

## Chapter 6

# Migration of Employees from Ukraine – Cultural Proximity and Human Resources Management Practices as a Chance to Keep them in Poland

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## Abstract

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the reasons for the emigration of Ukrainian employees and to explain the importance of cultural proximity and human resources practices whose aim is to keep them in Polish organisations. The considerations are based on a desk research analysis of migrations of Ukrainians, and on the results of quantitative empirical research conducted by the Authors regarding national cultures, values related to work and managing human resources. The research results allowed to determine problems faced by Ukrainian workers employed in Poland, as well as human resource management practices to help overcome them. The study shows that cultural proximity, linguistic similarity or common history favour the choice of Poland as the direction of migration for Ukrainians, and human resources management practices of Polish employers favour quick implementation to work in Poland.

**Keywords:** migration, culture, practices of human resources management, Ukrainian employees

## Introduction

Today, international labour migration occurs under new geographical, demographic, legal and other terms caused by reforms and changes in the political, social and economic environment worldwide. International labour migration is necessary and constitutes an objective condition of the economic development of a country.

The scale of the migration processes in modern societies and the importance of the economic, political and sociocultural changes they bring to countries and people all over the world require a comprehensive study. At the global level, the question concerns the research of migration as one of leading megatrends of the modern globalized world.

As a result, the range of migration problems has to be examined both as a specific phenomenon, and as a universal element that exerts an ongoing influence on modern transformations of the international environment.

Some consequences of international labour migration trends include (Myronchuk 2018):

- distribution of migration processes of workforce practically all around the world;
- the main direction of workforce migration from developing countries and transitional economies to developed countries;
- activation of migration processes from one developed country to another;
- revival of commutation migration between countries with transitional economies;
- migration of scientific and technical personnel as a new form of migration;
- strengthening of the tendency for intellect migration from countries with transitional economies and from developing countries into developed countries;
- increase in “young migration”;
- expansion of illegal migration.

The existing migration streams in the world economy can be classified into separate groups, based on the level of the socio-economic development of involved countries. Migration of workforce helps to balance the unevenness of worldwide profit allocation, since this is very important for the world economy.

It should be highlighted that the cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the field of migration began long before the signing of the Association Agreement (2014). The examination of migration legislation, support in terms of personnel training, information exchange, technical and material help of the EU were all important factors in the perceptible improvement of border and immigration control, considerable reduction in the illegal migration stream, conditions of granting refuge, and development of all control systems in terms of migration processes. The 2017 visa dialogue between Ukraine and the EU, which ended with Ukrainian citizens being free to travel to the EU, was central to migration management (Sichko 2016). The issues of legislation as well as the complexity and duration of procedures connected

with obtaining employment and residence permits in a given country constitute important factors for Ukrainian employees. Moreover, the cultural proximity may offer a compelling argument for Ukrainians to choose Poland as their destination for work and life. Common history, existing Polish and Ukrainian relations and similar lifestyles, languages or attitudes to work may prove really helpful in the process of adaptation and establishing relations.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the reasons for the emigration of Ukrainian employees and to explain the importance of cultural proximity and human resources practices whose aim is to keep them in Polish organisations. The considerations are based on a desk research analysis of the migrations of Ukrainians and the results of quantitative empirical research conducted by the Authors regarding national cultures, values related to work, and managing human resources.

## Main Focus of the Chapter

Nowadays, researchers are expected to find the essence of the phenomenon of migration and its elements in order to describe it at the modern stage of development. The results of such inquiries constitute considerable volumes of academic developments by specialists in political, historical, economic, and legal sciences, whose complex analyses allow us to form an integral vision of the problem, distinguish information necessary for the subjects of this research and do draw conclusions (Malynovska 2013, Glinka, Jelonek 2020, Lassalle et al. 2020).

Labour migration is a popular research topic among Ukrainian scholars, especially the theoretical basis of the phenomenon of external migration. Authors also examine the theoretical and practical problems of labour migration, state statistics, and migration-related labour in the context of general socio-demographic and economic situation. The scientists confirmed the increase in the importance of economic factors (Table 1).

The results of the cited research enrich the knowledge on the migration of Ukrainians, especially in terms of the impact of migration on the identity of migrants, the process of their adaptation in the new environment and the consequences of migration, as these topics have been poorly researched so far. The main reasons behind migration of Ukrainians were: seeking profitable employment (28%) and escaping from armed conflict (27%). Economic problems in the country (19%) and domestic circumstances (18%) were other significant factors. The lack of conditions for self-realization (9%) and political instability (7%) were the least popular reasons. Almost one third of Ukrainians (29%) declared that no circumstances would compel them to leave their motherland forever (Malynovska 2018). Ukrainians who work abroad indicate the search for better conditions of life as the principal reason of their migration. Thanks to higher wages abroad they are also able to financially support their families back home (International Migration Report 2017).

**Table 1.** The results of the research of migration of Ukrainian employees

	Author	Subject	Methods of research	Objects	Result
1	Liĭbanova Ye. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• theoretical basis of the phenomenon of external migration;</li><li>• external labour migrations in Ukraine (socio-economic aspect);</li><li>• problems of labour migration in Ukraine and the decision of migrants;</li><li>• theoretical and practical problems of labour migration;</li><li>• state statistics and special selective research of migrant labour in the context of general socio-demographic and economic situation.</li></ul>	qualitative, quantitative, interviews, international migrant surveys	Ukrainians	Due to the traditionally high mobility of Ukrainians, the idea of stopping external migration solely by increasing wages is unreasonable. The possibilities of the state influencing the migration behaviour of the population are outlined and constitute the most effective actions.
2	Bilan Y. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• theoretical aspects of material and non-material factors of external labour migration;</li><li>• factors of external labour migration from Ukraine;</li><li>• systemic analysis of external labour migration of the Ukrainian population;</li><li>• labour migration of population from four macroregions of Ukraine</li></ul>	qualitative, quantitative (semi-structured interviews),	experts and representatives of authority  80 in-depth interviews – 20 in each district with specific migration situations	Different aspects of the external migration phenomenon. External migration in today's world occurs in unprecedented volumes, and new forms of it are emerging all the time.
3	Lendiel M. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• features of migration of Ukrainians to Central European countries in the context of Postmaidan internal and international crisis (geographical, cultural and mental closeness, lower transaction costs for shuttle visits from and to Ukraine);</li><li>• migration policy and migration processes in the countries of European Union;</li></ul>	statistical data from public institutions of Ukraine, questionnaires, data from International Migration Organization (IMO), European Statute of State Migration Service of Ukraine	Ukrainians (emigrants and expats)	Migration policy of Ukraine and V4 countries

	Author	Subject	Methods of research	Objects	Result
4.	Kasianova M. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• migration of Ukrainian citizens to Belorussia, Moldova and Russia in the conditions of post-bipolar transformation of the international system;</li> <li>• international acts in relation to migrants and the system of international agreements with respect to/in the context of labour migration</li> </ul>	Qualitative. The interview format. Quantitative.	representatives of characteristics of Ukrainian migrants, estimation of indicators of external labour flows of Ukraine in the regional dimension	Characteristic of Ukrainian migration in regard to geographical and geopolitical specifics that caused the activation of Eastern direction of migration flows.
5.	Rovenchak O. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the sociological conceptualization of modern international migration as a sociocultural phenomenon of the globalization epoch;</li> <li>• the models of immigrants' adaptation that emphasize the sociocultural aspects of adaptation and its bilaterality; theoretical models applied to the investigation of Ukrainian immigration in Poland;</li> <li>• correlation of Poland immigrants' integration policy and Ukrainian immigrants' adaptation models;</li> </ul>	semi-structured interviews	female migrants in Poland, Greece and come back to Ukraine	Confirmation of the growing importance of non-economic factors as the causes for migration. The key models of female Ukrainians' adaptation in Greece were based on diaspora groups and voluntary segregation, while in Poland the assimilation trend is more obvious.
6.	Oppeld L. (2013) Svyatyschuk I., Stadny E. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• question of migration of highly educated intellectual persons;</li> <li>• the reasons and consequences of the intellectual migration in terms of European integration;</li> <li>• academic migration (reasons, problems, recommendations)</li> </ul>	quantitative	Ukrainian emigrants with a scientific degree	Identifying directions of migration policy

	Author	Subject	Methods of research	Objects	Result
7.	Malynovska O. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the specificity of some types of migration processes found the reflection in the separate group of scientific researches; external labour migrations of Ukrainians;</li> <li>the current state and prospects of development of migration policy of Ukraine;</li> <li>international standards, foreign experience and Ukrainian realities on social assistance of migrant workers;</li> </ul>	quantitative	Distribution of work permits issued to Ukrainian citizens	Probabilistic changes in the migration are analysed the behaviour of Ukrainians as a result of deepening of European integration processes
8.	Zubyk A. (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>modern labour migration of Ukrainians to Poland (cultural and historical aspects, legal migration);</li> <li>impact on the country's economic development.</li> </ul>	quantitative	migration flows to Ukraine and from Ukraine; distribution of work permits issued to Ukrainian citizens.	indicators of emigration and immigration, analysis of labour indicators migration in Poland, characteristics of competitive the advantages of Ukrainian labour migrants.

**Source:** Own elaboration based on Libanova (2018), Bilan (2017), Lendiel (2017), Kasianova (2018), Rovenchak (2012), Oppeld (2013), Svyatychuk, Stadniy (2015), Malynovska (2018), Zubyk (2014).

Analysing the age structure of Ukrainian migrants, it can be concluded that long-term migration is chosen by people of working age (18-44 years), while short-term migration is chosen by people over 45 years of age. People with higher education constitute the largest group among Ukrainian migrants (37%), which means that education and experience correspond to the needs of the labour market of Ukraine or the country of settlement. Analysts point out that a large number of well-educated and talented people (engineers, doctors, information technology specialists) migrate to work abroad, which constitutes a kind of “brain drain”, with them doing jobs below their qualifications (Lyashenko 2016). Nevertheless, 48% of Ukrainians over the age of thirty are ready to leave (Solodko 2018). The main reason is the pursuit of an interesting and well-paid job, which is not surprising since in practically every country in Europe the salary is higher than in Ukraine. The second important reason is the armed conflict in Ukraine, which in some way has affected most citizens, and those who managed to escape the consequences of the war would probably prefer to place their families and themselves away from danger. The economic situation is the third reason for moving. Respondents indicated that they wanted to leave Ukraine to improve overall quality of their life (Sokolovich, Lishchynskyy 2018). In addition to these three key reasons, Ukrainians also mention family circumstances. The largest number of Ukrainian migrants live in Russia, Canada, Poland, the USA and Brazil. In 2017, more than 8 million Ukrainians lived abroad. While living and working abroad, they transfer a significant part of their financial resources to the country. “In the first quarter of 2017, migrants working in Poland (90% of them are Ukrainians) sent more than 4.3 billion zlotys home using the online service TransferGo, which is almost two-thirds more than last year.... This is a record, which practically exceeds by 2 billion zlotys the amount of money transferred to Poland” (Adronik 2018).

The most crucial positive factor of external labour migration lies in the fact that a considerable part of the earned funds of Ukrainians is transferred or brought back to Ukraine. Transfers from labour migrants help to combat poverty, allow relatives to finance current consumption, children’s education, medical services, purchase or construction of accommodation, opening own businesses, etc. The National Bank of Ukraine explains that in 2016 the volumes of private money transfer amounted to \$ 5.5 billion (5.8% GDP), 20% of which was transferred via informal channels, and for three quarters of 2017 it was \$ 5.2 billion. Acquisition of new skills, increase in the labour market mobility, acceleration of technology exchange, more opportunities and business technologies, increase in export capacities for Ukrainian producers are among other positive aspects of emigration. Moreover, immigrants abroad generate demand for Ukrainian goods in the country they live in (Piontkivska 2018).

It is estimated that labour migration from Ukraine will continue to grow for about two-three years, and then begin to go down in the medium-term prospect (Solodko 2018). Poland will thus face an important challenge in terms of keeping this group of employees. It mostly stems from the growing competitive edge of Germany, the Czech Republic or Hungary, which are opening their markets for

economic immigrants from outside the European Union. It may be expected that it will not only be economic reasons that determine migration, but also social and cultural differences.

## Solutions and Recommendations

Cultural differences may constitute an important criterion in choosing the destination for migrant employees. They also often determine the length of stay. Even though migrants may exert a positive effect on the operation of organisations, as their presence is conducive to creativity, they activate innovativeness and become a source of cultural synergy, they can also be a source of conflicts, misunderstandings, communication problems or culture shock (Brett, Behfar, Kern 2010, Marx 2000, Klimas 2019, Rakowska 2019). There is a high risk of prejudice and stereotypes, as well as artificial divisions among employees within an organization. It undoubtedly affects the atmosphere at work and interpersonal relations, which translates into work performance. It brings about further consequences in the form of the fundamental question whether to stay in a given country, look for a more culturally similar one, or to return to the home country. Therefore, the cultural aspect may constitute the decisive factor for Ukrainian employees.

Poland granted approximately 2.5 million visas to Ukrainian citizens from 2016 to 2017. Thus, the number of long-term national visas grows along with work permit. In 2015, in Poland, employers submitted 763,000 statements to district labour departments regarding employing Ukrainians, in 2016 this number almost doubled, as there were 1.3 million statements, and in 2017 the number grew to 1.8 million. Moreover, by the end of 2019, approximately 143,000 Ukrainians were granted the right of temporary or permanent stay in Poland. Consequently, estimations show that approximately 2 million Ukrainians are now in Poland, and their number is growing. However, the number of Ukrainian employees who work in Poland legally and pay social insurance currently amounts to 665,600 (Błaszczak 2020). Ukrainians work for almost every other large Polish business, in every fifth average-size business and in every tenth small business, as calculated by Polish agencies of employment of personnel service. Young Ukrainians go to Poland to study, whereas adult Ukrainians – to make money in Polish enterprises and open their own businesses (Sytnyk 2018). The main reasons which determine powerful migration streams to Poland are: higher standards of living, historical connections, familiar language, large Ukrainian diaspora. The similarity of cultures is also significant. Certain dimensions of national cultures, such as a high level of avoiding uncertainties, restrictions and restraint in operations as well as adopting a time perspective which is too long are attributes of both Ukrainian and Polish cultures (Gadomska-Lila, Moskalenko 2019, Glinkowska, Chebotarova 2018, Illiashenko and et al. 2016). Additionally, both cultures respect organisational hierarchy, although the consent for unequal organizational statuses



is much stronger in Ukraine than in Poland. This cultural proximity may prove to be extremely important in establishing close relations in organizations which employ Ukrainian employees (International... 2017). It is confirmed by the research conducted by the Authors among Ukrainian employees.

Cultures, values and human resources management practices were subject of the research project dedicated to Ukrainian employees, conducted by the Authors from February to December 2018. It consists of two parts: quantitative research conducted in Ukraine among people who have worked in Poland, and qualitative research conducted in Poland among employers and other entities involved in actions pertaining to employment of Ukrainians, e.g. employment agencies, labour offices, trade unions, such as the Association of Ukrainians in Poland.

The main aim of the quantitative research was to identify human resources management practices used in Poland by employers employing Ukrainians. The main areas of human resources management analysed in order to identify key practices were: recruitment and selection, adaptation at work, work design, compensation and rewards, performance appraisal, training and development. They used a questionnaire devised by the Authors, using items devoted to human resources practices assessed by respondents in five Likert's scale.

Out of 441 respondents who correctly filled the questionnaire, the majority were male (222), aged 25-34 years old (181), with a Master's degree education (151), married (304), with one child (186). Most (280) had worked in Poland for the period of one-two years, typically in construction, agriculture, gastronomy.

Generally, Ukrainians are satisfied with working in Poland (77%). The results show that positive attitudes and behaviours are connected with cultural proximity and applying certain actions and practices, especially when creating appropriate working conditions, remuneration and assistance in adapting to work in Poland and in a given organisation. The data in Table 2 show that Ukrainian employees do not find the issues of language and manner of communication, accommodation, working hours, working ethos, legal and administrative issues to be barriers hampering their adaptation to working in Poland (fewer than a third of the respondents stated that they constituted problems).

In terms of cultural adaptation, human resources practices applied in organisations employing Ukrainians were found to be helpful. Their key role was to familiarise Ukrainian employees with characteristic features of the Polish culture and corporate culture, Polish standards regarding days off work, national holidays, assistance at the beginning of work provided in an enterprise by supervisors or colleagues, or even induction programmes (Table 3).

Special human resources management in organisations employing foreigners is crucial, as it requires more sensitivity in order to apply all the criteria, e.g. in the recruitment process, task allocation, performance assessment or rewarding results, so that they are clear and transparent and do not favour anyone.

Moreover, organisations which hire foreigners need an HRM system to make decisions from a global perspective, international managers, and ideas contributed by

**Table 2.** Problems at work in Poland

Survey question	Average	Standard deviation	No	Rather Not	Hard To Decide	Rather Yes	Yes
Difficulties with communication and language barrier posed major problems for me.	2.38	1.693	50%	15%	7%	0%	27%
Legal and administrative issues posed major problems for me.	2.39	1.663	44%	28%	0%	1%	27%
Difficulty with finding accommodation or its high costs posed major problems for me.	2.42	1.625	39%	34%	0%	0%	27%
Psychological difficulties, e.g. different work ethos, working hours, holidays, posed major problems for me.	2.34	1.592	44%	25%	5%	3%	23%

**Source:** Own elaboration.

**Table 3.** Assessing human resources management practices by Ukrainian employees working in Poland

Survey question	Average	Standard deviation	No	Rather Not	Hard To Decide	Rather Yes	Yes
I was instructed in employment rules and regulations observed in Poland (e.g. holidays, work hours) and in a given enterprise.	3.93	1.221	10%	5%	0%	49%	35%
At the beginning of my work I could rely on support from my superiors, co-workers, etc.	4.14	1.269	6%	8%	12%	12%	61%
I participated in an induction program to learn my duties.	2.77	1.860	46%	11%	1%	5%	38%
Favoritism was not evident in any of the recruitment decisions.	3.19	1.470	25%	4%	20%	30%	21%

**Source:** Own elaboration.

people from a variety of cultures. Decisions that are the outcome of a transnational HRM system balance uniformity (for fairness) with flexibility (to account for cultural and legal differences). This balance and the variety of perspectives should work together to improve the quality of decision making. The participants from various countries and cultures contribute ideas from a position of equality, rather than the home country's dominating culture. Such cultural characteristics influence the behavior of employees within an organization, as well as their attitudes toward various HRM practices.

## Conclusion

The specific national features of labour migration in Ukraine are explained not only by internal economic factors, but also by domestic policy, by both positive (signing of Agreement about the association from EU) and negative processes caused by the annexation of Crimea, military events in eastern Ukraine that simultaneously stimulate population's migration to other countries. There are many benefits of migration –higher salary, improvement of standards of living (both of emigrants and their families), getting new work experience and qualifications, improved language and communication skills, broadened horizons, increased awareness and understanding of the real terms of market economy, and acquisition of skills to live in a democratic society.

Cultural proximity and assimilation of differences may constitute an important factor in making decisions regarding the direction of migration. Common history, existing relations between Ukraine and Poland, awareness of conditions of living in Poland and significant similarity of national cultures as well as lifestyles, language, attitude to work highly, all facilitate assimilation and help to establish common relations. They constitute important factors which encourage to work in Poland on a longterm basis or even stay permanently. Therefore, it is necessary to take institutional measures aimed at extending the duration of stay in Poland, helping to bring families back home or creating incentives for legal work. This implies the need to develop policies at central level which take into account social aspects, health care and education. Actions taken by employers who hire Ukrainians are equally important, in order to allow for adaptation and integration or professional and personal development of employees, which is reflected in many HR practices. It will increase the competitive edge of Poland in terms of Ukrainian employees.

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## Key Terms and Definitions

Human resources management practices – formal and informal ways and methods of human resources management related to activities carried out within the basic stages of this process: selection, evaluation, motivation and development.

Labour migration – movement of persons from one place (e.g. country) to another for the purpose of employment.

Migration – movement of people to change their place of residence.

National culture – a set of values, norms, behaviours and beliefs shared by the population of one nation.

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