

Existing research on international labour migration seems to underestimate the impact of employers and their interests. Some scholars present migration as a triple-win game in which migrants, the sending society and receiving society all benefit. In this view, employers in the receiving society who – in our opinion – are at the root causes of any labour migration are underrated. This is also true in all the main labour migration theories, in which migrants, intermediaries (such as work agencies or networks of family/friends), and states of origin and destination are seen as the actors. The role of employers is usually reduced to characteristics of the receiving state's labour market or immigration policy. In reality, employers do pursue their interests related to the international migration of workers. We thus intend to **fill a gap in knowledge regarding labour immigration by investigating the - thus far neglected - role of employer's interest** in this process.

The objective of this project has two dimensions: empirical and theoretical. The empirical dimension consists of in-depth analysis of the influence of employers' interests in different political, economic and socio-cultural contexts: in Germany, Italy, Poland and the United Kingdom, and in the whole European Union (EU) during negotiations preceding the 2004 enlargement. Poland will be an especially interesting case, since we will have the opportunity to observe the employers' involvement in channelling migrants as a "process in the making". It is a traditional emigration country, which has recently (2017–2020) become one of the largest recipients of foreign workers in Europe. The theoretical aim is to provide an innovative conceptual framework based on the New Institutional Economics (NIE) approach and its core concepts, such as interest groups, collective actions, conflicts of interests, institutional embeddedness and moral hazard behaviours.

In the context of labour migration, the group interests of employers are expressed first of all through employers' activity to influence public policies, and also through particular activities independent of those policies or even contradictory to their objectives. But in this study, we aim to consider also the situations when employers do not express their preferences, but their interests are nevertheless taken into consideration or even given priority by other actors, for example government. Importantly, employers' interests are framed by historically rooted factors, which constitute a favourable environment. This brings us to the general hypothesis of the present project: **Institutions (including regulations) concerning the inflow and employment of immigrants reflect the group interests of employers**. Four supporting hypotheses were also formulated, for example that changes concerning the inflow or employment of immigrants which favour the interests of employers may take place without an active participation of the latter. If all the supporting hypotheses prove true, we will accept our general hypothesis as accurately describing the reality of labour migration.

So far, research on this subject has focused on employer lobbying (in the field of political science) or on the role of employers in particular sectors of the economy, like agriculture. This resulted in a narrow perspective, which we hope to broaden. Another novelty of the proposed project stems from our analytical approach. Since we concentrate both on employers who constitute a group of common interests, **and** the institutional environment in which employers' interests are considered and satisfied we adapt the NIE framework which had never been used in international migration research before. By grounding the study in the NIE methodology, we will be able to look at all levels of potential influences starting from social norms and informal institutions, through the institutional environment and relations between labour market organisations, and ending at resource allocation in the economy.

To achieve these goals, we plan to resort to the analysis of documents of public administrations, employers' organizations, trade unions, commerce chambers; to interviews with key actors for each case study: representatives of employers' organizations, work agencies, trade unions, former employers, stakeholders representing political elites and administration; and to the analysis of discourse in political forums, such as debates and speeches. To secure the highest standards of research and increase the project's recognition, a non-paid Advisory Board will be established, comprising of experts in the field.