

Poland's Door Only Slightly Ajar



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Dr. Kinga Wysińska-Di Carlo studies the unequal treatment of immigrants in Poland.

Most Poles declare that we should take in labor immigrants, regardless of whether they are ethnically and culturally similar to us. But how do these declarations translate into practice?

Various aspects of international migration and the integration of foreigners into host countries have long been studied across the globe. In Poland, researchers have thus far focused on explaining Polish migrants' reasons for emigrating and on describing the characteristics and strategies of their integration in Europe and across the world. Efforts to explore issues related to immigrants in Poland, and their integration into Polish society, have occurred relatively recently. With foreign-born residents accounting for 1.8% of the population (according to Eurostat figures for 2013), Poland ranks among the EU countries with the lowest share of immigrants, comparable only to that in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. This, however, is slowly beginning to change.

A country of immigration?

Economic and political transformations following the fall of communism in 1989, Poland's accession to the EU, and gradual facilitations for foreigners wishing to settle in our country have all made Poland increasingly attractive to immigrants, especially those from Eastern Europe. Such trends are reflected in the statistics of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy: in 2014, employers registered nearly 400,000 declarations of their intention to employ foreign nationals (up 64.4% from the previous year), and around 40,000 work permits were issued to foreigners (up by around 12%). In addition, demographic phenomena, such as an aging population, have prompted a growing number of measures aimed at establishing a coherent migration and integration policy, and encouraging foreigners to come to Poland, with the latter efforts mostly on the part of universities and selected employers.

Tracking both declared attitudes and actual behaviors towards immigration and immigrants among such social actors as landlords and employers in Poland is extremely interesting from a scientific point of view, because such attitudes and behaviors are really just starting to take shape in our country. Current views and behaviors of Polish residents are based neither on firsthand experience interacting with specific groups of migrants nor on any real rivalry over valuable resources (employment, housing, and social assistance). They are influenced almost exclusively by how we imagine people from other countries and their potential for integration. They therefore reflect almost directly the general stereotype of "others," the overall vision of immigrants, rather than any actual experience living in a multicultural society. Any changes in declared attitudes and behaviors observed in the coming years will then put to the test rival theories explaining processes that lead to greater or lesser acceptance of immigration and specific groups of migrants, depending on the presence or absence of specific factors, such as measures in support of integration.

In the realm of declarations

Let us first look at the attitudes towards immigration declared by Polish respondents, and their perception of potential benefits from the presence of immigrants, against the backdrop of the opinions expressed by respondents in other European countries. I have opted to use the term "declared" for a reason: attitudes towards immigration or specific groups of migrants are usually measured by looking at answers provided in questionnaires, which are merely indirect indicators of the respondents' actual opinions on the issue under study. I have analyzed the answers given by Polish respondents in the context of those given by respondents from other European countries in 2012 (ESS 6) using the findings of the cross-national European Social Survey, conducted every two years (see chart on page 36).

The results indicate that European respondents support controlled immigration, preferably with respect to individuals with similar ethnic and social backgrounds. Against this backdrop, the answers given by Polish respondents seem to suggest exceptional openness to the immigration of individuals belonging to different ethnic groups (see chart on page 37). Although most respondents in Poland support controlled immigration, their preferences do not differ depending on the groups of immigrants to which a given question pertains.



Declared attitudes and actual behaviors towards immigration and immigrants reflect almost directly the general stereotype of "others," the overall vision of immigrants, rather than any real experience living in multicultural society

Jakub Ostrowski

In addition, the study found that Polish respondents could see the beneficial effects of immigration, which distinguished them from respondents living in other countries, despite the fact that the Poles have essentially never experienced mass immigration.

Putting discrimination to the test

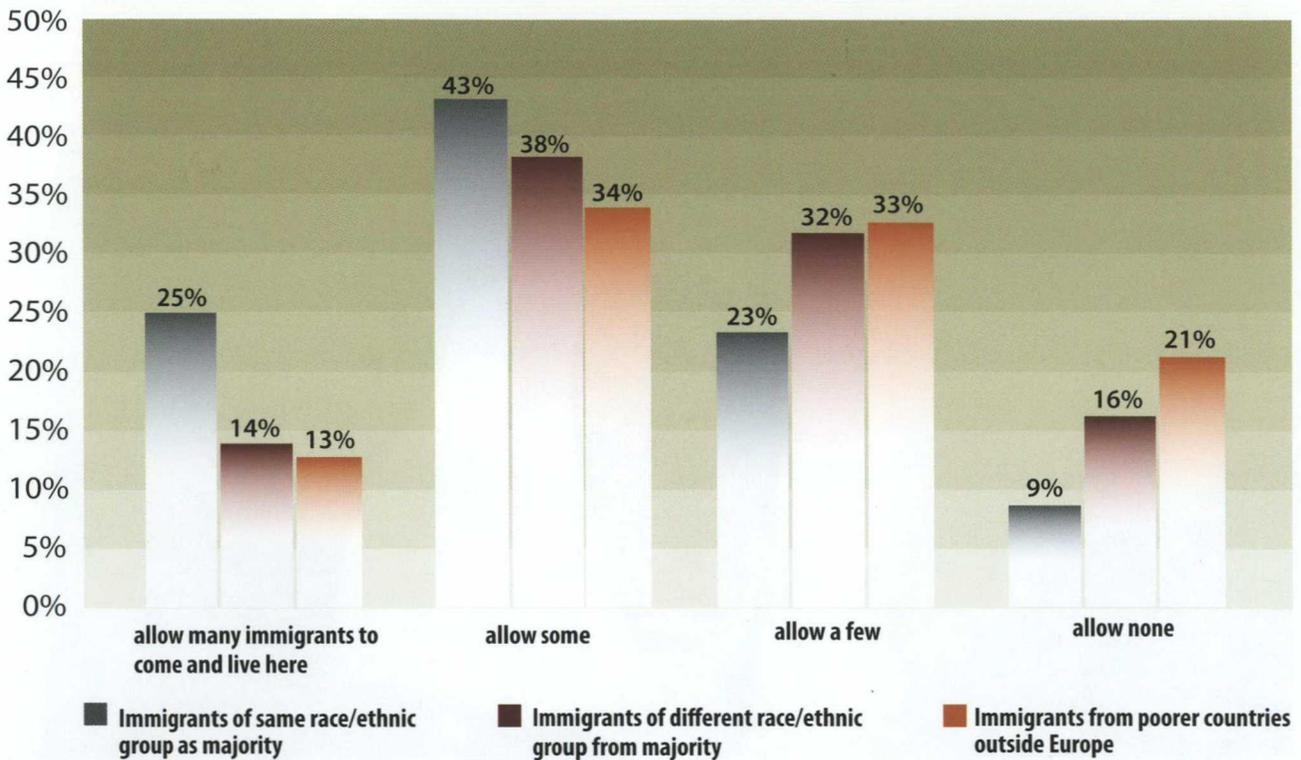
Such positive declarations could form the basis for claiming that potential immigrants who wish to settle

in Poland, regardless of their origin, stand a chance of avoiding various barriers to integration that result from aversion on the part of the host-country society. Such a claim, however, is not supported when we look at the actual behavior of those who make decisions affecting the situation of migrants.

Two fundamental challenges that foreigners face when arriving in a host country are finding accommodation (usually by renting an apartment) and securing gainful em-

Attitudes of Poles towards immigrants

The state should:



Source: Author's own elaboration based on www.europeansocialsurvey.org

The breakdown of responses given by respondents in all the countries taking part in the survey in 2012, regarding questions related to individuals from different types of countries (ESS 6).

ployment that guarantees a decent standard of living. The preferences and behaviors of those who are in a position to help them meet these needs are usually studied using a procedure called a discrimination test (aka matched-pair testing). Tests of this type are used to directly measure manifestations of unequal treatment on the part of employers, landlords, and providers of goods and services.

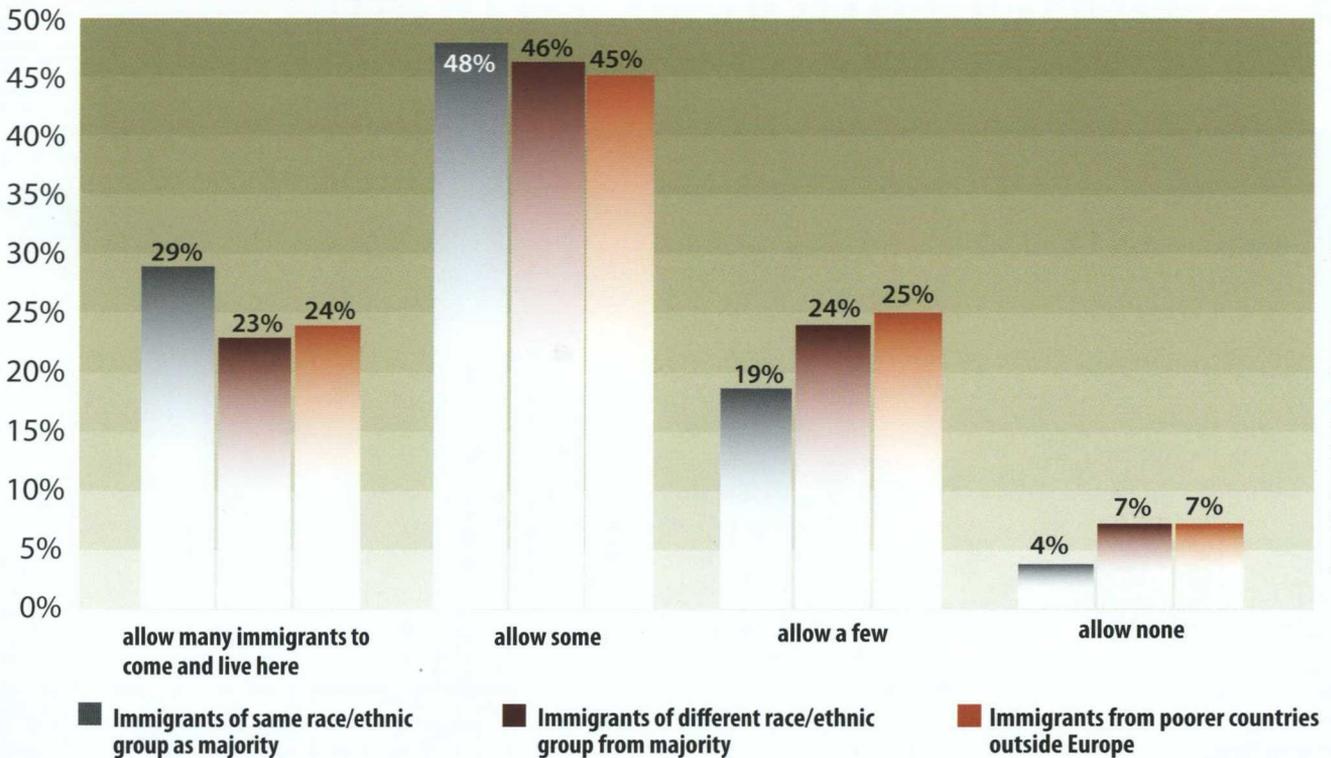
The design of this experimental procedure is relatively simple. Two fictitious persons with equivalent background and characteristics related to the type of transaction sought, but of different ethnicity or migration experience, apply to potential employers or inquire about the possibility of renting an apartment. For example, if the objective of the experiment is to test whether the odds of finding a job by an immigrant from Ukraine vs. a Polish national with the same qualifications, professional experience, and education are the same, the researcher drafts two résumés with equivalent information pertaining to the candidates' suitability for the job, and sends them to the same set of randomly selected employers. In the rental market test, a set of landlords are asked about the terms of the lease by individuals who have the same budget for renting an apartment, but differ only in terms of their accent when speaking Polish. The responses of employers and landlords are systematically registered.

The scale of discrimination can then be expressed as a ratio of the difference between positive replies of landlords or employers to members of majority and minority groups to the total number of observations taken into account, or as the difference in the likelihoods of obtaining a positive response by the two groups.

For rent (only Poles need apply)

Such discrimination tests conducted in Poland show that both employers and landlords do not treat Polish nationals and foreigners in the same way, despite the absence of reasonable arguments in favor of such unequal treatment. When it comes to the job market, the difference in the treatment of Polish and non-Polish candidates stood at 16% (in view of the size of various groups of migrants in Poland, the study used applications for Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Vietnamese pairs matched on gender). This means that, taking into account only those situations in which at least one of the candidates received a reply to his or her application, the foreigner was treated less favorably than the Polish candidate in 16 out of 100 cases, despite the fact that they had the same qualifications. Interestingly, the study found that Ukrainian women were least likely to find jobs, which suggests that, contrary to expectations, immigrants that

The Polish state should:



The breakdown of responses given by respondents in Poland in 2012, regarding questions related to individuals from different types of countries (ESS).

come from similar ethnic and cultural groups are not treated better in the labor market than migrants from ethnically dissimilar groups.

Tests conducted in the apartment rental market likewise demonstrated that landlords did not treat Polish and foreign nationals in the same way. Although the scale of discrimination was not large (7%), differences in the treatment of various ethnic groups did exist (the study tested the response of landlords to Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Vietnamese, and Polish-Nigerian pairs). When looking for apartments to rent, immigrants from Vietnam and Nigeria were more likely to meet with refusals, while immigrants from Ukraine faced the greatest difficulty obtaining consent to their registering temporary residence in the apartment and to signing a formal lease contract.

What do these differences say?

These findings point to a certain discrepancy between the views outwardly declared by Poles and their actual behaviors. What are the reasons for it? First of all, the declarations of respondents may result from their willingness to provide answers that are consistent with social norms and expectations. Secondly, the respondents may not be consciously aware of their actual attitudes and beliefs.

Thirdly, the impact of attitudes on behavior may be low if the respondents are convinced that certain behaviors are unacceptable or impossible to put into effect. Finally, attitudes and behaviors may not correlate due to external factors, for example such market-related factors as difficulties concluding a contract with a preferred partner.

Therefore, declared attitudes do not always provide a sufficient basis for predicting the treatment that immigrants actually receive or will receive in the future.

Declared attitudes and actual behaviors towards immigration and immigrants reflect almost directly the general stereotype of "others," the overall vision of immigrants, rather than any real experience living in multicultural society. ■

Further reading:

- http://www.ifispan.waw.pl/pliki/sondaz_archiw.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Non-national_population_by_group_of_citizenship_and_foreign-born_population_by_country_of_birth_1_January_2013_YB14_IL.png
 Wysińska K. in collaboration with Wencel K. (2013). *Status, tożsamość, dyskryminacja. O (nie)równym traktowaniu imigrantów* [Status, Identity, Discrimination: On the (In)Equal Treatment of Migrants]. Warsaw: ISP.
 Rich J. (2014). *What Do Field Experiments of Discrimination in Markets Tell Us? A Meta Analysis of Studies Conducted since 2000*. IZA Discussion Paper Series, 8584.