



# *Polonia Reykjavik 2010*

## Preliminary Report

November 2011

Hallfríður Þórarinsdóttir  
Anna Wojtynska



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**MIRRA**

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## Introduction

This is a preliminary report based on a survey conducted by MIRRA/CIRRA on the very first systematic mapping of working and living conditions amongst Polish labor migrants in Reykjavik. In the years from 2004 to 2008, the number of Polish migrant workers on the Icelandic labor market increased more than six times. Poles far exceeded any other migrant group in the country constituting over forty five percent of all foreign citizens at its peak.

This time period is marked at one end by the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in May 2004, when Poland, along with nine other states, became a member and at the other end with the sudden economic crisis that hit Iceland and most western economies in October 2008. More importantly, the period was characterized by outstanding economic growth, represented most clearly in an unmatched construction bubble. In Iceland the economy underwent an extraordinary expansion that began with fanfare in 2003 and ended in a near collapse of the national economy in the fall of 2008. During the boom years, Iceland became a major attraction for migrant workers, particularly Poles. Job demand seemed insatiable and unemployment was at a record low with the national average around one percent and even lower amongst Polish migrants where it went below one percent, making it the lowest among any foreign migrant group or citizens whatsoever (Sigurðsson and Arnarson 2011a). However, Poles were not only coming to Iceland at the time.

In wake of the EU enlargement, massive migration from Eastern to Western Europe began. People in thousands and hundreds of thousands moved to the west, the largest groups coming from Poland (Black et al. 2010b). At that time Poland suffered from high unemployment which in 2003 stood at 20% on average (Drinkwater et al. 2009). The migration wave from east to west was unexpected and contrary to most estimates.<sup>1</sup> Of particular countries, the United Kingdom received the highest number, where on estimate as many as half a million Poles migrated in 2007 alone (Kaczmarczyk 2010). The second most popular migration destination for Poles was Ireland, where their number was at its peak at around 320 thousand on estimate (de Burca 2011). Large numbers also went to the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway and some to Iceland (Dølvik and Eldring 2008). According to Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, as many as 1.5 million Poles were living in EU/EEA countries other than Poland in January 2009 (Iglicka and Ziolk-Skrzypczak, 2010). At the same time their number reached its peak in Iceland and came close to twelve thousand, a number which, though dwarfed by the one and a half million Poles on the move to the West at the time, is still considerable in an Icelandic context where the total population has never exceeded 320 thousand.

Polish migrants are by far the largest group of international migrants ever to have migrated to Iceland in modern times. The total number of Polish citizens residing in Iceland reached the

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<sup>1</sup> No estimates were made by Icelandic authorities on probable inflow of migrants resulting from the enlargement of the EU.

highest peak in the census of January 2009 when they constituted 46% of all foreign citizens ([www.hagstofa.is](http://www.hagstofa.is)). In 2007 the inflow to Iceland from the ten new EU member states was 22.2%, of which Poles constituted 18% (<http://ww3.dst.dk/pxwebNordic/dialog/statfile1.asp>). During the peak of the economic expansion, Poles constituted a little over 4% of employees active on the Icelandic labor market (Sigurðsson og Arnarson 2011a).

The tremendous migration from East Europe to the West stirred interest amongst migration scholars in Poland and of particular interest were the new and relatively new destinations for Poles, namely Norway and Iceland. The survey presented in this report is thus a result of a part of an international research project called *Mobility and Migrations at the Time of Transformation - Methodological Challenge* which was funded by EEA grants, *European Grants* and *Norwegian Grants*. The research was coordinated by The Centre of Migration Research (CMR) at Warsaw University. A similar survey was conducted amongst Polish labor migrants in Oslo in 2010 by Fafo - Institute for Applied International Studies in Oslo. The Reykjavik survey was carried out by MIRRA/CIRRA and conducted between May and August 2010. The analysis presented in this report is based on a survey of Polish migrants who lived in the Reykjavik metropolitan area in 2010.

The aim of the project was to create an infrastructure of data-gathering mechanisms concerning migrations and verifying their quality. This entailed:

- A. A critical review of all the existing statistical data concerning migration from and to Poland, including statistics from the destination countries.
- B. An analysis of relations between migration and the labor market, particularly in the context of statistical analysis of the labor market.
- C. The adjustment the migration research methodology to the current characteristics of migration phenomena, where a major part of migration flows is of a pendular nature and therefore inconsistent with traditional research methods applied thus far.
- D. The preparation of reference and recommendation concerning the data accumulation system regarding mobility and implementation of a part of suggested solutions.

In short the primary research focus was to compare and evaluate different survey methods and their applicability to immigrant populations from and to Poland. In addition statistics in the receiving countries was to be compared and contrasted with the data received in the survey. In order to collect data in Reykjavik, MIRRA/CIRRA conducted a survey and interviewed close to 500 Poles, men and women 18 years and older, living in the greater Reykjavík area. The interviews were conducted from May to early August 2010.

As stated earlier this preliminary report introduces the very first systematic mapping of working and living conditions amongst Polish labor migrants in Reykjavik. As a target group migrant laborers can be hard to reach and experience has shown that the use of traditional quantitative selecting methods to reach out to them can be problematic. This mapping is an experimentation of a certain methodology where the aim is to produce data on the Polish

migrant laborers to Iceland. The methodology is called *Respondent Driven Sample – RDS* and was originally designed to reach out to drug abusers and individuals who have tested HIV positive in the U.S. It was used in a research on immigrants for the first time in a pilot study conducted on Polish migrant workers in the Oslo area in 2007 (Friberg and Tyldum 2007). To the knowledge of MIRRA/CIRRA, the RDS methodology has never been used in Iceland before.

Massive unemployment ensued in the wake of the economic crisis, reaching an unprecedented 9% on national average in the year 2010 (VMST). Poles had been numerous in sectors that had expanded disproportionately during the boom era. One such industry, the construction industry, was hit especially hard after the crisis and came close to a collapse (Wojtynska and Zielsinska 2010). This near-collapse of the construction industry in turn resulted in much higher unemployment rates amongst Polish migrants than the national average and was even higher in the Reykjavik area. These shifts in labor participation are reflected in the survey.

The research project, including preparation, organizing, supervision and overall responsibility, was in the hands of Hallfríður Þórarinsdóttir Ph.D. and chair of CIRRA. Training of interviewees and all supervision of the interviews and various kinds of research assistance was in the hands of Anna Wojtynska, a Ph.D. student in anthropology at the University of Iceland, who worked on the research from the beginning. Coordination of the research was conducted by Paweł Kaczmarczyk, assistant professor in economics at The University of Warsaw.

The research *was funded by a grant from EEA Grants and Norway Grants* - grants aimed at reducing economic and social disparities in the European Economic Area.

In addition to the introduction, the report is divided into four parts. It begins with a brief overview of migration to Iceland in recent times and its main characteristics. Next is a short review of Icelandic databases useful in migration studies. The third part gives a description of the design of the Reykjavik RDS research and its process and development in Reykjavik. In the fourth section preliminary research outcomes are presented followed by a conclusion.

## **I. Migration in Iceland: major characteristics**

In only a few years Icelandic society has undergone major demographic transformation. For centuries the country was one of the most homogenous and sparsely populated countries in the Western world. Class difference set aside, extreme homogeneity characterized the society on levels of language, religion and culture. This homogeneity is now part of history. Yet as late as the middle of the twentieth century, foreign citizens were less than 2% of the total population and remained so for decades.<sup>2</sup> The 1980s and the 1990s saw some increase, when foreign workers started coming to work in fishing plants around the coast. In 1997 the percentage passed the 2% mark and has been increasing ever since. In 2004 foreign citizens were 3.5% of the total population.

The period from 2005 until the end of 2008 witnessed an unparalleled economic expansion, pulling foreign migrants to Iceland in unprecedented numbers, resulting in the doubling of the number of foreign citizens. The economic expansion came to an abrupt end in the fall of 2008 when three of the country's biggest banks went bankrupt. The financial crisis slowed migration flows almost to a halt, while outflows of foreign nationals increased. Consequently the population of foreign citizens dropped from 24.379 or from 7.6% of the overall population at the end of 2008 down to 21.701 or 6.8% at the beginning of January 2010. It is worth noting that during the years from 1991-2009 almost 8000 (7.859) foreign citizens were granted Icelandic citizenship.

As already mentioned, there are two fundamental incentives that caused this tremendous and sudden increase in immigration in Iceland. The first was due to the enlargement of the European Union when ten new member states entered the union in May 2004, thereby becoming a part of the common European (EU and EEA) labor market. Citizens of the new member states were, however, still obliged to apply for a work permit as Icelandic authorities utilized a two year adjustment period – granted by the European Union - before the free flow of people would come into effect. Foreign citizens who sought work in Iceland therefore still needed a work permit in order to be able to work in the country. Work permits were issued to the employer, not the employee. Yet in spite of this obstacle, immigration was considerable. On May 1, 2006 the restrictions were lifted and in 2007 the proportion of foreign citizens had reached 6%.

The second reason for the sudden increase of foreign citizens was the fast growing economy, which called for an unprecedented need for labor. At the peak of the economic boom in 2007, up to ten percent of the entire labor force in Iceland were foreign citizens and it is estimated

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<sup>2</sup> All figures in the introduction are retrieved from Iceland Statistics at: [www.hagstofa.is](http://www.hagstofa.is)

that, within the construction sector alone, the percentage of migrant workers was as high as 40%. Due to the current economic crises, the flow of incoming foreign laborers has come to a halt and some have returned to their country of origin, although exact figures on returnees are not yet available.

Intensity and speed have characterized immigration to Iceland, but there are other things that give immigration its distinct character (Þórarinsdóttir et al. 2009). The number of characteristics presented here is not exhaustive but should rather be seen as indicative.

The first characteristic of immigration in Iceland is the European bias. Although immigrants coming to Iceland hail from all over the world (countries of birth are well over 170), the vast majority comes from Europe, including the Nordic countries, or around 85% (exactly 84% in January 2010). The continent following Europe is Asia, where 9% of Iceland's foreign citizens originate (January 2010). The biggest sending countries of Asia are The Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. However, Poles are and have been by far the largest single national group, constituting 44% of all foreign citizens in the country in January 2010 ([www.hagstofa.is](http://www.hagstofa.is)).

The second characteristic of immigration in Iceland relates to the geographical dispersion of immigrants. Unlike the neighboring countries where immigrants are often clustered in cities and larger towns, immigrants in Iceland are dispersed rather evenly around the country. The relative even dispersion has roots in the fact the migrants initially sought work in the fishing towns around the coast. As would be expected, foreign migrants are more numerous in those areas of the country where economic expansion was the fastest during the booming years, i.e., particularly in the Reykjavik metropolitan area and the South West.

The third characteristic of immigration in Iceland relates to gender. In the early years of migration, women outnumbered men by three to two, but during the years of economic expansion there was a complete turnaround when men rapidly outnumbered women by three to two. Since the onset of the crisis the gender ratio is finding a balance and in 2011 is almost even.

The fourth characteristic of the immigrant population in Iceland relates to age. Unlike patterns in the national population where age distribution is relatively even, the vast bulk of the immigrant population falls into age categories between twenty and fifty years. The concentration of young adults and relatively few children and elderly can be explained by reference to the relatively short history of international migration to the country.

The fifth characteristic that sets the immigrant community in Iceland apart from immigrant communities in neighboring countries relates to religious affiliation. In light of the discussion thus far, it should not come as a surprise that most immigrants in Iceland are Christian. However, unlike native Icelanders who are Protestants and belong for the most part to the National Evangelical Lutheran Church, most of the Christian immigrants are Catholics, which

together make up the three largest immigrant groups: the Poles, the Lithuanians and Filipinos. Catholics in the country constitute just over 3%, whereas registered Buddhists fall under 0.30% and registered Muslims are 0.12 % ([www.hagstofa.is](http://www.hagstofa.is)).

## **II. Icelandic databases useful in migration analysis**

There is only one government institution in Iceland that exclusively works on gathering data on migrants in and immigration to the country: The Directorate of Immigration – Útlendingastofnun Íslands, an institution that issues short and long term resident permits. Citizens from countries outside the EU/EEA are obliged to apply for a resident permit. Other public institutions in Iceland that gather data on migrants in and immigration to the country do so only as part of their operation. Specific databases on migration are available as subdivisions within several institutions. Of these the most important institutions are:

- a. Statistics Iceland (Hagstofa Íslands)
- b. Directorate of Labor of Iceland (Vinnumálastofnun Íslands)
- c. Directorate of Internal Revenue (Skattstjóri ríkisins)

### **Statistics Iceland - Hagstofa Íslands**

Founded in 1914, Statistics Iceland is the center for official statistics in Iceland and collects, processes and disseminates data on the economy and society. All demographic information including statistical information on migration and immigrants falls under the Division of Social Statistics. The Population Statistics Department, a subdivision of Statistics Iceland, produces demographic and population statistics including statistics on all registered migrants and foreigners residing in Iceland as well as statistics on foreign citizens who have received Icelandic citizenship.

### **Icelandic Directorate of Immigration - Útlendingastofnun Íslands**

The most extensive objective of the Directorate is the issuing of residence permits. The Icelandic Directorate of Immigration handles all applications for residence permits, whether in conjunction with work, or, for example, family reunification, student permits, au-pair arrangements, visas, and requests for asylum.

## **The Directorate of Labor of Iceland - Vinnumálastofnun Íslands<sup>3</sup>**

The Directorate of Labor issues work permits to all foreign workers outside the EU and EEA as well as to citizens of Rumania and Bulgaria. It also oversees funds, accounts and the daily operation of the Unemployment Fund. The Labor Directorate supervises, manages and coordinates the activities of all employment services around the country and is responsible for The Unemployment Benefit Fund, The Wage Guarantee Fund, The Childbirth Leave Fund and payments to parents of children with long term illness.

The Directorate of Labor gathers information at regular intervals and both nationally and regionally on the employment situation, unemployment and employment prospects. It also monitors the composition of the workforce in Iceland and makes regular surveys of labor demand and the outlook and need for labor in specific occupations. Data collected at The Directorate of Labor such as monthly reports and annual figures are available on the institute's web page.

## **Directorate of Internal Revenue - Skattstjóri ríkisins**

The Directorate of Internal Revenue is the highest tax authority in the country. It keeps records of all filed income taxes and data on all registered tax payers, classified by citizenship, age, sex and place of residence in the country. The Directorate of Internal Revenue does not have an open database as such. However the institute provides statistics on registered taxpayers filed by citizenship, age and gender, which are available upon request.

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<sup>3</sup> The Directorate of Labor was established in 1998. Prior to that all operations were carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

### III. Design and process of Polonia Reykjavik RDS

As already mentioned, the sample in the survey was selected using Respondent Driven Sampling methodology - RDS. In simplified terms it may be said that RDS combines "snowball sampling" (asking individuals to recruit others they know who in turn recruit others they know and so on) with financial incentive and a statistical software or a mathematical model that weights the sample to compensate for the fact that the sample was collected in a non-random way.<sup>4</sup>

The RDS methodology, which originates in the United States, is especially designed to target populations such as drug abusers that might be hidden or sensitive in one way or another and where no sampling frame exists (Heckathorn 1997). RDS calls for the use of a two-step financial incentive: participants received payment for their own participation; they also received financial reward for recruiting others to participate. However, each individual could not recruit more than two other persons and was given a pair of numbered coupons to give to the persons he/she recruited who in turn had to submit their coupon upon registering in the survey. Thus no one could participate in the survey unless they had a numbered coupon. The recruiter in turn held on to a numbered voucher. Once the two recruitees had participated in the survey, the original recruiter could submit his voucher and redeem his payment.

In the Reykjavik survey financial incentives for individual participation was 2000 ISK - around \$18 at the time - and then 1000 ISK for each other respondent, so all in all it was possible for one person to earn 4000 ISK or around \$36.<sup>5</sup> This form of secondary incentive motivates recruiting others into the study and by so doing "peers' social influence is harnessed on the behalf of the sampling process" (Heckathorn 1997:177).<sup>6</sup>

#### Questionnaire

The Reykjavik survey used a standardized questionnaire that had been used by Fafo in the Oslo survey in early 2010 albeit with some minor modification. These modifications should not prevent comparisons between the two surveys, however. The Reykjavik version departs from the Oslo version by omitting one section (information about job tasks and work environment) and replacing it with a section concerning the impact of the economic crisis that hit the country in the fall of 2008. As the crisis brought about a sudden collapse within some sectors, such as the construction industry where Poles were numerous, and as the crisis was followed by mass unemployment, it was necessary to include questions on how the crisis had impacted peoples' lives and living standard. Other modifications of the questionnaire from the

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.respondentdrivensampling.org/>

<sup>5</sup> This is an approximate of the ratio of the the US dollar against the ISK krona in the summer of 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Further description of the research is to be found at: <http://www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/projekt/120/>

original Oslo version pertain to language use and language knowledge, i.e., what language people used at work and/or in their interaction with Icelanders. Modifications aside, other parts of the questionnaire were comparable with the Oslo version which consisted of 230 questions that were divided into several sections: personal information, educational background and work experience in Poland, decision to come to Iceland, employment, unemployment, information about company, workplace information, terms and condition at work, work related problems, remittances, financial crisis in Iceland, network information, trade unions, language knowledge, travel home, general welfare and future plans.

Once the questionnaire was ready, seven Polish nationals were recruited and trained to become interviewers. Interviews were conducted at the facilities of MIRRA/CIRRA in The Reykjavik Academy located close to the city center. Four rooms were used for the interviews and access to a fifth was available in the event of an urgent need. The number of rooms for interviews limited the total number of subjects that could be interviewed at any one time. The fieldwork started on May 16<sup>th</sup> and was over with by August 3<sup>rd</sup>, giving a fieldwork time of about twelve weeks in total. The original plan was to reach 500 Poles in the greater Reykjavik metropolitan area, but at the end of the survey the total number of participants was a little less, viz., 480. However, that number equals ten percent of all Poles eighteen years and older living in the area and born in Poland. The survey was intended to be confined to the Polish population in the Reykjavik metropolitan area but it transpired that a handful of participants came from communities in the Reykjanes peninsula, about 40-50 kilometers away.

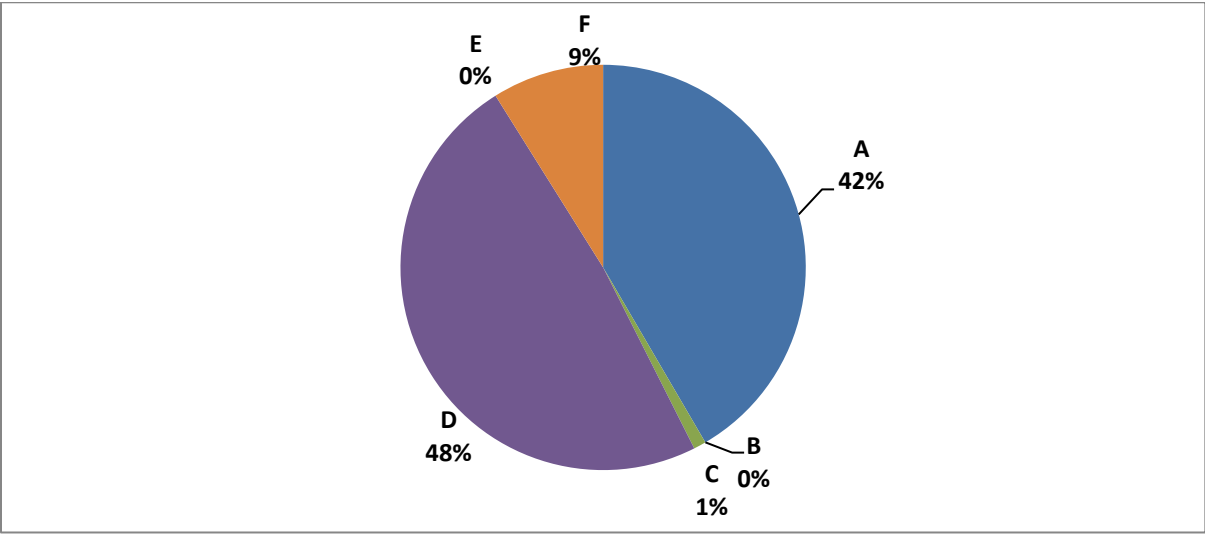
## Research process

The RDS methodology calls for handpicked participants at the very beginning. These participants or ‘seeds’ are selected in such a fashion so as prevent any kind of biases and to ensure an even distribution of core variables (age, gender, work sector) in the sample. The survey started with four seeds but two more were recruited shortly thereafter. Selection of the seeds was primarily based on the industries that had received the highest number of Poles in the years prior to the survey. These were the building industry, food-processing, fish-processing plant (due to long history of hiring Poles in this sector), trade and wholesale, and nursing and care. This plan did not pan out, however. For example, recruiting anyone from the construction industry turned out to be unsuccessful. So the ‘seeds’ that were eventually selected came from:

- A. Food processing.
- B. Health care (caretaking of the disabled).
- C. Trade and wholesale.
- D. Fish processing.
- E. Healthcare (nurse).
- F. Retail (hardware store).

Interestingly, while all seeds participated in the survey, they varied tremendously in terms of numbers of subjects brought in. Two (B and E) did not bring anyone and thus proved to be a dead end. One seed (C) brought two subjects. On the other hand, the remaining three, A, D and F, all recruited but in different numbers. Seed A brought in 200 subjects, seed D brought in 232 subjects and seed F brought in 40 subjects. As expected participation was slow at the beginning but after two weeks it had reached the level of nine to eleven people/subjects per day on average.

**Figure 1: Dispersion of seeds**



Half way into the survey it became clear that one recruitment network (A) was rendering disproportionate subjects compared to others. Several branches from seed A were rapidly reaching the 16<sup>th</sup> wave, which was considered to be the maximum number that any single branch was allowed to render. So when they reached the 16<sup>th</sup> wave no more coupons were given out. In spite of this inbuilt valve, it turned out that the recruitment network from the single seed of A kept expanding as subjects continued to come in in large numbers. In order to prevent a possible overrepresentation/bias and with the intention of giving other networks time to develop, a decision was made not to give anyone from that recruitment network any more coupons/vouchers.

The result of this decision took the researchers by complete surprise. Instead of putting an end to one recruitment network, it seemed to be slowing down other recruitment networks as well. From the day the decision to “close the door” on all A’s was taken, the survey seemed to come to a halt in the space of a few days. Within just four days the number of participants that came in dropped by more than two thirds or from twenty-two down to six. For the next three weeks the average number of subjects that showed up was between four and six per day. In the weeks following, participation was uneven from day to day, ranging from three to ten

right up until the very last week. In the last week the numbers were much higher, however, ranging from ten to twenty six or around eighteen per day on average.

In retrospect it is not clear what caused the sudden shift in attendance in the survey. For one thing the discontinuation of one recruitment network seemed to affect the recruitment process in other networks as well, as mentioned. The impact of events in one recruitment network on the development of others made researchers suspect that due to the small size of the Polish population in the Reykjavik area, the networks were overlapping. Consequently, possible rumors about the discontinuation of voucher distribution and the barring of the way to earning extra money that it entailed may have had a discouraging affect upon potential participants.

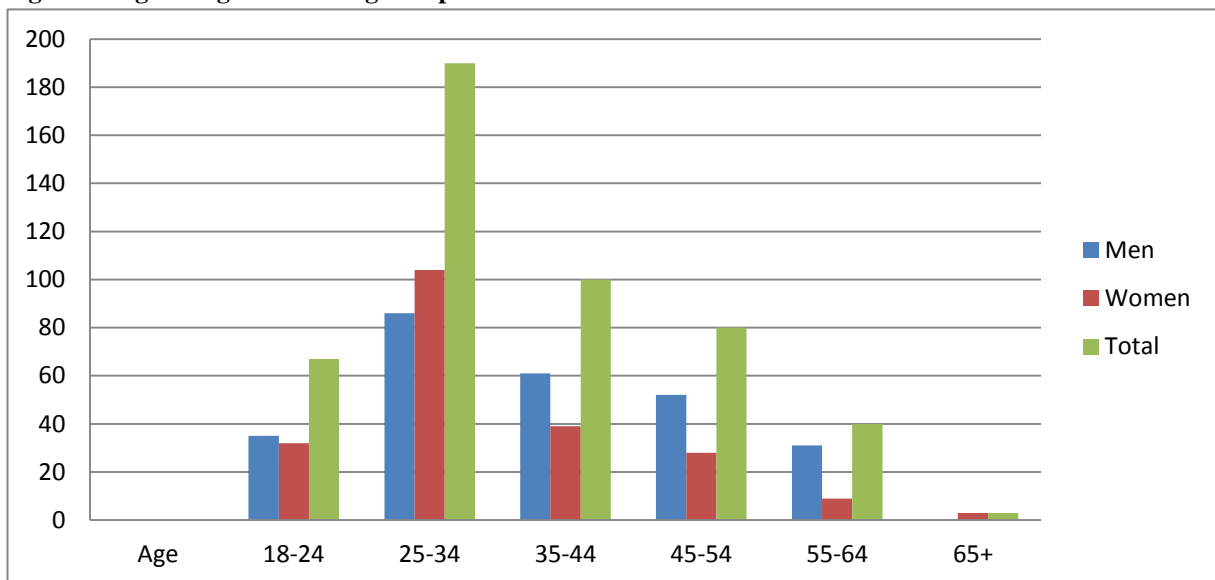
Another possible explanation for the sudden slowdown was the time of the survey: it took place in the summer, and the slowdown occurred at the end of June, beginning of July. Many Polish migrants go on vacation at this time and spend their holidays in Poland. Once the recruitment process started to pick up again, it soon became evident that the pattern of one dominant network was repeating itself. In light of the experience with the sudden slowdown, it was decided this time not to intervene or stop recruitment on the grounds of wave numbers. This post-lull phase in the recruitment process was thus allowed to develop freely. A deadline or final date was set for the end of survey with a view to preventing an overflow of participants, i.e., having too many people with coupons willing to participate

## VI. Preliminary Research Outcome

### What does the data reveal?

Of the 480 participants a little over half or 55% were male and 45% were female. Over 53% of the subjects were 35 years or younger. Interestingly, women were on average younger than men. Around 63% of the women were below the age of 35 while 46% of the men were in this age group.

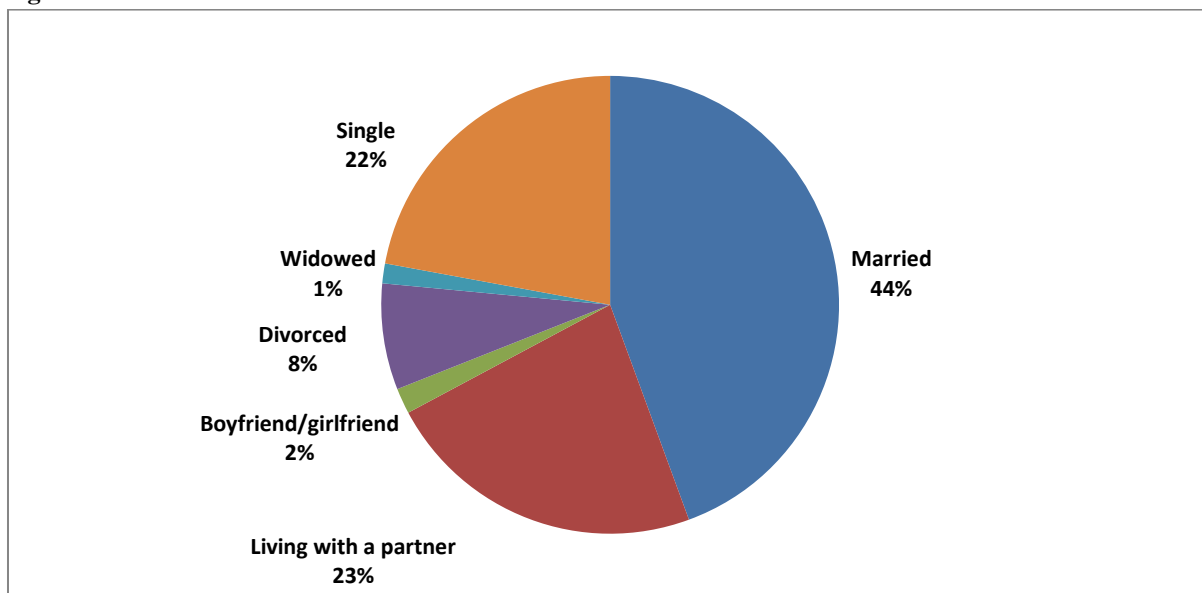
**Figure 2: Age and gender amongst respondents**



### Migration of families

In looking at marital status it turned out that close to 70% of all participants were either married (44%), living with their partner (23%), or in a relationship (2%). The remaining 30% were single, including 'divorced' and 'widowed'. Interestingly, of those who were married, all were married to a Polish spouse. Likewise, the vast majority or 93% of those who were in partnership had a Polish partner. Moreover, the majority of those who were married to a Polish person were living together in Iceland. For a Polish husband and wife to be together in Iceland indicates that migration of Poles to Iceland is based on migration of whole families or leads to the migration of whole families rather than to the migration of just one spouse. This tendency could be explained by the relative geographical distance between the two countries.

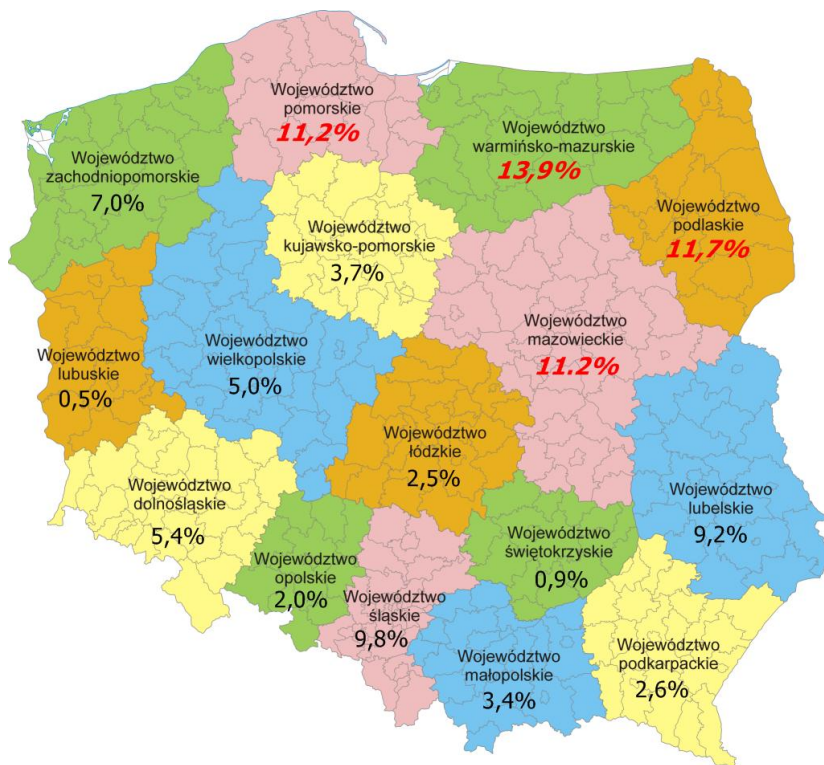
**Figure 3: Marital status**



### Place of origin

The Reykjavik survey shows that Poles in Iceland come from all over the Poland. The highest number from any one region is 14% who come from Warmińsko-Mazurskie, in the northwest part of Poland. Even though it is a region with a small population, it has the highest unemployment rate amongst all Polish regions of 20% (as of December 2010), with the national average at 12.3% for the end of 2010 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2010). The second highest number of Polish migrants in Iceland or 12% comes from the region Podlaskie, and equally many or 11% come from Pomorskie and Mazowieckie respectively. These two last regions were the first to send migrant workers to Iceland and therefore have a long tradition of migration flow to Iceland.

**Figure 4: Regions of origin in Poland**



**Table 1: Regions of origin in Poland**

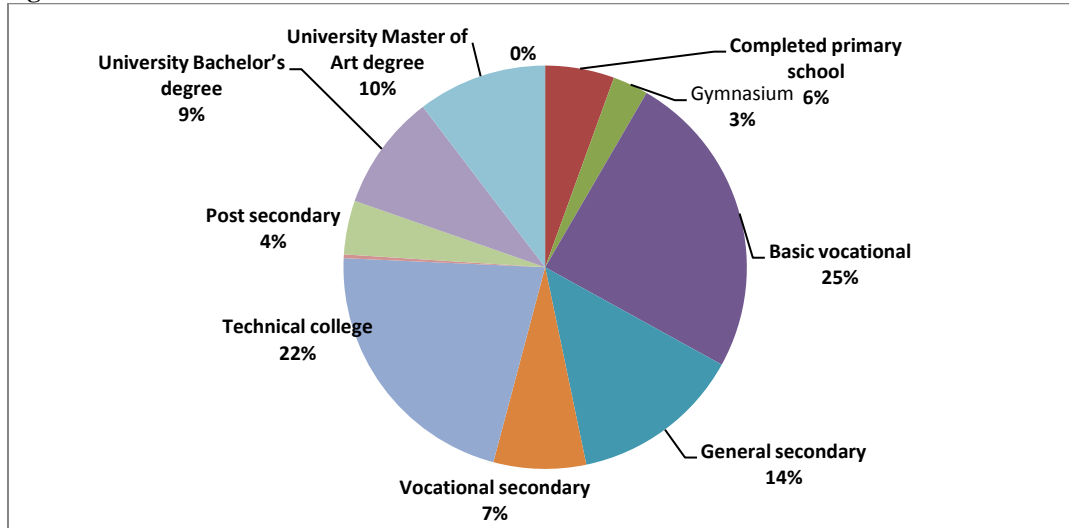
	Frequency	Percent
Dolnośląskie	26	5.4
Kujawsko- pomorskie	18	3.7
Lubelskie	44	9.2
Lubuskie	2	0.5
Łódzkie	12	2.5
Małopolskie	16	3.4
Mazowieckie	54	11.2
Opolskie	10	2.0
Podkarpackie	13	2.6

	Frequency	Percent
Podlaskie	56	11.7
Pomorskie	54	11.2
Śląskie	47	9.8
Świętokrzyskie	4	0.9
Warmińsko-mazurskie	67	13.9
Wielkopolskie	24	5.0
Zachodniopomorskie	34	7.0
Total	480	100.0

## Education

All participants had completed primary education. Moreover, the majority of them had completed secondary education at either a vocational or technical college. Less than ten percent of participants had only finished obligatory education. As many as twenty percent had finished university education. Of those, one half had completed a Bachelors degree or a college degree and the other half a Master's degree.

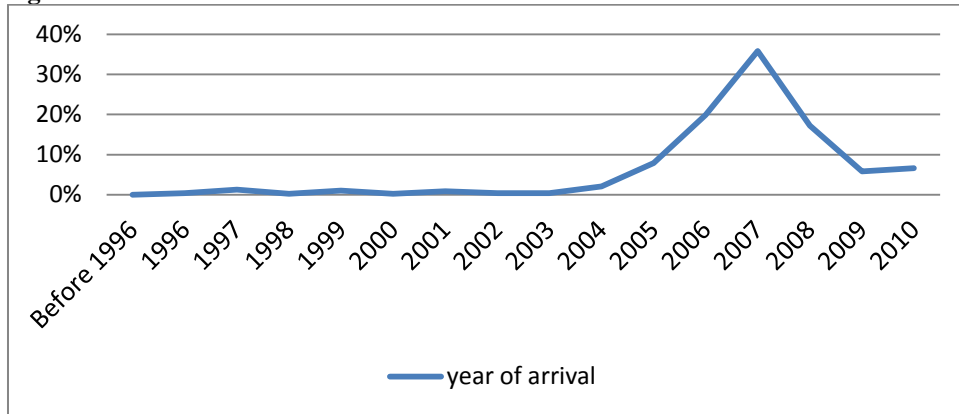
Figure 5: Education



## Length of stay in Iceland

The majority of the participants arrived in the years between 2006 and 2008, the time period of rapid economic expansion when the building sector, not least in the greater Reykjavik area, grew at an unprecedented rate. The great economic boom in the Reykjavik metropolitan area became a great magnet for immigrants during this period and replaced the appeal of the fishing villages around the coast that historically had been the main attraction for migrant laborers. Of participants in the RDS survey, only 15% had arrived before 2006. Surprisingly, another 15% arrived for the first time after the onset of the crisis.

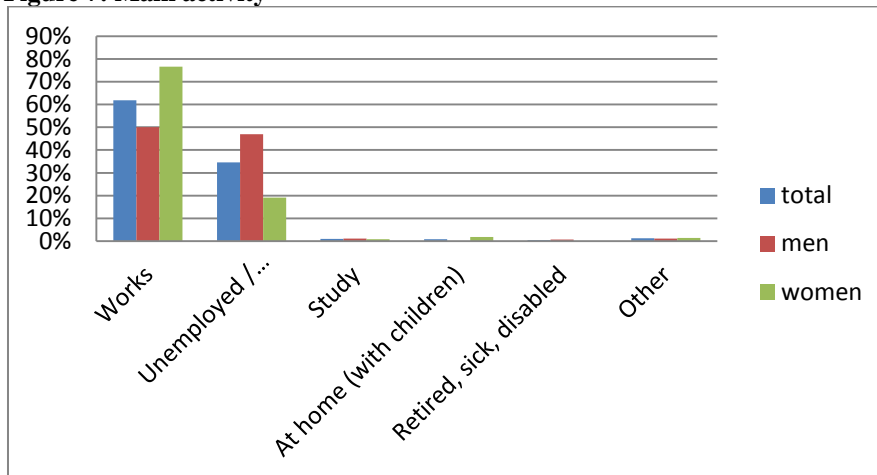
**Figure 6: Year of arrival**



### Current main activity

Close to 35% of all participants were unemployed or working only part time, whereas 62% were employed. However, employment was very unevenly dispersed between men and women. Unemployment was much higher amongst men or 47% (125 out of 265), whereas 19% (41 of 215) of all the women who participated in the survey were unemployed. Of the combined men and women who were unemployed, the ratio was 75% men and 25% women. Relatively many more unemployed males participated in the survey than unemployed females. The higher participation amongst unemployed males versus unemployed females raises questions about why males felt a stronger incentive to participate than females.

**Figure 7: Main activity**



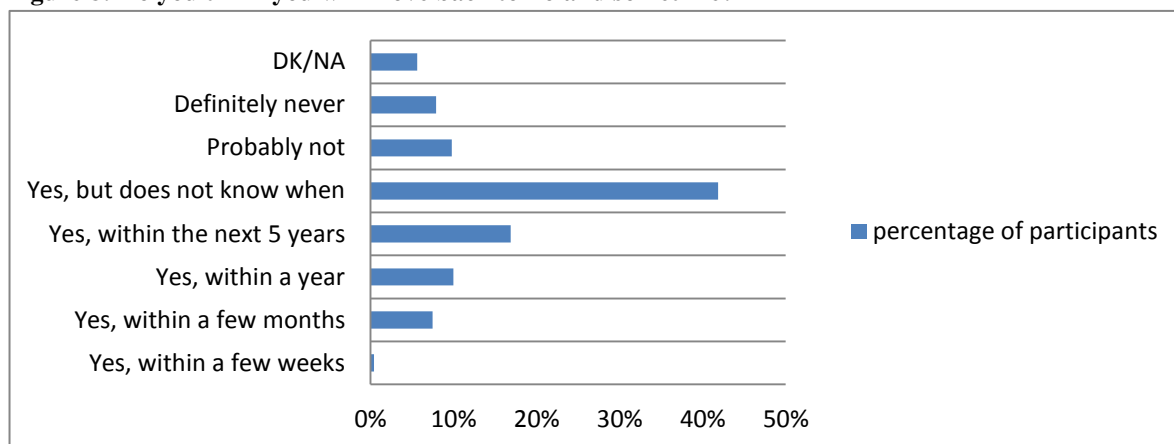
## Migration experience

A very high percentage or close to 87% of the participants had moved directly to Iceland from Poland, while only 13% had been living in another country before migrating to Iceland. Of those who had been living outside of Poland before moving to Iceland, 25% had been living in Germany, 17% in Norway, around 14% in Italy, and the rest were dispersed in other countries mostly in Europe. However, quite many of the respondents had at some point experienced working in other countries before moving to Iceland. In answering the question, “Have you worked abroad before coming to Iceland”, as many as 44% answered “yes”. Of those almost half had worked in Germany.

## Plans for future

Despite of the financial crisis in Iceland and the relatively high unemployment within the research population, only one fifth said that they were planning to move back to Poland within a year from the study. 17% said they were planning to return to Poland within the next five years and a little over 40% said they would return to Poland but did not know when.

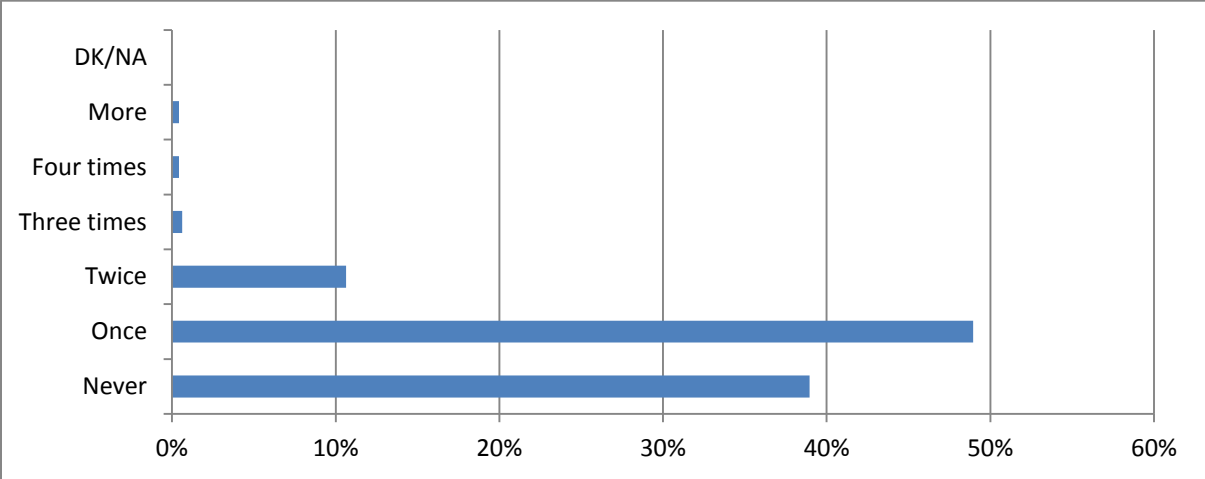
**Figure 8: Do you think you will move back to Poland sometime?**



## How often do you travel to Poland a year?

Of the participants around 40% had not travelled to Poland at all within the last year but around 50% had made one trip and only 10% of the participants had travelled to Poland two times within the last year.

**Figure 9: How many times did you go to Poland last year?**



## V. Evaluation of the RDS Reykjavik

One of the major concerns when the RSD method is used is to ascertain whether it provides a representative sample of the population under study. To assess the representativeness of the Reykjavik RDS sample, it was compared with official data on the Polish population in Iceland. However, there can be two major reasons for differences between these two sets of data. Either the RDS sample was not representative or the data from Statistic Iceland and/or the Directorate of Labor contain some biases.

As discussed before, Iceland has relatively good official data on the immigrant population, which is based on information from the National Registry (Þjóðskrá). All foreign citizens who want to reside in Iceland have to apply for a personal ID number (kennitala) and in this way they are enrolled in the registry. There is, however, one problem with the figures from Statistics Iceland regarding de-registration of immigrants who move from Iceland. Very few immigrants leaving the country report their emigration to the National Registry. However, the National Registry does make use of procedures to strike people who have left the country from the registry, e.g. by using information on taxpayers from the Tax Office (Skattstofa).

Another possible problem would be that Statistics Iceland would not, for obvious reasons, include information about undocumented foreigners. Despite the difficulties that exist in measuring an undocumented population, such population has, however, usually been estimated to be very low in Iceland. In an attempt to provide possible explanations for the low level of undocumented immigrants, several reasons might be cited; here three will be mentioned.

The first reason for the low level of undocumented immigrants is related to the geographical position of the island. Iceland is quite a remote island, which means that there are very limited ways to access the country – one international airport and one international seaport where ferries from the mainland dock. With such restricted access to the country, the authorities are in a position to conduct strong surveillance of its borders. The second reason for the low number of undocumented migrants has to do with regulation of border control. As discussed before, foreigners from countries outside the EEA who were coming to work in Iceland - including Polish citizens until May 2006 - were obliged to receive a work permit before entering the country. As of May 2006 all EEA citizens are allowed to stay in Iceland without any permit for three months and up to six months if searching for a job. EEA citizens are nonetheless obliged to apply for an ID number (kennitala) if they are staying beyond the three months or if they are looking for a job. For anyone living in Iceland for any length of time an ID number is necessary as so many things are based upon having one. For example, an individual cannot open a bank account unless he/she is in possession of an ID number. But this is only one among numerous examples of how important it is to be in possession of an ID number; it comes as no surprise, therefore, that the incentives for migrants to register are high.

The third reason for the relatively low number of undocumented migrants is the miniscule population. Because of its smallness it is hard to go unnoticed as an undocumented or unregistered individual.

This is not to say, however, that there are no cases of undocumented migrants in the country or that there have not been any. At the peak of the economic expansion, some cases of undocumented migrants caught media attention.<sup>7</sup> In such cases, the individuals were mostly workers within the construction industry outside of the Reykjavik area. Even after such incidents, the common assumption both amongst the public and the authorities has still been that illegal or undocumented migrants do not constitute a real problem in Iceland. One can only speculate on whether employing undocumented workers would slow down during times of economic crisis and high unemployment or whether it is likely to increase.

In the Reykjavik RDS survey, almost all participants stated that they were registered at the National Registry. Exceptions to this general rule were seven persons who said they had applied for an ID number but had not yet received it, which means that the sample should correspond with official data.

Four variables are used here to make an evaluation of the representativeness of the RDS sample in comparison with statistics from Statistics Iceland. These are *age*, *gender*, *length of stay* and *postal codes*. Figures on *unemployment* from the Directorate of Labor were used and compared with unemployment rates amongst participants in the RDS.

For the purpose of comparison, MIRRA/CIRRA received data from Statistics Iceland on the population of persons born in Poland, age 18 and older and residing in the capital area. MIRRA/CIRRA received data on unemployment among Polish citizens in the Reykjavik area<sup>8</sup> from the Directorate of Labor, also for the purpose of comparison.

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<sup>7</sup> See for example newspaper articles:

[www.visir.is/byggingafyrirtaeki-i-rannsokn/article/](http://www.visir.is/byggingafyrirtaeki-i-rannsokn/article/) (2005). "Byggingafyrirtæki í rannsókn" July 8, 2005.

[www.visir.is/vilja-kaera-thyskt-polskt-fyrirtaeki-fyrir-ologmaeta-starfssemi/article](http://www.visir.is/vilja-kaera-thyskt-polskt-fyrirtaeki-fyrir-ologmaeta-starfssemi/article) (2007). "Vilja kæra þýskt-pólskt fyrirtæki fyrir ólögmeta starfsemi". September 3, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the data from The Directorate of Labor is based upon Polish citizens only, whereas our sample includes all Poles in the metropolitan area of Reykjavik, including those who might have received Icelandic citizenship.

## Age and gender

When dispersion of age and gender within the Polish population in the RDS sample is compared with data from Statistics Iceland, some similarities are manifest. In the RDS sample 55% participants were males, while Statistics Iceland says that 57% of the entire Polish-born population 18 years and older in the capital region are males. Similarly, there are not many discrepancies between the RDS sample and the data from Statistics Iceland regarding age groups, especially when it comes to women. Small differences may be observed in the male population, however. There were fewer young men in the RDS sample than in the general population according to figures from SI, and the RDS sample also had more men aged above 45 in comparison with figures from SI. A possible explanation for this discrepancy might be explained by the high level of unemployment within this age group, thus giving these men higher incentive to participate in the survey.

**Table 2 Comparison between Statistics Iceland and RDS: Age and gender**

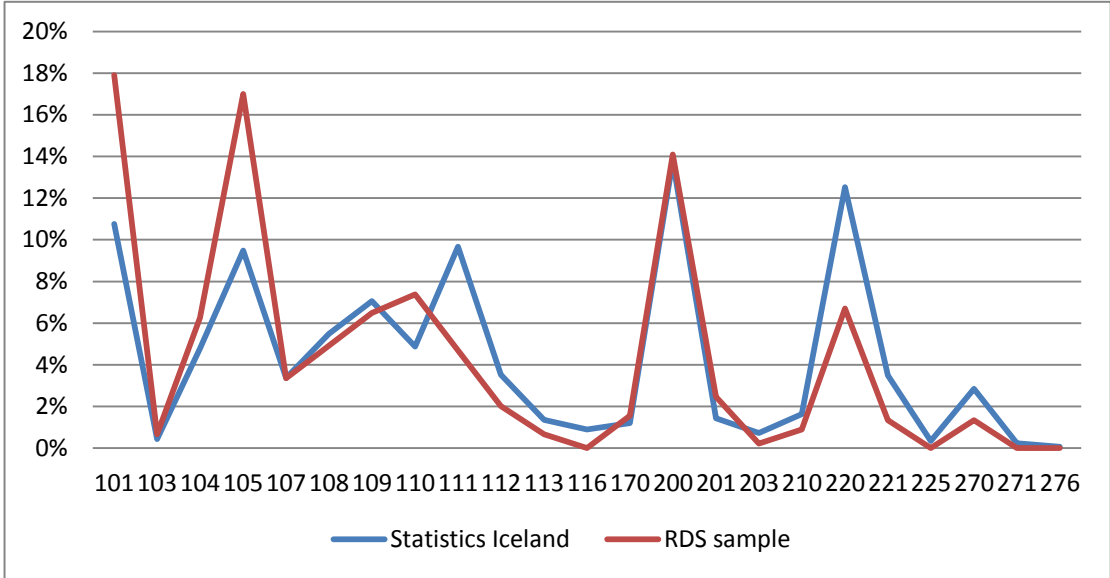
Age	Men		Women		Total	
	SI	RDS	SI	RDS	SI	RDS
18-24	11	13	19	15	15	14
25-34	45	32	48	49	46	40
35-44	24	23	16	18	21	21
45-54	15	20	12	13	14	16
55-64	4	12	5	4	4	8
65+	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Place of residency in Iceland

Interestingly, in comparing information on the place of residency within the Reykjavik metropolitan area amongst our participants, an overlapping can be observed. There are, however, some significant differences between the official SI data and the RDS sample. Some of these differences can be explained. As might be expected, distance between residency of participants and the place where the survey was conducted did matter. The closer to the location of the survey facilities people lived, the more likely it was for them to participate. Likewise, participation amongst residents living in postal codes further away from the facilities turned out to be lower. For example, participation was low in postal codes 220 and 221 in Hafnarfjörður and in postal code 270 in Mosfellsbær – a distance of approximately 13-17 kilometer respectively. Not surprisingly, participation was high amongst residents living in postal codes close to the research facilities, such as postal codes 101 and 107. What was

surprising, however, was the relatively high participation from postal code 110, an area which has a very low number of immigrants, whereas respondents from postal code 111, which has one of the highest concentration of immigrants, was very low. Both area 110 and 111 are equally far away from the survey facilities, i.e., approximately ten kilometers.

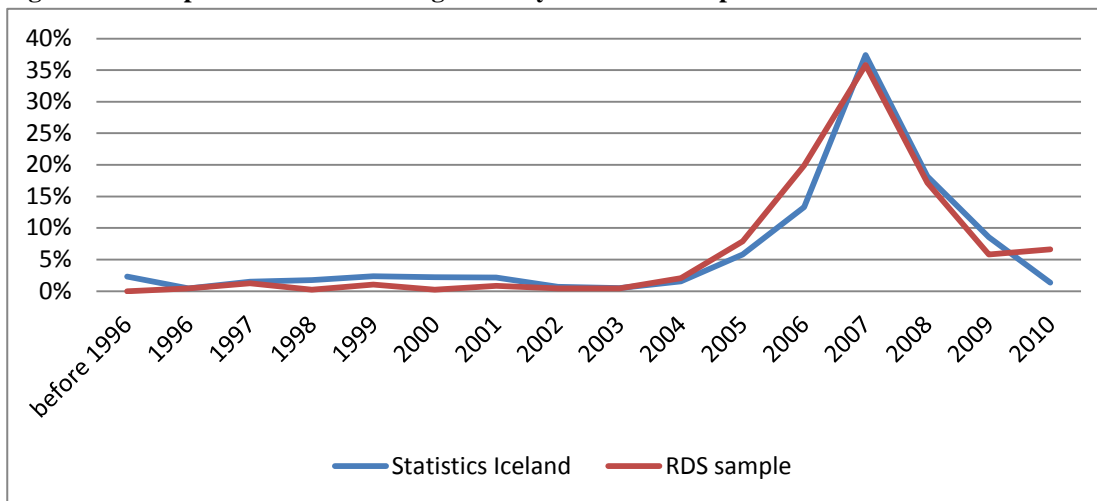
**Figure 9: Comparison of data on postal codes with RDS sample**



### Length of stay

The data on length of stay from Statistics Iceland nicely corresponds with the information obtained in the RDS survey. The vast majority of the participants arrived in Iceland for the first time during the booming years 2006-2008. However, the RDS survey did reveal two major imbalances with respect to length of stay in Iceland. The first imbalance concerns the low participation of individuals with long-term residency in the country; the second relates to the high participation of individuals who have newly arrived. One explanation of the former difference indicates that there is little contact or interaction between the older and the newer waves of Polish immigrants in Iceland. Another explanation could be that people with long-term residency - 15 years or longer – are already Icelandic citizens and have therefore less interest in participating in a survey such as this one. The imbalance between the RDS sample and the SI statistics concerns the high percentage of new arrivals, an imbalance which could be explained by the fact that new arrivals have not yet been included in the National Registry (the process takes up to 8 weeks and an individual’s arrival is marked not according to date of actual arrival but according to enlistment into the system).

**Figure 10: Comparison of data on length of stay with RDS sample**



## Unemployment

As mentioned earlier massive unemployment ensued in the wake of the economic crisis. In 2010 it reached an unprecedented 9% on national average ([www.vmmst.is](http://www.vmmst.is)). Moreover, Poles had been numerous in sectors that had expanded disproportionately during the boom era such as the construction industry and in other occupations that shrank considerably in the wake of the crisis. Not surprisingly, unemployment rates amongst Polish migrants soared, particularly in the Reykjavik area, and were much higher than the national average. These shifts in labor participation are reflected in the survey.

The largest dissimilarity between the RDS sample and official statistics was in case of the unemployment figures. Figures from the RDS survey showed considerably higher numbers than registration figures from the Directorate of Labor (Vinnuálastofnun) indicated. Of the entire sample of our participants, 166 persons or 34.5% of the whole said they were unemployed and of these 4% (7 persons) were not registered at the Directorate of Labor, i.e., not collecting unemployment benefits. This means that 33% of our entire sample has been registered at the Directorate of Labor as unemployed.

According to Directorate of Labor, there were 916 Polish citizens registered as unemployed in the Reykjavik area at the time when the survey was conducted, which equates to 20% of the Polish population 18 and older in the capital region. Figures from the Directorate of Labor include only Polish citizens, whereas the RDS sample includes all Poles regardless of whether they have received Icelandic citizenship or not. Unfortunately the RDS survey did not include a question on citizenship in its questionnaire. However, the discrepancy between unemployment figures from the RDS survey on the one hand and the Directorate of Labor on the other is too large to be explained exclusively by reference to the categorization of Polish citizen versus Poles with Icelandic citizenship. Another more likely explanation of the

overrepresentation of unemployment amongst participants in the RDS survey could simply be that unemployed people might have had both the time and a high incentive to participate in the survey, as earning a little money was a possibility. Interestingly, there is also a difference between official data and the RDS survey in the gender division of the unemployed. According to Directorate of Labor, men made up 67% of all unemployed Polish citizens, while the RDS sample showed that males constituted 75% of all unemployed Poles.

## VI. Preliminary conclusions

This report contains preliminary results from *Polonia Reykjavik 2010*, a research that includes the first systematic mapping of working and living conditions amongst Polish labor migrants in the greater Reykjavik area. *Polonia Reykjavik 2010* is the Icelandic part of the international research entitled *Migration and Mobility: Methodological Challenges* in which Poland and Norway also took part. As stated earlier, the primary research focus in using the RDS methodology was to compare and contrast official statistics on international migration back and forth from Poland with statistics in the receiving countries and moreover to compare and contrast this official data with the data received in the survey. First results show a high correspondence between RDS statistical data and official data in all major categories (age, gender, place of residency, length of stay), except in unemployment figures where unemployment seemed to be considerably higher amongst participants than actual figures from the Directorate of Labor show.

It has been shown that migration to Iceland in general and Polish migration to Reykjavik in particular is characterized by intensity, speed and extremes. First results from the study support this observation, and show that around 70% of the participants in the survey arrived in Iceland during the economic boom era from 2006 – 2008, highlighting the fact that the Polish migration to Iceland has primarily been labor driven. The inflow of Poles to Iceland at that time must nevertheless be seen as part of a greater migration flow from Eastern to Western Europe that occurred in the wake of the enlargement of the European Union in 2004. The vast majority of participants came directly from Poland to Iceland. High unemployment at home was the pushing factor for them and what seemed to be boundless job availability in Iceland, the pulling factor. *Polonia Reykjavik 2010* confirms that Poles have been subject to extreme fluctuation in the labor market.

It is fit to conclude with two surprising things the survey has shown. The first is the relatively high level of education of Polish migrants as the vast majority of participants appear to have vocational secondary training, a technical and/or an academic university degree. The second is the high level of marital or cohabiting status amongst the participants.

Further analysis from *Polonia Reykjavik 2010* is underway and many things about the Polish migrants in the greater Reykjavik area are still to be revealed.

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