

THE 'GUEST-WORKER SYNDROME' REVISITED?

Migration and employment among Polish workers in Oslo

Abstract

This paper discusses whether recent Polish labour migrants in Norway are likely to face long-term integration problems related to labour market exclusion and welfare dependency. The analyses of the development over the first six years since European Union accession suggest a conditional yes. On the basis of survey and qualitative data collected among Polish workers in Oslo, I show that (1) substantial numbers of initial temporary migrants have settled down, owing to life-cycle- and family-related dynamics of the migratory process; (2) flexibilisation and ethnic segmentation in migrant-labour-intensive industries have prevented migrants from accessing stable employment; and (3) migrant workers with weak ties to the labour market are particularly at risk of being pushed out of employment in times of economic uncertainty and restructuring. These workers have, however, so far had quite limited access to unemployment benefits and other welfare state benefits. The analyses suggest that, despite some significant differences, the experiences of the so-called guest-workers of the post-war era may be a relevant historical reference for understanding the situation of today's free-moving Central and Eastern European workers.

Keywords

Labour migration • settlement • segmentation • unemployment • social protection

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1 Introduction

Triggered by the Eastward enlargements of the European Union (EU) in 2004 and 2007 and powered by a booming demand for labour in many sectors, Norway has in recent years become a magnet for Central and Eastern European (CEE) labour migrants, and in particular Polish workers, who in some industries could expect to earn up to five times more in Norway than back home. Between May 2004 and November 2011, more than 140,000 Polish migrants were registered by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration. If we add workers from the Baltic states and Romania and the unknown but significant numbers of posted and undocumented workers who arrived without being registered, more than 200,000 labour migrants from the new EU member states had entered Norway by 2012. With less than 5,000,000 inhabitants and a work-force of about 2,500,000, this makes Norway one of the top destinations for migrants from the new member states in relative terms. It also makes Polish immigrants the largest immigrant group in Norway, with a ten-fold increase in the settled immigrant population from 7,000 in 2003 to more than 70,000 in 2012. The majority have come to work within construction, manufacturing, agriculture and low-skilled services, with a profound impact on the labour market in these sectors.

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Facing an ageing population, labour migration from new EU member states has largely been welcomed as a much-needed contribution to the domestic labour force in Norway. Despite ongoing concern for and comprehensive policy initiatives against “social dumping”, labour migration has largely been considered a win-win phenomenon, whereby employers get access to cheap and flexible labour, the government can expand its economic scope of action without the fear of inflation, while migrants from the new EU member states can supplement their homeland earnings with income from work in the West – income that may be low by destination country standards but highly rewarding in a transnational context (St.meld. nr. 18 (2007–2008), NOU 2012: 2). In a context where immigration from outside Europe has become an increasingly contested issue in Norwegian politics, the relatively warm welcome which the Polish immigration has been met with has been related to at least two factors. First of all, the majority of Polish labour migrants were not expected to settle down. Instead, it has often been argued that temporary and circular migration from new EU member states could satisfy the need for foreign labour without the problems traditionally associated with integration.¹ This view is also reflected in the European academic literature on post accession East–West migration. Much of this

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literature highlights the very different institutional and legal contexts of migration within the European area compared to migration from outside the EU, and have resulted in a series of new concepts which aim to conceptualise these new fluid and transient patterns of mobility. These include “income-seeking travel” (Morawska 2001), “fluid” or “incomplete” migration (Jaźwińska & Okólski 2001), “lasting temporariness” (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2005), “regional free movers” (Favell 2008) and “liquid migration” (Engbersen *et al.* 2010). Second, empirical studies from Norway and elsewhere suggest that these new migrants so far have not experienced any of the traditional economic integration problems often associated with non-European immigration. CEE migrants generally display high rates of employment and make low demands on welfare state benefits. Several Norwegian studies show that labour migration has contributed to increased numerical flexibility and reduced labour costs in a period marked by severe labour shortages in several sectors (Dølvik *et al.* 2006; Andersen *et al.* 2009), and to reducing “bottlenecks” in regional labour demand (Røed *et al.* 2011). Similarly, European economic research on the consequences of post-enlargement migration has generally concluded that it has had a positive impact on receiving economies, with “little, if any, impact on wages and employment and no negative impact on welfare systems” (Kahanec & Zimmermann 2010: 30). The fear of “welfare tourism” – a main argument in most western European countries for applying transitional restrictions in the first years after enlargement – has generally been found to be groundless; CEE migrants have come for work, not benefits (*ibid.*; see also European Commission 2008; Kahanec & Zimmermann 2009, 2010). CEE migrants’ perceived ethnic and cultural proximity to native Norwegians compared to non-Europeans should also not be underestimated as an explanation for their relative positive reception.²

There are, however, at least four good reasons to look beyond these immediate outcomes and try to explore processes that are at work today which may point towards possible different outcomes in the future. First of all, it could be argued that the significance of institutional differences between European free movement and state regulated immigration from outside the EU are somewhat exaggerated, and that state policies are not the only – or even the most important – factors shaping the adaptation and incorporation of migrants. Equally important are the structural processes in the labour market and economy that shape employment patterns and material relations and the social processes that shape settlement and community formation in migrant groups. Second, recent developments reflected in official statistics (such as rapidly increasing numbers of workers who register themselves as “settled” in Norway rather than on “temporary stay” and the changing gender composition of the migrant population) as well as a number of empirical studies in Norway and elsewhere have questioned the initial assumption that CEE labour migrants are only temporary migrants and not likely to settle down for the longer term (Grabowska-Lusińska & Okólski 2009; Friberg & Eldring 2011; Friberg, 2012a). Third, much existing economic research about the impact of CEE labour migration is methodologically flawed by an implicit assumption that this impact occurs instantaneously and affects labour markets uniformly, while, in reality, it is more likely to unfold through slow, long-term and sequential processes of adjustment that affect different sub-segments of labour markets and society in highly different ways (Arnholtz & Hansen 2011). Fourth, while the immediate post accession years were characterised by an economic boom, the recent financial and economic crisis has – even though Norway was among the least affected countries in Europe – provided a glimpse of how the migratory dynamic may play out under less favourable economic conditions.

As a historical reference and basis for developing an analytical framework for understanding today’s labour migrants I will use the experiences of the so-called post-war guest-workers. Before turning to the empirical investigation of Polish migrants in Oslo, I will present a brief historical account of this earlier wave of labour migration to Western Europe in general and to Norway in particular. In post-1945 Europe, temporary labour recruitment systems – the German *Gastarbeiter* programme (1955–73) being the most famous – played a major role in labour market policies in a period of sustained industrial growth and persistent need for labour. The idea behind these programmes was to *import labour but not people*: workers from less-developed countries were recruited for limited periods, their rights in the host countries were restricted and family reunion and settlement were minimised. Migrants were expected to accept relatively poor wages and conditions, to make little demand on social infrastructure, to avoid getting involved in labour struggles and to return home after definite periods of work. By the 1980s, however, the guest-worker programmes had largely been abandoned. Stephen Castles (1986) describes the failure of the programmes: The increased labour market segmentation in the wake of migration led to a constant need for migrant labour in certain industries. As temporary workers were recruited to meet a permanent labour demand, the rotation system inevitably broke down. The social and life-cycle-related dynamics of the migratory process gradually led to settlement and community formation as single workers grew older and established families and households. Over time, migrant workers were integrated into welfare systems, and liberal democratic states found themselves incapable of expelling large numbers of workers. It soon became clear that official policies of differential exclusion, the immigrant workers’ subordinate position in the lower segments of the labour market and barriers to occupational mobility and improvement gave rise to social marginalisation rather than return migration. As the 1973 oil crisis marked the end of Europe’s long industrial boom, followed by economic restructuring and decimation of jobs in traditional industrial employment, many labour migrants were excluded from the labour market and formed disadvantaged minorities, often with high levels of welfare dependency.

Castles describes the explicit guest-worker policies that many European countries adopted in the post-war era but similar patterns have been found in Norway, where such policies were not applied. From the late 1960s, Norway received substantial numbers of spontaneous labour migrants from Pakistan, Turkey and Morocco, who initially came for temporary work and who were predominantly hired as low-skilled manual labourers in industrial manufacturing. Contrary to policy-makers’ expectations and the original intentions of the workers themselves, most of them settled down and brought their families after the 1975 immigration stop (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli 2008). Studying the life-cycle employment profiles of these labour migrants, Bratsberg, Raaum and Røed (2010) showed that, during the first years after arrival, almost all the migrants worked and their employment rate even exceeded that of natives. Yet, about ten years after their arrival, immigrant employment showed a sharp and steady decline. By 2000, the employment rate of the studied immigrant cohort was down to 50 per cent, as opposed to 87 per cent in the native comparison group. According to the authors, the decline was explained partly by the migrants’ over-representation in jobs associated with short employment careers (the three Ds – dirty, difficult and dangerous), partly by their particular vulnerability to economic restructuring, with high probability of exit from employment during downturns, and partly by disincentives embedded in the social security system that contribute to poor life-cycle

employment performance, especially among immigrants with many dependent family members (Bratsberg *et al.* 2010). Although they apply very different methodologies and theoretical perspectives, the general process described both by Castles and by Bratsberg *et al.* includes the following three interconnected elements: (1) the recruitment and subordinate incorporation of “temporary” labour migrants; (2) settlement and community formation as a result of the social dynamic of the migratory process; and (3) vulnerability to unemployment and welfare dependency after periods of economic crisis and restructuring.³

In the following, I will refer to the combination of these three processes as the “*guest-worker syndrome*”.⁴ With a view to assessing this syndrome’s relevance for understanding possible outcomes of the Polish–Norwegian migratory system, each of the following three elements will be put under scrutiny:

- 1) whether Polish migrants are likely to settle down like the post-war guest-workers or whether their migration patterns are more likely to be temporary and transient;
- 2) whether today’s Polish labour migrants are subject to any form of subordinate incorporation in the labour market similar to that of their post-war counterparts;
- 3) whether Polish migrants are vulnerable to labour market exclusion in times of crisis and restructuring.

2 Data and methods

The analyses are based on a comparison of two surveys collected among Polish migrants in Oslo in 2006 and 2010, as well as qualitative interviews with Polish migrants in Oslo and return migrants in Poland. Transnational free-moving labour migrants are an elusive population for quantitative survey research. Some may only stay for short periods of time, some may not live in registered housing and many are not registered as residents because they are only planning to stay temporarily or not even in the tax registers if they are working in the informal economy. Ordinary random sampling based on public registers will therefore produce biased samples and low response rates. This is why, in the autumn and winter of 2006, Fafo, in collaboration with researchers from the Centre for Migration Research in Warsaw, conducted a pilot study using respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to study Polish migrant workers. RDS was first developed by Douglas Heckathorn (1997) and later refined by Heckathorn and associates (Salganik & Heckathorn 2004; Heckathorn 2007; Wejnert & Heckathorn 2008; Volz & Heckathorn 2008) in order to study hidden and hard-to-reach populations by combining elements of “snowball sampling” (getting individuals to recruit people they know who, in turn, recruit individuals they know and so on) with economic incentives for participation and recruiting.⁵ It also uses statistical software to produce estimates that adjust for network effects in the sampling procedure, such as the recruitment patterns of people with different characteristics and the network size of each respondent. The method has been shown to produce statistically unbiased estimates for populations where no sampling frame exists (*ibid.*). The 2006 survey proved successful and was repeated in early 2010, following the same procedures and using a slightly improved questionnaire. Both samples consist of Polish migrants staying in the Oslo area, and each time more than 500 people were interviewed. In both surveys, interviews were conducted face to face by a team of Polish-speaking interviewers. Respondents were asked a wide range of questions about their situation in Poland

before emigration, their migration histories, their labour market situation and social integration in Norway. The following analysis will describe developments and changes in patterns of labour market positions, settlement and unemployment by comparing the results from the two surveys. The analysis will also draw on forty qualitative interviews with Polish migrants that were collected in 2008 and 2009 and on a set of eight case studies in firms employing Polish migrants. The qualitative material will be used for processes tracing and explaining the observed patterns in the quantitative material.

3 Are Polish migrants likely to settle down in Norway?

When I first came to Norway, I just thought that it would be nice to work, make some money and go back to Poland after a while. I wasn’t sure how long I would stay, but month by month, year by year, I have lived here – for 2 years now. [...] Lately I’ve started thinking that I just might stay. (Polish construction worker, 32, interviewed in Oslo in 2009.)

Regulated by principles of free movement of labour and services and assisted by cheap airline flights and Internet-based communications, CEE migrants are indeed free to take up employment in any destination in the EEA without severing their ties to their homelands or communities and can go back home without fear of losing residence rights. This enables them to exploit the benefits of relatively high wages in destination countries and low living costs at home, allowing them to lead significant parts of their lives both at home and abroad, in a way that was hardly possible for post-war guest-workers who faced completely different obstacles to their transnational engagements in terms of geographical distance, political borders and expensive and slow means of communication. Such circular or transnational mobility is particularly rewarding given the exceptionally high cost level in Norway compared to Poland. As we shall see, however, dynamics related to life-cycle-, family- and social-network-driven processes of settlement and community formation may still provide a powerful dynamic in favour of more enduring settlement. The comparison of survey results from 2006 and 2010 presented in table 1 gives us a glimpse of this dynamic in this early stage of the migratory experience. When the first survey was conducted, in 2006, the population of Polish migrants in Oslo was indeed highly transient and unsettled and consisted largely of recently arrived male workers who had left their families back home to work temporarily abroad, commuting back and forth between work in Norway and their families in Poland. Many of them had quite open-ended plans for the future but most of them expected to return to Poland at some point.

When the survey was replicated only three and a half years later, the Polish community in the Norwegian capital had undergone significant changes. The proportion of women in the population had increased from 26 per cent to 36 per cent, as a result of family migration. While almost all men reported that they had migrated for economic reasons, roughly half the women reported that they had come in order to join their spouses. In 2006, most respondents reported that their spouses were living in Poland. In 2010, the situation was reversed: most of the non-single respondents now reported that their spouses were living in Norway. Similarly, the situation had changed dramatically in terms of housing and living arrangements. In 2006, the majority reported that they lived with colleagues and friends in temporary shared housing. In 2010, the majority were residing together with

Table 1. Family situations and housing arrangements in 2006 and 2010 compared. Per cent

Family status	Year		Change
	2006 (n = 510)	2010 (n = 501)	
Do not have spouses	28	28	0
Spouses living in Poland	48	30	-18
Spouses living in Norway	24	42	+18
Total	100	100	
Housing arrangements in Norway	2006	2010	
Living alone	22	20	-2
Living with friends/colleagues/others	58	27	-31
Living with spouses/family members	20	52	+32
Total	100	100	

Source: 2006 and 2010 Polonia surveys among Polish migrants in Oslo. Fafo.

their families. These results show that in less than four years there had been a considerable shift in the Polish migrant community in Oslo: from consisting of a transient and unsettled population mostly made up of male workers to a far more settled immigrant community consisting of men, women and families.

What had happened in the period between the two surveys? First of all, permanent and long-term migrants tend to accumulate in the immigrant populations of the destination countries, while temporary, short-term migrants do not. This inevitably leads to changes in the total composition even if migration patterns or intentions do not. But changes in the migrant population are also related to changes in the situation of individual migrants and families. According to the qualitative study, migrants usually perceive going to work abroad as a strategy for building better lives for themselves and their families *in Poland*, and at the time of arrival, few migrants have any intention of settling down in Norway. Nevertheless, many end up overstaying their initial return dates and gradually become more settled. Two main reasons can be identified: first of all, Norwegian employers in construction, industrial manufacturing, cleaning, etc. are generally recruiting temporary workers to meet a permanent labour demand. As employers try to avoid the cost of retraining new employees and as workers are constantly offered new temporary assignments, the circular pattern of migration tends to break down.⁶ Second, as migrants often miscalculate the cost of living abroad and thereby the time needed to reach their target earnings, families back home often become dependent on income remittances. As initial plans of swift return dwindle, many migrants suffer under the strain of living neither here nor there – separated from their families and friends in Poland and marginalised in Norwegian labour markets and communities. Without the prospect of immediate reunion, their living apart from their families becomes increasingly frustrating and puts transnational relationships under considerable stress. While some migrants eventually return to Poland in order to reunite their families, many opt for reuniting with their families in Norway, especially if their wives can find work in Norway. As more Polish women gain a foothold in parts of the Norwegian labour market, jobs become increasingly accessible to other Polish women through informal networks of relatives, friends and acquaintances. As increasing numbers of settled families are able to provide increasingly varied social, practical and emotional

support to other families, reducing the risk and increasing the reward for others contemplating this option, settlement and community formation takes on the character of a cumulative self-perpetuating process.

4 Are Polish migrants subject to subordinate incorporation in the labour market?

You have a staff of people who know the machines, the technical stuff, etc. That's the 'core' [...]. Those are the real assets of the firm and you need a group of people you really can trust. On top of that, you hire people from the temp agencies and subcontractors to be helpers, to do the manual labour or to do specific tasks. That's the outer circle, that's where you find the Poles. (Manager, medium-sized construction firm in Oslo.)

Unlike classical guest-workers, Polish workers in Norway are not subject to any differential legal treatment. Their access to the Norwegian labour market is regulated by free movement of labour within the EU/EEA internal market that guarantees equal treatment and access. Once the transitional period allowing member states to postpone free movement ran out in May 2009, individual member states could not apply any form of discriminatory policy or restriction on the social and settlement rights of CEE workers. As CEE workers are not racially distinguishable from the native populations, they are supposedly less likely to face labour market discrimination and prejudice than non-European migrants are, at least in the long run. Nevertheless, Polish migrants tend to find themselves in a very different position in the labour market than most native workers. First of all, the labour market for Polish migrants is confined to relatively low-skilled work in a few sectors and highly segregated by gender. In Oslo, nine out of ten Polish men are employed in the construction industry, while more than two-thirds of the women work as cleaners (although, as we shall see, women have recently to some extent accessed more varied occupations). The small residual category "other sectors" consists primarily of men who work in transport, storage and industrial manufacturing and of women who work in health care, child-care and hotels.⁷ Second, most Polish migrants

Table 2. Sectors and terms of employment in 2006 and 2010 compared. Per cent

Terms of employment:	Construction work		Cleaning		Other	
	2006 (n = 289)	2010 (n = 292)	2006 (n = 108)	2010 (n = 81)	2006 (n = 57)	2010 (n = 81)
Permanent legal jobs in Norwegian companies	15	19	3	17	20	48
Temporary and atypical legal employment (posted subcontractors, agency work, etc.)	54	52	11	25	44	42
Illegal employment (have no written contract and do not pay tax)	32	28	86	58	37	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: 2006 and 2010 Polonia surveys among Polish workers in Oslo. Fafo.

are not offered what is usually considered to be regular employment. The regulated Norwegian labour market is characterised by a strict separation between standard and atypical forms of employment, and permanent employment within firms is considered to be the norm (Nesheim 2002). Both surveys indicate that those Polish migrant workers who are permanently employed on legal terms by Norwegian firms tend to enjoy working conditions quite similar to those of their native colleagues (although they rarely get paid in keeping with skills and experience obtained in Poland). However, very few Polish migrants manage to access this kind of employment. When the first survey was conducted in 2006, only 15 per cent of the Polish construction workers, 3 per cent of the cleaners and 20 per cent of those employed in other industries were permanently employed on legal terms by Norwegian companies.

In construction, 85 per cent had some sort of temporary and atypical employment arrangement, and belonged to what we may call the peripheral “outer circle” of the work-force in the sense that they were not permanently employed in the companies for which they worked. Some had temporary contracts, many were hired through temporary staffing agencies, some were posted workers hired through transnational Polish subcontracting firms and a few were self-employed casual labourers. Those who were employed on legal terms – meaning that they had written contracts and paid tax from their income – were usually paid according to legally mandatory minimum wages (which are about two-thirds of the industry average) set through the extension of national collective agreements. In addition to being relatively low paid, these kinds of labour intensive temporary and casual jobs, which are generally shunned by natives, provide very little financial and job security, since employers do not have any financial obligation to the workers between temporary assignments and the workers can be laid off at short notice. Many, however, had what we may call informal employment – meaning that they did not have written contracts and did not pay tax from their income. In addition to the lack of employment protection, these workers are usually paid below-minimum wages and they typically work under exploitative conditions. Typically employed by small Norwegian or Polish firms or operating as self-employed casual labourers and usually found in the market for private renovation and building services or at the bottom of long chains of subcontractors on construction sites, these workers do not have access to any social rights in Norway. Of the cleaners, most of whom were female, the majority were in fact employed in the informal economy. These were usually found within the domestic services market that expanded rapidly after the EU-enlargement. In addition to low wages and the barring of access to social protection,

severe under-employment was also common among cleaners, with fierce competition for assignments. Among those employed outside these primary Polish immigrant niches (“other sectors”), the pattern of employment was quite similar to that of those in the construction industry (although one must make allowances for a very small *n*).

When the second survey was conducted, in 2010, there were several reasons to expect that many migrants would have found their way into more stable forms of employment, with better working conditions and more protection against fluctuations in demand. With more time to adapt and to acquire basic language skills, they might have become less dependent on middlemen and go-betweens and many might have obtained work experience in Norway and gone through the initial trial periods often required prior to the landing of regular employment. Employers could be expected to have grown more accustomed to Polish workers, and extensive policy initiatives had been launched in order to combat exploitative working conditions and promote decent work, narrowing the scope for low-wage competition (Alsos & Eldring 2008).

To some extent, the results could confirm this hypothesis. Among the relatively few but increasing numbers of Polish workers employed outside the two main “Polish” niche sectors of construction and cleaning, roughly half were permanently employed by Norwegian firms in 2010, in comparison to only 20 per cent in 2006. Furthermore, illegal employment was substantially reduced in this group. Among cleaners, illegal work was still common but quite a few had moved from informal domestic services to work in regular cleaning firms operating on the formal market. In other words, there were indications of a certain trend towards formalisation of employment relations among cleaners and towards standardisation of employment among those outside cleaning and construction. However, in the construction industry – by far the largest employer of Polish migrants in Norway – very little had changed. Less than one in five were permanently employed in Norwegian firms, illegal work was just as common as in 2006 and atypical and temporary employment of different kinds (mainly work commissioned by temporary staffing agencies and Polish transnational subcontractors) was still the most common form of employment. Looking at the relationship between length of stay in Norway and jobs position, confirms a pattern of little or no upward mobility even for those settling down for longer periods of time. Among those who had worked in Norway for more than four years (*n* = 131), only 22 per cent reported having permanent legal jobs in Norwegian firms. Furthermore, and despite substantial policy efforts to combat social dumping, indicators of exploitative working conditions seemed to be just as prevalent in 2010 as they

had been in 2006. Ninety-five per cent of the Polish construction workers in Oslo had hourly wages below the industry average and one in five workers earned less than the legal minimum wage for unskilled workers without prior experience (despite the fact that most of them had relevant skills and work experience). One-third of the construction workers reported that they had experienced not getting paid for their work and two-thirds had worked overtime without receiving overtime payment. One-third of construction workers and two-thirds of cleaners expected to get no paid leave if they became sick, one-third of workers in all sectors expected to lose their jobs or face serious problems if they talked to labour inspectors, and one-fifth of workers expected to lose their jobs or face serious problems if they became sick. The results regarding these indicators of precarious and exploitative working conditions were largely the same in 2010 as they were in 2006.

So how do we explain these different patterns of mobility and in particular the apparent lack of mobility and improvement in the construction sector? The survey material gives some indications. For example, contrary to most cleaners and workers in other sectors, most Polish construction workers reported that they only worked alongside other Poles and that at work they spoke only Polish, a testament to work organisations in the construction industry strictly separated along lines of language and nationality. This is probably the reason why construction workers report to have significantly lower language skills than other workers, even when controlling for length of stay. The qualitative study among employers and migrants within the construction industry confirm a trend towards stricter separation of the work-force into clearly distinguishable segments based on nationality. Employers typically stated that Polish workers were the best suited to the kinds of jobs found in the firms' temporary external work-forces, while Norwegian workers were the best suited to jobs within the firms. Notions of the two groups' having different and incompatible "work cultures" were commonly used by employers as a reason not to offer Poles permanent jobs. Polish migrants, on the other hand, insisted that they met with completely different expectations at work than their native co-workers, and even though most of them hoped to access what they referred to as regular "Norwegian jobs" they feared sanctions and termination of employment if they did not conform to the "Polish" style of work, which included working hard at low rates (Friberg, 2012b). The combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence clearly indicates that the large-scale recruitment of Polish labour in the construction industry – combined with structural changes in employment relations, including extensive use of temporary staffing and other forms of atypical and informal employment – has led to a clear-cut ethnic division of labour, with different expectations and different conditions for native and migrant workers. Recruitment practices appear to be informed by stereotypical notions about the suitability of different groups for different kinds of work. This amounts to a major hurdle for occupational mobility, which appear to be much easier for Polish workers employed in industries where the use of migrant labour is less institutionalised.

5 Are Polish migrants vulnerable to labour market exclusion in times of crisis and restructuring?

After I was laid off, our company continued to bring in new people from Poland. It's not logical. People are sitting at home, getting paid by NAV [Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration] and the company do what they please. I guess it's more cost effective

though, because the new people work for lower rates. [...] Maybe this is how they can make it through the crisis. (Unemployed Polish construction worker, interviewed in 2009.)

Migrant-labour-intensive sectors all over Europe were severely affected by the financial and economic crisis that struck in 2008. Although Norway was among the European countries least affected, some sectors, such as construction and industrial manufacturing, which had been expanding rapidly in the boom leading up to the crisis and were highly sensitive to changes in credit markets and international demand, failed to escape its consequences (NOU 2011: 1). According to a nationwide survey conducted in 2009 among employers in these industries, the most common way to meet reduced labour demand was to cut the use of hired labour from temporary staffing agencies and subcontractors while protecting the firms' regular employees (Andersen *et al.* 2009). These particular segments of the labour market in these industries were exactly where the majority of the Polish migrants worked. Usually not permanently employed, they could easily be laid off or simply run out of assignments as the market for labour-intensive subcontracting collapsed.

The timing of the crisis was important in terms of migrants' eligibility for unemployment benefits. First of all, the transitional regulations had restricted the migrants' access to social benefits during their first year of residence. When the regulations were revoked, in May 2009, Polish migrants were equally eligible to claim unemployment benefit if they lost their jobs, and four and a half years after enlargement, many of them had stayed long enough to earn benefits. Until 2008, the unemployment level of settled Polish immigrants – just like that of the general population – was less than 2 per cent. In the wake of the crisis, registered unemployment in the general population did not change very much, but among settled Polish immigrants it soared. In Oslo, 15.4 per cent of the settled Polish labour migrants were unemployed at the time of the survey. Survey results, however, indicated that the real unemployment was much higher than the registered unemployment. Many who had lost their jobs were still not eligible to receive unemployment benefits – either because they had not earned enough or because they had worked in the informal economy. These workers had little incentive to register. While the proportion of respondents who reported that they received unemployment benefit concurred with official unemployment figures, the proportion of Polish migrant workers who reported that they were without paid employment at the time of the survey was about 30 per cent, twice as high as official numbers and a ten-fold increase since 2006.

Unemployment affected different parts of the migrant population in different ways. Not surprisingly, construction workers were more severely affected than those working in other sectors. Long-term stayers and the more recent arrivals were almost equally at risk of losing their jobs but those who had lived in Norway for more than two years had significantly better chances of accessing unemployment benefits. Most importantly, the results showed that compared to those with regular employment, atypical and casual employment substantially increases the risk of labour market exclusion. At the same time, atypical and casual employment reduces access to social protection in the form of unemployment benefits. Those in standard employment appear to be less at risk of becoming unemployed but have greater chances of gaining access to benefit if they do. The results show that flexibilisation and casualisation of labour relations not only affect working conditions but also influence the distribution of risk related to labour market exclusion and access to social protection.

Table 3. Employment status and access to unemployment benefit among Polish workers in Oslo, 2010. Job seekers who never had a job in Norway are excluded from the analysis. Per cent, n = 410

	Employed	Unemployed, without benefit	Unemployed, with benefit	Total
Total (n=410)	69	17	14	99
Industry				
Construction (n=240)	56	23	20	101
Other sectors (incl. cleaning) (n=163)	89	9	2	101
Length of stay				
Less than two years (n=171)	72	25	4	101
More than two years (n=239)	67	12	21	100
Type of employment in current/last job				
Permanent legal employment (n=100)	79	5	16	100
Atypical or casual employment (n=305)	67	21	12	100

Source: 2010 Polonia survey among Polish labour migrants in Oslo. Fafo.

Furthermore, the survey showed that unemployment does not necessarily lead to return migration. In general, those who had lost their jobs in Norway reported that they would rather stay and look for work than return to Poland or move to other countries where the crisis was much deeper.⁸ Qualitative evidence indicates that many workers alternate between working in for example temporary staffing agencies and periodically claiming unemployment benefits between assignments. Unemployed migrants were generally no less inclined to think that they would stay in Norway than those who were employed. The survey provides little information about how those unemployed migrant workers who do not receive benefits support themselves in Norway. However, qualitative data suggests that survival strategies include spending savings and getting support from family and friends, help from charities and the occasional odd job.

The crisis led to a short dip in in-migration, but by 2010 the number of new entries from Poland was even higher than before the crisis. High levels of in-migration from Poland combined with persistent levels of unemployment among resident Polish migrants may suggest that employers prefer fresh recruits straight from Poland over unemployed settled workers. This is supported by some of the qualitative interviews with migrants (as illustrated by the quotation above). Interviews with employers suggest that some perceive recent migrants as being less "spoiled", and being willing to work harder for less, compared to those who have settled down with their families and have access to social rights in Norway. Downsizing and lay-offs in the wake of the crisis may thus have provided opportunities to renew the work-force with fresh and cheaper workers as the labour demand recovered.

6 Discussion

Labour migration from the new EU member states has brought substantial economic gains not just for the migrants but also for Norwegian society, by providing much-needed labour in a period of high economic growth, while placing only modest burdens on public spending. In the introduction to this paper, I nonetheless

asked whether Polish labour migrants in Norway in the longer run might face traditional integration problems related to labour market exclusion and welfare dependency, and whether the experiences of the so-called guest-workers of the post-war era could be relevant for understanding the fate of today's free-moving CEE workers. These experiences were summed up in three interrelated processes referred to as the "guest-worker syndrome", consisting of: (1) the recruitment and subordinate incorporation of "temporary" labour migrants; (2) settlement and community formation as a result of the social dynamic of the migratory process; and (3) vulnerability to unemployment and welfare dependency after periods of economic crisis and restructuring. The presented analysis suggests a conditional yes to this question. Despite obvious institutional differences, there are several features of today's Polish-Norwegian migration system which parallel those of historical guest-worker migrations. Although Polish migrants do display extensive patterns of circular and transnational migration, the two surveys document a trend towards more long-term settlement. It remains to see how many will eventually stay for good, but at this point it is reasonable to assume that a significant part of the migrant population will do so. Just as in the case of the post-war guest-workers, this process is driven by labour market-, life-cycle, family- and network-related processes within the migration system. At the same time, extensive restructuring of immigrant-intensive labour markets has led to the establishment of peripheral immigrant niches in the labour market, where, unlike in the otherwise highly regulated Norwegian labour market, atypical or informal employment is the norm. The analyses suggest that such employment has not been a stepping-stone into the regular labour market but instead represents a more enduring form of ethnic segmentation. As most Polish workers are confined to temporary, atypical, and precarious employment, they are disproportionately vulnerable to fluctuations in labour demand, with high risk of unemployment in times of crisis and restructuring. So far Polish migrants have only had limited access to social protection, but this may change with increasing length of stay. However, the historical guest-workers were largely employed in the kind of traditional manufacturing that was gradually outsourced to low-cost countries in the wake of economic restructuring. Today's labour migrants on the other hand are mostly drawn to construction,

agriculture and service sector jobs that must be performed locally. A long-term decimation of the kind of jobs that labour migrants perform, similar to what happened in the 1970s, therefore seems unlikely. But the precarious nature of employment in migrant-labour-intensive segments of the labour market is a new and distinct phenomenon, and the establishment of such new precarious job segments within the context of a generous universal welfare state – exemplified by the rapid growth in temporary staffing and the rise of an informal labour market in the shadow economy – may have some problematic side-effects in the long run. The present study can only give a rough indication of some possible outcomes. For one, it is reasonable to assume that hard physical labour, low wages, limited employment protection, fluctuating demand and few prospects of occupational mobility, combined with generous state benefits, may, in the long run, among some of the new migrant workers, lead to relatively short employment careers and possible welfare dependency. Alternatively, deteriorating labour standards may translate into downward pressure on welfare benefits as governments attempt to maintain incentives to work. Similar concerns about the long-term employment prospects of labour migrants and the viability of a generous universal welfare state in the face of increasing labour migration and low wage competition have recently been raised in the 2011 Norwegian government report on welfare and immigration (NOU 2011: 7). A related concern is that the interplay between generous state benefits and restructuring of manpower strategies in the lower rungs of migrant-intensive industries may generate a dynamic where employers gain access to a permanent fluid reservoir of temporary workers accepting precarious and short-term employment, while the welfare state meets the cost of its availability and reproduction in periods of low demand. Such a development would imply that the risks generated by labour market flexibilisation and increasing precariousness in the labour market, may quickly translate into public costs.

So far, however, the same weak integration into the labour market that puts Polish labour migrants disproportionately at risk of becoming unemployed in the first place also prevents many of them from accessing social protection in the form of public benefits. This suggests that within these new, flexible, casualised, migrant-intensive labour markets, parts of the mobile work-force are at risk of falling outside not only the labour market but also the protection of the welfare state. Both concerns appear to be causally linked to flexibilisation and precariousness in immigrant intensive parts of the labour market.

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Notes

1. Dagens Næringsliv 24.01.2007, Norsk Industri (2007) *Konjunkturrapport 2007*. Oslo: Norsk Industri.
2. In fact, anti-immigration activists often portray "hard working" and "christian" Polish immigrants as a positive contrast to "undesirable" non-Europeans (see for example: <http://www.minervanett.no/2011/03/31/polakker-for-like-til-a-bli-tatt-alvorlig/>)
3. Bratsberg *et al.* also invoke disincentives to re-entry provided by generous welfare benefits for families with many children as an important explanation for labour market exclusion of minority groups with high birth rates. These are, however, not relevant for Polish migrants, since Poland has a lower birth rate than Norway.
4. I use the term syndrome as referring to a combination of phenomena seen in association, or "concurrency of symptoms" from the Greek word συνδρομή (*sundromē*) (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dsundromh%2F>).
5. For an ethical discussion of the practice of paying respondents, see Tyldum (2011).
6. The "exception that proves this rule" is the agricultural sector, which, in Norway, generates only short-term seasonal demand for labour. Registry data based on temporary residence permits granted under the transitional regime shows that, unlike those working in other sectors, very few agricultural workers can be found in the registers after some years (Friberg, 2012a).
7. Agriculture and certain sectors of industrial manufacturing are also major employers of Polish migrants but these industries are located elsewhere in the country and thus are not a part of our sample.
8. It should be noted that our survey has a bias towards stayers, since returnees are not part of the sample population. For example, workers who (1) had families in Poland, (2) had lost their jobs and (3) had no access to benefits in Norway appeared to be severely under-represented in the survey, indicating that many of them had already left.

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