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The Situation of Illegal Polish Seasonal Workers in German Agriculture

Abstract

Illegal seasonal workers have great quantitative importance in the agriculture of Western Europe but empirical research on this topic is very scarce.

In this paper the results of narrative interviews with Poles coming from a rural region in north-western Poland are presented. An important result was the central role of trust in the relationship between the employer and the seasonal worker which replaces a formal contract. This trust is important in the recruitment of illegal seasonal workers and in the regularity of payment. Personal relationships are also important for labour conditions and accommodation.

Keywords: seasonal work, illegal work, earning migration, Polish illegal workers in Germany, German agriculture.

Introduction

Seasonal work is of crucial importance in agriculture. In 2002, there were approximately 275,000 legal seasonal workers in German agriculture approximately 90% of whom came from Poland. They mainly work in the harvest of grapes, asparagus, strawberries and other fruit.

Employers must pay fixed minimum wages, and – in employment lasting over two months – social security.

The existing contingents do not satisfy the need for a seasonal workforce. Since the German long-term unemployed hardly work as seasonal workers, there is a great need for more foreign seasonal workers. A very frequent solution to cover this need is the 'illegal' employment of further foreign seasonal workers. 'Illegal' means that the seasonal workers are not formally registered, official wages are not respected and insurance is not paid.

An important reason for low payment and non-payment of insurance is the pressure on the prices for agricultural products.

The number of Poles interested in seasonal work considerably exceeds this contingent, so that many have no chance of getting legal work, among them peasants who cannot register as unemployed. It is estimated that in German agriculture the number of illegally employed seasonal workers is equal to the number of those employed legally.

Despite the great number of illegal seasonal workers in German agriculture there is hardly no research on their situation. The actual policy towards illegal work which is characterised by increased control and hardly includes the rural areas is oriented towards the obedience of legal regulations and not on the understanding of the motivation of the actors.

The objective of this presentation is to present:

- the motivation for the engagement in illegal seasonal work,
- the socio-economic situation of illegal seasonal workers,
- the arrangements of working places,
- the working and living conditions of illegal seasonal workers,
- their future prospects.

Methodology

Since the subjective view of the interviewees is at the centre of the research, the qualitative interview technique is the best procedure. In this way, the interviewees can express their views in their own words and emphasise aspects which are important for them. Their own expressions were the answers to the questions of a semi-structured interview guideline.

Corresponding to the qualitative methodology, the evaluation was concentrated on the one hand, on the expounding of individual particularities which are relevant to the topic and on the other, on the grouping of the interview material to types which express communalities. Following the qualitative methodology, only a limited number of persons were interviewed taking into consideration the particularities of the individuals and types.

In Poland narrative interviews were carried out in which the interviewees reported on illegal seasonal work which they did in the past. 64 interviews were carried out in all, of which 60 which were well realised and rich in information, were selected for evaluation. These interviews were realised by students of the Sociological Institute at the University of Toruń.

This research has no claim on being representative; biases come on the one hand, from the concentration on the region in North-Western Poland; on the other hand, the 'snow-ball' method to find the sample was used, and this technique can also create distortions. The essential condition to be

chosen was illegal work in German agriculture in the last few years. Although, as we mentioned, the sample is not representative, we tried to look for different people (i.e. diverse level of education, place of residence, age, sex, unemployed and employee), to make our analysis more comprehensive.

Why Illegal Seasonal Work?

To the question: "Did you try to find legal work as a seasonal worker in German agriculture?" only 17 of the 60 interviewees gave a positive response. They also referred to the problems that very few employers would employ someone legally and that legal seasonal work is temporarily limited. Most of them who had not tried to apply for legal seasonal work (32 of 60 cases) justified this by saying that they had no chance of finding legal work. A frequent reason for this answer was:

- that there would be too many unemployed persons in their region,
- that they had no chance for a legal work arrangement as peasants or policemen,
- that legal work is only permitted for a very restricted time,
- that only very few German employers would employ someone legally,
- that a 43-year-old applicant would be too old for an official application,
- possibility of negotiations of individual conditions (time of work in Germany, number of home visits etc.).

But there is a large spectrum of further reasons why illegal seasonal workers did not apply for legal work:

- in order to earn more money,
- because acquaintances had offered them illegal jobs,
- the employer was very satisfied with the work done by the legal employee and 'rewarded' him the following year with illegal work,
- the employer went bankrupt and the employee continued his work illegally for a neighbouring farmer,
- during their travels through Germany students would experience the adventure of working illegally in agriculture.

In summary, the motives for illegal work are very different, but the expectation that people do not get legal employment is of particular importance.

It was also difficult to receive information from the respondents on the number of people illegally employed on the farms on which they had worked. Therefore, there was uncertainty with respect to the answer to this question. The spectrum of illegally employed Poles on farms ranges from 1 to 100 persons (in the ex-German Democratic Republic).

The Socio-economic Situation of Illegal Seasonal Workers and their Motivation for Working in Germany

All the respondents emphasised spontaneously the high rates of unemployment especially in the villages and small towns in north-western Poland which ranged from 25 to 40%. In the villages where after the political change large agricultural enterprises were often closed there was generally no work.

Better opportunities only existed in the nearby small towns or distant cities. Since most of the respondents did not own cars, this potential was linked to a good transport connection between villages and small towns or distant cities but this was not the case in all the villages. One respondent said that the inhabitants of his village who go to Gdańsk by train must leave at 4.00 a.m. and return very late in the evening. So, seasonal labour is a reaction to lacking local opportunities. Although only eleven of the sixty cases were peasants, 100% come from rural areas (villages and small towns), where labour opportunities are very bad. So, seasonal work cannot be regarded in isolation from the differences between cities and countryside which are very distinctive in Poland.

The socio-economic and professional situation of illegal seasonal workers is very different. Considering these differences 5 types can be differentiated:

- Type 1: unemployed, not permanently employed
- Type 2: very badly paid
- Type 3: additional income
- Type 4: farmer
- Type 5: student, pupil

Closer Description of the Different Types and their Motivations

Type 1: unemployed or occasional worker: The first cases of this type are in a very difficult financial situation. Some people describe their situations as being 'very hard.' Some are also in debt.

I had whatever was necessary to pay the rates of my bank credit. I had no other choice. The banks don't show any mercy.

In other cases the money earned is used for supporting the family and for the children's education. There are no prospects of permanent employment in Poland; in one case, a person also works there illegally.

In the second case of this first type the partner of the unemployed person or only occasionally employed respondent is occupied. In this case, the

money earned from illegal seasonal work goes towards paying off loans but also in order to renovate the home.

A third case of this type is an interesting single case. He is 34 years old and lives in a village with a high unemployment rate. He observes that many of those unemployed people – instead of working – stand in front of the shop drinking beer and he criticises their perplexity. He personally intends to realise an alternative. He considered the possibility of working in Germany as a way of earning money quickly and with that money he wanted to import second-hand cars from Germany and sell them in Poland. After that he intends to completely give up illegal seasonal work and only travel to Germany for the motorcar trade. The respondent emphasises that working in Germany – although financially attractive – doesn't develop people working there. A problem is also the long absence from Poland – that absence from his place of residence as a lorry dweller led to the separation from his female partner. He intends to use the money he earns for the construction of a house.

Elwert (2002, p. 13/14) resumes the results of his own research and of his Polish collaborator Małgorzata Irek (1998) in the following way, understanding 'close migrants' as migrants who can enter Germany in one day as for instance those from Poland and 'distant migrants' as those coming mainly from Africa: "Whereas in the close migrants only partly investment goods for own enterprises develop (luxury goods and not at last investments for the house and the household play an important role), for distant migrants the accumulation objective 'investment' has a central role."

The statement on the close migrants corresponds to the results of this survey in north-western Poland. The difference with Irek's results (1998) where the underclass is practically not represented among Polish migrants could be explained by the specificity of seasonal migration. Due to the unqualified work and since the costs of accommodation and food are lower in rural areas than in cities, seasonal migration for working in agriculture can be better financed by lower income groups than long-term migration in urban regions.

Type 2: Very badly paid: People of the second type were not unemployed but badly paid. This type is represented in the sample by a nurse who describes her payment as being 'disastrously bad.' She worked in Germany with her husband in order to be able to buy a home. After that, children were born and the respondent stopped working.

Type 3: Additional income: People of the third type are not in a difficult situation but wish to improve their circumstances. Examples are two teachers, a policeman, a technician and an employee. The objectives of earning money were:

- an improvement of the family's living conditions,

— renovation of the home,
 — the financing of travelling to Western Europe, consumption, family hobbies. In this type there was also a case where the foundation of an enterprise was financed.

Type 4: Peasants: On the one hand, this type is formed by peasants who still own their own farms and on the other hand, by young peasants living on their parents' farms.

The first group of this type is formed by owners of very small farms who are completely or partly subsistence peasants and where the marriage partner generally has an extra-agricultural profession. These farmers also do seasonal labour on larger farms in the village. In one case, debt was the motive for seasonal labour in Germany. But there was also a peasant who was the owner of a large 50 ha farm and who described his financial situation as being good. He wanted to earn additional money in order to ameliorate the financial situation of his family; besides, he bought new machines in order to modernise his agriculture. His activity in Germany was not only physical work, he also managed the farm.

In another group, the parents are still the owners of the farm. The income from small farms is insufficient for all the people living on the farm. Some of them have extra-agricultural professions, others are unemployed. Their future prospects are often not clear. A 28-year-old hairdresser who became unemployed intends to work in Germany as a seasonal worker instead of accepting a badly paid job in her profession.

Type 5: Students / Pupils: The motives of students and pupils are very different. On the one hand, the objective is to finance their studies and become financially independent from their parents. This would not be possible by working in Poland: *In Poland, it would never be possible to earn money for the following academic year in the summer holidays.*

One respondent said that he permanently sought possibilities of rising quickly. Most emphasised the possibility of earning money in Germany. But the motive of helping the parents financially was also presented. Some of the people in this group had been to Germany when they were young accompanying their parents during seasonal labour (in one case the parents have travelled regularly to seasonal work in Germany for 15 years), so that we can speak of a "socialisation into illegal seasonal work."

Students' and pupils' motive for earning money for their studies is linked with their interest in tourism and search for adventure.

Finding a Job

Since the classic study of Granovetter (1973) the importance of social networks for finding jobs has been emphasised. Later, this result was also

found for legally employed Polish seasonal workers in German agriculture (Becker and Heller 2002).

For the illegal employment of foreign seasonal workers networks for arranging employment are especially important: in most cases the interviewees reported that the working place was arranged for them by acquaintances, relatives or acquaintances of relatives ('weak ties' in Granovetter's terminology).

Reasons:

1. Searching for a job in a foreign country is very difficult, mainly if the language is not or hardly understood. There were some cases where singular interviewees reported that they went 'from farm to farm' in order to find a job, but these were exceptions (mainly students).

In contrast to this exception, the following situation of a 32-year-old peasant is typical: *The work was offered to me by a colleague in the village. I trust him. Alone, I would not have dared travel to Germany to work. I would not know where to seek work.*

2. In illegal employment mutual trust is essential since both the employee and the employer take a risk.

Due to a recommendation an employee can understand that he will be paid according to agreement and the employer can understand that the recommended employee will do a good job. There was a case of an employer sending an employee whom he trusted back to his homeland in order to recruit a new labour-force.

A further important result of the research is the continuity of seasonal activities; so, approximately half of the illegal seasonal workers work longer than a year for the same employer (10 years in one case). There was also a case where a person first worked in Germany legally and then 6 times illegally.

In two cases we noticed a very specific kind of 'promotion.' The people who worked once or twice formally and were evaluated as being very good workers obtained a proposal of illegal work the following year with higher payment. Both agreed.

Seasonal Workers' Relationship with Employers

Since – due to the lack of a formal labour contract – there is no formal and institutionalised regulation of labour, the informal regulation of the relationship between the employer and the employee is of great importance, and this in a form of trust and personal relationship.

One respondent emphasised the following: *Naturally, there were no written labour contracts. Everything, such as the hourly wage and working*

conditions, is based on the employer's word. Trust in such cases is necessary.

Naturally, there are no written labour contracts. All these contracts, i.e. the hourly wage and working conditions, are based on the employer's word. In these cases, trust is essential. It sometimes happens that the employer doesn't pay. The interviewee admitted that he had never been swindled. But once his colleague didn't receive his wage of 1250 Euros. It sometimes happened that the employee then reported to the police that the farmer employed foreigners illegally. *It's possible to arrange with the police that the employee will not be punished for illegal employment if he reports the employer to the police.*

In the majority of cases the personal relationship between employees and employer was described as positive, in special cases as 'familiar,' 'amicable' or 'super.' In 13 cases, the relationship was described as 'mediocre,' in 9 cases as 'formal' and in 6 further cases as 'bad;' one of this last group referred to permanent control. Two further interviewees said that they were cheated and that they were not paid the full amount.

There is a general trend that a personal, friendly and even familiar relationship between employer and employee exists on small farms and a bad relationship on big farms, for instance on a farm where 100 Poles were employed and were constantly controlled. But there were also exceptions.

Conditions for the Willingness of Risk

Illegal seasonal work is linked with risk, since seasonal workers and employers must pay high fines when the police finds illegal work. So, the question arises why workers engage in the risk of working illegally in Germany. The most frequent motive was the reported bad financial circumstances, obligations and lack of prospects in the homeland. *If you have to feed a family and have no job prospects, it would be a risk to stay in Poland and not to use such an opportunity.*

It has been emphasised that the risk is smaller if one knows and trusts the employer or if acquaintances know the employer and have established contacts between employer and employee. It has also been emphasised that the countryside has less control of illegal activities than the urban area. Farms are often located in an isolated part of the countryside so that people are not afraid of becoming victims of control. In one case, for example, workers were informed that in case of control they would have to take their beds out of the house and hide in the forest. Finally, it has been said that the kind of work, accommodation and food are essential for the availability of taking the risk of illegal work.

Payment

With the exception of 21 cases, all interviewees reported that they were paid hourly wages. The exceptions were two large farms (in one case over 100 employees) in Eastern Germany and a smaller farm in the region of Brandenburg. Probably, the large farms have a lower proportion in the sample than in reality, so that it cannot be said that piece work payment is an exception. A plausible explanation for the fact that on larger farms payment is made on a piece-work basis could be that on larger farms control of single workers is more difficult and that the relationship of the employer and employees is more anonymous than personal or friendly. On the other hand, it is easier to control work on smaller farms.

Since the times about which these reports were made were between 1 and 10 years ago, it makes no sense to calculate an average wage. Since the introduction of the Euro-currency the respondents were paid approximately 5 Euros per hour with a dispersion between 4.40 Euros and 7 Euros. (In 2003 the official wage was 5.70 Euros.) So, there is no great difference with the wages for legal work. Seasonal workers had to pay for their food and accommodation which had not been expected by some workers. Whereas payment for legal work is regulated by national laws, payment for illegal work can vary depending on the intensity of work and on the personal relationship between the employer and the employee. So, in 10 cases, extra rewards were paid for good work. One female student reported that other workers who had a positive relationship with the employer received 5 Euros per hour whereas she and others only received 4.40 Euros per hour despite the fact that 4.60 Euros per hour had been prearranged.

There was also a case where the hourly wages had been lowered since further Polish seasonal workers were willing to work on the farm: *At the beginning, my boss proposed to pay me 14 DM per hour and additionally a contribution towards food. But after some months when further Poles were engaged we only received 12 DM per hour and a contribution towards food.*

That interviewee also reported that wages for legal work were lower than wages for illegal work. *Once a year, the employer did employ us officially for three months. During that time, we only received 8 DM per hour without contributions towards food.*

Most of the interviewees reported that wages were paid weekly. These short times were certainly in relation to the financial needs of seasonal workers for their food and accommodation. On the other hand, for seasonal workers insecurity was reduced, since there was less danger that they would have to flee without money if the police came – or that the police

took their money away. For the employer, regular weekly payment provides the possibility of documenting the reliability of the workers.

In summary, even if there is no formal work contract, an informal working relationship can be the basis for reliability. On the other hand, the situation of illegality produces pressure on the employer to avoid conflict with the employee which could motivate him to report the employer to the police. There is a legal regulation in Germany that the employer must pay for work done by the employee, regardless of whether the employee has an official residence permit or not.

Working Conditions

All the interviewees emphasised that the work was well organised. Corresponding to the non-existing legal regulations, working hours in seasonal work and also the kind of work to be done vary. During times of high labour demand working times were 16 hours per day. For the 11 interviewees who gave quantitative information, the average was 11 hours per day; the minimum being 8 hours. Saturday work is almost the rule and Sunday work is no exception. In situations of lower labour demand the working times are lower or other work is done, for instance helping in the renovation of a building. Breaks are very important in such long working hours as was often spontaneously emphasised by the interviewees. In some areas, especially during the harvesting of cucumbers and fruit, it was emphasised that work was very hard. So, a student reported: *The worst work was in the field. We drove so-called 'airplanes.'* These were horizontally installed wings which were put on to a tractor. We lay flat on these wings and gathered the cucumbers. So, we worked all the time on our stomachs. But there were also hills, then we worked with our heads down, we were hot and dizzy. No German would work in this way.

Working conditions were also characterised in a very different way. One group describes their employer positively and another group negatively often emphasising the control by the employer which is in relation to payment on an hourly basis. It is well known that in official work the relationship between employer and employee has an important role, but in unofficial work it plays an even greater role than in non-regulated work.

Accommodation

Accommodation is very important for illegal seasonal workers and it is a factor when taking the risk of illegal seasonal work. Accommodation conditions are now legally regulated in Germany. The accommodation is very varied.

In six cases the employer did not provide accommodation, so that the employees had to camp. The accommodation situation often improved in the course of time according to legal regulations which illegal workers also benefited from as well as the development of a positive atmosphere between employer and employee. Most seasonal workers described their later accommodation situation as being positive, few as bad.

Differences mainly depend on two factors:

Firstly, it was sometimes said that legally employed seasonal workers are better accommodated than the illegally employed. On the other hand, there is a trend that accommodation is especially bad on farms where many seasonal workers are employed. So, one female respondent reported the following on a farm where approximately 100 persons were illegally employed: *We lived in an old granary. I lived with my brother in a stinking room full of fungus and without a window. There was a table, a wardrobe and two beds. Besides, that was one of the best rooms. There was always a war about rooms. They were in a tragic condition. Everyone quarrelled about them. We enjoyed our room. In some rooms there were no beds. The workers were forced to sleep on the ground. All the rooms were closed.*

On the other hand, a seasonal worker reported on a farm where only two seasonal workers were employed: *Working conditions were good. I lived in a room in the employer's house. I had my own bath and my own kitchen. The equipment was as in Poland. I did not have to pay for water, electricity or gas.*

These differences reflect the relationships on big farms characterised by anonymity and the relationships on small farms with few seasonal workers which can develop into friendship. In the latter case, accommodation in farmhouses is offered to the employees as rooms which are no longer needed due to the diminishing dimension of the peasant family and which would otherwise be used as guestrooms.

Respondents emphasised that they didn't expect perfect living conditions, they knew that their stay in Germany would not be very long and that they only went there to earn money. *I don't go there for a holiday. I just want to earn money. I don't even want to have too much free time to think about my home, my family, I plan to work hard, then I will take my money and go back home.*

Due to the lack of great expectations the evaluations of living conditions are not bad, although they are often very modest, resembling a camp.

The Relationship between Illegal Seasonal Workers

Especially in the perspective of rural sociology the question of the social relationship between seasonal workers is important.

The social relationship with other seasonal workers is important when living in a foreign environment, and in the form of labour cooperation it is also important for the quality of work. In summary, the social relationships among seasonal workers were characterised in a few cases as 'competitive,' sometimes 'so-so' or 'varied' and in most cases as 'cooperative;' in a few cases, there was no information.

The situation of competition first becomes noticeable at the time of job – seeking. *It happens that new workers in order to get any work – are willing to work for a lower hourly wage. A German employs the person who costs him less.*

Competition can also concern the time during work. So, an unemployed person said: *There was an atmosphere of competition, especially between the Poles, some would also stay with the same employer the following year.*

The high rate of unemployment in the rural areas of north-western Poland with limited labour opportunities can create job competition before and during seasonal work.

In two cases competition was connected with personal conflicts between workers. *We were there for two months, together all day: in the field, in the canteen, every evening. You are always with the same people. If you don't like somebody you can easily break down.*

In the second group ('so-so' or 'varied') there is at first a case where competition exists between the Poles but Germans help the Poles and another case where competition exists only between these Poles who will return the following year. In another case it was reported that the workers were structured in small groups, where solidarity existed within these small (2–4 persons) groups. Others characterise the mutual relationship as being 'cool' or say: *Everyone had his working place and was responsible for it.*

One form of different relationships was also sometimes mentioned in the form that there is a negative relationship towards a Polish 'boss' who is permanently employed and who has the task of supervising Polish seasonal workers. This person is especially hated by the seasonal workers and gets called 'terrorist' or 'Bin Laden.'

The third group where a positive relationship exists between the illegal seasonal workers is the biggest. In this group mutual help and team spirit are emphasised. The basis for a friendly relationship can also be the fact that these persons have known each other for a longer time having worked for the same employer for some years. *The atmosphere between us was good, it is not a place for finding great friendship, but you can rely on others. We were in the same boat.*

Relationships between employees vary. In illegal seasonal work, there is no general solidarity between workers – a result which is also typical for the informal economy in general.

Leisure Time and Contacts with the German Population

Due to the long working hours almost all the respondents only had very short leisure times. *In the evening, we relaxed after the hard work in front of the hut. After work I always rested well in order to be able to work well the next day. Besides this, nothing. I saved money.*

If the seasonal workers did not work or go shopping at weekends, they assembled to drink beer or have a barbecue. Mainly students are interested in travelling around the area in order to get to know it. Two respondents reported that they had attended local village festivals.

This extreme labour load is also an important reason for the fact that 23 respondents indicated that they had no contacts with the German population. Naturally, a further important reason for this were language problems. Contacts which became more permanent and often developed into friendships concentrated on work and were related to the employer, other farmers as potential future employers, the employer's neighbour, German employees etc.

One respondent reported: *German women helped us with our shopping.*

In summary, Polish seasonal workers are very isolated from their social environment because of their great labour load and due to language problems. In some cases friendly relations develop, but they are concentrated on the working place.

Perspectives on Future Illegal Seasonal Work

On the question if they would consider doing illegal seasonal work in the future, 23 interviewees gave negative responses, 17 gave positive responses and most people said: *It depends, I'm not sure or I don't yet know.* One interviewee (A 32-year-old owner of a small farm) said: *I don't know if I really want this. I'm not too old. But with my health it's worse. And as I said, alone? What is the sense of this policy? To have your own land and not to be able to feed yourself? Is it really necessary to go to foreign countries in order to earn money and then save your own land with this money?*

The justifications for negative responses vary: three respondents referred to hard work creating health problems in one case: one described the work as 'agony.' Two who gave negative responses were even older (62 and 63) and one respondent gave a negative response because he was finishing his studies. Two respondents justified their negative decisions with the problems of separation from their families; two others had meanwhile found work in Poland. Further justifications for negative responses were:

- one female interviewee is now looking after their children at home;
- one interviewee would now work legally in order to maintain his pension claims;
- one interviewee refuses to work again illegally in Germany because of his bad experience with the employer.

Positive responses also vary: Two students will continue to work in Germany in order to be able to finish their studies. Two who are unemployed or only occasional workers do not see any alternative. One female interviewee aged 28 who was satisfied with her work in Germany received a job offer in her profession (hairdresser), but she found that it would be more profitable to work in Germany; with the money she paid for her old-age pension. The owner of a big farm, aged 25 has been working in Germany for 10 years and will continue to do so in order to receive an additional income. Finally, a seasonal worker became acquainted with another farmer in the village and will work on that farm the following year and since he studied physics he will also repair the agricultural machines.

People who hesitate about whether or not to go to Germany again, try to find (or change) their jobs in Poland are often in difficult family situations. Regardless of their earlier experiences, good or bad, they mostly perceive illegal work in Germany as an extremity.

Theoretical Conclusion

A significant result of the interviews was the importance of trust and positive personal relationships between employer and employee. This informal regulation replaces an institutionalised regulation, i.e. a work contract. Apart from one small exception, it showed that the employer's 'word' as an informal regulation is just as respected as a written contract. This personal relationship is especially positive if the Polish employee is also a peasant.

An important base for personal trust are the previous experiences which the employer and the employee had gained. If the mutual experiences in the first year of illegal seasonal work were positive this can be a base of trust for illegal seasonal work in future years and explains why a continuity of illegal seasonal work exists – sometimes even a generational continuity. But there are differences in the dimensions of the farms in the sense that this relationship is more anonymous on larger farms, and that on these larger farms labour control is gaining importance. On small farms the importance of trust is reflected in the fact that payment is made according to an hourly wage and not on a piece-rate basis.

Social relationships in Poland are also important because many interviewees work in Germany in order to be able to help their parents or other

family members financially. The level of social relationships – the meso-level – cannot be overlooked and it is incorrect to only consider the micro-level in the sense of the maximisation of individual benefit.

So, the theoretical conclusion is that the absence of legal regulations as a labour contract does not mean that illegal work has no regulations; a regulation does exist but it is informal and based on personal relationships and not on a written contract or national labour regulations.

Practical Conclusion

At first, the relationship between the high degree of unemployment in Poland and the importance of illegal labour migration becomes evident. So the most effective way of reducing illegal labour migration would not be increased control but the creation of job opportunities in Poland's rural areas. Many illegal Polish seasonal workers do not want to work illegally in Germany because of separation from their families, hard working conditions and bad accommodation, but they have to do so for financial reasons.

Since many seasonal workers cannot find work in their rural region and since most of the job opportunities are in urban centres, an amelioration of the transport infrastructure in order to create better connections between rural areas and urban centres would be essential.

Together, these two recommendations are going in the direction of a promotion of regional development in Poland. Until the measures are realised, the contingents for legal seasonal work in agriculture should be increased and concentrated on regions with high unemployment. Small peasants who own their own farms should also have the possibility of working legally as seasonal workers in German agriculture.

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