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## Experience in Employing Immigrants and the Perception of Benefits of a Diverse Workforce

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this article is to present the employers' perception of challenges and opportunities resulting from the presence of immigrants on the labour market, and to show how experience in employing immigrants (or the lack of it) influences the employers' perception of benefits and challenges of having a cultural diverse workforce.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Therefore, two groups of organizations were subject of analysis: those employing and those not employing immigrants. The paper discusses the results of a survey conducted among 400 Polish employers from the construction sector. The research was based on the Allport's contact theory.

**Findings:** The results show a statistically significant difference between organisations employing and not employing immigrants in regard to the perception of benefits, as well as the future demand on immigrant workforce. In contrast, there were no significant differences between organisations employing and not employing immigrants as to their perception of barriers.

**Practical Implications:** The research shows that through positive attitudes, organisations may support the process of spreading acceptance towards immigrants

**Originality/value:** The conducted research contributes to the existing knowledge by presenting the differences in the perception of immigrant workforce by organisations employing and not employing a diverse, immigrant workforce by showing that experience in employing immigrants affects the employers' perception.

**Keywords:** Migration, immigration, labour market, diversity, contact theory, construction.

**JEL classification:** J15, J61, M14, M51, J21.

**Paper Type:** Research study.

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## **1. Introduction**

Employing an immigrant workforce has become an important strategy for organisations in Europe and all over the world. Migrants have now become an important part of the workforce in countries that until recently were perceived as emigration countries, including East European Countries like Poland (Solga and Kubiciel-Lodzinska, 2017), Czechia (Heath and Richards, 2020; Seidlova, 2018), Slovakia (Panik *et al.*, 2019) or Latvia (Ivļevs, 2012) and can be characterized as so-called transition economies (Zygmunt, 2020; Caran and Noja, 2015).

Employers play a key role in the recruitment of immigrants (Rodriguez, 2004) and in their integration (Lundborg and Skedinger, 2016). Unemployment is a powerful push-factor for migration (Mihi-Ramirez *et al.*, 2017) and demand for work is the key driver for immigration (Massey *et al.*, 1999), thus, while analysing migration processes, it is necessary not only to study the migrants themselves, but also the employers.

The main goal of this article is to present the employers' perception on the challenges and opportunities resulting from the presence of immigrants on the labour market. As indicated by Serban *et al.* (2020), attitudes towards migrants in Europe have changed over time and there are many factors which influence those attitudes. Sometimes it is reasonable to assume that employer's attitudes are similar to the general public (Carlsson and Rooth, 2012)). However, the attitude regarding employment decisions cannot be inferred from surveys of the general population. It is necessary to conduct research that directly shows the attitude of employers to migrants. The aim of the article was to show how experience in employing immigrants (or the lack of it) influences the employers' perception of benefits and challenges of having a cultural, diverse workforce. Therefore, two groups of organizations were subject to analysis: those employing and those not employing immigrants.

The paper discusses results of a quantitative study conducted among 400 Polish employers from the construction sector. The choice of the sector results from a growing demand on immigrants in construction (Erllich and Grabelsky, 2005; Kumar and Fernández, 2015), which often even relies on an immigrant workforce (Wells, 1996). This results, among others, from its seasonal and project-based work character (Bosch and Philips, 2002) and other characteristics like seasonality or staff fluctuation (Hawrysz, 2017a). Furthermore, in construction, similar to services and agriculture, it is difficult to look for savings by simply moving the economic activity to a different location (Bebenek, 2016). That is why migrants are eagerly employed in this sector.

Companies employing and not employing migrants took part in the study. This approach enabled valuable insight into the prejudices against migrant workers and to any anticipated difficulties or pitfalls associated with their employment. Comparing perceptions with real experiences has allowed determining where the biggest misunderstandings lie and what information or support can help overcome employer barriers in employing migrant workers.

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The conducted research contributes to the existing knowledge by presenting the differences in the perception of the immigrant workforce by organisations employing and not employing a diverse, immigrant workforce. In focusing on the construction sector, the following research questions were asked: Are there differences in the perception of opportunities resulting from employing migrants between organisations employing and not employing immigrants? Are there differences in the perception of challenges resulting from employing migrants between organisations employing and not employing immigrants? Are there differences in the perception of the future demand on immigrant workforce?

The paper is organized as follows. First a literature review is presented, followed by the methodology and the description of the research sample. The research results are then discussed, finally, conclusions are presented.

## 2. Literature Review

Research conducted so far pays relatively little attention to the issue of the perception of immigrant labour by employers. However, several topics describing employers in the context of using immigrant workforces can be distinguished. Most studies focus on motives for hiring immigrants. Such studies refer to the use of unskilled or low-skilled workers, but also high-skilled migrants (Frank, 2018). This shows that immigrants do not push out domestic workers but are rather employed because domestic workers are not available (Borjas, 1994; Martins *et al.*, 2018). Other reasons for reaching towards immigrants is the short supply of candidates with the required experience for the job and a short supply of candidates with the required skills (CIPD, 2005). These co-related factors have been indicated by organisations employing high-skilled migrants and concerns both specific qualifications (knowledge of the foreign market) and qualifications that are affected by a shortage in the immigration country (IT specialists, engineers, medical personnel) (Khoo *et al.*, 2007). Research shows that the main driver for employing foreigners is their complementarity (Hunt and Gauthier-Loiselle, 2010; Quispe-Agnoli and Zavodny, 2002; Noja and Cristea, 2018).

The second research area focuses on the benefits of employing immigrants. Research indicates that offering jobs to immigrants allows the lowering of costs, as immigrants are more willing to accept lower wages (Piore, 1979; Waldinger and Lichter, 2003), they are more efficient and willingly work over-time (Lyon and Sulcova, 2009; Metcalf *et al.*, 2009). Research also reveals that factors stimulating immigrant employment are beliefs that it is easier to manage immigrants (Shih, 2002) and that they work harder (and more efficiently) than domestic workers (Hock and Sivananthiran, 1995). These benefits are not conferred only to the organisations per se, but also to the immigrants themselves, as they ease their path towards economic integration (Brzozowski, 2019; Marcu *et al.*, 2018).

The third research area concerns human resources management and diversity

management. The country of origin (Stangej *et al.*, 2019), race (Kirschenman and Neckerman, 1991; Pager and Karafin, 2009) or even the holding of a foreign sounding name (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004; Carlsson and Rooth, 2007) may influence the decision to hire an immigrant. Research demonstrates that the attitudes of individual managers may influence the way immigrants are perceived and may influence their selection and promotion process (Frank, 2018; Lundborg and Skedinger, 2016). In assessing a candidate, managers have a complex task - as they are often confronted with language and cultural differences that may make it difficult to make the decision to hire such a person (Farashah and Blomquist, 2019).

Furthermore, such attributes may also create additional challenges, among others, for the development of motivation systems (Adamska, 2018). On the other hand, literature and practice show that diversity management and inclusion bring measurable benefits for organizations (Cox, 1994; Cox and Blake, 1991; Klitmoller and Luring, 2013; Pless and Maak, 2004; Bebenek, 2018), and diversity management is perceived as a tool of managing intellectual capital (Jelinkova and Jirincova, 2015; Adamska and Szweczek-Śtepien, 2020). In addition, the managers' cultural backgrounds may influence their willingness to employ immigrants (especially unemployed non-Western immigrants). Higher willingness to employ immigrants, as shown by Swedish studies, characterises organisations having at least one manager from a non-Western country in their ranks (Daunfeldt *et al.*, 2019).

The fourth research area presents a macroeconomic perspective and emphasizes that it is important to include the socio-economic context of the decision to employ an immigrant while analysing the employer's role in this process (MacKenzie and Forde, 2009). It should be stressed that from macroeconomic perspective, immigration should be perceived as a positive process, as it fosters entrepreneurship (Brzozowski, 2017; Zbierowski, Brzozowska and Gojny-Zbierowska, 2019; Glinka and Jelonek, 2021); and thus innovation in economic and regional perspectives (Malik *et al.*, 2020), but also innovation as a capability (Hawrysz, 2017b; Kowal *et al.*, 2017; Klimas and Czakon, 2018) or from the perspective of individual organisations (Zygmunt, 2020; Drewniak and Karaszewski, 2020).

The literature review has brought to light that the employer's perception of immigrants is, in general, usually analysed from the perspective of the organisation that is in fact employing this group of workers. The literature lacks a comparative analysis of organisations having experience in employing immigrant workforce and organisations which do not have such an experience. The research conducted (so far) shows that the willingness to employ immigrants is linked to their attitude towards the immigrants' country of origin (Maj *et al.*, 2020) and that employers' perception of immigrants may be influenced by their experience in employing immigrants or their lack of it (Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Maj, 2017). Due to the presented research gap, the necessity to conduct the presented research in order to fill the gap has been assessed as relevant. Experience basically refers to the knowledge acquired as built upon observations and happenstance (Roth and Jornt, 2014). Having or not having experience, to some

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extent, affects the perception of a given phenomenon, because affective reactions arise through science and experience (Damasio, 2006). According to Dewey's theory of experience, education is connected with acquaintance. This theory referred directly to the education process, but it can also be adapted to wider needs and it can be assumed that in learning something "new" (Giles, 1987), its possible acceptance is based on direct cognition and influences attitudes towards some phenomenon or people.

When formulating the hypothesis, however, interpersonal contact theory (also known as contact theory) formulated by Allport (1954) was crucial. Accordingly, interaction with a person with a stigmatised identity reduces not only prejudices against that person, but also prejudices against the stigmatised group. Therefore, when constructing the hypotheses, it was considered that having or not having experience in employing immigrants is important for the perception of a migrant workforce. Contact theory was used, among other purposes, in examining the attitude of White Americans to the African-American community (Dixon *et al.*, 2010). Studies confirm that the existence of contact between groups usually corresponds with a lower level of prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Thus, contact is an important factor taken into consideration when studying racial attitudes (Binder *et al.*, 2009). As a rule, it favours more positive attitudes - hence, the following hypothesis was developed:

*H1: The fact of employing or not employing immigrants influences the perception of benefits of employing immigrants.*

Migrants belong to a different culture and introduce new norms and beliefs that can negatively affect attitudes towards them (Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995). Based on the contact theory and the integrated threat theory, a second hypothesis was formulated. According to the integrated threat theory, if people believe that their beliefs and values are at risk, prejudices may occur. The threat does not have to be real, just perceiving the threat (the appearance of a barrier) can trigger a prejudice (Stephan and Stephan, 1996).

*H2: The fact of employing or not employing immigrants influences the perception of barriers of employing immigrants.*

Based on the attitude theory, a third hypothesis was formulated. Attitudes are individualistic tendencies to positively or negatively respond to a phenomenon, behaviour or person (Ajzen, 1993). According to this theory, cognitive approaches or information processing is used to shape attitudes. An attitude towards a phenomenon is shaped by way of the beliefs that people have about this phenomenon (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). These beliefs may result from direct observation or knowledge - or are shaped on the basis of information that the entity receives from outside, e.g. from media communications (Ajzen, 1993).

*H3: The fact of employing or not employing immigrants influences the perception of*

*the future demand on immigrant workforce*

Research has uncovered the fact that contact has a positive effect on attitudes towards other social groups (Brown *et al.*, 2007), and migrants may be perceived as such. The Migrant Acceptance Index shows a strong correlation between interpersonal contact with a migrant and the attitudes towards them. Herein, individuals who had previous contact with immigrants have a more positive attitude towards them than do those who did not have such an experience (Fleming *et al.*, 2018).

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

The article discusses the results of a quantitative study conducted among 400 companies from the construction industry. The choice of this industry was deliberate. Construction, according to global studies, is a sector with a high demand for an immigrant workforce (Buckley *et al.*, 2016). The case is the same in Poland. For many years following the systemic transformation, Poland was an emigration country. Poles went to work abroad and this mainly concerned employees from the construction industry (Grabowska-Lusinska, 2007). As a consequence, there is an workforce gap in Poland, among others, in the construction sector, which has now become supplemented by immigrants (Organiściak-Krzykowska and Piotrowski, 2015). From the perspective of domestic workers, construction is not an attractive work area and is often avoided by them (Wells, 1996). Thus, employers from this sector very often prefer immigrants (Chan *et al.*, 2008). This may result from labour market segregation, which means that immigrants are willingly to include themselves in the construction sector (Buckley *et al.*, 2016).

The companies which were included in the study were chosen due to their main PKD code (Polish Classification of Activities), which classifies organizations as active in the construction industry. The companies were then divided into those employing immigrants and those not having experience in employing an immigrant workforce. The standardized questionnaire used the five-point Likert scale, where 1 meant “I disagree” and 5 meant “I agree”. The structure of the sample is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Structure of the Sample*

	PERCENTAGES
Organizations' size	
up to 9 employees	49,5
from 10 to 49 employees	36,5
from 50 to 250 employees	12,8
more thank 250 employees	1,3
Employing immigrants	
yes	25

no

75

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*Source: Own elaboration.*

In order to verify if the differences between organizations employing and not employing immigrants are statistically significant, the Mann–Whitney U test was used.

#### **4. Research Results**

The first analysed issue was the perception of benefits resulting from employing immigrants. The benefits were defined as cost reduction (*CostRed*) (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003), stability (*Stab*) (Hock and Sivananthiran, 1995), hiring employees with desirable competencies (*DesCompt*) (Khoo *et al.*, 2007), acquiring more efficient employees who are willing to work over-time (*Efficiency*) (Lyon and Sulcova, 2009; Metcalf *et al.*, 2009). Declarations of organisations employing and not employing immigrants were compared. The results are presented in Table 2.

The second analysed issue was the perception of barriers by respondents whose organisations employ and do not employ immigrants. The barriers were defined as legal activity resulting from employing an immigrant (*Legal*), language and cultural barriers (*LanCult*), lack of trust (*Trust*), the necessity to prepare the immigrant for the new job (*Prep*) and the necessity to take care of the immigrant by finding them a place to live, helping them in government office procedures or in contact with health care practitioners (*Care*). The results are presented in Table 3.

The outcome shows no significant difference between organisations employing and not employing immigrants as to their perception of barriers. Therefore, the hypothesis H2 was not confirmed.

As no statistically significant differences between the two respondent groups were detected, we decided to look closer at the assessment of barriers in general. This is presented in Table 4.

The lack of significant differences in the perception of barriers between the two groups of respondents may result from the fact that employing an immigrant in Poland is associated with the necessity to meet a number of formalities that may even discourage entities from hiring immigrants (Wysieńska-DiCarlo and Klaus, 2018). Furthermore, organizations employing immigrants must take into account the need to provide mini-care, among others, by helping them to deal with health care services due to language difficulties (Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Solga, 2018).

The third analysed issue was the perception of future demand of immigrant workforces within the Polish labour market. In order to measure this perception, the respondents

were asked for their opinion as to whether Polish companies will need to use immigrant workforce in all industries (*AllInd*), in seasonal and physical occupations (*Season*) or if there will not be a need at all to employ immigrants (*NoNeed*). The results are presented in Table 5.

The results show a statistically significant difference between organisations employing and not employing immigrants in regard to the perception of the future demand of an immigrant workforce in all industries, and in seasonal and physical occupations. Here, respondents from organisations employing immigrants assessed this future demand as more likely, whereas respondents from organisations not employing immigrants were more statistically more likely to state that there will be no need in the future to employ immigrants. Thus, hypothesis H3 was confirmed.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The conducted research contributes to the existing knowledge by presenting the differences in the perception of immigrant workforces by organisations employing and not employing a diverse, immigrant workforce. Current literature has paid little attention to the attitudes towards immigrants. The presented results show that the fact of employing or not employing immigrants influences the employer's perception of this issue. The conducted research indicates that there are no differences between organisations employing and not employing immigrants in the perception of barriers. However, respondents from both groups acknowledged the existence of barriers to employing such a workforce. In light of the fact that there are differences as to the perception of benefits, the fact that both groups perceive barriers in a similar way requires further investigation. Moreover, further research is necessary in order to determine how managers make decisions and work with immigrant and culturally diverse workforces. Further research on the perception of immigrant workers, depending on their country of origin and especially with a focus of immigrants from outside of Europe should also be undertaken.

In case of the analysed organisations it is difficult to see the advantages of working in diverse teams that enable harnessing different perspectives, and that, in the long run, benefit organisational development. This may result from the fact that the actual or potential employment in the construction industry regards positions not requiring high or specialized qualifications. In addition, the issue of higher team dynamics was not addressed, although this came up, among others, in studies conducted in the UK (Rolfe et al., 2013). This, however, may be a result from the adopted quantitative research design and the standardised questionnaire used in this research.



**Table 2.** Perception of benefits of employing immigrants

Variable	Employing Immigrants (n=100)			Not employing immigrants (n=300)			Total (n=400)			Mann-Whitney U test	
	M	SD	ME	M	SD	ME	M	SD	ME	Z	p
CostRed	3,39	1,32	3	2,44	1,05	3	2,68	1,2	3	-6,302	<0,001
Stab	3,12	1,09	3	2,59	1,09	3	1,72	1,11	3	-4,045	<0,001
DesCompt	2,87	1,07	3	2,48	1,11	3	2,58	1,11	3	-3,11	0,002
Efficiency	2,78	1,01	3	2,46	1,01	3	2,54	1,02	3	-2,506	0,012

*Source:* Own elaboration.

**Table 3.** Perception of barriers of employing immigrants

Variable	Employing Immigrants (n=100)			Not employing immigrants (n=300)			Total (n=400)			Mann-Whitney U test	
	M	SD	ME	M	SD	ME	M	SD	ME	Z	p
Legal	3,43	1,13	4	3,24	1,21	3	3,29	1,19	3	-1,305	0,192
LanCult	2,86	1,11	3	3,03	1,3	3	2,99	1,26	3	-1,261	0,207
Trust	2,74	1,08	3	2,93	1,37	3	2,89	1,3	3	-1,396	0,163
Prep	2,71	1,03	3	2,91	1,33	3	2,86	1,26	3	-1,515	0,13
Care	2,92	1,19	3	2,97	1,34	3	2,96	1,31	3	-0,413	0,68

*Source:* Own elaboration

**Table 4.** Assessment of barriers of employing immigrants

	I disagree	I rather disagree	It's difficult to assess	I rather agree	I agree	TOTAL
While hiring an immigrant the most troublesome are the complicated formal	12%	8,8%	33,8%	29,8%	15,8%	100%

and legal conditions ( <i>Legal</i> )						
The employment of immigrants is hindered by language and cultural barriers ( <i>LanCult</i> )	16,8%	17,3%	28,5%	25,2%	12%	100%
The employment of immigrants is hampered by a lack of trust in the employee who comes "only for a moment" ( <i>Trust</i> )	22,8%	10%	36%	18,5%	12,8%	100%
The employment of foreigners is hampered by the necessity to prepare them for the job ( <i>Prep</i> )	20,8%	14%	34,8%	19,3%	11,3%	100%
In employing foreigners, the need to "take care of" them - finding a flat, helping with contacts with health services, offices is troublesome ( <i>Care</i> )	18,3%	17,3%	30%	19,3%	15,3%	100%

*Source: Own elaboration*

**Table 5. Perception of future demand on immigrant workforce**

Variable	Employing Immigrants (n=100)			Not employing immigrants (n=300)			Total (n=400)			Mann-Whitney U test	
	M	SD	ME	M	SD	ME	M	SD	ME	Z	p
AllInd	2,9	1,25	3	2,51	1,26	3	2,61	1,27	3	-2,629	0,009
Season	3,18	1,22	3	2,72	1,16	3	2,84	1,19	3	-3,17	0,002
NoNeed	1,44	0,82	1	2,55	1,1	3	2,28	1,15	3	-8,715	<0,001

*Source: Own elaboration.*

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The conducted research contributes to employment theory as it identifies intercultural contact within the organisation as an exogenous variable leading to positive attitudes towards immigrants. It is, hence, a first step towards developing for immigration, an open and inclusive workplace model.

The study has also practical implications. It shows that through positive attitudes, organisations may support the process of spreading acceptance towards immigrants. It also shows that there is a need to further simplify administrative, through for example e-administration (Hawrysz, 2020) procedures in the field of immigrant employment, as well as to provide support for the networking process between managers from companies employing and not employing immigrants to support them in the employment process. As a consequence of the changes on the labour market it looks like in the future it will be necessary to supplement Poland's domestic workforce with immigrant workers and for managers to acquire skills in creating and managing diverse teams. It also seems necessary to support the talent management process of migrants (Guo and Al Ariss, 2015). This is an area that receives relatively little support in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where immigrants are rather identified with jobs that do not require high or specialised qualifications.

The conducted research did not identify who is responsible for making the decision to hire an immigrant in particular organisations. This is an issue that would require further analysis, as previous studies (Frank, 2018; Lundborg and Skedinger, 2016) indicate that the managers' attitude can be crucial when making a decision about using migrant workforce, and it may influence attitudes towards diversity. Another subject of further analysis is the question of whether the country of origin of the immigrant plays a role in the perception and attitude formation of Poland's employers. Indeed, studies elsewhere show that the country of origin of the migrant, his or her religion, education are important factors affecting their acceptance or lack of it (Ho et al., 1994). Also as indicated, among others, by Fetzer (2000), attitudes towards immigrants may be shaped by the economic self-interest of a person or the persons own experience of marginality or oppression. Therefore, in-depth studies of decision-makers in the employment process of immigrants could shed some light on the issue in question. In addition, further research should include a division into skilled and unskilled migrants

One of the limitations of the conducted study is the fact that only organisations from the construction industry were subject to analysis. Thus, the possibility to extend the research results across the whole of Poland's industry is limited. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct a cross-sectional study. Furthermore, the quantitative nature of study is a barrier of sorts, as the chosen, standardised questionnaire limits the possibility to collect more diverse and deeper information. Conducting a qualitative study would allow for conducting a deeper analysis.

Immigration is an important global process, thus, the understanding of how the perceptions and attitudes of employers towards immigrants develops and evolves

could help to explain and predict critical points where problems related to immigration may appear. As research shows, experience and contact with immigrants may help to alleviate potential prejudice and to see the benefits, but also the necessity of integrating immigrants into the industry.

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