

## LABOUR RELATED MIGRATION UNDER CONDITIONS OF FREE MOVEMENT: POLISH NATIONALS IN IRELAND

### MIGRAÇÃO RELACIONADA COM O TRABALHO EM CONDIÇÕES DE LIVRE CIRCULAÇÃO: OS NACIONAIS POLACOS NA IRLANDA

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#### Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to add to existing knowledge and theory relating international labour migration under conditions of free movement. The chapter focuses on Polish nationals who, with Lithuanians, are the largest immigrant group in Ireland from the eight countries of Central and Eastern Europe that acceded to membership of the European Union (EU) in 2004. The research draws on census of population data at a range of geographical scales. The movement of the immigrants between areas was traced using choropleth mapping and statistical measurement of population density and distribution, compared with the Irish population, using the Hoover Index and the Dissimilarity Index. The greatest concentration of Polish nationals occurs in large centres of population but movement took place to smaller places from the beginning and increased over time.

**Key words:** labour migration, free movement, Polish, Ireland

#### Abstrato

O objetivo deste capítulo é contribuir para o aumento do conhecimento sobre a teoria relativa à migração internacional de mão-de-obra em condições de livre circulação. O capítulo foca-se nos cidadãos polacos que, com os lituanos, são o maior grupo de imigrantes na Irlanda, dos oito países da Europa Central e Oriental que aderiram à União Europeia (UE) em 2004. A pesquisa baseia-se no censo de dados populacionais numa gama de escalas geográficas. O movimento dos imigrantes entre as áreas foi rastreado usando mapeamento coroplético e as estatísticas da densidade e distribuição populacional, comparado com a população irlandesa. Foram usados os Índices, Hoover e de Dissimilaridade. Na Irlanda a maior concentração de cidadãos polacos ocorre em grandes centros populacionais, mas com o tempo, o movimento tem tendência para se dirigir para lugares de menor dimensão.

**Palavras-chave:** migração laboral, livre circulação, polacos, Irlanda

## 1- Introduction

Ireland, as used in this chapter, refers to the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland (RoI) (Figure 1). The country provides an interesting example where largescale labour immigration is relatively new. The aim of the chapter is to add to existing knowledge and theory relating to international labour migration where free movement is possible (KRINGS et al., 2013). In this context, special attention is given to the distribution of the immigrants between urban and rural areas. The paper focuses on Polish nationals who, with Lithuanians, arrived in the largest numbers in Ireland after the accession of eight countries in Central and Eastern Europe to the EU, on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2004 (Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia). Nationality is used for classification, instead of place of birth, to include children born in Ireland, who were registered as Polish, and obtain a comprehensive view of the distribution of the group in Ireland. The research draws on census of population data at a range of geographical scales. The methods of analysis used include: (i) tabulations

of the distribution of the migrants between areas and in comparison with the Irish population; (ii) choropleth mapping of population density; and (iii) use of the Hoover Index (H) to measure population density and the Dissimilarity Index (D) to measure dissimilarity in distribution, compared with the Irish population. The associations of the distributions with broad types of employment are discussed.



Figure 1- Ireland: counties.  
Source: CSO (2007b), boundary files.

Ireland changed from being a country of emigration to one of increased immigration during the 1990s. Following a major famine between 1845 and 1847, the twenty-six counties of the RoI lost population almost continuously, through emigration, until the mid-1960s because of the inability of the economy to support the natural increase in population. Immigration of non-nationals was limited in extent. From the late 1960s, a number of factors contributed to economic growth. These included: the attraction of overseas investment in manufacturing through cash grants towards establishment costs and a low taxation regime relating to profits from exports; a policy of increased investment in second and third level education; and the benefits gained from membership of the, then, European Economic Community (now EU) after 1973. Ireland became one of the fastest growing economies among the OECD member states, from the late 1990s until the international recession of 2008 (McHALE, 2012). Demand for labour soon outstripped supply and overseas workers were recruited through work permits to fill vacancies in both professional and skilled occupations (MacÉINRÍ & WHITE, 2008; Quinn, 2010). From 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004, when EU enlargement took place, Ireland with Sweden and the United Kingdom provided immediate access to their labour markets for the citizens of the new member states, who had hitherto been employed on work permits. These workers were free to move to employment throughout

Ireland and to change jobs as necessary or desired. Their experience provides an interesting example in which to explore labour mobility in a country where labour immigration is relatively new.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 provides the context for the research based on a brief review of academic literature relating to international labour migration and Polish nationals in Ireland; Section 3 describes the methodology used; Section 4 presents the results; and Section 5 provides a brief summary and conclusion.

## **2- Context**

### **2.1- international labour migration**

Large cities are known to attract both documented and undocumented labour immigrants, because of the range of employment opportunities that they provide. The opportunities include highly paid employment for those with skills and education but also lower paid and precarious employment (SASSEN, 1996). Movement to smaller cities and towns takes place over time, often taking several generations. Since the late 1990s direct movement and dispersal to small towns and rural areas has been documented in several countries but is under-documented for Ireland (see JENTSCH & SIMARD [2009] for an overview). This levels of emigration among increasingly educated young rural people who seek employment elsewhere. Primary production in agriculture, forestry and mining activities and their processing have become increasingly industrialised. Employment has sometimes declined but in other cases, such as agriculture and the food sector, intensive manual activities have expanded (ROGALY, 2008; RYE & SCOTT, 2018). The types of employment that are available are no longer attractive to many of the increasingly educated young native population (FONSECA, 2008; KASIMIS, 2008; RYE & SCOTT, 2018).

In Europe, immigrant labour from other European low wage economies has been identified as often moving to low paid and low skilled employment in building and construction, hospitality and tourism, agriculture, food processing, retail, health care, domestic work and manufacturing (FONSECA 2008; JENTSCH & SIMARD, 2009; McAREAVEY, 2017; RYE & SLETTEBAK, 2020). The willingness of some immigrant labour to accept employment that may be below their skill levels and educational qualifications is attributed, inter alia, to unemployment in the country or origin, the comparatively higher wage levels available in the destination country, and a desire to obtain experience of living in another country (FAVELL, 2008; de HAAS et al., 2020). The acquisition of language skills and lifestyle reasons may be involved also, as among young Polish people in Ireland (KRINGS et al., 2013; GILMARTIN & MIGGS, 2015).

Some of the types of employment that immigrants engage in involve health risks, unpleasant working conditions, low wages and unsociable working hours. Largescale civic building and construction projects are frequently major sources of employment for migrant males and can pose risks to their health (CHAN et al., 2010). Food processing activities may involve demanding unpleasant and sometimes unhealthy work in abattoirs, meat packing and fish processing facilities and mushroom production units (RYE & SCOTT, 2018; HAYES & ROONEY, 2014). Seasonal labour demands in cafés, restaurants and hotels in tourist areas are frequently filled by both male and female migrant workers,

and they may work unsocial hours on low wages that are not acceptable to local workers (RYE & SCOTT, 2018). Migrant female workers may find demanding employment in elderly care homes and as cleaners in private homes (KASIMIS, 2008).

## **2.2- Polish labour immigration to Ireland**

From the late 1990s, the citizens of the eight former Soviet Bloc countries of Eastern and Central Europe, that were negotiating access to membership of the EU, were prioritized for Irish work permits to meet labour vacancies (MacÉINRÍ & WHITE, 2008). Their numbers increased rapidly after accession to membership on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004 (QUINN, 2010). Polish immigrant workers in Ireland possessed relatively high levels of education in that a majority had completed upper second level education and many held technical qualifications (CSO, 2008). A relatively smaller proportion held university degrees. Polish workers were perceived as being hard working but they reported instances of being exploited (KROPIWIEC & KING-O'RIAIN, 2006). There was some evidence that a downgrading of qualifications occurred on the first arrival in Ireland for some of these workers and, by implication, a lowering of the wages offered by comparison with Irish workers (VOITCHOVSKY, 2014). There were delays in having qualifications recognized and poor English language skills proved problematic in some instances in negotiating wages with employers (GRABOWSKA, 2005).

Central Statistics Office (CSO) summary reports reveal that the main sectors in which Polish workers found employment were building and construction (prior to the recession of 2008), manufacturing (which includes meat processing), wholesale and retail activities, hospitality, and business services (CSO, 2008; CSO, 2017a). The agricultural processing sectors were of importance for them. These included beef processing for export, which expanded markedly during the late 1990s, in small and medium sized towns throughout the country (CROWLEY et al., 2008); and pig and poultry processing which are concentrated, respectively, in the north midlands counties of Cavan and Monaghan (Figure 1) (CROWLEY et al., 2008: 37). During the 1980s, mushroom production for the domestic and export markets gained prominence in Ireland, initially based in small towns in county Monaghan and later introduced in parts of the west and the south (CROWLEY et al., 2008: 211). Polish women were employed in this sector, sometimes in very poor working conditions (ACQUEROS-FERNÁNDEZ, 2009). The rapidly expanding tourism sector in scenic rural areas, the expansion of restaurants and cafés and retail establishments in small as well as large settlements also provided employment, especially for female immigrants (WICKHAM et al., 2008).

Polish male immigrants employed in the construction sector were particularly vulnerable to unemployment during the recession that began in 2008. The Irish construction sector collapsed, due to both national and international factors and was instrumental in causing the failure of the banking sector, leading to recession. The recession was identified as contributing to unemployment of 60% among migrant workers and some return migration took place to Poland, as did movement to other countries where employment was available (KRINGS et al., 2011).

### 3- Data sources and methods of analysis

The analysis conducted involved study of the distribution of Polish nationals in Ireland between cities, towns and rural areas, choropleth mapping at a detailed Electoral District (ED) level which enabled urban and rural differences to be disaggregated further and application of the H index (see BARCUS & SIMMONS, 2013, and ROGERSON & PLANE, 2013) and the D index (see LICHTER & JOHNSON, 2006). The main source of data used in the reported research are population counts for: (i) settlements of varying size groupings; and (ii) for 3409 EDs, which are the smallest units for which comprehensive census data are available in Ireland. EDs vary in size from less than one Km<sup>2</sup> to more than 100 Km<sup>2</sup> and the populations vary from less than one hundred in some peripheral rural locations to several thousands in urban areas. The choropleth mapping illustrates the density of the Polish population per 10km<sup>2</sup> by ED, for the three census years 2006, 2011 and 2016. (The detailed data from the 2022 census of population are not available at the time of writing). The H and the D indexes were calculated for EDs for each of the three census years.

The H index measures the extent of concentration and deconcentration of a population in a region that is disaggregated into a set of sub-regions, EDs in this instance. The index can range of 0 to 100 and the larger values represent a higher degree of concentration. The value of the index can be interpreted as the proportion of the total population that would need to be redistributed across sub-regions to achieve equal population densities in all sub-regions (ROGERSON & PLANE, 2013: 99). A decrease in the value of the index over time would indicate that the population in question is becoming more dispersed and an increase would indicate greater concentration. The index is calculated as follows:

$$H_t = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |p_{it} - a_i|$$

Where  $p_{it}$  and  $a_i$  denote sub-region  $i$ 's percentage share of the total population at time  $t$  and its area, respectively, and where there are  $n$  sub-regions.

The D index measures the relative distribution of one population in relation to another across geographical areas (LICHTER & JOHNSON, 2006). It is used here to measure dissimilarity between the distribution of Polish versus Irish nationals. Like the H index, the value of D can range from 0 to 100. The value indicates the percentage of a minority population that would need to be redistributed to be similar in distribution to the majority comparator population. The index is expressed as follows:

$$D_t = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |m_{it} - c_{it}|$$

Where  $m_{it}$  and  $c_{it}$  are the respective percentages of a minority migrant group (Polish nationals) and the comparator population (Irish nationals) residing in an ED  $i$  at time  $t$ . If the minority population percentage ( $m_{it}$ ) and the comparator percentage are equal in all EDs then the index is equal to 0, meaning that they are distributed in the same percentages over all EDs and residential segregation is low (LICHTER &

JOHNSON, 2006: 116). If the index equals 100, this means that segregation is high and 100 percent of the minority population would have to move to other EDs to be distributed similarly to the majority population. The D values serve to complement the information available from the H index.

## 4- Results

### 4.1 The changing distribution of Polish nationals in Ireland

There were just over 2000 Polish nationals registered in the Irish census in 2002. At the census of 2006, they numbered 63,276 (Table 1). It is suggested that considerable underreporting took place in 2002, possibly, because the census enumerators had difficulty in making contact with the immigrants or because workers, who were involved in informal employment, did not wish to be registered. Very substantial growth in numbers took place between 2006 and 2011 when Polish nationals accounted for 2.7% of the total population of the state. Immigration of Polish women increased during these years also and male-female parity was almost reached by 2011 (CSO, 2012a) (females exceeded males slightly in 2016). The years involved include the period of rapid economic growth until 2008. Whilst some Poles returned to Poland or migrated elsewhere following the recession in 2008, notably males who had become unemployed in the construction industry, the number of resident Polish nationals declined only marginally between 2011 and 2016. This suggests that many remained in Ireland and that the losses that occurred were offset by limited immigration and the birth of children.

Table 1- Ireland: Polish nationals usually resident and present on census night in various years.

Population	2002	2006	2011	2016	% change		
					2002-06	2006-2011	2011-2016
State total	3,744,059	4,172,013	4,525,281	4,689,921	11.43	8.47	3.64
Polish (N)	2091	63,276	122,585	122,515	2,926.11	93.73	-0.06
Polish % of total	0.05	1.52	2.71	2.61			

Sources: CSO (2003); CSO (2007a); CSO (2017a).

The percentage distribution of Polish nationals, as compared with Irish nationals in 2006, reveals the importance of the capital, Dublin city, other large cities and towns with populations of 10,000 and over as immigrant destinations (Table 2). Movement took place also to smaller towns and to rural areas. By contrast, over 40% of Irish nationals lived in settlements with populations of less than 1500 people, compared with some 12% of Polish nationals. These settlements include many small towns and villages. During the years of recovery from recession between 2011 and 2016, Polish people began to move from Dublin and the larger cities to towns of 10,000 population and over. The proportions remained relatively constant in towns of 5000-9999 and 2000-4999 population, at around 13% and 8.6%, respectively, in both years. Some increases took place in smaller settlements and especially in areas of countryside outside towns and villages (an increase from 4.44% to 5.64%). The overall pattern emerging is one of some dispersion from larger to smaller places over time.

Table 2- Irish and Polish nationals: % distribution between different town size groupings and rural areas in various years.

	2006 (%)		2011 (%)		2016 (%)	
	Irish	Polish	Irish	Polish	Irish	Polish
Dublin City and suburbs	23.53	28.00	22.89	24.95	23.25	22.75
Other cities and suburbs	9.15	16.00	8.90	14.03	8.84	13.13
Towns 10,000 +	14.02	23.30	15.18	27.64	15.70	28.89
Towns 5000-9999	6.30	11.10	6.21	13.11	5.92	13.20
Towns 3000-4999	2.49	4.80				
Towns 1500-2999	2.94	4.40				
Areas <1500 population	41.56	12.30				
Towns 2000-4999			4.70	8.59	4.70	8.67
Towns 1500-1999			1.43	1.83	1.55	2.15
Towns 1000-1499			2.07	1.98	2.06	2.06
Towns 500-999			2.79	2.16	2.87	2.27
Towns <500			2.67	1.27	2.60	1.24
Remainder of country			33.20	4.44	32.50	5.64
Total number	3,610,498	63,276	3,927,143	122,585	4,082,513	122,515

Sources: CSO (2007a); CSO (2008); CSO (2017b).

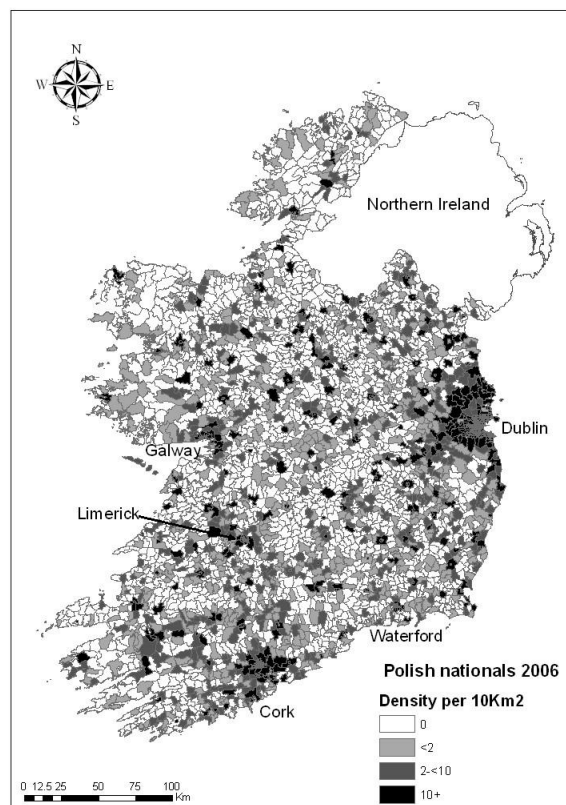


Figure 2- Distribution of Polish nationals by ED, 2006.  
 Source: CSO (2007b), Census 2006, Small area statistics and boundary files.

Choropleth mapping was used to help understand the spatial distribution of the Polish population in Ireland in greater detail, using a density measure of numbers per 10 Km<sup>2</sup>. In 2006, as

expected from the data in Table 1, the highest densities, in excess of 10 per 10 Km<sup>2</sup> were associated with Dublin and the cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and with towns of 10,000 population and over (Figure 2). The latter appear as areas shaded black away from the cores of the main settlements. There is also evidence of movement to smaller places at lower densities. By 2011, when the population of Polish nationals had increased by 93.7% over the 2006 figure, there was evidence of growth of population in the environs of the largest cities and towns but also of spread to smaller places in the midlands and to tourist locations in western coastal areas (Figure 3). Further dispersal is again apparent by 2016 (Figure 4). In 2016, Polish nationals were resident in 68% of all EDs. The numbers present in individual EDs highlight the movement of relatively small numbers to areas outside the cities and large towns. There were less than 10 Polish nationals in 54% of the EDs where they were resident; 10-49 in another 25.3% of cases; 50-99 in 7.8%; 100-499 in 11.3%; and 500 and over in 2.0% of EDs (45 EDs). The latter comprised of EDs in cities, large towns and some towns with populations of 5,000-9,999 people which contained food processing facilities (CSO, 2017a).

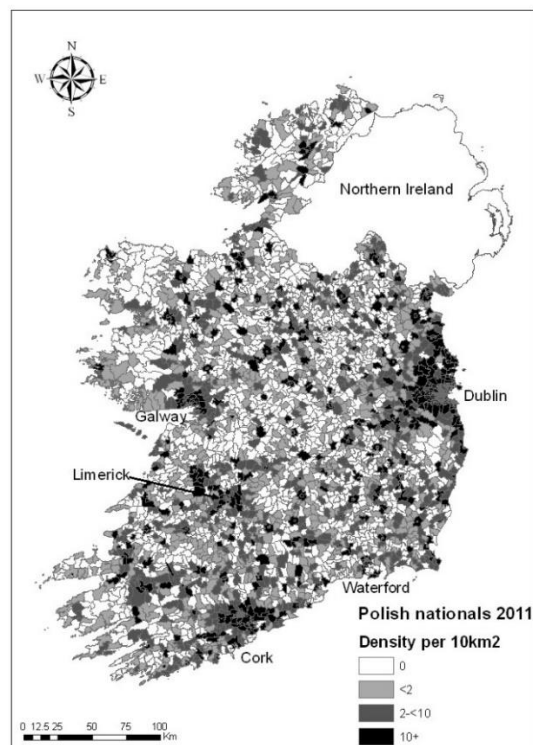


Figure 3- Ireland: distribution of Polish nationals, 2011 by ED.  
Source: CSO (2012), Census 2011, Small area statistics and boundary files.



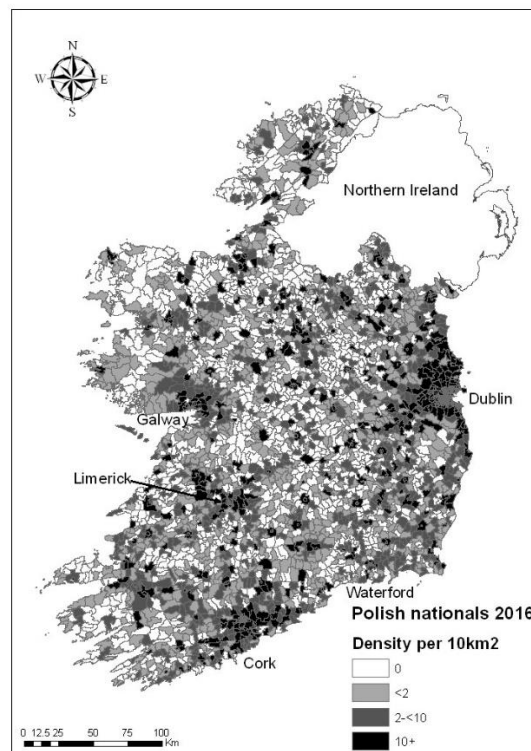


Figure 4- Ireland: distribution of Polish nationals by ED, 2016.  
Sources: CSO (2017b), Census 2016, Small area statistics and boundary files.

The application of the H and the D indices permits the density of Polish nationals in Ireland and the difference in their distribution, by comparison with Irish nationals, to be summarised in single indexes, respectively. Both indexes were calculated for 2006, 2011 and 2016 based on the 3409 EDs. The H values illustrate that both populations were unevenly distributed across the EDs (i.e. both were concentrated in larger settlements) (Table 3). However, Polish nationals were more concentrated than were the Irish nationals. In excess of 83% of Poles would have had to move in 2006 to be equally distributed between EDs, by comparison with almost 56% of Irish people. Both populations became deconcentrated between 2006 and 2011 and the Polish population followed that trend between 2011 and 2016. However, the Irish population became slightly more concentrated again by 2016. This difference can be explained by the fact that, during the recession, many young Irish people from smaller places migrated overseas (to countries like Australia, New Zealand and Canada) where they could find employment, often on two-year visas. Wages fell at this time in services, working conditions declined and unemployment increased (CAWLEY & GALVIN, 2016). It appears that Polish people moved to some of the lower paying jobs left by the Irish in smaller towns and villages. The cost of accommodation in such areas fell sharply following the recession in 2008 which provided an additional incentive to move there, if jobs were vacated by young Irish people who had emigrated. Also, knowledge of employment markets in Ireland was growing over time among Polish immigrants and sharing of such knowledge

among compatriots, which was a feature of Polish immigration from the beginning, may have influenced movement (GRABOWSKA, 2005).

Table 3- Hoover and Dissimilarity Index values for Irish and Polish populations, 2006, 2011, 2016.

	2006	2011	2016
Hoover Index Values			
Irish	55.703	54.990	55.829
Polish	83.504	82.979	81.809
Dissimilarity Index Values			
Polish vs Irish	44.432	43.412	41.496

Sources: Author's analysis based on CSO (2007b, 2012b, 2017b).

The D index measures the disparity in the distribution of the Polish nationals in comparison with Irish nationals and indicates the proportion of the former who would have to move to be similarly distributed to the latter (Table 3). The decline in the index over time from 44.432 to 41.496 again illustrates dispersion among the Polish population in Ireland.

#### 4.2- Links with employment

The number of Polish nationals employed in managerial and professional occupations in Ireland has increased over time. Nevertheless, a large proportion of the group have held non-managerial and non-professional positions. For more than two decades, Polish people have filled vacancies that existed in building and construction, meat processing, mushroom production, health care, hospitality, retail services and other sectors in cities, large towns and smaller settlements in Ireland. Small numbers of Polish men and women have also established businesses, particularly as tradespeople and as seamstresses, respectively, and one-fifth of all men engaged in the bakery sector in 2016 were Polish (CSO, 2017a). Polish shops have been established in cities and towns where there are large Polish communities (PŁACHECKI, 2012). Detailed published census data are not available relating to the employment held by nationality groups by location. However, the CSO conducts analysis of overall employment by nationality group and the results permit broad categories of employment to be identified.

Table 4- Population aged 15 years and over, at work, by nationality, principal broad industrial groups and principal broad occupational groups

	Polish	State
At work (number)	75,508	1,970,728
Broad industrial group (%)		
Wholesale & retail trade; repair of motor vehicles & cycles	22.0	13.0
Manufacturing	18.0	10.0
Accommodation & food service industries	15.0	6.0
Broad occupational group (%)		
Elementary occupations	23.0	9.0
Skilled trades	17.0	14.0
Process, plant & machine operative occupations & transport	15.0	6.0

Source: CSO (2017a).

In 2016, some 73% of Polish nationals resident in Ireland were employed (by comparison with 53% of Irish nationals) (CSO, 2017a). Only small proportions were unemployed, at school, engaged in home duties or retired. A majority held at least a high school educational qualification, but relatively small proportions held professional qualifications. The principal industrial groups in which 55% of Poles were engaged in 2016 reflect these qualifications (Table 4). They were more likely to work in wholesale and retail activities and repairs, in manufacturing, including food processing, and in accommodation and food services, than was the total population. The actual occupations held reveal that they were more likely to be engaged in elementary work (low grade) as operatives and in transport than among the population as a whole (Table 4). A lesser disparity was apparent in the case of skilled trades' occupations. It is clear that the wide range of occupations in which Polish people were willing to engage contributed to their movement to both large and smaller places in Ireland. Their social connections with other Polish people are documented as facilitating movement (GRABOWSKA, 2005). Over time, social relationships and inter-marriage with Irish people must have had an influence also.

## **5- Summary and conclusion**

The results of the reported research confirm the tendency for immigrant workers, when free to do so, to move to large gateway cities initially where employment opportunities are greatest. Less usual, however, is the fact that the Polish nationals also moved in small numbers to a range of smaller towns and villages that are widely distributed throughout the Irish state from their first arrival in Ireland. That wider distribution increased over time as revealed by the choropleth mapping and the H index values. Nevertheless, the D index values show that the Polish nationals remained more concentrated in larger centres of population than did the Irish population. They remain minorities in most small towns and villages. Their distribution is explained in part by the availability of employment but falling house prices following the recession in 2008 and personal contacts with fellow nationals also facilitated their movement to smaller settlements.

The focus of the research was on the distribution of Polish immigrants in Ireland under conditions of free movement. Some aspects of the economic, social and cultural implications arising may be noted. Polish immigrants have made important contributions to employment and society in cities, large towns and smaller places in Ireland since the late 1990s and are valued employees. Polish people share the Roman Catholic religion with a majority of Irish people, which provides a common bond (KIVISTO, 2014). Polish shops and bakeries are present in both cities and towns where there are Polish communities and Irish knowledge of Polish foods is increasing. Polish people have a strong sense of cultural identity, which finds expression in the establishment of Polish language classes for their children. Polish is now a subject at state examinations in Ireland. New social and cultural links have become established between Ireland and Poland over a relatively short time period as an expression of increased transnationalism. A generation of young Polish people is now growing up in urban and rural Ireland. Their career, social and migration decisions are likely to have important implications for the future characteristics and geographical expressions of Irish-Polish relations.

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