



Polish foundation to help destitute immigrants in Britain return home

22.08.2006 WARSAW, Poland (AP) _ A Polish humanitarian group plans to start working in London to help Poles return home after they failed to find decent work there, the group said Friday.

Barka, a foundation based in the western Polish city of Poznan, will send five members _ including a lawyer, a psychologist and a social worker _ to London in two weeks. There, they will help Poles who are homeless, jobless or who have had scrapes with the law, board member Ewa Sadowska said.

Poland's Foreign Ministry is helping fund the mission, spokesman Andrzej Sados said. He wouldn't say how much funding the ministry is giving, however.

Since Britain opened its labor market in 2004 to Poland and other new EU members, hundreds of thousands have gone there in hopes of finding work. Many escape a bleak situation in Poland, where the jobless rate is 15.7 percent, the EU's highest, and where wages remain low by comparison to those in older EU members.

But many of the immigrants lack English and job skills, and travel to Britain without enough money to support themselves as they get settled, Sadowska said.

"It's a very sad situation," she told The Associated Press. Many of them are "honest and nice people in Poland ... people who you would never expect to steal."

"But in extreme situations, the degradation can take place very quickly."

Most are young men, but some are older and alcoholics, she said.

She said the foundation's first priority will be to encourage people to return to their homes in Poland. But it will also help those determined to stay find legal work, learn English and adjust socially, Sadowska said.

The group expects to open a permanent office in London eventually.

She said Barka decided to embark on the project after receiving appeals for help from two British charities, the Simon Community and Housing Justice.

"We were interested in getting a partnership going because the British government isn't giving enough thought to the basic needs of people arriving here," said Alastair Murray, a coordinator with Housing Justice. "Polish officials also need to know that Poles should do homework before coming. They should come with a little bit of money and knowledge."

There are no official numbers of how many Poles live in Britain, according to the British Embassy in Warsaw. The government has registered 240,000 Poles in its so-called Worker Registration Scheme since May 2004, but many more people _ including self-employed Poles not required to register _ are believed to be working and living there.

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