perspective enabling one to compare and appreciate different countries and societies, broadening horizons, social sensitivity and insights into various social groups (seniors, disabled, ethnic groups); understanding 'the big and the small, the daily lives of societies'; putting oneself in someone else's shoes through also appreciating physical work in order to understand why one needs education which might result in building aspirations as a result of migration.

Apart from learning about another culture, another country, I think that such a few-month sojourns abroad to hard manual work and working hard when you are a university graduate makes you realise that you can go to any work, not necessarily work 12 hours in a factory. (female, born in 1992)

I think that we look at the world and other people, we do see it when we return to Poland [after working abroad]. We do not look with a narrow perspective, we start looking with a wider perspective, that everyone has the right to have own views, opinions and expressions. (female, born in 1992)

Bifocal orientation (White et al. 2018), relating to the reflexive, comparative thinking of both origin and destination, noticing similarities, differences and peculiarities, equips people with a kind of ‘sociological imagination’ (Mills 2000). It facilitates them with leaving their comfort zones, encountering social diversity and difference.

I only know that it [work abroad] opens the eyes to the world. Each trip is an extra experience that helps to understand a little more, see more around. (male, born in 1987)

It seems to me that in connection with migration, it is very important to be able to look from a different perspective, also see how someone else does it. (female, born in 1991)

To sum up, the acquisition and enhancement of *human capacities* occur mostly through social learning (cf. Williams and Baláz 2005; Hagan, Hernandez-Leon, and Domonsant 2015) when people experience contextual disjuncture and apply the bifocal perspectives into their working and living abroad. These processes are especially worth observing with the aim of the mobile transition approach which magnifies the impact of working and living abroad on both *individual* and *social* domains of *human capacities*. Among the *individual* domain of *human capacities* enhanced by migration, we identified two categories: capacities for self-making and capacities for being. Among the *social* domain of *human capacities*, we identified two features: capacities for communicating with and relating to people, and capacities for understanding society. This is connected to the fact that when people transiting between various domains of life and stages of their life course while being mobile they develop as humans.

## Conclusions

The study of the impact of working and living abroad on the informal human capital, conceptually captured in this article as *migratory human capacities approach* was conducted with people who had experienced or were still experiencing international migration, predominantly in connection with work abroad in the EEA. Poland was taken in this analysis as a case study. We considered human capital from different angles but especially from that which economic human capital models usually do not do – from the perspective of its informal components.

First, we developed the theoretical approach of human capacities which grasps the interplay of *individual* and *social* domains of the informal human capital. Human capacities are generally about being and acting in social world and might be acquired and enhanced by international migration, by working and living abroad. We focused on various domains of human capacities: cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal by selecting them from the wide set of various domains of competences and applied these domains both to the qualitative and quantitative data. Second, we wanted to get insight into these *human capacities* in migratory and return situations in various birth cohorts. Third, in order to achieve our objectives, it was necessary to perform qualitative and quantitative analyses because we could learn about the impact of international migration on the



informal human capital of both the 'Generation of Change' (1968–1982) and the 'Generation of Migration' (1983–1993). Fourth, we approached the topic primarily from sociological and psychological perspectives, which broaden the economic perspectives on human capital and migration. In this article, we have not considered, however, transfer of human capacities as this is the subject for a different paper.

In our three-step quantitative analysis, comprising (1) factor and reliability analyses, (2) multiple regression model with general human capacities by birth cohorts and (3) detailed multiple regression model created separately for the *individual* and the *social* domains of human capacities, we established that experience of working abroad is significant for the birth cohorts of the 'Generation of Change' (1968–1982), in particular, for those born 1968–1972 who were roughly 18 in the symbolic 1989. Our quantitative findings are in line with the economic models that show that international migration is a valuable asset for the development of human capital – especially, as we proved, with regard to the informal aspects such as human capacities. Our findings both quantitative and qualitative also show that a *Matthew effect* (Merton 1968) where migration reinforces human capital among those who are already rich in human capital – namely well-educated but do not necessarily have marketable qualifications – is partly true in the case of migrants from Poland. This is connected to the fact that post-accession migrants from Poland, and especially university graduates, worked abroad predominantly in low-skilled jobs. In many cases they were formally overeducated for these jobs but not over-skilled in terms of their informal human capital. Therefore, there was still a space to develop their human capacities, both its individual and social domains.

By birth cohorts taken into this analysis, we found out that there is a positive impact of working abroad on human capacities of birth cohorts on the whole 'Generation of Change' (1968–1982) and older birth cohorts of the 'Generation of Migration' (1983–1988). The strongest impact is in birth cohort of 1968–1972 (see Table 2) which is connected to the cleavages between both the communist educational system they graduated from and the democratic labour market under construction they entered not prepared because neither their parents nor teachers were able to prepare them for these changes and clashes. They are also connected with the higher education boom in Poland in 1990s and the first decade of 2010. Therefore, to a certain degree, migration took it over and created some social and situational learning spaces for acquiring capacities for communicating with people in foreign languages and sharing ideas, for establishing contacts with colleagues and clients, for cooperating in a group, for completing actions on time.

Migration does not influence work-related human capacities in birth cohort 1988–1992. It does not exclude however the influence on the life skills and life course transitions. When we look at the human capacities separately for *individual* and *social* dimensions we see that the younger people were, the stronger international migration impacted on the *individual* dimension of their human capacities.

Therefore we complemented the quantitative findings with a qualitative analysis of the younger birth cohorts born 1984–1993 to see the impact of migration on their human capacities other than directly connected with work and employability. Among these birth cohorts we could also observe mobile transitions and learn about the connections between acquiring and enhancing human capacities and transiting in life. We qualitatively deconstructed human capacities into the *individual* – self-making and being – and the *social* – communicating with and relating to others and understanding society. We

observed in this analysis that human capacities are packed in bundles, and the *individual* and *social* components are in constant interplay, which is especially visible when people create synergies in life between acquired and enhanced human capacities while experiencing mobile transitions. This is connected to the findings that migration impacts on people as both humans but also as becoming adults. It means that they feel that they grow up in their migrancy, also through uncomfortable experiences of working long hours in manual, low-skilled jobs, in unfamiliar environments. They become independent by both leaving parental home but also by experiencing lack of direct support from friends left behind. Looking back they highlighted the strong marker: ‘I made it aboard’ meaning that if they made life elsewhere they are able to make it everywhere, on their own. It gives them the power of independence to act in life. This proves that thanks to migration they enhanced capacities for self-making by acquiring or developing self-confidence, self-efficacy but also self-respect, especially after performing manual, low-skilled jobs. They also understood well that thanks to migration they acquired capacities for communicating which are not about a foreign language only. They are about expressing themselves, linguistic boldness, understanding that other people are also from elsewhere and they came from their contexts and cultures. It helped them to develop a distance and capacity for not judging other people too quickly. This was also possible thanks to developing a bifocal orientation between an origin and destinations which helped them to understand the differences in the world but also to appreciate what they left behind. These connections between *individual* and *social* human capacities affected by migration bring us closer to understand the complexities of mobile transitions (Robertson, Harris, and Baldassar 2018).

In this article, we did not overestimate and romanticise the impact of migration on soft skills of Poles coming from different generations. We have shown, however, how migration can reinforce the developments of informal human capital of Polish society (cf. White et al. 2018), especially among birth cohorts born before the symbolic 1989.

## Notes

1. The exact formulation of the migration question was: “Have you ever performed abroad any of the work that you have ever done? – no/yes” [in Polish: Czy któr kolwiek z prac, kt re dot d Pan(i) wymieni (a), wykonywa (a) Pan(i) za granic ?– nie/tak].
2. The project *Peer-groups & migration* (an abbreviation) with full title *Education-to-domestic and- foreign labor market transitions of youth: The role of locality, peer group and new media*, is funded by National Science Center Poland under the Sonata Bis Project Contract No. 2015/18/E/HS6/00147 (2016–2020); for detailed methodological information of this study, please see: (Grabowska et al. 2017).
3. Polish: niski/podstawowy/ redni/wysoki/bardzo wysoki.
4. KMO – Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin test for sampling adequacy to situate our data in factor analysis.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the National Science Center Poland under the Sonata Bis Program, grant number 2015/18/E/HS6/00147 (2016–2020), research project *Education-to-domestic and-*

foreign labor market transitions of youth: The role of locality, peer group and new media (with the abbreviation Peer-groups & migration).

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