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COVID-19 Pandemic and the Situation of Immigrants in Enterprises

Abstract

During the first (spring 2020) and second wave (autumn 2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic, Poland was among the countries with the strictest regulation, lockdown, and national quarantine. The pandemic has significantly influenced the situation of enterprises, especially for immigrants. The main aim and contribution of this paper is the analysis of the immigrant's situation during the pandemic from the perspective of companies. The research goal is the identification of strategies adopted by the firms employing immigrants, so as to providing additional help to their foreign workforce during the pandemic. For the purpose of this research, a multilevel model of the triangulation design was chosen. The qualitative research included seven in-depth-interviews with purposefully selected enterprises. The quantitative study was conducted on a sample of $n=894$ employers. For the purpose of the second round of research, 17 interviews with companies employing immigrants were conducted. The research showed that during the first wave of the pandemic, employers most often terminated employment with immigrants, which, however, in some cases, was the initiative of the immigrant. Some firms recognizing special needs of their foreign workforce developed strategies that manifested themselves in offering additional help to their foreign workers. The paper contributes to the literature on the situation of immigrants in terms of special treatments of immigrants as vulnerable workers and the knowledge of strategies enterprises adopted in order to help their foreign workforce during the pandemic by presenting the perspective of employers.

Keywords

COVID-19 | immigration | organisational strategies | foreign workforce | labour market | diversity management

JEL Codes

J01, J15, J61

1. Introduction

During the first (spring 2020) and second wave (autumn 2020) of the COVID-19 pandemic, Poland was among the countries with the strictest regulation, lockdown, and the so-called national quarantine (Kaplan, Frias, & McFall-Johnsen, 2020). The pandemic has significantly influenced the situation in enterprises and on the labour market, especially for immigrants. Despite their crucial role in the economy, the meaning ascribed to them by concepts such as diversity management,

immigrants are the most vulnerable and exposed to discrimination groups, especially in exceptional situations (Pinheiro, Emberson & Trautrim, 2019; Turchick Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013; Wang, et al., 2021) including the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the suspension of all activities in many industries. COVID-19 influenced the labour market in several ways: 1. It disrupted the so far adopted way of work performance and forced organisations and employees to perform work remotely. 2. It changed entrepreneurs' decisions on organisational development. 3. In some cases, it led

to employment restrictions and, consequently, the dismissal of employees, such as in the United States (Borjas & Cassidy, 2020). Immigrants and foreigners are an important part of the workforce in Polish organisations and contribute to its diversity, which, among other factors, leads to innovations (Zygmunt, 2020).

During the first wave of the pandemic, direct contact trade was very limited. Most of the stores were closed, except for the most necessary ones, including grocery shops. Restaurants and hotels almost ceased to function. The restrictions also affected the transport and tourism industries. All these are spheres that primarily attract immigrants (Sönmez, et al., 2020). In this situation, migrant workers have become a group at risk of exclusion (Rasnaca, 2020) because they occupy one of the weakest positions in the labour market (Edo, 2019). Usually, they do not enjoy the same protection as domestic workers, and when the economic situation deteriorates, they are dismissed in the first place (Brzozowski, et al., 2020). As with other crises, migrants are more exposed to the direct and indirect effects of the ongoing pandemic, which include the necessity of avoiding infection or receiving proper health care. It has been noted that immigrants living in overcrowded centres do not have adequate hygienic and sanitary conditions. It is also impossible to maintain social distance (Guadagno, 2020). On the other hand, as the pandemic continues and the restrictions persist, migrants have become essential workers in some countries because their work has proven to be crucial to maintaining the stability of certain industries (Della Rosa, 2021).

During the pandemic in Poland, the number of foreigners registered for retirement and disability insurance (which is one of the possible indicators of the number of those working in Poland) at the end of April 2020 fell by 47,900, compared to February 2020 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2020).

The aim of this article is to show the situation of immigrants in Opolskie Voivodeship during the pandemic from the perspective of employers. Opolskie Voivodeship is a peripheral region of a still developing country (Zygmunt, 2017) with a prevalence of micro- and small companies. At the same time, the work of immigrants in the region is very important. The research shows that in the Opolskie Voivodeship, the share of companies employing foreigners (Górny, et al., 2018). The number of documents enabling foreigners to work, compared to the number of employees in individual Polish regions, showed that in the Opolskie

Voivodeship, their share is the highest in Poland. For example, in 2020, the percentage of declarations on entrusting work to a foreigner per region was the highest in the Opolskie Voivodeship, amounting to 30%, while in the Mazowieckie Voivodship it was 14.5%, and in the Dolnośląskie Voivodship 18.6% (Solga, Kubiciel-Lodzińska & Maj, 2021). It can therefore be concluded that in the Opole region, taking up employment by foreigners is becoming a more and more common phenomenon.

This article fills the research gap regarding the impact of the pandemic in two ways: (1) with regard to the situation of immigrants in enterprises during the pandemic, (2) it broadens the extent of the economics and management literature documenting the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the treatment of immigrants as vulnerable workers; it also expands the knowledge of the strategies enterprises adopt in order to help their foreign workforce during the pandemic. The main research problem analysed in this paper is the nature of changes in companies operating in Opolskie Voivodeship as well as the strategies adopted by firms employing immigrants to provide additional help to their foreign workforce.

2. Literature Review: The Vulnerability of Immigrant Workers to COVID-19

This article uses the concept of vulnerability, which refers to a situation in which certain social groups may find themselves in a more difficult situation than others because they face obstacles that make it difficult for them to use their resources (Sen, 1999). Immigrants, due to the fact of staying in another country, having to communicate using a foreign language, having limited social capital (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010), are exposed to job loss and/or lower wages. A low position in the labour market makes them function in the so-called “culture of silence” (De Vito & Gomez, 2020). In this context of immigrants functioning in host countries, one can distinguish between structural and systemic vulnerability, where structural vulnerability refers to the risk of discrimination due to the interaction with socioeconomic, cultural/normative, and political hierarchies, and systemic vulnerability refers to a reduced ability to maintain or realize a sustainable livelihood (Tagliacozzo, Pisacane & Kilkey, 2021).

As in the case of other crises, also during the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants were a group significantly exposed to its direct and indirect effects. The first factor increasing the risk of negative consequences of a pandemic is the nature of the work they perform. Migrants are present mainly in occupations requiring direct contact with other people; it is rather impossible to perform this kind of work remotely (Borjas & Cassidy, 2020). They take up employment mainly in blue-collar or low-skilled occupations (Fernández-Reino & McNeil, 2020). Moreover, migrants are most often employed on fixed-term contracts, which makes it easier to terminate their employment. Consequently, during the pandemic, they were primarily exposed to a decline in income, especially those employed informally (Kinyanjui, 2020) immigrants felt a lack of stability in employment and, as a consequence, have been more exposed and vulnerable to economic shocks (Blanchflower, Costa & Machin, 2017). It is also a group that has limited access to comprehensive information about the development of the pandemic (Liem et al., 2021).

As the research conducted in Kraków (Poland) showed, foreigners who were employed by temporary employment agencies became the first victims of the economic recession. The research also showed that discrimination also affected immigrants in the housing market. They had problems renting a flat, difficulties in dealing with official matters, and insufficient knowledge of the Polish language, which made contacts with health care facilities difficult. The research also points to the lack of information about the pandemic in a language other than Polish (Brzozowski et al., 2020).

During the pandemic, migrants were forced to develop their own survival strategies and to adapt to changes taking place in the labour market. Research conducted among immigrants in Poznań (Poland) has shown that these strategies can be very different, and they depend, among others, on the immigrant's social capital (Churski et al., 2021). One of the biggest concerns, apart from health issues, that migrants had staying in Poland during the pandemic was the loss of a job and the economic downturn (Kowalewska, Adamczyk & Trojanowska-Strzeboszewska, 2021).

Among migrants, women have a weaker position in the labour market than men, which is why the situation of migrants and how they coped with the labour market during the pandemic was also analysed (Azeez et al., 2021). Research in Canada has shown that highly skilled migrant women are either unemployed

or forced to work below their qualifications as a result of the pandemic (Nardon et al., 2021). This was also the case, inter alia, for the situation of women from Asia (Fang & Liu, 2021). Particular attention was paid to those employed in the field of personal care, e.g., in the context of the work of nurses (Galam, 2020) and in the elderly care (Giordano, 2021; Kuhlmann et al., 2020).

A separate group of migrants who received research attention were refugees and their situation in the labour market during the COVID-19 crisis (Bohnet & Ruegger, 2021; Brito, 2020; Falkenhain et al., 2021; Kondilis et al., 2021), as well as migrants with an irregular situation (Bhopal, 2020). In order to limit the spread of the epidemic, restrictions on the mobility of people were introduced, which generated additional difficulties for people wishing to apply for asylum or international protection in a given country. The introduction of restrictions on the right to enter Poland, for example, meant that foreigners were deprived of access to the refugee procedure (Pietrzak, 2021). The mobility limitations also resulted in the obligatory quarantine that people had to go into after crossing borders. As media reports showed, especially during the first wave, a lot of immigrants decided to return home, confronted with the uncertain future and the question of whether and when it would be possible for them to go back home to their families. This resulted in a hold, or at least a strong limitation, on the influx of immigrants in Poland. The analyses of the National Bank of Poland show that in the first half of 2020, the pandemic caused a 5%–10% decrease in economic immigrants (Strzelecki & Dudek, 2021). Furthermore, the analysis covered immigrant entrepreneurs and the impact of the pandemic on their business activities (Prah & Sibiri, 2020).

An important factor is the fact, that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, immigrants were at risk of social exclusion due to their origin and limited contacts with the host society (Liem et al., 2020). The attitudes of the receiving societies during the pandemic changed, which was particularly evident at the beginning of the pandemic towards people from Asia. People were distancing themselves from them for fear of contamination (Wang et al., 2021). Some migrants, mainly of Chinese origin, have experienced social exclusion due to their origin (He et al., 2020). This was shown, among others, by studies conducted in Great Britain (Pang, 2021), Italy (Adja et al., 2020), Canada (Toronto), and Nairobi (Mamuji et al., 2020). The distance was also visible in relation to other

migrants. As research shows, e.g., from Japan, being a foreigner was a sufficient reason to be discriminated against during the pandemic (Bhandari et al., 2021). During the pandemic, the emergence of conspiracy theories that caused panic, an increase in xenophobic and racist sentiment towards ethnic groups was observed, as shown by the report covering Estonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain (Pankowski & Dziegielewski, 2020). A rise in prejudice against migrants caused by the pandemic has also been confirmed (Bianco, Kosic & Pierro, 2021; Eliaset al., 2021).

The vast majority of research was carried out from the perspective of migrants. There are no analyses that would show the perspective of employers of immigrants who, due to the economic downturn caused by the pandemic, were forced to make difficult decisions. The presented paper fills the present research gap by answering two main research questions: 1. What was the nature of the changes in the employment in companies? 2. What strategies did enterprises adopt in order to help their foreign workforce during the first wave of the pandemic?

3. Materials and Methods

For the purpose of this research a multilevel model of the triangulation design was chosen (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) (Figure 1).

The research was divided into two stages. The first stage was based on the embedded design and included qualitative research, supplemented with the quantitative research (S1). The second stage (S2) was a second, qualitative research. The qualitative research from S1 included seven in-depth interviews with purposefully selected companies, including representatives of the local government (one entity), business environment enterprises (one entity), employers' associations (one entity), temporary employment agencies (two entities), and selected business entities (2 entities). The Individual In-depth Interviews (IDI) were conducted using a semistructured questionnaire. The paper discusses only three questions from the study, as the other questions were about the financial condition of the firm and the assessment of the Anti-Crisis Shield introduced by the Polish government and thus were out of scope of this paper. The quantitative study (S1) was a structured survey conducted using the computer-

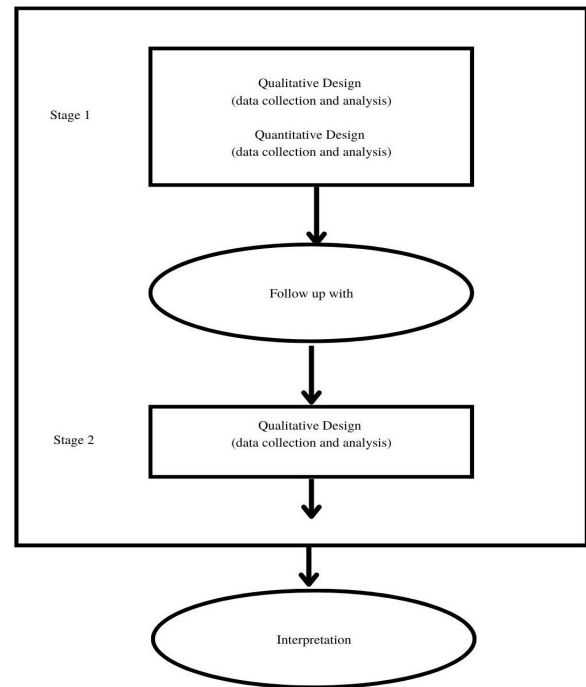


Figure 1. The Research Design and Process
Source: Own elaboration

assisted telephone interview (CATI) technique on a sample of n=894 employers selected using following criteria: represented industry and size. The employers were selected out of the private sector, using a stratified random sampling from the REGON database (which includes information about enterprises registered in the Opolskie Voivodeship). The sample was selected in a proportional way; therefore, the number of entities of entities in particular layers reflects the number of such entities in the population.

The qualitative interviews as well as the quantitative survey were carried out between July and August 2020. The sample structure of the quantitative study, due to the size of the company, is presented in Table 1, and the sample structure (the represented sector) is presented in Table 2.

For the purpose of the second round, 17 interviews with enterprises employing immigrants were conducted. The IDIs were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire from January till February 2021. The sample structure of the IDIs conducted during the second round of the study is presented in Table 3.

Data obtained in both qualitative studies (S1 and S2) have been analysed using the MAXQDA software.

Table 1. Sample structure related to the size (number of employees) in the company

Number of Employees	Number of Respondents	Percentage
0 (own business)	25	2.8
From 1 to 9	357	39.9
From 10 to 49	328	36.7
From 50 to 249	157	17.6
From 250 to 1000	24	2.7
Over 1000	3	0.3
Total	894	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2. Sample structure related to the sector represented by the company

Sector	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Construction	133	14.9
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	78	8.7
Administrative and supporting activities	30	3.4
Education	21	2.3
Trade and repair	195	21.8
Hotels and restaurants	27	3.0
Information and communication	21	2.3
Property and business services	50	5.6
Health care and social welfare	45	5.0
Financial intermediation	27	3.0
Other service activities	85	9.5
Industrial processing	110	12.3
Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing	19	2.1
Transport, storage, and connectivity	49	5.5
Energy sector	4	0.4
Total	894	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3. Stage 2 sample structure due to the size of the enterprises and the migrational background and/or double nationality of the companies' owners/chairmen of the board

Sector	Number of Employees	Migrational Background and/or Double Nationality
Respondent 1	10-49	yes
Respondent 2	over 250	no
Respondent 3	over 250	no
Respondent 4	50-249	no
Respondent 5	1-9	yes
Respondent 6	50-249	no
Respondent 7	1-9	no
Respondent 8	50-249	no
Respondent 9	50-249	yes
Respondent 10	50-249	yes
Respondent 11	50-249	no
Respondent 12	over 250	yes
Respondent 13	1-9	no
Respondent 14	1-9	yes
Respondent 15	up to 9 employees	no
Respondent 16	1-9	yes
Respondent 17	over 250	no

Source: Own elaboration

The analysis was conducted using the grounded theory approach. A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used. The first-round pass of coding was made using predefined codes; however, already during the first round of coding, new codes inductively emerged. Thus, while analysing following interviews, the list of codes evolved. After adding new codes, previously analysed interviews were analysed again in order to verify if this change affected previous material. This approach allowed for the determination of the saturation point. To ensure the quality of the analysis, the audit trail, collaboration, and disconfirming evidence validity procedures were used (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The quotations for the paper were chosen first separately by the authors and then discussed in a common session during which the final selection was made.

3. Results

During the qualitative interviews, respondents were asked about changes in size of employment. Most of the respondents (72.3%) stated that the size of employment did not change or the company employed additional employees (4.1%). However, almost every fourth company (23.8%) stated that during the first wave of the pandemic, they had to reduce employment. In most cases, the employers terminated employment contracts only with foreigners (63.4%) or with foreigners and domestic workers (15.5%) (Table 4). In cases of increasing employment, companies hired mostly only Poles (68.5%), or Poles and immigrants (22.9%) (Table 5).

This suggests that, in fact, immigrants were at higher risk of being terminated from employment and that enterprises tried to protect domestic workers more than immigrants.

Furthermore, the respondents were also asked about their plans to hire new employees within the next three months. The vast majority (80.1%) stated that they did not plan to hire new employees. Among the firms who planned to hire new staff, the majority wanted to employ only Poles (Table 6).

When asked about plans to terminate employment with employees within the next three months, most of the respondents stated that they did not have such plans (94.8%). Among those who planned to terminate the employment, only one respondent admitted that they planned to terminate employment only with a foreigner, and 66.7% stated that they planned to terminate employment with both Poles and immigrants. This may suggest that in case of a need to terminate employment, the country of origin of the employee may not be a primary criterion.

The quantitative data gives an overview of the situation of immigrants in enterprises during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The qualitative data allowed for better understanding of the research problem, validation, and broadening of the quantitative results.

The analysis of the qualitative data presents, however, a more complex picture of the situation. Asked for the consequences of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents (S1 and S2) pointed towards the mass loss of employees in all sectors, but also gave examples from their own companies of foreign immigrants terminating employment in order to go back to their home countries:

Table 4. Termination of employment by the employee's nationality during the first wave of the pandemic

Nationality	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Only immigrants	135	63.4
Immigrants and Poles	33	15.5
Only Poles	45	21.1
Total	213	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

Table 5. Establishing employment relationship by the employee's nationality during the first wave of the pandemic

Nationality	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Only immigrants	8	22.9
Immigrants and Poles	3	8.6
Only Poles	24	68.5
Total	35	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

Table 6. Expected employment in the next three months by nationality of the employee

Nationality	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Only immigrants	17	9.9
Immigrants and Poles	98	57.0
Only Poles	57	33.1
Total	172	100.0

Source: Own elaboration

“[An employee] was absolutely horrified of the pandemic and fled back to Ireland. I hired him because he had already worked in Poland for several years, so I thought he knew the realities. He was surprised, however, that there are some quarantines. He was afraid that he might get infected here” (Respondent no. 14, S2).

“It [happened] in waves. As soon as a pandemic broke out in March, it was a surprise to them. They did not know what to do with themselves, what was their fate, what would happen. Of course, they

left for Ukraine, but they have already returned” (Respondent no. 2, S1).

Another issue, not visible in the quantitative data is the faith of immigrants collaborating with enterprises based on contracts different than an employment contract, like f.e. (fixed-term) contracts, mandate contracts, specific task contracts, or internships. Respondent no. 5, (S1) stated, that although the situation for the immigrants employed in their company based on employment contract did not change, the pandemic influenced the immigrants collaborating with the company:

“We cooperated with many students from the Ukraine, Russia, Belarus. They were better specialists than those we could hire in Poland due to their language knowledge, their knowledge of the culture. Due to the lock-down and the suspension of our activity, the cooperation [stopped] I don’t even know if they are still in Poland.”

This shows that the termination of employment with immigrants was not always at the initiative of the employers.

The respondents confirm the trend visible in the quantitative data, suggesting that the employers make decisions about employing and terminating employment, including, among other reasons, the nationality of the worker. As stated by Respondent no. 3, S1:

“From what I can see and what I can observe, more and more Polish employees are looking for a job and I can see the trend that we choose domestic workers more willingly. And this is probably such a trend that when there is a boom or a good moment in the market, all employees are taken, and when there was a recession, unfortunately employers try to choose native employees.”

The pandemic resulted in a shortage of workers in the labour market, as emphasized by Respondent no. 6:

“Such signals were indeed that there, that there is a shortage of workers (...) this deficit of foreigners is quite large. Here, even the XYZ company reported problems, because it employs a lot of foreigners and has problems with recruiting this staff back after the first wave of the pandemic.”

Temporary employment agencies pointed towards a second group of challenges, which resulted from the

administrative restrictions regulating the process of employing immigrants. Administrative barriers as well as some inconsistencies in the legal regulations are among the main challenges for labour market immigration and employment of foreign workforce in Poland (Strzelecki & Dudek, 2021). As pointed out by the respondents, during the pandemic the legal and administrative facilitations introduced were not sufficient. One of the problematic regulations was the quarantine requirement for people coming to Poland from countries outside the Schengen area, which affected not only the immigrants themselves but also recruiters operating abroad (Respondent no. 1, S1). However, one of the respondents mentioned an example of a positive and well assessed regulation:

“Unfortunately, many of the [work] permits they had ended or were expiring, and here it is very nice that such an automatic extension worked. It was a government ordinance that automatically extended the validity of the documents until the end of the pandemic. It’s cool because this market was still receptive and still is” (Respondent no. 7, S1).

The second research question analysed in the qualitative interviews (S2) was the question of how employers handled the situation their foreign workforce found themselves in. The analysis allowed us to distinguish two strategies adopted by the respondents (Figure 2).

The interview analysis showed that companies adopted two strategies. The first one included additional help for the foreign workforce in enterprises resulting from the recognition of additional challenges and needs they were facing. The second one was based on the equal treatment approach and did not include any special or additional treatment of immigrants. When introducing additional help for the foreign workforce, the respondents pointed towards providing free dedicated premises for quarantine purposes, essential products, food, and groceries. The employers recognized the special requirements and needs of their foreign workforce; however, they did not treat it only in terms of selfless help but also in terms of building employee engagement and satisfaction.

“During a pandemic, we provide accommodation for quarantine and when the employees decide to come to us, they know that they can count on such an apartment; they do not have to look for anything on their own. In addition, they will receive masks and hand disinfectants from the company. We

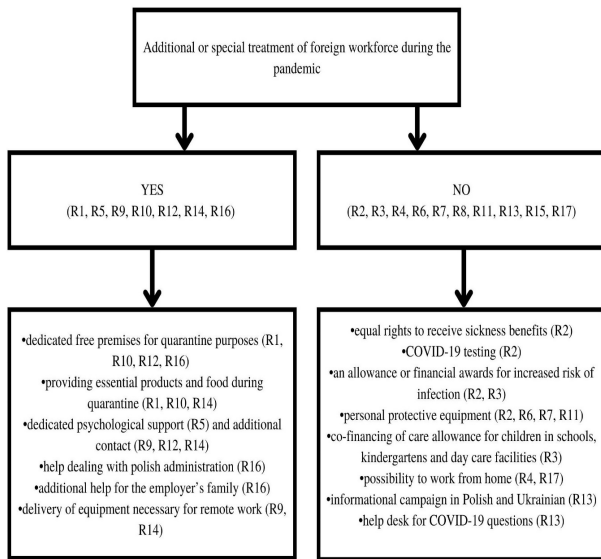


Figure 2. Strategies of treating foreign workforce adopted by enterprises during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Own elaboration

also help them in dealing with all official matters. Our company is guided by the principle that every help to employees translates into positive relations and better cooperation, and thus, of course, more efficient teamwork,” (Respondent no. 16, S2).

“We have a dedicated facility where people are quarantined. We provide them with this facility free of charge for 10 days. They have access to all necessary utilities, a place to sleep, sanitary facilities, basic purchases are delivered. So, of course, this is a certain difficulty, but we simply had to adjust organisationally to the applicable regulations,” (Respondent no 1, S2).

Among other dedicated instruments respondents pointed towards was the already mentioned help in dealing with administration and official matters. Some of the respondents mentioned additional contact with foreign employees as a form of additional support and care.

“More phone contacts for sure, more conversations on Viber, Whatsapp, etc. Even though it is so good that we have the HR department in the company, not in another location. I am here on site and I can look after these employees. And they can come, of course with masks, with all precautions etc. ... But if they have any additional questions, they have a telephone number for me, they can write to me, call me, and they know that they will get the necessary help” (Respondent no. 9, S2).

The second strategy adopted by enterprises was based on the equal treatment approach. Respondents stated that they provided the same assistance to all their employees regardless of their nationality. Respondents mentioned several instruments introduced in the particular companies: from COVID-19 test and the access to protective equipment, financial allowance for working in job positions with increased risk of infection, informational campaigns and help desks for employees, the possibility to work from home, and providing the employees with the necessary equipment. What may be perceived as alarming and an indication of a lack of understanding for the vulnerability of migrants is the argument, or more a way of arguing for the equal treatment approach as represented by amongst others.

Respondent no. 11 (S2), who stressed:

“No, I can't think of anything that could be unequal in this care. As a company, we all had to take care of and follow the restrictions on the same principles, we all wear masks and disinfect our hands in the same way, we act in the same way in the event of a threat or potential threat, so I can't think of anything that somehow employees from Ukraine were treated differently.”

This shows that some employees when asked about differences in treatment of domestic and foreign employees associate it with discrimination rather than additional help or a sort of “affirmative action”.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The quantitative research showed that during the first wave of the pandemic, the immigrants were more vulnerable than the domestic workforce. When employers were forced to terminate employment, foreigners seemed to be the first to be let go and the last to be hired (Jayaweera & Anderson, 2008). Such an interpretation should, however, be seen as too superficial, as the qualitative interviews showed that the outflow of the immigrants was at least partially their initiative. The outflow of immigrants resulted in a shortage of workers in the labour market. Although some of the Polish government's initiatives were intended to keep the foreign workforce in Poland, others made it difficult for companies to recruit new employees abroad as well as for immigrants to come back to Poland.

The present paper fills the research gap by answering two main research questions. The first was about the nature of changes in the employment of immigrants in enterprises. In the course of the research, it was found that although employers, when forced by the situation, terminate employment of immigrants first. The qualitative research, however, showed that in many cases this termination may have been an initiative of the immigrants themselves, which left Poland in fear of the pandemic and the following lockdown in order to reunite with their families. These data, however, due to the qualitative nature of the analyses, should not be generalised. Statistical data show that, in fact, between February and April 2020, the population of foreigners in Poland decreased by approximately 10% (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2020). It is difficult to determine unequivocally what factors were responsible for this. Probably there could have been several of them. Such increased returns, which have been called “panic mobility”, have also been recorded in South American countries (Cohen, 2020; Zapata & Prieto, 2020). This may suggest some exceptions to the vulnerability of immigrants and thus requires further research. The more difficult labour market situation of migrants is also indicated by research among skilled female migrants in Canada, which confirms the weaker labour market position of migrants and showed that they lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic (Nardon et al., 2021). Job loss was often associated with a return to the country of origin (Sarkar, 2021; Sommaribas & Nienaber, 2021). By answering the second question: What strategies did companies adopt in order to help their foreign workforce during the first wave of the pandemic, it can be concluded that in the case of employers who recognize the specific needs of immigrants, foreigners’ additional assistance was offered. These employers noticed that for immigrants, who are usually accommodated in places where many people are staying, e.g. employee hotels, employee flats, barracks, it is necessary to prepare separate rooms for quarantine, provide help in grocery shopping, help in contacts with public administration, and psychological support. An important finding is that the needs of migrants resulting from their exceptional situation were most often answered by employers who themselves had a migrational background or declared dual nationality. Due to the qualitative nature of the research, this issue requires further, in-depth research. The results show the positive attitude of the surveyed employers towards foreign workers, which was not evident during the pandemic, as analyses

show that employers exploited the difficult situation of migrants, which worsened their working conditions (Wang, 2022).

The present research has important managerial implications. The strategies of foreign employee relations companies developed the pandemic suggest that there is a range of instruments companies may use in order to limit the consequences or scope of immigrants’ vulnerability. Although equal treatment may seem the appropriate approach, it does not address the special needs immigrants may have. Also, from the point of view of the enterprises, it seems a missed opportunity for human and social sustainable behaviour as well as for the development and strengthening of employee engagement and loyalty. It seems that from the point of view of employer branding, it is worthwhile for companies that recognize and address the specific needs of their foreign employees to use it in their prepared marketing messages (Baruk & Wesolowski, 2021).

The conducted research is not free of limitations. Although different types of organisations were interviewed including enterprises, business environment organisations, employers’ associations, and temporary employment agencies, the perspective of the immigrants was not included. For a complete picture of the situation of migrants in the labour market, it is also useful to have their perspective. Then the information obtained is complete and allows us to show the factors affecting the more difficult situation of foreign workers both from the point of view of employers and employees. However, as most of the research on immigrants during the pandemic focused on their perspective, this paper aimed to present the perspective of the employers, which has been identified as a research gap, and thus is the main contribution of the paper.

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