

Attitudes of trade unions and employers' organisations to the presence of foreigners on the labour market in Poland

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Dissertation summary

The subject of this dissertation is the attitudes of trade unions and employers' organisations towards the presence of foreigners in the Polish labour market during the period of 2016–2023/2024. It examines their stance as actors in migration policy, their attitude, and the way they treat individuals with third-country citizenship who are, have been, or are about to be engaged in gainful employment in Poland.

Thus, the dissertation is concerned with the attitude of the aforementioned social partners, also referred to as social dialogue partners, towards labour (economic) migration. It also covers their attitude towards foreigners whose primary motivation for coming to Poland was not to earn an income (e.g., refugees from Ukraine).

Until 2014, migration policy in Poland was not a subject of broader discussion among these actors. Currently, in the face of labour market shortages, labour migration receives the most attention in migration policy discussions, alongside issues related to the protection and integration of refugees from Ukraine. Nevertheless, the inclusion of social dialogue is a new development in the migration policy literature.

In this dissertation, I identify, describe, and analyze the attitude of social partners towards the presence of foreigners in the labour market in Poland. I hypothesize that in Poland, being a young immigrant state, migration policy is formed by a dynamic interaction between different actors, such as employers' organizations and trade unions. These actors take a specific stance towards the presence of foreigners in the Polish labour market, and the processes of migration policy enable the expression of this stance.

I have chosen to apply John W. Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams (MSF) and the similar approach of Ishani Mukherjee and Michael Howlett (2015), who develop Kingdon's theory, to this dissertation. This theoretical orientation stems from my inquiries in the thesis, focusing on selected public policy actors and their activities. In this thesis, I consider migration policy as a sphere in which public problems compete for the attention of policymakers. From this perspective, it is possible to observe how – by communicating their positions and taking (or not taking) certain actions – trade unions and employers' organizations influence the agenda formation and decision-making process with regard to the migration phenomenon and, in particular, the presence of foreigners in the labour market.

I analysed how this position vis-à-vis foreigners in the Polish labour market is presented by trade unions and employers' organisations in documents (opinions, positions) and other official content produced by these migration policy actors (content analysis), and thus in materials approved by the management of these organisations. I juxtaposed this picture with information obtained during semi-structured interviews with representatives of trade unions and employers' organisations at the central level. I conducted 23 interviews of this kind, with 24 individuals. In addition, I conducted four expert interviews with individuals representing the scientific and research community and those working in state administration.

I researched representative trade unions and employers' organizations, i.e., those that formally participated in the social dialogue within the Council for Social Dialogue between 2016 and 2023/2024. On the trade union side, these are:

1. The Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity” (NSZZ “Solidarność”);
2. The All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ); and
3. The Trade Union Forum (FZZ).

On the employers' organization side, these are:

1. The Employers of the Republic of Poland;
2. The Confederation “Lewiatan”;
3. The Polish Craft Association (ZRP);
4. The Employers' Association of the Business Centre Club (BCC);
5. The Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP); and
6. The Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs (FPP) (from 25 January 2021).

The research made it possible to reconstruct the attitudes of trade unions and employers' organizations towards foreigners in the Polish labour market. The positions of trade unions can be categorized as 'passive acceptance'. Unions acknowledge that foreigners can fill gaps in the labour market, but they remain strongly concerned about the risk of social dumping. Their commitment to improving working conditions and protecting the rights of this group is cautious, reflected in their attitude of passive observers-critics. Employers, on the other hand, emphasize the need to employ foreigners for the economic development of Poland, but often do not consider the full costs of immigration (e.g., development of illegal practices of temporary work agencies, transit of foreigners from Poland to other EU countries). In light of these challenges, both trade unions and employers' organisations face the need to redefine their approach, especially in the context of integration and ensuring social cohesion after the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Employers' organisations are particularly active in proposing solutions to problems in migration policy and have access to significant knowledge resources. At the same time, trade unions focus more on defining problems. Regarding the hypothesis put forward, the processes existing in migration policy allow for the articulation of the positions of the actors researched, but this does not take place in the main formal forum for discussion between the social partners, which is the Social Dialogue Council.

The dissertation consists of an “Introduction”, seven chapters, and a “Summary”.

The “Introduction” justifies the choice of the thesis topic, discusses the research problem, the subject and scope of the research, and presents the purpose of the thesis. The main hypothesis, supporting hypotheses, and research questions are also presented.

Chapter I., “Theoretical Assumptions, Research Methods and Research Process”, presents the concepts adopted and the theoretical framework that shapes the analysis of migration policy as a public policy. The first part of the chapter focuses on explaining the theoretical assumptions that underpinned the research conducted. It also defines the basic concepts and presents the results of the literature review. The second part of the chapter presents the techniques, methods, and research tools used in the research process and the course of the research.

Chapter II., “Poland’s Migration Policy as a Public Policy: Development, Instruments, Actors”, discusses the evolution of Poland's migration policy, with a focus on the period 2016-2023/2024. A key element of this chapter is the presentation of the actors involved in shaping migration policy in Poland.

Chapter III., “Foreigners and Foreign Women in the Labour Market in Poland in 2016–2023/2024”, presents the relevant background of the formation of the attitude of trade unions and employers' organizations towards the presence of foreigners and foreign women in the labor market in Poland. The state of the economy is discussed, with a particular focus on the labour market and its needs. The main labour market and social trends that have had or could

have had an impact on the adopted migration policy solutions and, on the other hand, on the possibilities of the reception of foreigners by the labour market are presented. It also discusses the legal conditions for the presence of foreigners in the labour market in Poland, presents relevant figures, and raises the issue of the reception of the increasing immigration by Polish citizens.

Chapter IV., “Trade Unions and Employers’ Organizations as Actors of Public Policy in Poland”, is devoted to presenting the role these organizations played in the political debate in Poland during 2016–2023/2024, considering the formal and legal perspective and their potential impact on migration and labour market policies. This chapter presents the characteristics of the organizations studied, including historical background, current positioning, variability and internal structure, and channels and modes of internal communication.

Chapter V., “The Attitude of Trade Unions and Employers’ Organizations Towards Foreigners and Foreign Women in the Labor Market in Poland in the Light of Documents”, presents the results of the analysis of the key documents of the surveyed organizations, in accordance with the adopted methodology.

Chapter VI., “Opinions of Trade Union Representatives on Foreigners in the Labour Market in Poland – Results of Fieldwork”, develops the analysis presented in the previous chapter. It presents the results of interviews conducted with representatives of the researched organisations.

Chapter VII., “Opinions of Representatives of Employers’ Organisations on Foreigners in the Labor Market in Poland – Results of Fieldwork”, presents the results of interviews with representatives of employers’ organisations.

The “Summary” provides a synthetic review of the most significant findings from the analyses conducted and formulates recommendations for migration policy and social dialogue and its actors. This part of the doctoral dissertation also includes prospective reflections on potential trajectories for further studies on the analyzed issues, pointing to untapped areas and opportunities for expanding knowledge in the context of migration policy.