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The Tendency of Entrepreneurs to Employ Foreigners: Labour Immigrants in the Opinion of Employers

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This article presents selected results from a survey conducted in 2014 and 2015 in the Province of Opole, among 263 entrepreneurs representing companies from different sectors which varied due to the number of employees and the labour market segment. Organisations with experience in employing a foreign workforce as well as those who had not previously employed foreigners were asked about their willingness to engage a foreign workforce. The analysis was made taking into account the labour market segment. Majority of respondents claimed that the country of origin of the foreign workforce is irrelevant. Such attitude was more frequent among entrepreneurs with experience in hiring foreigners than among those who have not yet taken on foreign labour. Entrepreneurs, especially those employing foreigners during the study, tended to view foreigners as more available and more willing to work overtime, hence 'better' than Polish employees. Interestingly, among respondents representing the secondary labour market, the opinion that foreigners are 'better' employees was more common than in the group representing the primary labour market.

Keywords: immigration; foreigners; labour market; Province of Opole; diversity management

Introduction

Although it does not yet have the character of a mass inflow, labour immigration to Poland is gaining in importance. This is evidenced, *inter alia*, by the increase in the number of the documents issued allowing foreigners to undertake legal work in Poland. For example, in 2004 slightly more than 12 000 work permits for foreigners were issued in the country. However, by 2016 their number exceeded 120 000. An even more dynamic growth was recorded in the number of registered statements about the intention to entrust work to a foreigner. Their number has increased from 21 000 in 2007¹ (Department of Labour Market 2014) to over 1 300 000 in 2016. The vast majority of documents were intended for Ukrainian citizens.

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The increase in labour immigration to Poland is socially accepted. Therefore, the question arises as to what the attitudes are of employers providing jobs for immigrants. Is the country of origin of the foreigner of relevance here? How do entrepreneurs evaluate the work of foreigners compared to Polish employees? What are the differences between employers with regard to the size of the company, the segment of an industry and their previous experience of hiring a foreign workforce. In relation to these research questions, hypotheses are put forward in this paper:

H1 The country of origin matters to employers taking on foreign workers.

H2 Employers perceive foreigners as 'better' workers than Poles because they have lower pay expectations.

H3 Organisations employing a foreign workforce in the primary labour market will perceive foreigners in a different way than will employers from the secondary labour market.

H4 Differences will occur in employers' perceptions of a foreign workforce between those having experience of hiring foreigners and those having no such experience.

This paper discusses the selected results of a survey conducted among 263 entrepreneurs from the Province of Opole.² The choice of research area is not accidental. The Opole Region is referred to as *migrational* (Heffner and Solga 2013: 43) – characterised by a long tradition of departures (usually foreign ones), with their accompanying social, demographic and economic consequences. The Province of Opole has become a kind of 'laboratory' for the study of migration processes, in particular emigration. For several years now, it has also been a region where research related to the process of foreign immigration has been conducted – mainly labour-market related (Jończy and Kubiciel 2010; Kubiciel-Lodzińska 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014, 2016; Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Ustrzycki 2013) but also educational (Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Ruszczak 2016).

The research presented in this paper supplements the current state of the art by examining attitudes of employers towards foreign workers. It was intended, *inter alia*, to determine whether the country of origin of foreigners is important to employers as well as to establish how representatives of companies evaluate foreign workers in comparison to Poles. The variables were analysed considering the labour-market segment represented by the entrepreneurs and the experience of the respondents in the field of employing a foreign workforce. The multidimensional analysis is an important addition to current knowledge pertaining to the perception of foreigners as employees.

Literature review

There may be a number of reasons to explain the demand for a foreign workforce. Firstly, it may arise due to structural mismatches between the supply of and demand for labour (Dietz and Kaczmarczyk 2008; Constant 2014), secondly, because of labour-market segmentation, (Piore 1979; Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor 1998) and, thirdly, as a result of socio-demographic changes (Kotowska 1999; van de Kaa 1999; Okólski 2004) including, for example, the growing demand for care services for the elderly. Usually these factors occur in combination, therefore a significant area of migration research is the position of the foreign workforce on the domestic labour market and the analysis of the competition between native and foreign workers (Borjas 1987; Peri 2016). Various aspects of the demand for the work of foreigners have also been examined, i.e. from the point of view of foreign companies (Coniglio, Hoxhaj and Seric 2017) or the

influence of the managerial background on the management style (Åslund, Hensvik and Nordström Skans 2009).

Despite the growing importance of labour immigration to Poland, research conducted among employers concerning the demand for the work of foreigners is rather limited. Moreover, studies in the field of integration, including economic integration, were conducted mainly among foreigners (Górny 2007; Grzymała-Kazłowska 2008; Bloch and Goździak 2010; Brzozowski and Pędziwiatr 2014). One of the first studies conducted from the perspective of the employers dealing with the problem of the demand for the work of foreigners in Poland was carried out by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) in 2001 (Morecka and Domaradzka 2004). It concerned, *inter alia*, the issue of hiring domestic help in households. Katarzyna Gmaj (2005) conducted 15 in-depth interviews with employers aimed at identifying their reasons for choosing foreigners. Analysis of the results produced the conclusion that, in Poland, foreigners undertake employment in two different sectors: the primary sector (foreigners coming from so-called 'Western' countries') and the secondary sector ('Eastern' countries). Maciej Kalski and Paweł Łazarczyk (2005) examined the demand for employees from the countries of the European Economic Area – 472 business entities participated in the study. The authors established that almost 90 per cent of respondents had not previously initiated actions to employ foreigners and about 80 per cent of respondents did not plan to hire citizens from the EEA. Enterprises which did consider such a possibility were large firms having international ties through their ownership and shareholder structure. The respondents usually declared their willingness to employ, firstly, Germans, then British, French, Czech, Danish and Dutch citizens.

A study of the demand for the work of foreigners was also conducted by the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (IPiSS) (Golinowska 2004). According to interviews in 30 enterprises employing foreigners, it would seem that the main reason for hiring a foreign workforce was their specific qualifications – perceived as necessary to maintaining a business on the market (this included managers and skilled workers with special and limited skills). Another reason has been the desire to distinguish a company from its competition and win customers (Chinese or Vietnamese chefs, foreign-language teachers). The third most mentioned reason was the knowledge which foreigners would have of their home-country market, which would allow the organisation to smoothly enter new areas (trade professionals who know the language of the country and its customs and who already had established business contacts).

The demand for the work of foreigners was also one of the elements of another project conducted by the IPiSS. Respondents were asked, among other things, about the issue of employing foreigners in order to fill vacancies. The survey covered 639 companies, of which only 9 employed a foreigner. Among the reasons which were crucial for hiring a foreigner were, for example, the latter's lower wage expectations and greater willingness to work, as well as Polish employees' lack of willingness to work. Despite the low number of foreigners in the organisations studied, their willingness to employ a foreign workforce was high. In a situation where no Polish workers could be found, 36.5 per cent of respondents would employ immigrants, 38.7 per cent would not have taken such a decision and 24.9 per cent were not able or did not want to unequivocally declare themselves (Kukulak-Dolata and Sobocka-Szczapa 2013).

The Centre of Migration Research in Warsaw also conducted analyses related to the demand for a foreign workforce on the basis of representative survey of Polish employers (Grabowska-Lusińska and Żylicz 2008). The results showed that the demand for the work of foreigners did not exceed 1 per cent in Poland at the time of the survey. At the same time, the potential demand amounted to 3.3 per cent and the probability of employing a foreigner was declared by just over 18 per cent of all firms interviewed.

In the Province of Opole, a study covering only organisations employing foreigners – both legally and illegally – was conducted. The aim of the research concerned the division of the labour market, i.e. the entities

employing foreign workers within the primary and secondary labour markets were identified. Overall, 91 organisations employing foreigners legally (15 representing the primary and 76 the secondary labour-market segments) and 10 employers benefiting from illegal employment participated in the study (Jończy and Kubiciel 2010). The study concluded that the main reason for hiring foreigners in organisations in the primary labour market was their qualifications whereas, on the secondary market, the lack of Polish workers willing to work for the remuneration offered was crucial. Over 75 per cent of respondents declared that using a foreign workforce allowed stability to be maintained (in the secondary labour market almost 90 per cent made this statement). The study also showed that employing immigrants in the secondary labour market resulted in additional expenditure (i.e., the cost of the work permit, free accommodation, meals etc.), which organisations not using a foreign workforce did not have to incur.

Also worth mentioning is the research, conducted by the East–West Link, among 150 employers, to determine their reasons for employing foreigners, the most common difficulties and relations between Polish and foreign employees. Among the arguments for hiring a foreign workforce, employers pointed to the lower labour costs and the higher motivation of the employees. However, the vast majority (90 per cent) mentioned the shortage of a Polish workforce as the main reason for hiring foreigners. Among the barriers for using foreigners, the respondents mentioned communication issues such as the language barrier as well as a lack of necessary qualifications (Wafflard 2011).

The research mentioned above generally refers to employers' motives for taking on immigrants, the difficulties involved with employing them and the perceived benefits. The attitude of employers towards their foreign workforce is rarely taken into account. Moreover, the attitude towards foreigners taking up employment in Poland has thus far mainly been studied from the perspective of society as a whole (Public Opinion Research Centre 2008, 2015).

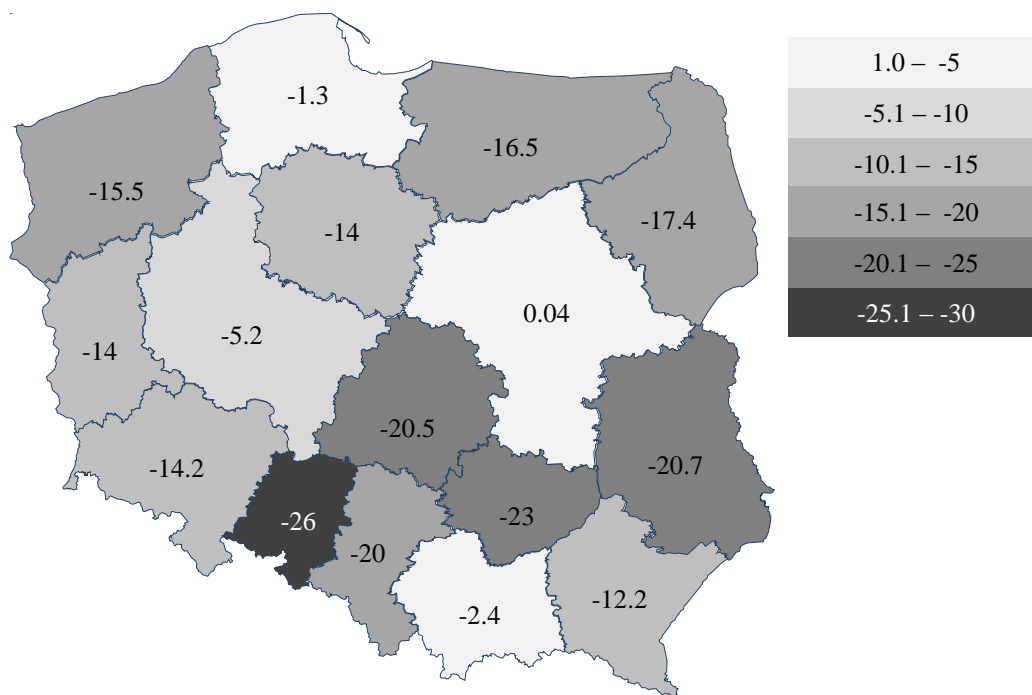
Apart from the analysis of motives for the employment of foreigners and difficulties resulting from the use of a foreign workforce, very few analyses of the employers' attitudes towards employing foreigners or the evaluation of their work have been carried out in Poland thus far. Among those which *have* been conducted, the following should be mentioned. Firstly, a study carried out by the Institute of Social Policy at the University of Warsaw, in which employers were asked about assigned employees and their professional relationships with Poles, should be mentioned (Institute of Social Policy of the University of Warsaw 2011). On the other hand, a comparison of the quality of the work performed by foreigners and by Poles was taken into account in research on foreigners' demands for work. The survey was conducted in the Lublin region (Kornefał 2008) and carried out in construction companies of Eastern Poland by a team from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (Organiściak-Krzykowska, Piotrowski, Nyklewicz, Skórska and Kucharski 2013). Entrepreneurs from the Lublin region highly appreciated the conscientiousness and honesty of foreigners. Employers with experience of using a foreign workforce admitted that they would prefer to employ a foreigner than an unemployed Pole. Nearly 70 per cent of the representatives of companies participating in the second study did not notice any difference in the work of foreigners and native workers. A similar comparison was carried out by Dariusz Klimek (2014). Entrepreneurs emphasised that there was a greater availability of migrants than of Poles.

Data and description of a research area

This paper presents selected results of a survey carried out in 2014/2015 in enterprises in the Opole Province. The Opole region is the smallest province in Poland – as regards both its territory and the number of inhabitants. According to the data provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO), the population only slightly exceeds 1 million, which places the region in last position in the country. Furthermore, according to prognoses,

the region's population will keep diminishing – the CSO's prognosis for the years 2014–2050 is that the Opole Province will face the biggest drop in population, since the number of its inhabitants will have decreased by 2050 by over 25 per cent in comparison with that in 2013 (CSO 2014) as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Population change from 2013 to 2050 by regions (in percentages)



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the CSO (2014).

The actual population situation in Opole Province has proved true to the unfavourable demographic scenarios presented for the region by the CSO. The real numbers have already been assessed as lower than 1 million at approximately 930 000–940 000. This results from the fact that so-called suspended emigrants make up almost 9 per cent of the region's population, something which is not recorded in the official statistics. It concerns those who went abroad in the 1980s, yet whose registered residence still remains in the Opole region (Jończy 2010: 156–157). It follows from other studies that the actual population quota in the region is even lower and, in 2011, amounted to slightly over 870 000, the result having been corrected to take into account unregistered emigrants (Dybowska and Widera 2015: 113). The decline in the total population was accompanied by a change in its structure – a drop in the number of children and an increase in the number of people of post-working age – which would have a serious impact on the labour market.

The survey of enterprises was not expected to be representative of all companies in the region. Although it is possible to draw up representative samples both of those that employ foreigners and of those that do not, convincing employers to participate in a study is, in most cases, ineffective and the response rate in such surveys is usually very low (Golinowska 2004: 167). Therefore, the sample was defined broadly to include all enterprises which were, at the time of the research, employing and not employing a foreign workforce, regardless of the industry and the size – i.e. micro, small, medium and large enterprises.³

Respondents were contacted in several ways. First, a CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) survey was sent to over 900 companies – to all members of the Opole Chamber of Commerce (479 companies), Klub 150 (199 companies), participants of the international research project pursued by the Opole University of

Technology and the University of Opole (200 companies),⁴ and those featured in the database of the Opole Province Office as entities that obtained work permits for foreigners in 2014 (30 companies). However, only 44 filled out and returned it – i.e. less than 5 per cent of the group. Therefore, contacting respondents by email was found to be ineffective. The second method used in the study was PAPI (Paper & Pen Personal Interview), conducted at meetings and in training organised for the enterprises.⁵ It is worth noting that not all enterprises taking part in such meetings agreed to participate in the study. On average, about one third (in some cases a half) of all participants refused to talk to the interviewer in order to complete the questionnaire. This shows that studies in the business community constitute a challenge. Finally, 263 employers were included in the study – managers, firm owners, directors or supervisors responsible for the human resources management policy in the particular organisation.

The sample consisted mainly of micro-enterprises (43 per cent or 113 entities). Over a third (88 respondents) were small companies. Medium and large enterprises made up a much smaller part of the group and included, respectively, 17.1 per cent (45 companies) and 6.4 per cent (17 companies) of the sample. Among the surveyed companies, the largest group was the construction sector with over 25 per cent (70 companies). The detailed breakdown of the sample by sector is presented in Table 1. Employers in the service sector were the second largest group at 66 per cent. The third largest group, with 11.8 per cent (31 companies) of all analysed organisations was the metal industry and the fourth group was organisations from the food industry at 10.7 per cent (28 respondents).

Table 1. Enterprises by sector of industry

Sector	N	%
Construction	70	26.6
Metal industry	31	11.8
Fuel and energy industry	4	1.5
Wood and paper industry	12	4.7
Furniture industry	13	4.9
Medical services and rehabilitation	7	2.7
Transportation and logistics	13	4.9
Food industry	28	10.7
Chemical industry	5	1.9
Agriculture	10	3.8
Services	66	25.0
Tourism	4	1.5
Total	263	100.0

Source: author's own compilation.

The share of respondents from other industries was lower. The companies representing the furniture and transport and logistics industries each accounted for 4.9 per cent (13 companies) and the wood and paper industry 4.7 per cent (12 entities). In terms of the number of respondents, agricultural companies represented 3.8 per cent (10 entities), firms representing medical and rehabilitation services 2.7 per cent (7 companies), the chemical industry 1.9 per cent (5 companies) and organisations representing tourism and the fuel and energy industry 1.5 per cent each (4 respondents).

Furthermore, in accordance with dual labour-market theory (Piore 1979), the companies were divided according to the segment of the labour market represented by them. The primary labour market includes prestigious industries and occupations – the so-called ‘good’ jobs. On the other hand, the secondary labour market includes non-skilled jobs, which are generally perceived as unattractive – the so-called ‘bad’ jobs (Bibb and Form 1977: 977). Qualification for a particular segment depended on the profession in which the company employed or would be willing to employ a foreigner. Assignment to the primary market meant that the company was employing (or would employ) a foreigner qualified in a white-collar profession (such as foreign language teachers, doctors, IT specialists, sales representatives, sports trainers, chemists, technologists, mechanical engineers, marketing specialists, automation specialists or office workers). Assignment to the secondary labour market were companies employing or willing to employ a foreigner qualified in a blue-collar profession (including skilled and unskilled workers, i.e. construction workers, welders, chefs, drivers, carpenters, mechanics, locksmiths, electricians, barbers, hairdressers or cleaner). Regardless of the sector, organisations employing foreigners in ‘white-collar’ positions are included in the primary sector while those employing foreigners in ‘blue-collar’ jobs were included into the secondary labour market. For simplicity purposes, we will henceforth refer to organisations employing foreigners in ‘good’ jobs as being in the primary labour market and those employing foreigners in ‘bad’ jobs as being in the secondary labour market. The vast majority of respondents were companies employing a foreign workforce in jobs from the secondary labour market – 81 per cent of the respondents (213 in total), while those in the primary labour market accounted for 19 per cent of the sample (50 in total) – see Table 2.

Table 2. Enterprises by number of employees and labour-market segment

Labour-market segment	Micro enterprises (≤10 employees)		Small enterprises (≤50 employees)		Medium enterprises (≤250 employees)		Large enterprises (≥250 employees)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Primary	20	17.7	14	15.9	11	24.4	5	29.4	50	19.0
Secondary	93	82.3	74	84.1	34	75.6	12	70.6	213	81.0
Total	113	100.0	88	100.0	45	100.0	17	100.0	263	100.0

Source: Author’s own compilation.

In the case of micro enterprises, over 82 per cent (93 firms) were included in the secondary labour-market segment while 17.7 per cent (20 firms) were in the primary sector. Within the group of small enterprises, the share of the secondary labour-market sector was higher at 84.1 per cent (74 companies) with less than 16 per cent (14 firms) for the primary market. Among the medium and large organisations there was a slightly higher number in the primary labour market with, respectively, 24.4 per cent (11 organisations) and 29.4 per cent (5). Respectively, 75.6 per cent (34 firms) and 70.6 per cent (12 firms) represented the secondary labour market.

Foreigners’ country of origin and employers’ willingness to hire immigrants

One of the objectives of this paper was to determine whether the country of origin was relevant for the employers in our survey when deciding whether or not to employ a foreigner. The answers are summarised in Table 3. More than 50 per cent of respondents (139 organisations) claimed that the origin of the foreign worker was irrelevant. Almost one fifth (65 firms) claimed that, if they did decide to employ a foreigner, they would prefer a person from Eastern Europe. A little over 8 per cent of respondents (17 replies) would only employ

a person from an EU member-state, while 14 per cent (38 firms) stated unequivocally that they did not intend to employ foreigners at all.

Table 3. Responses to the question ‘Has country of origin been taken into account when deciding whether or not to employ a foreigner?’

Response	Primary labour market		Secondary labour market		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No, the country of origin of the foreign worker is not relevant	28	52.8	111	52.9	139	51.3
Yes, we would be ready to employ a person from Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia)	13	24.5	52	24.7	65	24.7
Yes, we would be ready to employ only a person coming from an EU member-state	7	13.2	10	4.8	17	8.1
We do not want to employ foreigners	2	3.8	36	17.1	38	14.0
Other	3	5.7	1	0.5	4	1.8
Total	53	100.0	210	100.0	263	100.0

Source: Author’s own compilation.

Furthermore, when analysing the responses by labour-market segment, we can see that respondents from the primary segment were slightly more likely to employ only employees from EU member-states – 13.2 per cent versus 4.8 per cent. However, a greater share of employers from the secondary segment categorically declared that they did not intend to employ a foreign workforce (17.1 per cent against 3.8 per cent).

Concerning the origin of the foreign workforce, differences are apparent between entrepreneurs with experience in hiring foreigners and those who have not yet used foreign labour, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Response to the question concerning employers’ willingness to hire a foreign workforce due to their country of origin, by respondents’ experience (or lack of) in employing foreigners

Response	Entrepreneurs with experience in hiring foreigners		Entrepreneurs with no experience in hiring foreigners		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No, the country of origin of the employee is not relevant	17	45.9	122	54.0	139	52.9
Yes, we would be ready to employ a person from Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia)	18	48.6	47	20.8	65	24.7
Yes, we would be ready to employ only a person coming from an EU member-state	0	0.0	17	7.5	17	6.5
We do not want to employ foreigners	0	0.0	38	16.8	38	14.4
Other	3	7.9	1	0.4	4	1.5
Total	38	100.0	225	100.0	263	100.0

Source: Author’s own compilation.

Almost 46 per cent of entrepreneurs who had experience in employing foreigners claimed that the origin of the foreign employee was not relevant – less than the group of employers who had not hired yet foreign workers. In the latter case, as many as 54 per cent of respondents were open to hiring a foreign workforce regardless of country of origin. In turn, more than 48 per cent of respondents with experience in employing foreigners indicated that they are inclined to employ people from Eastern Europe. In this same group, no one was ready to employ only a person from an EU member-state, while 7.5 per cent of respondents from those with no experience of hiring foreigners would consider it. The responses in Table 4 indicate a fairly broad openness of the employers surveyed towards immigrants. However, during direct talks with the former, we found that what our respondents meant by the term ‘foreigner’ was people from Eastern Europe, mainly the Ukraine. They did not even think of people coming from Africa or Asia, for example, which could explain the high percentage of responses indicating a lack of preference as to the nationality of the foreign worker.

Foreigners versus Polish workers: employers’ assessments

The employers were also asked to compare foreign and Polish workers. The answers given were analysed according to the labour-market segments in which the companies operated and their experience in hiring a foreign workforce. In general, positive assessments of foreigners’ work predominated. More than 22 per cent of respondents (79 employers) considered foreigners to be more available and more willing to work overtime, hence ‘better’ than Polish employees. Approximately 17 per cent (62 employers) said they were ‘better’ because of their lower wage expectations and 12 per cent (43 employers) claimed that they were ‘better’ than Poles because they cared more about their job and were less conflictual. In more than 10 per cent of respondents’ opinions (36 employers), foreigners are ‘worse’ employees than Poles because of the need to take care of them after working hours. Slightly more than 9 per cent of respondents (33 employers) indicated that immigrants are ‘worse’ employees because they arrive for a short period of time and therefore do not engage in the job and 5 per cent (18 respondents) thought they were ‘worse’ than Poles because they had to learn the job. Nearly 8 per cent (28 respondents) assessed foreigners as equal to Polish employees and nearly 15 per cent (53) had no opinion. The details are presented in Table 5.

Some interesting differences in the distribution of responses are visible between organisations due to their experience in the employment of a foreign workforce, as shown in Table 5. In those firms employing foreigners during the study period, foreigners were more often assessed as ‘better’ than Polish workers. More than a quarter of respondents in this group were of the opinion that foreign workers are ‘better’ workers than Poles because they are more available, while a fifth – who had no experience in employing foreigners were of the same opinion. Similarly, more respondents from the first group than the second pointed to the lower wage expectations of immigrants (18 compared to 17 per cent) and the fact that foreigners care more about their jobs than do Poles (15.1 versus 11.5 per cent). On the other hand, among employers who had no experience of hiring foreigners, it was often felt that foreigners are ‘worse’ because they arrive for a short period of time and therefore do not engage in the job (9.5 per cent) and that they have to be taken care of after working hours (over 10 per cent).

Table 5. Foreign employees: employers' assessment compared to Polish workers

Foreign workers are:	Entrepreneurs with experience in hiring foreigners		Entrepreneurs with no experience in hiring foreigners		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
'Better' employees because they are more available and willing to work overtime	14	26.4	65	21.4	79	22.1
'Better' employees because they have lower wage expectations	10	18.9	52	17.1	62	17.4
'Better' employees because they care more about their job and are less conflictual	8	15.1	35	11.5	43	12.0
'Worse' employees because they had to learn the job	3	5.7	15	4.9	18	5.0
'Worse' employees because they arrive for a short period of time and therefore do not engage in the job	4	7.5	29	9.5	33	9.2
'Worse' employees because of the need to take care of them after working hours	3	5.7	33	10.9	36	10.1
They are the same as Polish employees	7	13.2	21	7.0	28	7.8
I do not have an opinion	3	5.7	50	16.4	53	14.8
Other	1	1.9	4	1.3	5	1.4
Total	53	100.0	304	100.0	357	100.0

Source: Author's own compilation.

When analysing the results of this research, we can see that most employers were of the opinion that foreigners are 'better' employees than Poles because they are more likely to work overtime. It is worth emphasising that this is a judgment common not only among employers in the Province of Opole. The same opinion was expressed by entrepreneurs in the United Kingdom who stated that among the benefits of employing migrant workers was the fact that they were more 'employable' not because of lower wages but, rather, due to their higher productivity and greater willingness to work overtime (Sommerville and Sumpton 2009: 17). Such expectations are particularly noticeable in agriculture, hotel and catering, as well as in construction. The desire to employ foreigners due to their 'greater motivation and commitment' and greater willingness to work 'many hours, more flexibly' has also been revealed in other studies conducted among UK employers (Dench, Hurstfield, Hill and Akroyd 2006: 29).

Some differences in the distribution of responses are visible between organisations depending on their labour-market segment (Table 6).

The organisations representing the primary labour market emphasised that immigrants are 'better' because they are more willing to work overtime (18.2 per cent – 12 respondents). At the same time a group only slightly smaller with 17 per cent (11 replies) did not have an opinion about the issue in question. For more than 15 per cent of the respondents, foreigners are 'better' employees because they care more about their work and, for 13 per cent of respondents, foreigners – due to their lower wage expectations – are 'better' employees than Poles. According to 7.6 per cent of entrepreneurs (5 replies), foreigners are 'worse' employees because they do not engage in the work and, in the opinion of 4.5 per cent of respondents (3) it is because they have to learn the

job and to be taken care of after working hours. More than 13 per cent of respondents considered immigrants and Poles be equally employable.

Table 6. Foreign employees: employers' assessment by labour-market segment

Foreign workers are:	Primary labour market		Secondary labour market		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
'Better' employees because they are more available and willing to work overtime	12	18.2	67	23.0	79	22.1
'Better' employees because they have lower wage expectations	9	13.6	53	18.2	62	17.4
'Better' employees because they care more about their job and are less conflictual	10	15.2	33	11.3	43	12.0
'Worse' employees because they had to learn the job	3	4.5	15	5.2	18	5.0
'Worse' employees because they arrive for a short period of time and therefore do not engage in the job	5	7.6	28	9.6	33	9.2
'Worse' employees because of the need to take care of them after working hours	3	4.5	33	11.3	36	10.1
They are the same as Polish employees	9	13.6	19	6.5	28	7.8
I do not have an opinion	11	16.7	42	14.4	53	14.8
Other	4	6.1	1	0.3	5	1.6
Total	66	100.0	291	100.0	357	100.0

Source: Author's own compilation.

Among the respondents representing the secondary labour market, the opinion that foreigners are 'better' employees was more common than those in the primary labour market. Of the respondents, 23 per cent (67 companies) emphasised that foreigners are more willing to work overtime. More than 18 per cent of respondents said that, in their opinion, immigrants are 'better' because they have lower pay expectations and 11.3 per cent (33 respondents) claimed that it was because they were more engaged in their job. A little over a fifth of the responses were negative opinions about foreigners. The most frequently mentioned accusation concerned the need to take care of immigrants after working hours (11.3 per cent or 33 responses), immigrants' lack of engagement in work (9.6 per cent – 28 replies) and the need to train them (5.2 per cent – 15 responses). More than 14 per cent of the respondents did not have an opinion on foreign workers and 6.5 per cent (19 replies) considered foreigners to be equal to Polish employees.

Summary

The growing number of foreigners employed by Polish companies makes immigration an increasingly important part of the labour market. The growing interest in reaching out to a foreign workforce can be observed, *inter alia*, by analysing the number of work permits issued and the registered statements of intention to entrust work to a foreigner. Between the year 2007 and 2016 the number of the former increased tenfold while, in the same period, the latter were registered 60 times more often. It was therefore considered important to determine

whether employers had preferences regarding the country of origin of the foreign workforce. At present most of the foreigners undertaking employment in Poland are Ukrainian citizens. However, the question arises as to whether employers would be willing to employ people from other, possibly distant, countries?

The research we conducted confirmed our hypothesis that employers pay attention to the country of origin of the foreign workforce. We have seen that, although more than half of our employer respondents officially declared that the origin of a foreign employee is of no importance to them, our results revealed that this does not fully correspond with the reality since, in the minds of employers, a foreigner equals a Ukrainian. In answering the question, they were not thinking, for example, of people from Africa, Asia or the Far East as potential employees.

However, differences can be seen between entrepreneurs with experience in hiring foreigners and those who have not yet engaged foreign labour. Almost 46 per cent of entrepreneurs from the former group claimed that the country of origin of the foreign employee was irrelevant. This is less than in the group of employers who have not hired foreign workers yet. More than 22 per cent of respondents (79 employers) considered foreigners as more available and more willing to work overtime, hence 'better' than Polish employees. Such an opinion was particularly common in firms employing foreigners during the study period: it was expressed by a quarter of respondents from this group. Among those representing the secondary labour market, the opinion that foreigners are 'better' employees was more common than in the group representing the primary labour market.

Differences in perceptions of foreign employees were noticed while analysing the data by the labour-market segment (primary or secondary) in which the foreigners were employed. Organisations employing foreigners in jobs on the primary labour market more often than those on the secondary labour market said that they would be willing to employ only an EU citizen. On the other hand, organisations employing or willing to employ a foreign workforce in secondary labour-market jobs more often pointed to the need for them to take care of the foreigners after work.

The hypothesis regarding the perception of foreigners as 'better' workers than native ones due to their lower wage expectations was verified negatively. Although for more than 50 per cent of the surveyed organisations foreigners were 'better' employees than Poles, it was found out that this was mainly due to the belief that the employer could benefit from the specific and difficult market position of the foreign workforce. Entrepreneurs focused primarily on the greater availability of a foreign workforce and their lower pay expectations.

It seems that the importance of labour immigration to Poland is on the increase. Almost 88 per cent of entrepreneurs who took part in the survey in the Province of Opole believed that the employment of immigrants in Poland would become a necessity. Only slightly more than 9 per cent of the respondents strongly believed that there would be no such need. Moreover, in the course of the study, a third admitted that they already felt that the difficulty of recruiting appropriately qualified staff hampered the development of their company. Therefore it is evident that employees will be forced to deal with immigrants in the future and adapt some strategies to deal with the challenges associated with it. The most obvious strategy is diversity management, which acknowledges differences between employees *inter alia* due to their nationality and ethnic origin and offers strategies for dealing with the challenges while gaining competitive advantage and additional profits (Maj 2012, 2015; Maj and Walkowiak 2015).

The opinions of employers show that Poland is facing the challenges of labour immigration and perhaps also permanent migration. It is therefore necessary to conduct more in-depth analyses relating to immigrants – both circulating and permanent – that would allow the government to determine the amount of taxes they should pay, their usage of the social security systems, how to redistribute the income or generally to determine their situation in Polish organisations and on the Polish labour market.

Notes

- ¹ Statements about the intention to entrust work to a foreigner were introduced in 2006.
- ² More detailed research results were presented in Kubiciel-Lodzińska (2016).
- ³ In this paper the terms ‘firm’, ‘enterprise’, ‘organisation’ and ‘company’ are used interchangeably.
- ⁴ This refers to the EU-funded project *Effective Transfer of Knowledge from Science to Industry in the Opolskie Voivodeship*.
- ⁵ One of the authors of this study was a participant at business meetings organised in cooperation with Opolskie Centrum Rozwoju Gospodarki, Opolska Izba Gospodarcza, consulting company Zaga. The authors received assistance from the Cech Rzemiosł i Przedsiębiorczości in Opole.

Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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