

**Explaining Variation in Settlement Patterns:
Ukrainians and Vietnamese in Poland**

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is patterns of settlement migration in Poland. In particular, we are interested in modes of economic activity and degree of integration of migrants in the receiving country. Our analysis is based on original data pertaining to two groups of migrants residing in Poland: Ukrainians and Vietnamese. These groups were chosen because they are the largest migrant groups in Poland, and because they are the most distinct from each other along a vector of key migration-related characteristics (distance from origin and language dissimilarity, to name but two).

A representative survey of Vietnamese and Ukrainian migrants was carried out in 2005 by the Centre of Migration Research at Warsaw University. The survey was confined to Warsaw district because by and large it is the capital that attracts foreigners. The sampling frame for the survey was based on the permanent residence permit register, which records permanent residents staying in Poland. Thus, in our analysis settlement migrants were defined as those who hold a permanent residence permit. (In Poland, the permanent residence permit may be issued after five years of residence, and it grants a right to work without a work permit.) We interviewed 167 Ukrainian migrants and 174 Vietnamese migrants.

We study the patterns of settlement of Ukrainians and Vietnamese. These patterns include measures of economic activity and degrees of integration. We find a significant difference between the two groups by the mode of employment: Vietnamese are largely self-employed (three fourth), and over two thirds of them engage in trade, while Ukrainians are largely employees working for others (two thirds). The traditional approach of explaining such differences draws on human capital characteristics, risk-bearing attitudes, access to credit, and the like. We argue, however, that there is an additional explanation for the observed difference which (co-)rests with the process of migration itself, and with the structure of migrants' families.

Because of the great geographical distance between Poland and Vietnam, migration by a Vietnamese is a major undertaking, involving a high cost of movement. Since the penalty for a failed move could be very harsh, successful migration requires highly accurate information. In the case of migration by Ukrainians, however, the role of and the need for accurate information is muted; in case of failure, a migration “correction” (for example, return migration) is relatively easy. Thus, Vietnamese need to, and actually rely much more than Ukrainians on network capital and consequently, they are more likely to be firmly “networked” after their arrival in Poland. Conversely, Ukrainian migrants have little network bonds. Vietnamese migrants are both bound by and continuously draw upon the Vietnamese network. This entails different venues of access to the receiving economy: Vietnamese work for themselves, so to speak, establishing small businesses, Ukrainians work for others for wage.

Contributing factors to the self-employment / employment-for-wage differentiation are the pattern and timing of marriage: Vietnamese marry mostly prior to their migration and hence the incidence of intermarriages with Poles is relatively little, while most Ukrainians marry subsequent to their migration, and intermarry greatly. These differences translate into different degrees of access to job opportunities in the receiving economy.

Language is a contributing factor too: the Ukrainian language is quite similar to the Polish language, and being married to a Pole further polishes language proficiency. Thus, Ukrainians find it relatively easy to learn about employment opportunities in the receiving economy, as compared to Vietnamese. However, language proficiency is determined endogenously: people can invest in language acquisition. The network affiliation alluded to above provides different incentives to master Polish; being part of an enclave weakens the incentive to reach out.

Gender could be another contributing factor. Ukrainian migrants are largely women (67 percent). Vietnamese migrants are largely men (only 40 percent of the Vietnamese migrants are women). To the extent that women are more inclined than men to choose occupations where work is for wage, Ukrainian migrants will be less likely to be observed to work for themselves.