

# Zbigniew Długosz, Szymon Biały

---

## Selected aspects of permanent emigration from Poland (2001–2010)

---

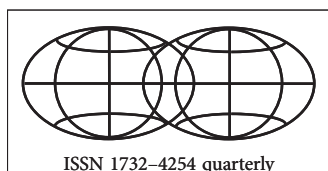
Bulletin of Geography. Socio-Economic Series nr 23, 25-37

---

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.



## Selected aspects of permanent emigration from Poland (2001-2010)

Zbigniew Długosz<sup>1, CDFMR</sup>, Szymon Biały<sup>2, CDFMR</sup>

*Pedagogical University of Cracow*, Institute of Geography, Podchorążych 2, 30-084 Kraków, Poland; <sup>1</sup>e-mail: [zdługosz@up.krakow.pl](mailto:zdługosz@up.krakow.pl);  
<sup>2</sup>e-mail: [bialysz@up.krakow](mailto:bialysz@up.krakow) (corresponding author)

Długosz, Z. and Biały, S., 2014: Selected aspects of permanent emigration from Poland (2001-2010). In: Szymańska, D. and Biegańska, J. editors, *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, No. 23, Toruń: Nicolaus Copernicus University Press, pp. 25–37. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/bog-2014-0002>

**Abstract.** The purpose of the paper is to describe permanent emigration from Poland during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This period of time was characterised by major political and economic changes in Poland and elsewhere in the world. The paper is based on data obtained from the GUS Demographic Yearbook for the years prior to 2011. The spatial analysis in the paper is based on the current administrative division of Poland – voivodships. This includes the number of migrants and their demographic and social structure. Finally, the paper addresses the direction of migrant flow in terms of absolute numbers and rates of change.

© 2014 Nicolaus Copernicus University Press. All rights reserved.

**Article details:**

Received: 08 May 2013  
Revised: 12 September 2013  
Accepted: 14 November 2013

**Key words:**

Poland, human geography, demographics, human migration.

### Contents:

1. Introduction .....	25
2. Emigration from Poland in the postwar period .....	26
3. Structure of Polish emigrants .....	27
4. Spatial pattern of emigration from Poland .....	28
5. Rate of emigration and its changes .....	33
References .....	37

### 1. Introduction

In the words of A. Mariański (1984), human migration is as old as humanity itself. Human migration has occurred for a great variety of reasons throughout human history. This included reasons

associated with changes in the Earth's climate, great tribal migrations, travel and conquest. Today many unique economic, social and political reasons serve as the basis for human migration across countries and continents (Salt et al., 2005). These complex processes have affected Poland for decades

(Długosz, 1992, 2007, 2012; Klimaszewski, 2002; Slany, 2005; Kaczmarczyk, 2008, 2010; Janicka-Żylicz, Kowalska, 2010). The effects of migration can be observed directly or indirectly in terms of absolute numbers, population distributions, and changes in demographic structures (Castles, Miller, 2009). Human migration is not an abstract idea but one that affects everyday life in Poland and elsewhere.

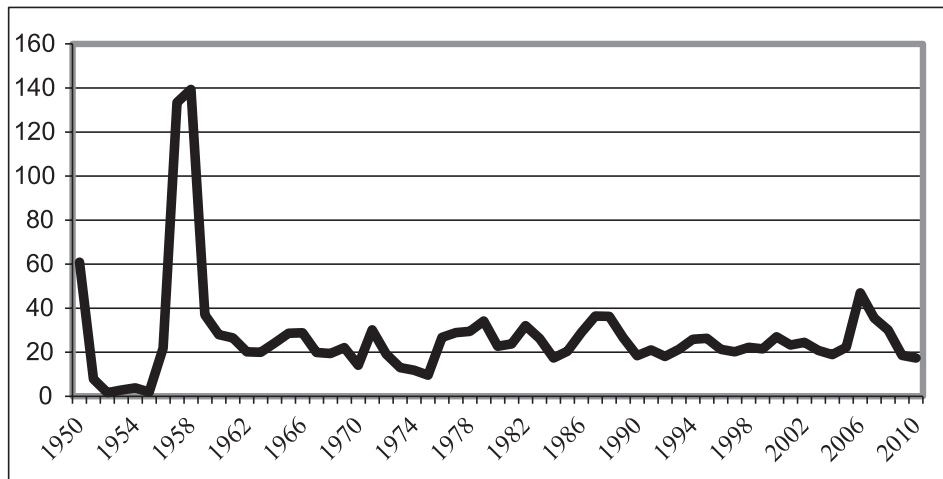
Today's advanced society provides a number of factors generating the permanence, direction, extent and structure of contemporary migration. The economic aspect of migration is especially important in Poland, with job markets either attracting or pushing out migrants. While migration has been an issue in Poland for centuries, relatively recent events such as Poland's 2004 entry into the European Union and the elimination of visas across most of the European Union have changed the nature of migration across the European continent. These key changes will continue to affect the Polish job market as well as the nation's demographics in a way that will also alter the age structure. The key component of permanent migration in Poland is young people, which will alter the nation's demographic situation and the current system of social security.

The purpose of the paper is to describe permanent emigration from Poland during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This period of time was characterised by major political and economic changes in Poland and elsewhere in the world. It is difficult to assess accurately emigration from Poland, as many emigrants do not claim to emigrate permanently at the time of departure and temporary emigration can turn into permanent emigration and vice versa. It is also difficult to determine accurately the ultimate direction of emigration, as that can also change over time. The paper relies on permanent emigration data provided by Poland's GUS Demographic Yearbooks for the years prior to 2011. No other data are considered. The data are classified based on Poland's administrative units known as voivodships. The paper attempts to focus on what the available published data can offer in terms of key aspects of emigration such as absolute numbers, selected demographic and social issues, and rates of change as well as the direction of migration.

## 2. Emigration from Poland in the postwar period

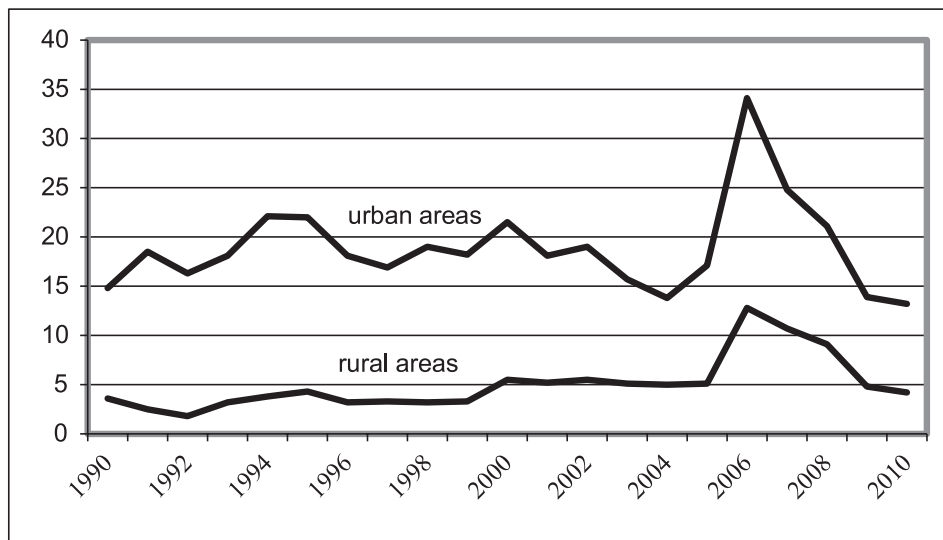
While emigration has a long history in Poland, the postwar era has been specific in that respect. The political and economic situation in Poland changed after World War II. The number of recorded cases of permanent emigration from Poland between 1952 and 2010 is 1,569,600. The word 'recorded' is very important here, as an individual may return and then leave again without officially registering as a resident of Poland. The peak emigration period (Fig. 1) was 1957-1958 when 273,700 Polish citizens left Poland, mainly for Israel. The number of recorded emigrants then decreased to fewer than 30,000 per year, and even fewer than 20,000 per year in the early 1970s. The number of emigrants increased in the late 1970s and remained steady until Poland made the transition to democracy in 1989. Emigration peaks can be observed in the last years of communism in Poland (1980s) and following the signing of the Schengen Treaty, which eliminated visas across much of the European Union (2006-2008). Annual emigration from Poland exceeded 30,000 following Schengen, with 47,000 citizens emigrating in 2006. The rate of emigration from Poland then significantly decreased in 2009 and 2010 largely due to the global economic crisis. While 224,800 Polish citizens emigrated in the 1990s, that number increased to 258,400 between 2001 and 2010. Both numbers refer to permanent emigration.

The level of emigration and the rate of emigration can be studied based on original place of residence. In some years emigration from urban areas was several times larger than that from rural areas (Fig. 2). The number of individuals emigrating from cities between 1952 and 2010 was 1,130,900. The number of emigrants from rural areas was 438,600 during the same time period. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century accounted for close to 17% (190,800) of all emigration from Poland during the study period. Higher rates of emigration were recorded in the 1950s and 1980s. On the other hand, rural emigration accounted for 15.4% (67,500) in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which was more than that in the 1980s and 1990s.



**Fig. 1.** Emigration from Poland (in thousands)

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbook



**Fig. 2.** Emigration from Poland based on place of residence (in thousands)

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbook

### 3. Structure of Polish emigrants

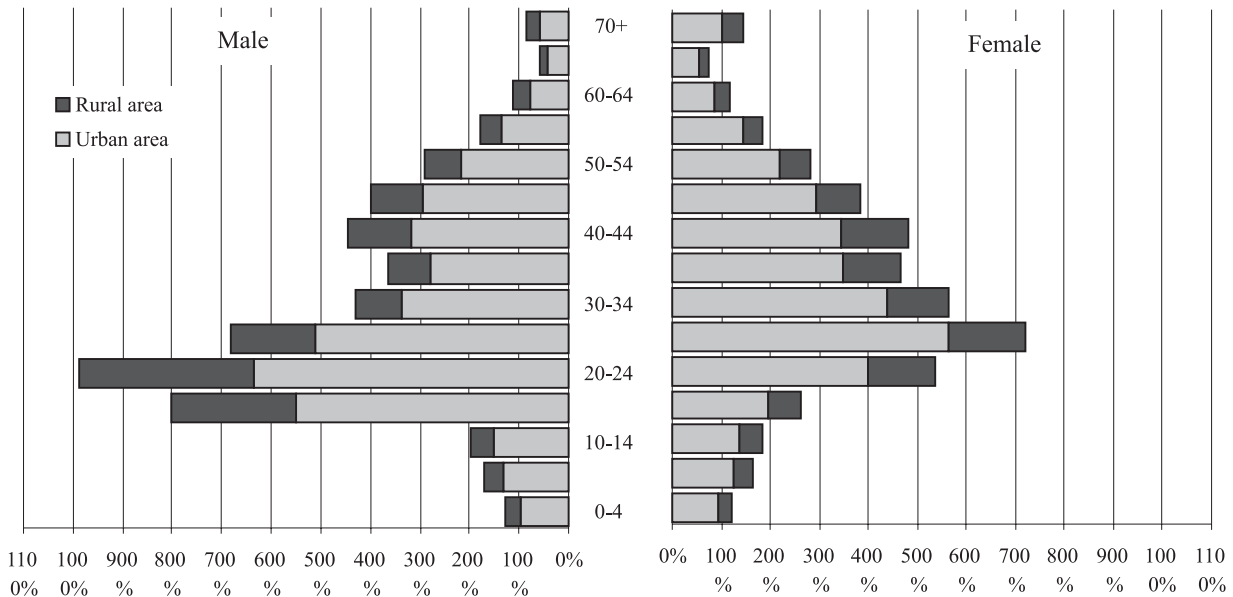
In the years 2001-2010 most permanent emigrants (53.3%) from Poland were men. The same had been true in the 1990s. The percentage of male emigrants declined below 50% in the years 2009-2010, while peaking in 2007 (58.8%) and bottoming out in 2009 (45.2%). The ratio between male and female emigrants varied between 2001 and 2005. The percentage of male emigrants increased starting in 2005

and then decreased starting in 2008. A more complex situation applied to male emigrants from urban areas, with the overall percentage at 71.9% for the 2001-2010 period. The percentage of urban men in the overall emigration volume ranged from 68.2% in 2008 to 75.9% in 2010, with the average remaining over 70%.

In terms of age structure, the largest group of emigrants from Poland consisted of early working age individuals, especially urban dwellers. For the male population in the 15-29 age interval, the distri-

bution ranged from 5.1% to 6.4% for each five-year age group. For the female population in the 20-34 age interval, the distribution ranged from 4.0% to 5.6% for each five-year group. The percentages of rural emigrants were more even for each given year during the ten-year study period. While most rural emigrants were men in the 15-24 age group (2.5% to 3.5% per year), the percentages of rural wom-

en were more broadly distributed across the 20-44 age range at 1.2% to 1.6% per year. For other age groups, the urban/rural ratio was similar for both men and women (Fig. 3). Another key issue here is the emigration of children, even very small children. It appears that a large number of adult emigrants are willing to leave Poland permanently along with their children for economic reasons.



**Fig. 3.** Gender and age structure of Polish emigrants in the period 2001-2010 (in tenths of one percent)

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks.

The marital status of Polish emigrants has also changed somewhat in recent decades. The majority of male emigrants in each decade since 1980 have been single (51.5%, 58.9%, 55.8%, respectively). The second largest – but declining – group consisted of married men (46.6%, 38.7%, 31.8%, respectively). A third group – divorced men – fluctuated but remained relatively steady in each of the three decades since 1980 (2.1%, 1.6%, 3.3%, respectively). On the other hand, the percentage of emigrating widowers declined steadily (0.8%, 0.6%, 0.4%, respectively). Next, the percentage of married women emigrating from Poland has been in decline since 1980, with 53.4% in the period 1981-1990, 48.8% in the period 1991-2000, and 42.9% in the period 2001-2010.

The percentage of single women emigrating from Poland has fluctuated (39.4%, 44.4%, 42.9%, respectively) but now equals that of married wom-

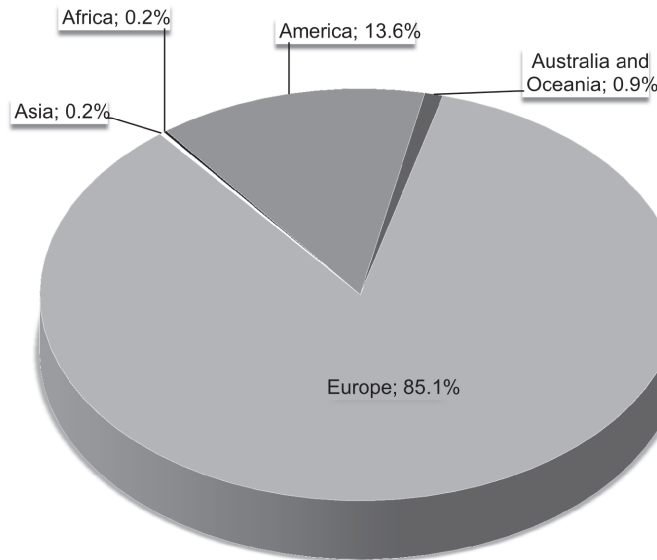
en emigrating from Poland. Next, the percentage of widows decreased from 4.6% in the 1980s to 2.5% in the period 2001-2010. On the other hand, the percentage of divorced women increased systematically from 2.6% in the 1980s to 4.6% in the last decade. In effect, the percentage of divorced women was higher than that of widowed women. This data may be incomplete, as the Demographic Yearbooks for 2006-2010 include a large group of individuals with no established marital status.

#### 4. Spatial pattern of emigration from Poland

Most Polish emigrants (85.1%) left for other countries in Europe (Fig. 4) in the period 2001-2010.

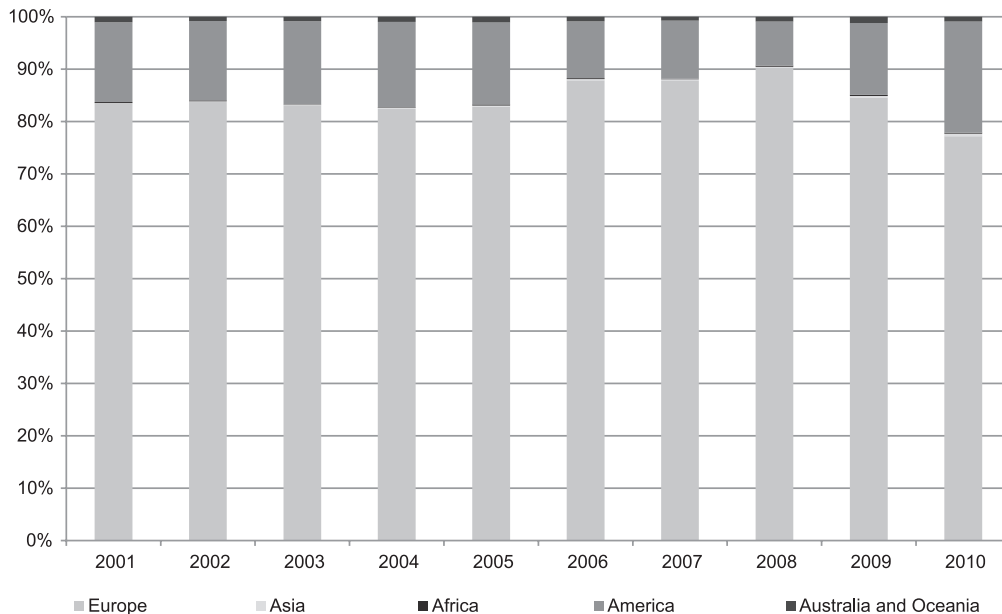
The second largest destination was North and South America (13.6%), with North America being the primary destination. Only 0.9% of Polish emigrants left for Australia and even fewer for Asia and Africa (0.2%). Fig. 5 shows emigration data for selected years. While emigration to America has decreased in favour of Europe, the percentage for America has been on the rise in recent years. Emigration to other continents remains low and steady.

However, in order to get a more accurate picture of Polish emigration, it is necessary to look at the issue at the country level. More than half (50.3%) of Polish emigrants left for Germany between 2001 and 2010 (Fig. 6). The second largest destination was Great Britain at 17.4% and the third was the United States at 10.3%. Other top destinations included Canada (3.2%), Holland (2.3%), Italy (2.1%) and Austria (2.0%).



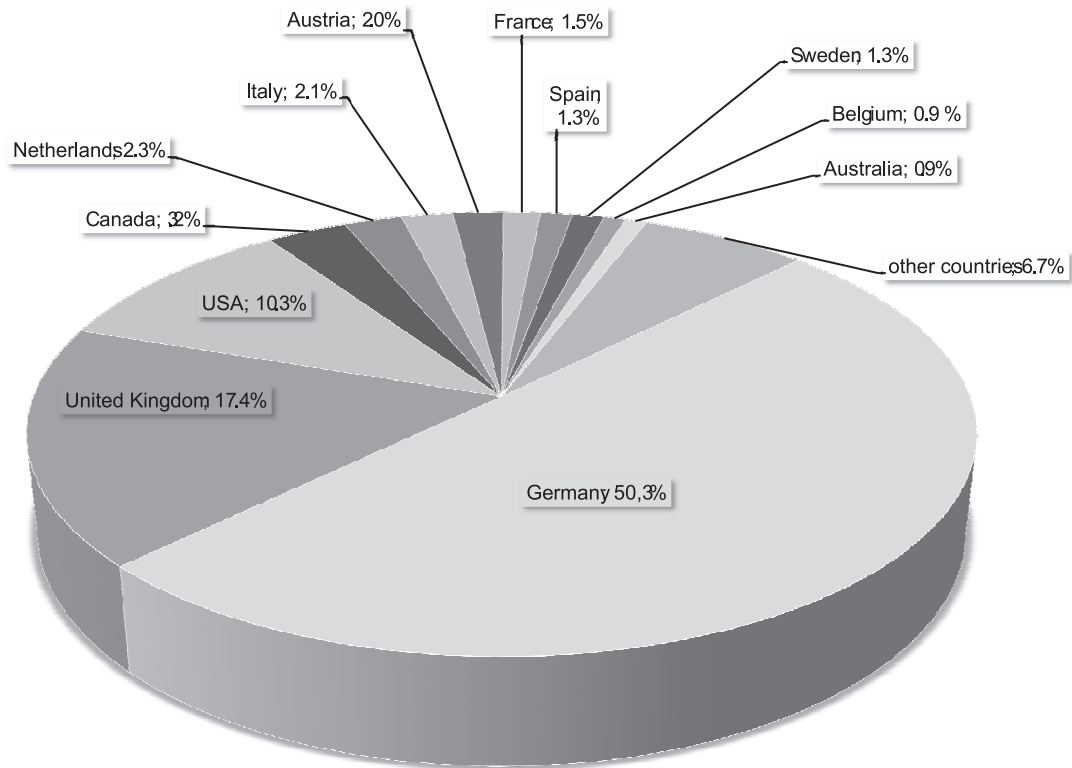
**Fig. 4.** Emigration profile for Poland in the period 2001-2010 at the continent level (in %)

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks



**Fig. 5.** Emigration rates for Poland in the period 2001-2010 at the continent level (in %)

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks.



**Fig. 6.** Emigration profile for Poland in the period 2001-2010 at the country level (in %)

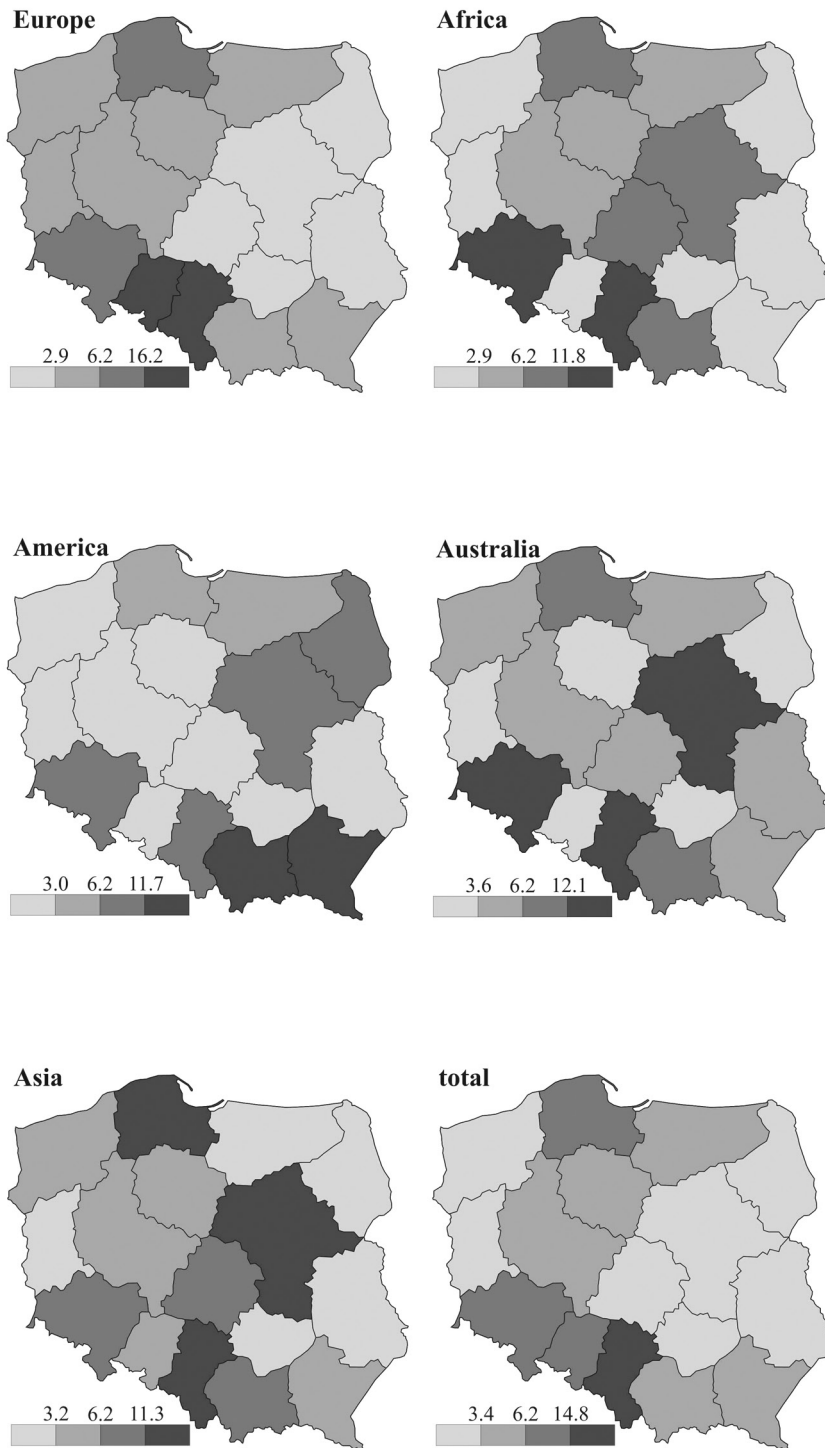
Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks

The same can be said of the gender structure. Female immigrants from Poland tended to exceed male immigrants in Belgium, France, and Italy. Male immigrants exceeded female immigrants in Great Britain to a substantial degree, and also to some degree in Spain, Holland, Germany and the United States. The number of male and female immigrants from Poland was about the same in Austria, Sweden, Canada, and Australia. The geography of Polish emigrants followed global emigration trends, with most immigrants anywhere being urban dwellers. This was true of Polish immigrants in all countries with significant Polish immigrant populations. The largest urban/rural disproportion (mostly men) during the study period was noted in Germany (18.8 percentage points), Great Britain (9.8 percentage points), and the United States (6.5 percentage points).

Certain spatial patterns have also been identified at the voivodship level. In global terms, Śląskie Voivodship was the largest source of Polish emi-

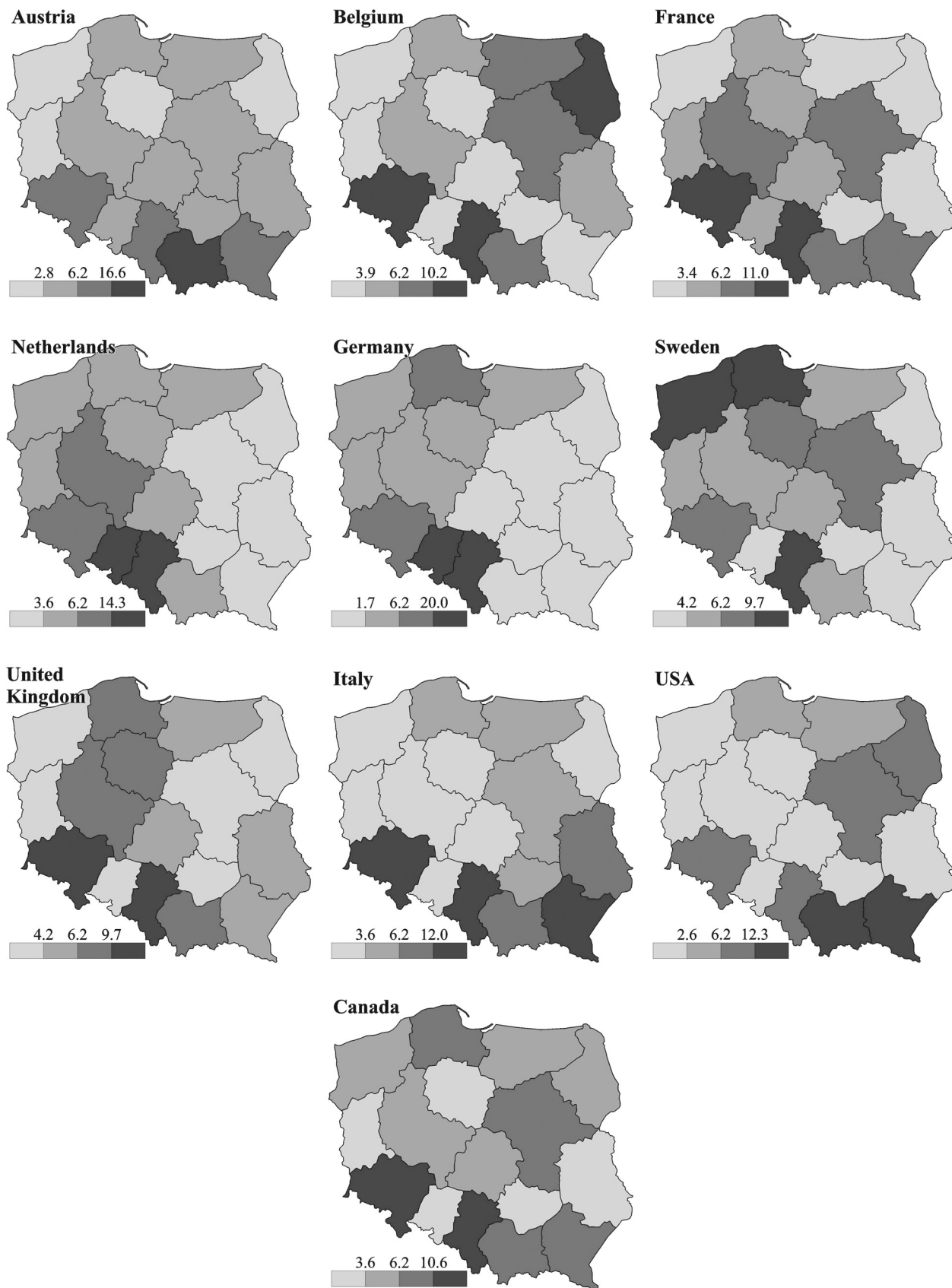
grants at 27.5%, followed by Opolskie Voivodship at 14.5%. The smallest share of emigrants had originated in two other Polish voivodships: Świętokrzyskie (1.4%) and Lubelskie (2.2%). At the continent level, the situation was somewhat different. While the share of emigrants leaving for other countries in Europe reflected global Polish emigration trends, the share of emigrants leaving for America was substantially due to Małopolskie Voivodship (17.0%) and Podkarpackie Voivodship (17.5%). The smallest emigration shares were found for Lubuskie Voivodship (1.8%), Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship (2.0%), and Świętokrzyskie Voivodship (2.0%). Other continents, with small emigration shares, sourced Polish immigrants in the following three voivodships: Dolnośląskie, Pomorskie, Śląskie (Fig. 7). This trend was generated by a number of factors including economic development in each voivodship of origin and each destination country (Fig. 8) as well as long-term contacts between emigrants and their families in Poland.





**Fig. 7.** Polish emigration patterns for the period 2001-2010 by continents  
*Source:* Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks





**Fig. 8.** Polish emigration patterns for the period 2001-2010 by countries  
*Source:* Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks

## 5. Rate of emigration and its changes

In order to obtain a more accurate picture of the situation, one may analyse emigration data and rate-of-change data using 5-year averages and 10-year averages for the 2001-2010 period. The calculations were performed per 100,000 residents at the voivodship level. Quartiles were used to illustrate classes in order to make the data more comparable.

The global annual average (Fig. 9) for the period 2001-2010 was the highest for Opolskie Voivodship (718), which was the result of significant emigration primarily to other European countries as well

as countries in Asia. Another high average for European migration was noted for Śląskie Voivodship (303). High averages for migration to Africa were noted for Dolnośląskie (0.6) and Pomorskie (0.4); High averages for other continents are as follows: (a) America: Podlaskie (59), Podkarpackie (58), (b) Australia: Dolnośląskie (2.9), Pomorskie (2.1), (c) Asia: Pomorskie (0.7), Łódzkie (0.5), Dolnośląskie (0.5), Opolskie (0.5). The lowest levels of emigration from Poland were recorded for both Mazowieckie Voivodship (31) and Wielkopolskie Voivodship (60). This was true both in terms of Europe and beyond. One possible explanation would be the better economic opportunity in these two voivodships.

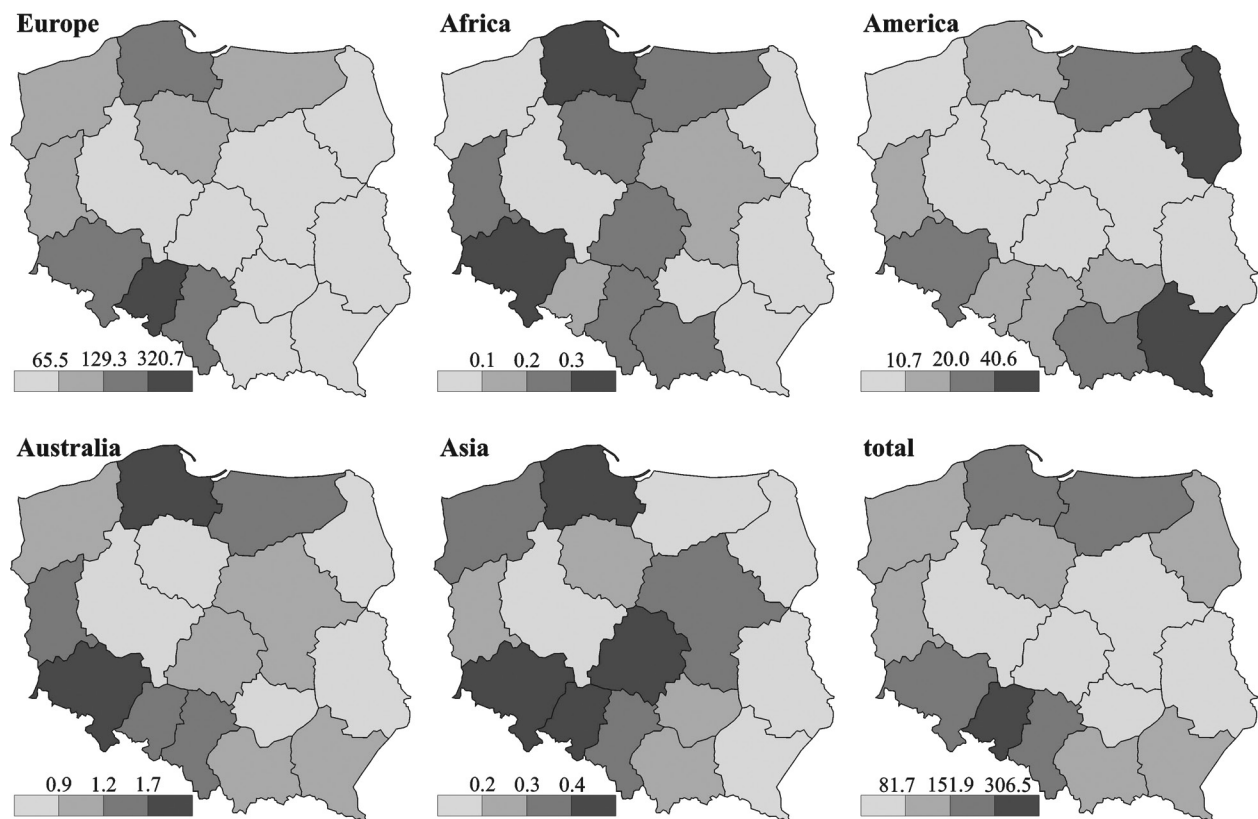
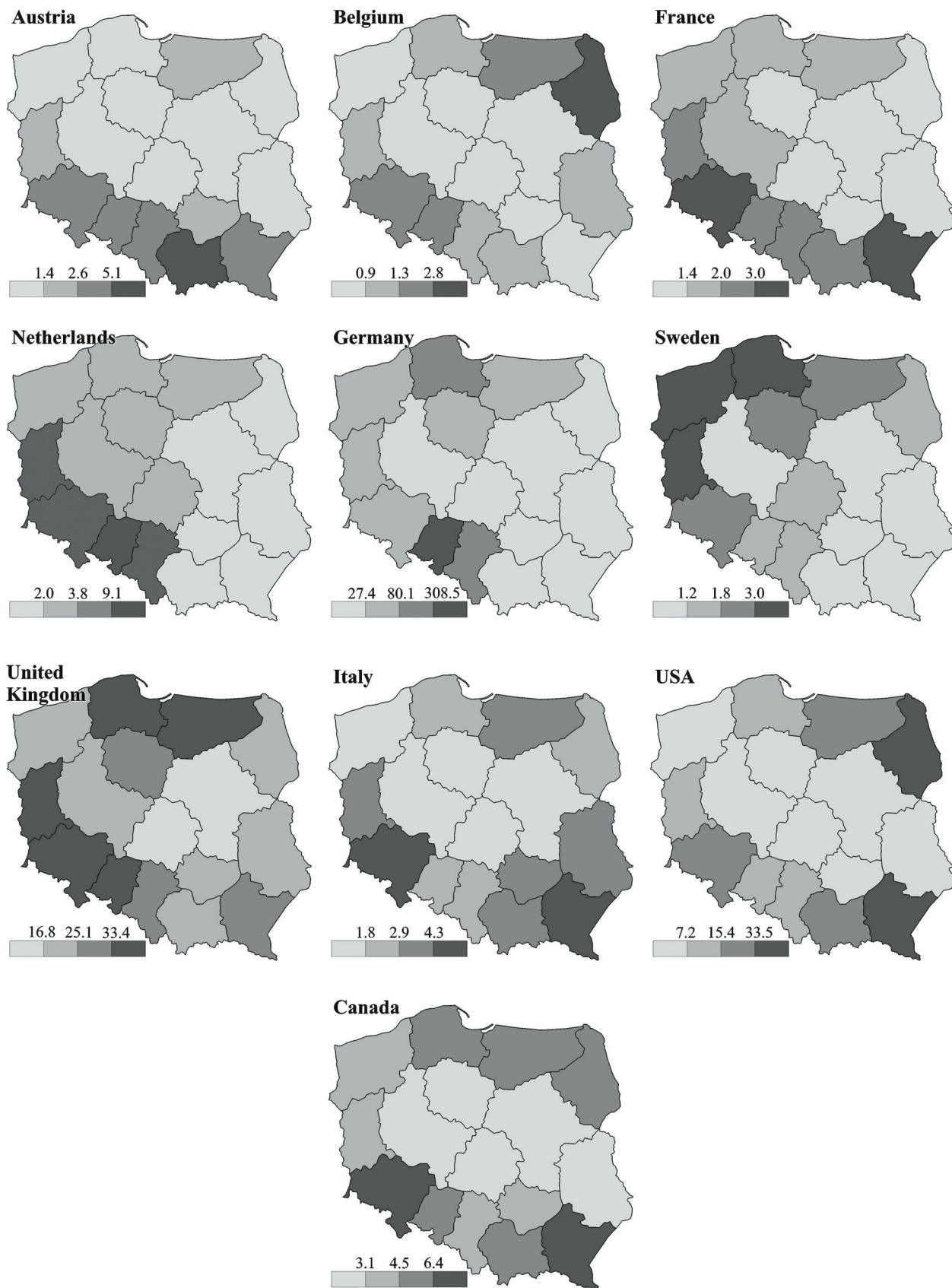


Fig. 9. Average annual rate of emigration from Poland in the period 2001-2010, by continent and per 100,000 residents

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks

Fig. 10 shows Polish emigration directions by key destination country and certain patterns may be discerned. For example, the highest average rate of emigration to Austria per 100,000 residents in the period 2001-2010 was calculated for Małopolskie Voivodship (10.5), while the lowest rate was cal-

culated for Kujawsko-Pomorskie Voivodship (0.6). For Belgium, the highest rate was calculated for Podlaskie Voivodship (5.3), while the lowest for Świętokrzyskie Voivodship (0.5). For Germany, the highest rate was calculated for Opolskie Voivodship (615), while the lowest for Mazowieckie (4.1).

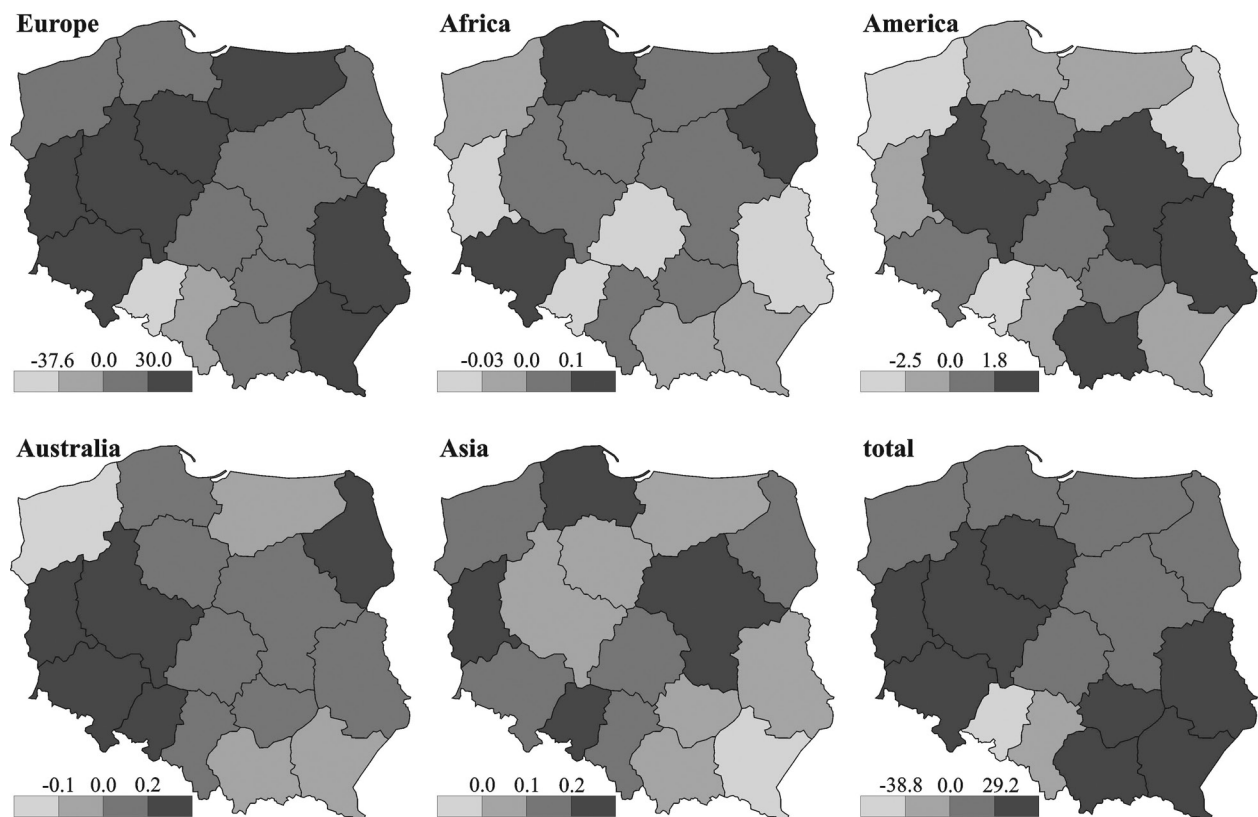


**Fig. 10.** Average annual rate of emigration from Poland in the period 2001-2010, by country and per 100,000 residents  
*Source:* Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks

Other destination countries with easily identifiable sources of Polish immigration were the following: (a) France, Canada, Italy – Dolnośląskie Voivodship (4.1, 9.9, 5.4, respectively) and Podkarpackie Voivodship (3.9, 7.2, 6.6, respectively); (b) United States – Podlaskie Voivodship (62.2) and Podkarpackie Voivodship (50.5); (c) Sweden – northwestern Poland; (d) Holland – southwestern Poland; (e) Great Britain – Pomorskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Dolnośląskie, Lubuskie, and Opolskie voivodships. In general, the lowest average rates of emigration were calculated for Łódzkie and Mazowieckie voivodships.

The averaging of emigration rates over a decade provides some insight into the issue. However, it is important to remember that migrations change over time. This is why this paper uses five-year averages. As the averages in Fig. 11 show, Opolskie (-59) and Śląskie (-19) voivodships experienced a decline in global emigration, while the largest

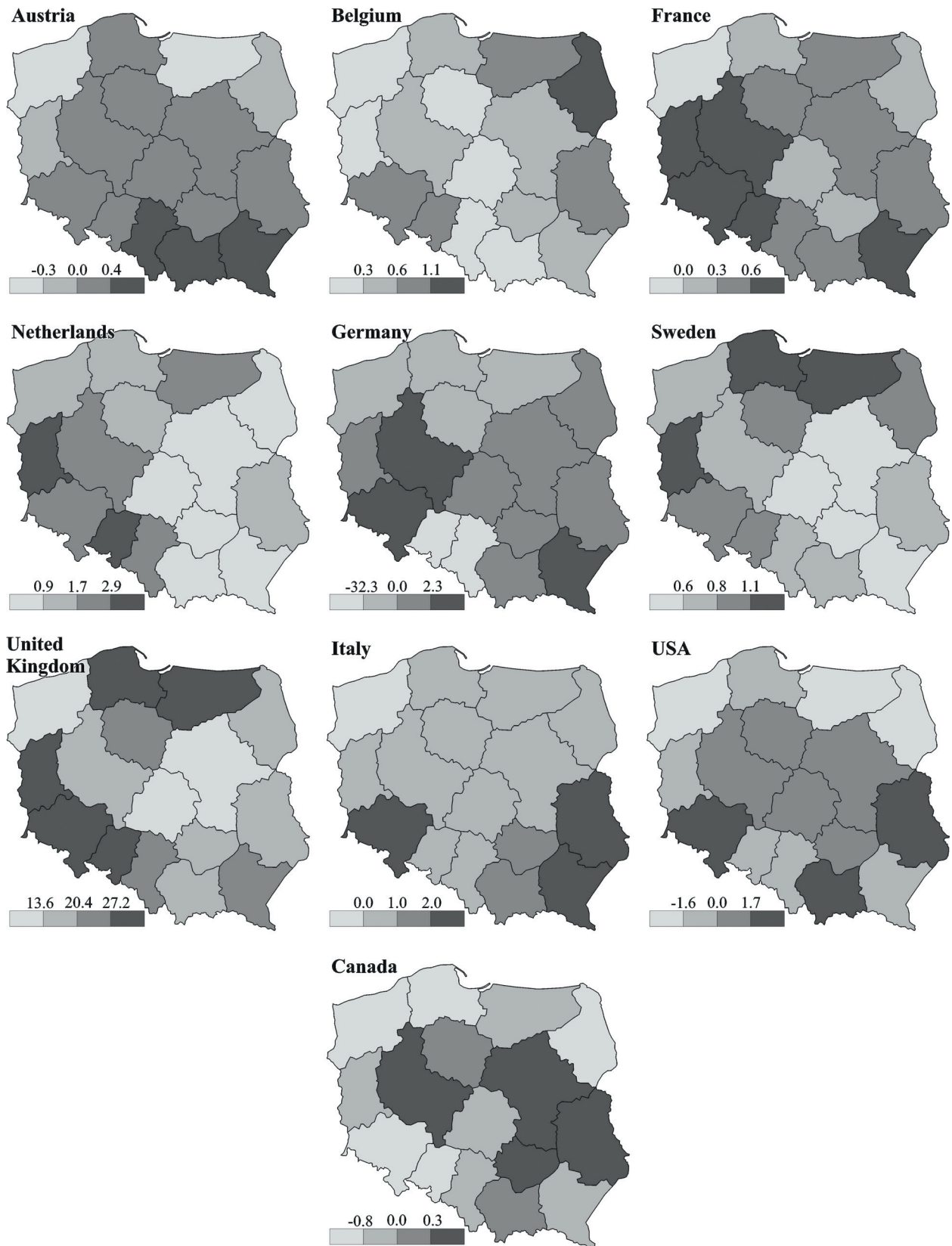
increase was noted for Dolnośląskie (55) and Lubuskie (47) voivodships. Polish emigration patterns changed at the country level and by default continent level. Changes at the country level were complex and due to both the economic situation in Poland as well as that in the host countries (Fig. 12). The decline in emigration affected first and foremost Austria, France, Italy, Canada, Germany and the United States. Hence, the key driver of emigration from Poland is not only the economic situation in Poland but also that in destination countries. Emigration may change course from one direction to another. One recent example of this is the shift towards Scandinavia. Ultimately, the rate at which various countries exit the current global economic crisis will help determine the rate of emigration from Poland. Finally, it is important to note that a first destination country may not be the ultimate destination country but a stage in the life of a given emigrant.



**Fig. 11.** Changes in the average annual rate of emigration from Poland in the period 2001-2010, by continent and per 100,000 residents

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks





**Fig. 12.** Changes in the average annual rate of emigration from Poland in the periods 2001-2005 and 2006-2010, by country and per 100,000 residents

Source: Authors' own work based on 2002-2011 Demographic Yearbooks

---

## References

- Castles, S. and Miller, M.J.**, 2009: *The Age of Migration, International Population Movements in the Modern World* (4th ed.), Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Długosz, Z.**, 1992: O niektórych przestrzennych aspektach migracji zagranicznych w Polsce (On some spatial aspects of migrations abroad in Poland – in Polish). In: *Zeszyty Naukowe UJ, Prace Geograficzne*, Z. 91, pp. 21-35.
- Długosz, Z.**, 2007: Wybrane aspekty stałej emigracji ludności z Polski za granicę po 1989 r. (Selected aspects of permanent emigration from Poland after 1989 – in Polish). In: *Czasopismo Geograficzne*, 78 (1-2), pp. 3-22.
- Długosz, Z.**, 2012: Wybrane przestrzenne aspekty trwałych migracji zagranicznych ludności w Polsce w okresie transformacji (Selected spatial aspects of permanent migrations of foreign populations in Poland in the period of the transformation – in Polish). In: Rączaszek, A. editor, *Demograficzne uwarunkowania rozwoju społecznego* (Demographic determinants of social development – in Polish), *Studia Ekonomiczne, Zeszyty Naukowe*, Nr 98, Katowice: Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny, pp. 243-258.
- Janicka-Żylicz, A. and Kowalska, K.**, 2010: Współczesne migracje zagraniczne Polaków a polski rynek pracy (Contemporary foreign migration of Poles and the Polish job market – in Polish). In: *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, Z. 4, Warszawa: Komitet Badań nad Migracjami Ludności i Polonią PAN, pp. 79-106.
- Kaczmarczyk, P.** editor, 2008: *Współczesne migracje zagraniczne Polaków – aspekty lokalne i regionalne* (Contemporary foreign migration of Poles – local and regional aspects – in Polish), Warszawa: Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami UW.
- Kaczmarczyk, P.**, 2010: Poakcesyjne migracje Polaków – próba bilansu (Polish migration following EU entry – an assessment – in Polish). In: *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny*, Z. 4, Warszawa, pp. 5-36.
- Klimaszewski, B.** editor, 2002: *Emigracja z Polski po 1989 roku* (Emigration from Poland after 1989 – in Polish), Kraków: Grell.
- Maryński, A.**, 1984: *Migracje w świecie* (Migration in our world – in Polish), Warszawa: PWN.
- Salt, J., Clarke, J. and Wanner, Ph.**, 2005: *International Labour Migration*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Slany, K.** editor, 2005: *International migration: a multidimensional analysis*, Kraków: AGH University of Science and Technology Press.