LATVIAN MIGRANT WORKERS' EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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Abstract. In 2009 and 2010, through a nation-wide research study conducted at the University of Limerick, over 250 Latvians residing in the Republic of Ireland were asked about their experience of discrimination in employment. They were asked three specific Likert-scale questions and one open-ended question dealing with discrimination through their first-hand experience; perceptions in general about discrimination against Eastern European and Baltic migrant workers; and about the Irish employers. Then the results were compared against the responses from Lithuanian, Polish, and Slovak respondents.

Statistical analyses indicate that the Latvian respondents did not express any more or less compelling cases of discrimination *vis-à-vis* the other three nationalities groups studied. Chi-square analyses of the three questions on the experience of discrimination were inclusive. This paper, however, offers some explanations as to why the stories of discrimination and incidents of negative experience from the Latvian migrant workers in the Republic of Ireland were not present and proposes for a further longitutial study in 2015.

Key Words: Respondent-Driven Sampling, immigration, discrimination, collective threat, prejudice, EU labour migration, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Slovak migrant labour in the Republic of Ireland.

Introduction

Quillian (1995) developed a theory of prejudice toward groups based on collective threat and proposed that collective threat is a function of the size of the subordinate group relative to the dominant group and economic factors (586). On May 1, 2004, Latvia was one of the new 10 EU member states that joined the existing 15 EU member states. Since then, approximately 60,000 people have left Latvia and chosen to find work in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Republic of Ireland, the three existing EU member states that placed no restrictions on their labour markets against the new EU10 member state nationals (Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts Konrāda Adenauera fonds, 2006: 52).

By September 2005, nearly 19,915 Latvians were working in the United Kingdom, based on the data from the UK Worker Registration Scheme (Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts Konrāda Adenauera fonds, 2006: 52). The other 40,000 are thought to have sought work in Sweden and the Republic of Ireland (Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts Konrāda Adenauera fonds, 2006: 52). It is estimated that approximately 15,000 to 20,000 are located in the Republic of Ireland although the numbers are relative and changing, thus might not be exact. According to unofficial data, the number of people who have left could fluctuate by some 30% (Latvijas Ārpolitikas institūts Konrāda Adenauera fonds, 2006: 52 – 53). Furthermore, it is no secret that the Republic of Ireland has now been experiencing an economic downturn since the collapse of its bubble economy (so-

called the "'Celtic-Tiger' Years"), and its unemployment rate by December 2009 reached a staggering 12.9% (Quinn, 2010: 1).

It is within this unique historical context that this paper explores the collective experience of discrimination as expressed by Latvian migrant workers in the Republic of Ireland. According to Quillian's theory, the two ingredients are clearly present for the correct recipe: Estimated 20,000 Latvian migrant workers at a time when there was a sudden and relative increase in the unemployment rate. In a country where its inhabitants number approximately 4.24 million in 2006 (Quinn, 2010: 1), Latvians would make up slightly less than 0.5% of the population, thus they would comprise a large number relative to the Irish native.

In the Republic of Ireland, there is a concentration of migrant workers from the EU10 states in the construction, manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare, and hospitality sectors (Doyle *et al*, 2006: 72; and Ruhs, 2006). Previous research findings made it clear that employers in the Republic of Ireland have had access to an almost unlimited pool of relatively well-qualified EU10 migrants who could be employed in low-skilled jobs at wages and conditions that were rock bottom, or sometimes even lower than the minimum standards set out in employment laws and regulations (Ruhs, 2006). Due to the fact that profit-maximising employers would exploit the EU10 migrant workers by discriminating in terms of different wages among workers and of different EU10 nationalities based on differences among the real wages prevailing in their countries of origin, this paper attempts to investigate the possible existence of such discrimination based on nationality.

It has already shown that the Latvians were ranked the lowest among the four most populous new EU10 member state migrant workers in the Republic of Ireland in terms of their labour market performances (Parker and Halpin, 2011: 17). Whereas Slovaks earned €13.30 per hour (SD = 7.38), Poles €12.97 (SD = 6.11), and Lithuanians €12.46 (5.65), Latvians reported only €11.16 (SD = 3.19), at a time when the Irish legal minimum wage was at €8.65 per hour (Parker and Halpin, 2011: 17). Noting that this labour market performance sequence exactly coincided with the GDP per capita ranking sequence, Parker and Halpin (2011) speculate that the reserve wage of the home countries did have some relative predictive power on how they would perform in the Irish labour market (19 – 20). Since the Latvian cohorts ranked the lowest in the Irish labour market, this paper chooses to place a greater amount of focus on the experience of discrimination as expressed by the Latvians and attempts to extract their collective accounts of discrimination. O'Connell and McGinnity (2008) find that non-Irish nationals are three itmes more likely to experience discrimination while searching for employment than the Irish natives. McGinnity *et al* (2009) also report that job applicants with typical Irish names are more than twice as likely to be

called in for interviews as applicants whose names are identifiably non-Irish family names although they both apply with virtually equivalent *curriculam vitaes,* and their findings are statistically robust and consistent across the three different types of occupations tested (iii).

Barrett and Duffy (2007), however, offer an alternate prediction. They hypothesise that since the inward migration into the Republic of Ireland took place during the time when the Irish economy has been expanding at a high rate between 2004 and 2007 in the "Celtic Tiger" Years, the economic conditions have been relatively favourable for the EU10 migrant workers in the Irish labour market (Barrett and Duffy, 2007: 5), including for the Latvians. Moreover, because the vast majority of the immigration into the Republic of Ireland has been from other European countries, many of the immigrants into Ireland might not have been subject to the common forms of possible discrimination such as those based on race, colour, or religion. These positive factors could work in such a way to set the recent Latvian immigrants into the Republic of Ireland fairing relatively well *vis- à-vis* Irish natives (Barrett and Duffy, 2007: 5). Based on analysis from level of education and labour market performances of the EU10 migrant workers, Barrett and McCarthy (2007) "suggest that a general form of discrimination is not in operation, but instead that immigrants with third level qualifications are unable to exploit their education to the fullest degree (17)," possibly due to their nature of employment in the Republic of Ireland. Low returns to education, especially among the female cohorts, might mean that there is relatively little occupational variation among them, and almost all EU10 migrant workers in the Republic of Ireland are in similar low-skilled, manual occupations such as in hotel and restaurants, retail services, construction, etc., even if they are qualified for highskill jobs.

In these low-skilled occupations, their higher levels of education would not carry much relevance. This is also attested by the fact that as the labour market performance ranking sequence decreased from the Slovak cohorts to the Latvian cohorts in Parker and Halpin's research study (2011: 17), the standard deviations on their hourly wage also decreased markedly from 7.38 to 3.19, meaning that there seemed to be very little variations on the types of their occupations in the Republic of Ireland. Thus, given these two competing hypotheses, it would be worthwhile to enquire into which one might be more accurate in accessing the social reality of discrimination as expressed by Latvian migrant workers living in the Republic of Ireland, and this paper thus endeavours to find out.

Research Methods

The research for this survey was conducted on 1,144 self-identified EU10 migrant workers living in the Republic of Ireland in 2009 and 2010. The *Census 2006* (Central Statistics Office, 2008) shows the four most numerous EU10 nationalities in the Republic of Ireland were Polish (63,276), Lithuanian (24,628), Latvian (13,319), and Slovak (8,111). The sample for this research study focused on these four nationalities and was drawn based on a derivative of the snowball sampling method (Singleton and Straits, 1999: 162). Specifically, a variant of snowball sampling method (Goodman, 1961; and Singleton and Straits, 1999: 163), called, "respondent-driven sampling" method, or the "RDS" (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004), was used.

RDS employs a method of chain referral system. When members of the target population are identified, these "seed" respondents are requested to refer the survey to other members of the same target population, who then are contacted and requested to refer others, and so forth (Singleton and Straits, 1999: 163). RDS was deliberately used because the sample in this study was deemed as a "hidden" population within Irish society; it was not reliably recorded anywhere; and it was not willing to advertise its immigrant status in the Republic of Ireland openly and flambouyantly for a research study. It is also utilised because it "is (also) cheaper, quicker, and easier to implement than other methods commonly used to study hidden populations" (Semaan *et al,* 2002).

RDS is specifically designed to solve the problem of conducting statistical analysis on a population that could not be sampled in a conventional random sampling methods. Hidden populations such as those that participate in stigmatised activities, members of subcultures, or recent immigrants, would pose problems for conventioanl survey research, making it almost impossible to get statistically valid samples.

RDS method was deemed to be highly appropriate for this study because migrant workers tend to "chain- migrate" (MacDonald and MacDonald, 1964). Chain-migration means that individuals move to another area or country in the train of others such as family and social contacts, who have moved there before them, and they would smooth their path in securing employment and housing.

For this research study, the potential respondents were told that they were participating in a national study about the state of EU10 migrant workers in the Republic of Ireland. As part of the survey, they were asked about their opinions and attitudes on a limited range of social topics and issues, including their experience of discrimination in employment in the Republic of Ireland.

Three Liker-scale questions specifically dealt with experience of discrimination, and they were: Question 22: *"I think there is prejudice against Eastern Europeans in the Irish job market;"* Question 25: *"I think there are employers in Ireland who would refuse a job to a person because of her race, religion, cultural background or nationality;"* and Question 28: *"In Ireland, I have been refused a job for reasons which I think were to do with my nationality."* Respondents were asked to choose one of the five-point Likert-scale responses, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." If these three questions on the experience of discrimination had formed an index, one factor could be extracted with an Eigenvalue of 1.815 that explains 60.503% of the variance with Cronbach's alpha = 0.673, which was relatively low for reliability.

The survey took about five to ten minutes to complete. The original English survey was translated into Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Slovak, and Russian, and was approved by the appropriate ethics committee authorities at the University of Limerick. The data collection on the Latvian and Polish cohorts began first in March 2009, the Slovak cohort in April 2009, and the Lithuanian cohort in June 2009. All four nationality groups had an overlapping period of 177 days from June 7, 2009 to December 31, 2009, or for about six months. The data were then cleaned, input into SPSS, and analysed for this paper. For analysis, we use chi-square tests among all four nationality groups and divided by gender for a closer look.

Results

Table 1. Demographics

Sex/Gender	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT
Female	690	60.3	60.3
Male	454	39.7	39.7
Nationality			
Polish	328	28.7	28.8
Lithuanian	282	24.7	24.8
Latvian	259	22.6	22.7
Slovak	246	21.5	21.6
Czech	5	0.4	0.4
Hungarian	4	0.3	0.4
Estonian	2	0.2	0.2
Russian	9	0.8	0.8
Ukrainian	3	0.3	0.3
Kazakh	1	0.1	0.1

Other/Missing	5	0.5	
Age			
Under 18	2	0.2	0.2
18 – 19	7	0.6	0.6
20 – 29	570	49.8	50.0
30 – 39	400	35.0	35.1
40 – 49	115	10.1	10.1
50 – 59	44	3.8	3.9
60 and over	2	0.2	0.2
Missing	4	0.3	
TOTAL	1144	100.0	

Chi-Square Analyses on Three Questions Dealing with Discrimination

Table 2.1. I Think That Prejudice against Eastern Europeans in the Irish Job Market Exists

Nationality (χ^2 Value)	Latvian	(1.775)	Lithuanian	(1.101)	Slovak	(12.624)	Polish	(2.816)
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
(n)	*(80)*	*(178)*	*(95)*	*(185)*	*(108)*	*(137)*	*(155)*	*(173)*
Strongly Agree/ Agree	32 (40.0%)	68 (38.2%)	26 (27.4%)	46 (24.9%)	52 (48.1%)	36 (26.3%)	52 (33.5%)	56 (32.4%)
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	19 (23.8%)	56 (31.5%)	43 (45.3%)	77 (41.6%)	34 (31.5%)	59 (43.1%)	37 (23.9%)	55 (31.8%)
Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	29 (36.2%)	54 (30.3%)	26 (27.4%)	62 (33.5%)	22 (20.4%)	42 (30.7%)	66 (42.6%)	62 (35.8%)
P-Value	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*< 0.01*	*< 0.01*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*

Table 2.2. I Think That Irish Employers Would Refuse Jobs Based on Race, Religion, Cultural Background or Nationality

Nationality (χ^2 Value)	Latvian	(0.364)	Lithuanian	(2.831)	Slovak	(8.375)	Polish	(5.158)
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
(n)	*(80)*	*(178)*	*(94)*	*(185)*	*(109)*	*(137)*	*(155)*	*(172)*
Strongly Agree/ Agree	41 (51.2%)	84 (47.2%)	51 (54.3%)	81 (43.8%)	48 (44.0%)	37 (27.0%)	63 (40.6%)	71 (41.3%)
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	17 (21.2%)	41 (23.0%)	26 (27.7%)	60 (32.4%)	26 (23.9%)	49 (35.8%)	29 (18.7%)	48 (27.9%)
Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	22 (27.5%)	53 (29.8%)	17 (18.1%)	44 (23.8%)	35 (32.1%)	51 (37.2%)	63 (40.6%)	53 (30.8%)
P-Value	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*< 0.05*	*< 0.05*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*

Table 2.3. In Ireland, I Have Been Refused a Job Because of My Nationality

Nationality (χ^2 Value)	Latvian	(1.113)	Lithuanian	(3.488)	Slovak	(7.390)	Polish	(1.827)
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
(n)	*(80)*	*(178)*	*(95)*	*(187)*	*(109)*	*(137)*	*(155)*	*(171)*
Strongly Agree/ Agree	17 (21.2%)	31 (17.4%)	20 (21.1%)	25 (13.4%)	18 (16.5%)	9 (6.6%)	16 (10.3%)	15 (8.8%)
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	10 (12.5%)	30 (16.9%)	21 (22.1%)	37 (19.8%)	18 (16.5%)	18 (13.1%)	20 (12.9%)	15 (8.8%)
Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	53 (66.2%)	117 (65.7%)	54 (56.8%)	125 (66.8%)	73 (67.0%)	110 (80.3%)	119 (76.8%)	141 (82.5%)
P-Value	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*	*< 0.05*	*< 0.05*	*n. s.*	*n. s.*

Discussion

Table 2.1 shows that none of the chi-square test results is significant, except the Slovak cohorts whose male respondents expressed agreeing sentiments with the existence of prejudice against Eastern Europeans in the Irish job market. This is ironic given the fact that of the four nationality groups, Slovaks, especially, Slovak males, performed best in terms of their hourly earnings in the Irish labour market. Seen from another angle, however, this might be the indication and the expression of "glass ceiling" that they recognise. This pattern is repeated in Table 2.2 where the Slovak male respondents again expressed the statistically significant sentiments that Irish employers would refuse jobs based on their demographic factors.

While both Latvian male and female respondents concurred with the statement that Irish employers would refuse jobs based on race, religion, cultural background or nationality, the chi-square results are not significant. None of the four nationality groups, moreover, expressed any sentiments that it has been refused a job because of nationality. This is possibly because of the types of low-skilled jobs that they have been seeking in the Republic of Ireland where their levels of education, nationality, or any other demographic factors are irrelevant due to the low competitive nature of the occupations. Like elsewhere, here, again, only Slovak responses show statistical significances.

Conclusions

1. The results shown here may indicate that the prediction from Barrett and Duffy (2007) is supported. Their hypothesis is that since the inward migration into the Republic of Ireland took place during the time when the Irish economy has been expanding at a high rate during the "Celtic Tiger" Years, the economic conditions have been favourable for the EU10 migrant workers in the Irish labour market (Barrett and Duffy, 2007: 5). Furthermore, since the majority of the EU10 immigration into the Republic of Ireland has been from other European

countries, many of the EU10 immigrants into the Republic of Ireland might not have been experiencing the common forms of discrimination based on race, colour, or religion. These positive factors could work in such a way to set Quillian's theory of prejudice toward groups based on collective threat inapplicable in the Republic of Ireland – at least against the four EU10 migrant workers surveyed for this study.

2. On the other hand, however, there is another explanation for this. The experience of discrimination may need longer time to accrue. It may take one generation or even a life-time of small events and reflections. When this survey was taken, the vast majority of respondents had resided and had been working in the Republic of Ireland for less than five years. This is just too short of a time period to form any definitive opinions or sentiments on such complex and profound concept as experience of discrimination. It would require experience of attempting to switch jobs, of trying to advance one's career, of going to panel interviews, attempting to land high-skilled, high-paying competitive jobs, etc. This would require at least a dozen years of labour market experience, and thus, this survey might have been inadequate or too premature to gauge such complex and abstract sentiments as experience of discrimination, which also require a high degree of sophistication in suspicion, detection, and deduction. The respondents in this study might still have been too enthusiastic and glad to just be in the Republic of Ireland and be working. This sense of euphoria would necessarily preclude them from realising and sensing obvious incidents of discrimination and would attribute the causes to other non-benign factors.

3. There is still yet another possible explanation. There should exist smaller percentage of Irish population that is mostly likely to compete with EU10 migrant workers in the labour market since the Republic of Ireland has a relatively wealthy population. This would necessarily mean that the Republic of Ireland would have fewer citizens employed in low-skill occupations since most Irish natives tend to avoid these low-skill jobs. This would also necessarily mean that Irish employers would have fewer opportunities to discriminate against EU10 migrant workers in these low-skill occupations. This may explain why only Slovak responses are statistically significant and why only Slovak males agree with the sentiment that prejudice against Eastern Europeans in the Irish job market exists – because they are the cohorts that are most likely to compete with Irish natives, given their relatively higher labour market performances – and that Irish employers would refuse jobs based on race, religion, cultural background or nationality. Note that none expressed any statistically significant sentiment that it has been refused a job because of nationality precisely because hardly any cohort competes in a labour market

segment in which it is in direct competitions with Irish natives. These low-skill jobs are not the types of occupations in which nationality would pose any relevance or as a discriminating factor by Irish employers. Given these facts, it would be, therefore, safe for us to assume that the vast majority of the EU10 migrant workers are not in direct competitions with Irish natives in the Irish labour market, but *among* themselves for low-skilled occupations. Quillian (1995) also notes that "in Europe, wealth tends to decrease the competition for jobs and resources between immigrants and the host society" (p.592), and needless to say, the Republic of Ireland is a relatively wealthy nation in the twenty-first century world.

4. It would, therefore, compel us to question what the results might be if a same, or a similar, longitudinal study is to take place in 2015 and pose the same three questions to the same set of respondents. The results then may depict a completely different set of experience on discrimination in the Republic of Ireland.

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