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## **AFP Business report about dentists from Paragona to the UK:**

### **“Britain woos Poles to fill holes in dentistry**

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Warsaw - Since Poland joined the European Union in May last year, nearly 100 000 Poles have gone to Britain to fill holes in the job market, a recent British government report has shown.

While the mythical invasion of Polish plumbers in France has been cited as one of the reasons for the French 'non' to the European Union constitution, the British are welcoming dentists, farmhands, healthcare workers, even much-feared plumbers from Poland and the other seven former communist new EU members.

And sometimes, as in the case of dentists, they are being openly courted.

"Britain has a shortage of dentists, whereas driving around Warsaw, one is struck by how many oral healthcare practices there are here," Christopher Thompson, political secretary at the British embassy in Warsaw, told AFP.

But a dentist cannot just be transplanted from Poland to Britain without any preparatory work, so to prepare Poles to fill holes in the British job market - and teeth - the Polish and British governments have set up a training school in Warsaw.

Suitable candidates are selected and sent to Britain to visit their potential employers, and then attend a six-week course at the school to learn how Britain's National Health Service (NHS) works and to polish up their technical and day-to-day English.

The school has already sent 120 dentists to Britain since the start of the year. In June, 54 were attending the course.

When they graduate on July 1 - the day Britain takes over the EU presidency - they will head off to Britain to work as dentists for a starting salary of £48 500 (R607,200).

At that salary, with the very attractive NHS pension plan thrown in, it's hardly surprising that few Polish dentists care what the mouth of this British gift horse looks like.

But they insist it isn't just money that is luring them to Britain.

"The pension cover in Britain and the salary are much better than in Poland, but this is also a chance to work abroad and give my kids a chance to experience a different culture," said Agata Olga Siemaszko, a 41-year-old mother of two from Gdansk, who on July 1 will head to Grimsby, in northern England, to practice dentistry.

Twenty-nine-year-old Joanna Konopinska, who is also bound for Grimsby, said she was going to Britain to "have a better life."

They are not pushing British dentists out of jobs, either, Brian Grieveson, a dean of postgraduate studies in dental education at the University of Liverpool, told AFP while he was in Warsaw to drill the future drillers on the ins and outs of the NHS.

"There is a shortage in Britain of around 1 000 dentists, which was worsened 15 years ago when two schools were closed down and the government projected that the state of Britain's dental health would improve to such an extent that we wouldn't need as many dentists.

"What they didn't take into account was that the population would continue to grow while demand for good oral healthcare has also increased," he said.

To partly plug the gap, Britain is seeking to recruit 230 dentists from Poland by the end of this year.

Britain, Ireland and Sweden were the only three older EU member states which did not bar access to their job markets to nationals from former communist bloc countries which last May joined the EU.

"When it came to decision time on allowing in workers from new EU member states, the 15 original members made 15 decisions. Twelve chose to restrict their job markets because they thought that was the best for them," said Thompson.

"From our point of view, the arrangement we have is working well. But that doesn't mean we should dictate to anyone else that what they are doing is right or wrong," Thompson told AFP.

"There are 600 000 job vacancies in the UK and if people come to work, they fill key labour shortages," he said.

About 175 000 accession state nationals registered to work in the UK between May 1, 2004 and March this year, according to a report issued by the British government. More than half were Polish. Only 75 were plumbers - and not all of them were Polish.

The biggest group - more than 27 000 - were factory workers. – AFP"