

THE POLES AND THEIR PERCEPTION ON EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT. The paper presents the results of two research studies carried out in 2003 and 2010 regarding the perception of Polish students on their employment opportunities in European Union. The results show some hope that the scale of young Polish people emigration for economic reasons will decrease; this is considered a positive phenomenon taking into consideration the development potential and the needs of the Polish economy.

Keywords: perception, Poland, students, employment opportunities

JEL classification: J61

1. Introduction

Before Poland's accession to the European Union numerous pessimistic scenarios on mass emigration for economic reasons from the accessing countries were presented in the media. According to them, the countries of the "old union" were supposed to be flooded with high waves of cheap labour force. Spread by the media anxiety made most of the countries introduce protective periods in order to protect their labour markets.

However, the economic reality turned out to be different. First, the scale of migration was less extensive than expected. Second, it was mostly young people, well educated specialists needed in the countries of fast growing economies, who emigrated.

Research carried out by the author of the paper and finalised before the accession showed preferences, directions and scale of the potential migration. As it turned out, almost 39% respondents did not consider emigration at all.

The paper aims presenting the results of a research carried out during the spring of the 2010 and comparing them to results of analogical research of the year 2003 (Siemiątkowski and., Szmyt 2004). It covered students' preferences relating to emigration for economic reasons. Such comparison might be a source of interesting information on possible changes that took place in reference to respondents' approach to identification of their employment opportunities in the

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EU countries. Most probably, six years of membership and hundreds of thousands of people working abroad significantly influence the perception of the emigration problem of both the participants to the survey and the other members of the Polish society.

2. Scale and directions of Poles' migration for economic reasons after the year 2004

There are many reasons for migration at the international level. In general, the three following groups are distinguished:

- economic;
- political;
- socio-cultural.

To the first group belongs usually: poverty caused by low payments or unemployment. The perspective of an improvement of financial situation due to higher payments, an improvement of living standards are considered; personal and professional development creates a strong incentive for the migration to other countries (Mansoor and Quillin 2006).

Among the political reasons there should be mentioned: armed conflicts, corruption and violence. The perspective of regaining freedom, respect and sense of security is another reason for migrating.

The socio-cultural factors include cases of discrimination for ethnical or religious reasons.

An accurate assessment of Poles' migration for economic reasons was not made and is not known now the dimension of the migration generated by these reasons. There are many Polish people employed with no official record. Contrary to their previous declarations, most of the European Economic Area (EEA) countries opened their labour markets for Polish citizens. At present, the free access to their labour markets has been applied in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Island, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Hungary, Great Britain, and Italy. A facilitated access to their markets has been introduced in Holland, Denmark, France, Lichtenstein and Norway. Actually, there remained only four countries (that is: Austria, Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg) in which the regulations being in force before 1 May 2004 have not been amended so far, but that is about to change soon (Duszczczyk and Wiśniewski 2007 and Jendroszczyk 2011).

It is possible to evaluate a number of Polish people legally employed in EEU countries on the basis of officially available data. Estimations equal to approximately 800-900 thousands which is two times more then before the accession Duszczczyk and Wiśniewski 2007 and Jendroszczyk 2011). However there exists other diverse estimations [see table 1].

Table 1.**Estimations of the scale of Poles' migrations for economic reasons after the accession**

Source	MPiPS	Catholic Church	Media	Domestic experts	ECAS*
In thousands of people	660	1,000	2,000 – 3,000	1,200	1,120

* European Citizen Action Service

Source: Kłos, 2006, Biuro Analiz Sejmowych, Warsaw 2008.

The lowest estimate was made by the MPiPS (Ministry of Employment and Social Policy) and amounted to 600 thousand people. The estimate made by the media is the highest – they claim that even as many as 4 million people might have gone abroad in search of employment. However such a figure is rather unlikely. Domestic experts claim that the ECAS estimate seems to be closest to the reality².

According to the official data the most popular destination was Germany – 47.8%. Great Britain came second – 23.6%, Ireland was third – 8.9%. Also, an important number of Poles decided to leave for France and Italy³.

As the estimate figures show, the choices of emigration destinations are diverse. The question is why the potential employees choose a given country, which factors facilitate and which hinder taking up employment abroad.

3. Presentation and characterisations of the research sample

The first research was conducted on a group of 410 people – students of Torun School of Banking (WSB) in January 2003. The research was based on a questionnaire form prepared previously during a pilot research. The form consisted of 16, mostly closed, questions. The participants were student of all years, all kinds of study (regular, extramural, evening), and all five specialisations. The majority of the respondents were women (67.8%), young people at the age of 18 to 21 (62.7%), and unmarried (85.6%).

In order to compare the results from the 2003, a research was conducted during the spring of the current year (2010). The recent research has been based on the same questionnaire form. The sample size amounted to 460 students of WSB and covered all the study specialisations. However, the research did not cover the evening classes. Over the time elapsed between the two researches, this form of study (evening classes) ceased to exist within the school programs.

The vast majority of the respondents again were represented by women – 67.4%, young people (18 to 21 years) – 51.1%, and unmarried persons – 86.7%. Most of the parameters did not change significantly, although the research sample has been selected randomly. The only significant change that took place is the decrease of the

² Wpływ emigracji zarobkowej na Polskę, Ministerstwo Gospodarki, Departament Analiz i Prognoz, Warsaw 2004, p. 14.

³ *Ibidem*.

percentage of young people in the sample. It was smaller by 11.6 points compared with in the previous research. The change may generate an impact on the results. Older people's opinion on the issue in question may be different from the young ones.

In reply to a question "Did you consider taking up legal employment in the EU after the Poland accession?" 61.2% respondents answered affirmatively, and 38.8% gave a negative answer in the year 2003. The situation changed in 2010 when only 48% considered taking up employment abroad, and the others answered negatively.

It turned out that the proportion of respondents declaring interest in taking up employment in the EU countries decreased during the years that passed between the two researches. There may be a variety of reasons for the change. First, the unemployment in Poland significantly decreased. Second, salaries and wages increased. Third, the unemployed persons can chose any kind of work they wish to take up. The half of the respondents did not even have to consider going abroad in a search of employment.

More surprisingly, the percentage of respondents interested in taking up employment if given the real opportunity decreased as well. In the year 2003 almost 92% declared their readiness to go abroad for economic reasons, in 2010 the proportion decreased to 77.4%. Most probably, the reasons are very similar to the ones enumerated in the previous question. A clear upturn in the Polish economy and an improvement of the situation on the labour market caused a decrease in the interest of searching for the employment opportunities abroad. An additional factor which should be also mentioned is the fact that working abroad became less profitable. In comparison to the year 2003, value of the major currencies drastically decreased. For example, the exchange rate of British pound to new Polish zloty changed by several dozen percent which caused that for the same amount of foreign currency one can afford much less in Poland now. The situation makes both potential employees and those who have left before to verify cost-effectiveness of being employed abroad.

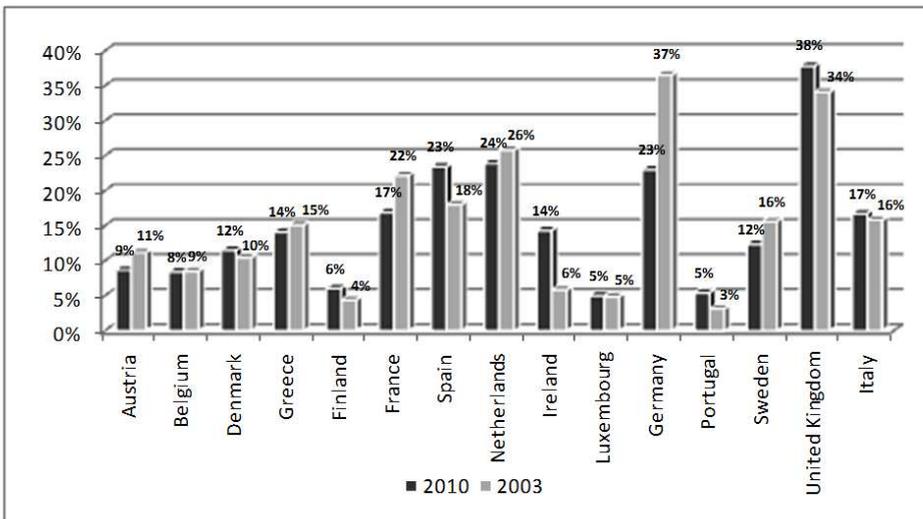
4. Respondents' preferences with reference to country and type of employment

Another question asked in the questionnaire related to the choice of country the respondents would like to be employed in. In the year 2003 two of the most popular destinations were Germany (36.6%) and Great Britain (34.6%)⁴. Many respondents have also chosen Holland (25.9%) and France (22.2%) [see

⁴ Similar research has been carried out by CBOS. In their research the order of country choice is similar. Germany, Great Britain and France make three most popular destinations. However, the differences between the disproportions between individual countries are slightly higher than in the author's research. In the CBOS research Germany was definitely most popular choice, whereas Great Britain and sequent countries were chosen by significantly fewer responders, see and compare: "Czy chcemy pracować w krajach Unii Europejskiej – opinie Polaków, Czechów, Węgrów i Litwinów", Komunikat z badań, CBOS, May 2001, quoted after: <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2001/KOM071/KOM071.htm> and graph 1.

graph 1.]. The respondents' choice was not surprising – the chosen countries have been migration destinations of Polish citizens since long ago.

Behind economic reasons, most probably Germany has the advantage of the geographical closeness to Poland. In case of other chosen countries historical considerations might be of significant importance. Many Polish citizens have their families in Great Britain or France, who moved there after the Second World War or in a search of an escape from communist political persecutions. Fewest respondents would leave for Portugal (3.17%), Finland (4.4%) and Luxemburg (4.9%). Many factors were indicated as reasons of their choice. As far as Portugal is concerned, its unfavourable economic situation seems to make the country least popular, Finland's' biggest disadvantages is most probably the unfavourable climate, while Luxemburg is likely to have distracted the respondents because of saturation on its labour market.



Graph 1: Which country (countries) would you like to take up employment in?

Source: Own calculations based on the research results.

The second research did not reveal meaningful changes as far as respondents' preferences are concerned. There exist slight differences; however they do not change the general trend.

In the 2010 research, Great Britain became the most popular destination of the Polish migration for economic reasons (37.8%). Attractiveness of the UK remained high first, as a result of free access to the labour market; second, it offers relatively good working conditions; third, many Polish citizens who emigrated there

during a few past years and settled in are now followed by their families, friends and acquaintances.

Holland became the second country in respect to attractiveness and Spain is situated on the third position. The German economy became less popular among Polish emigrants. In the 2003 research Germany represented the first choice. As 2010 research shows, Germany came only on the fourth position (chosen by 23% of respondents) and lost over 13.5 points. The fall of interest in taking up employment in Germany seems to be natural taking into consideration the current socio-economic situation of the country. The federal government has not approved opening the labour market yet and foreign citizens still encounter difficulties with legal employment there. Besides, the German economy goes through another stage of slowdown and the demand for labour is limited there.

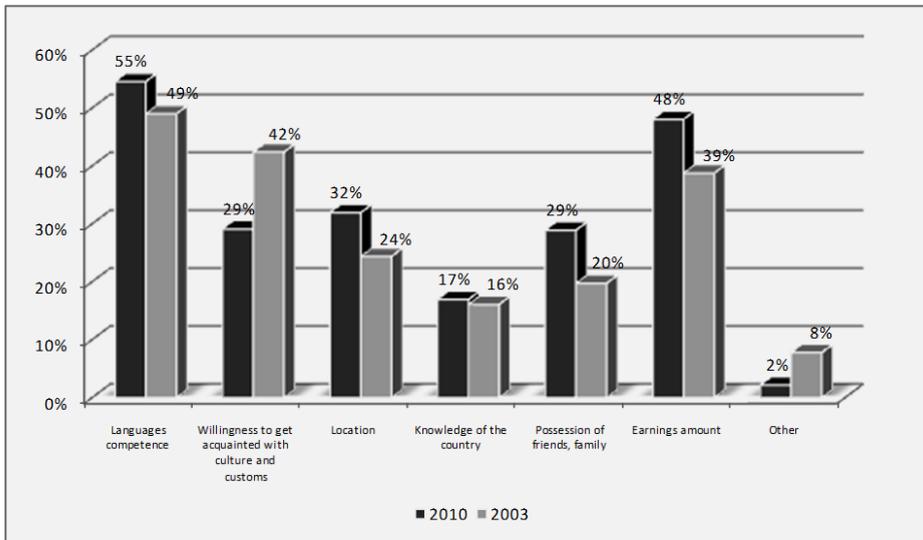
The country that registered the highest growth of interest among the potential emigrants is Ireland. The country's unquestioned (past) economic success, high rate of the economic growth, free access to the market make the country very attractive for prospective employees from the new EU countries.

One of the questions asked in the questionnaire concerned factors that influenced the country choice [see graph 2]. For most of the respondents it was foreign language proficiency which played the most important role in choosing an individual country. In the 2003 research, this factor was decisive for 49.0% of respondents, in 2010 – 54.6%.

Other two factors considered of great importance were the willingness to get acquainted with culture and customs of a given country (43.3%, in 2003), and the earnings amount (38.8%, in 2003). The language proficiency facilitates to establish contacts and is one of the most frequently mentioned factors in researches concerning the subject. The great importance that was given to the second factor underlined by the respondents may be explained by the fact that to the research sample was represented vastly by the relatively young, mostly unmarried people – willing to leave Poland for a longer period of time and get acquainted with foreign cultures. Earning amounts is a natural factor of migrations for economic reasons. Obviously emigrants decide to search for a job abroad either because they can not find a job in their own country, or they get unsatisfactory payment there.

In the 2010 research, there appeared some changes in relation to the importance of these factors. Besides to the languages proficiency, the respondents gave significance to earnings amount (48%) and location – geographical closeness of an individual country (32%).

The first factor in question might be related to improvement on the Polish labour market. There is no problem with finding any job; there is a challenge to find a better one.



Graph 2: Which of the factors are decisive in choosing a country?

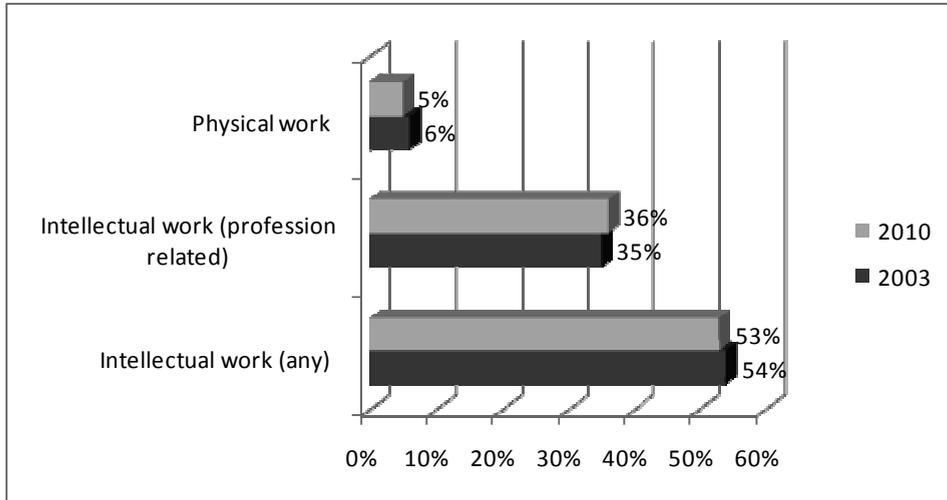
Source: Own calculations based on the research results.

The second factor mentioned above became more important due to experience gained by those who had to leave their families to take up employment abroad. They realised that leaving their families behind presented a relatively big obstacle. Good railway and air connections with Poland condition frequency of family contacts and determine the duration of staying abroad.

The most important change that occurred between the 2003 and 2010 researches regards the willingness to get acquainted with the foreign culture and customs of a given country. In the 2003 research, this factor was underlined by more than 42% of respondents, in 2010 only by 29%. The probable reason for the change is that the mobility of Polish citizens has grown over the past years. More and more often, Polish people spend their vacations in foreign countries and have a chance to explore other countries and get acquainted with their culture and customs. It might lead to perceiving the factor as less significant in the 2010 research.

The research examined also the type of employment the respondents would like to take up abroad [see: graph 3.]. In the year 2003 it turned out that as many as 54.4% of the respondents would like to take up any kind of intellectual work. Over 34.6% would rather have a kind of intellectual work related to their professions, and over 6% of students could work physically. Their preferences seem to be related to the year of study they were in. Most of the respondents ready to take up

physical work were students of the first year. Only 1.5% of the respondents being in the last year of study would like to work physically⁵.



Graph 3: Percentage of respondents willing to take up a given type of employment

Source: Own calculations based on the research results.

In the year 2010 there was no significant change of priorities relating to the question. Only little changes in answers given by the respondents occurred. Any kind of intellectual work was preferred by 53.3 % of the respondents, intellectual and profession related one – by 36.6%. The proportion of respondents willing to work physically decreased from 6% to 5.2%.

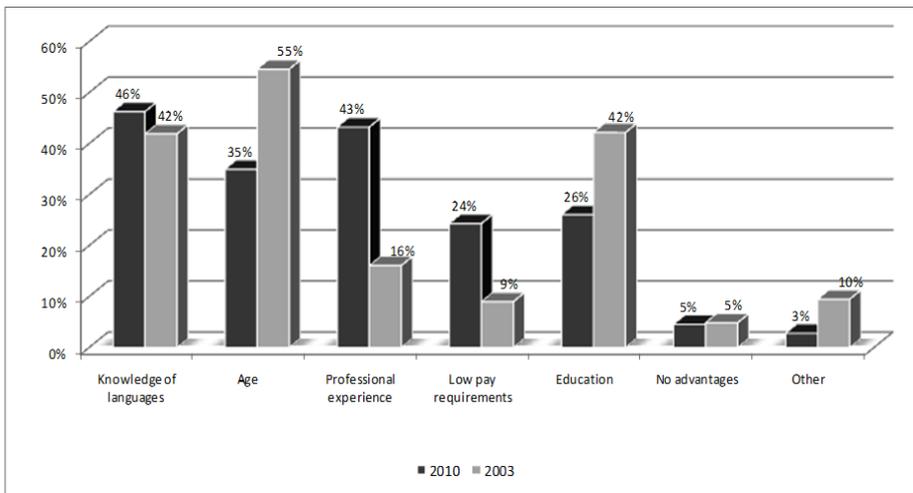
5. The Poles' advantages and disadvantages on labour markets in the EU countries

One of the questions asked in the research was how the respondents perceive their main assets (advantages) in the context of perspective employment in one of the EU countries [see graph 4.]. In the 2003 research most of the students perceived age as their advantage (54.6%), on the second place came the education (42.2%), followed by knowledge of foreign languages (almost 42%). A little less respondents chose professional experience (e.g.: part of the respondents were extramural students, who work during the week and study in the weekends), and low pay requirements (9%).

⁵ Based on the research results.

However, in the year 2010 some important changes took place in relation to the question. The percentage of the respondents perceiving knowledge of foreign languages as their biggest advantage increased and amounted to 46%. Language competence is followed by the enhanced awareness of Polish citizens of their chances on the local and global labour market, and seems to be a natural result of the integration processes.

Age perceived as significant advantage on the European labour market was mentioned by significantly fewer respondents than in the previous research – and equalled 35% (which means a decrease of over 18 % in comparison with the year 2003). On the other hand, more respondents perceived professional experience as one of biggest advantages and its percentage increased to 43%.



Graph 4: Percentage of respondents naming given factors as their advantages in searching for an employment in the EU

Source: Own calculations based on the research results.

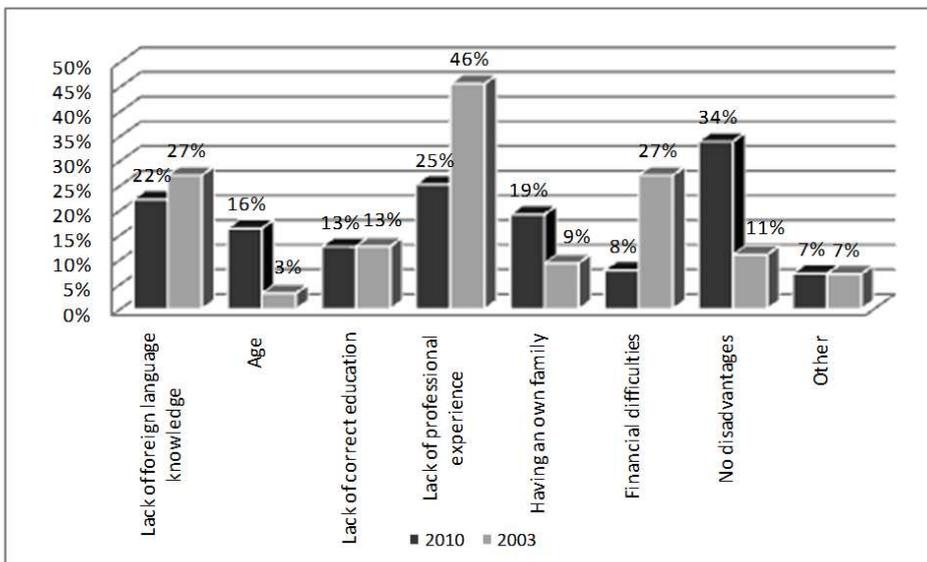
Polish employees managed to gain more experience during a few years after the accession and changed their attitude on the perception of their advantages on the EU labour market. They realised that taking up good employment without any professional experience is difficult, sometimes even impossible.

The proportion of other factors mentioned in the research changed as well. In the 2010 research low pay requirements were perceived as one of their biggest advantages by more respondents than in the 2003 research. The percentage increased from 9% to 24%. However, the education related factor is mentioned by significantly fewer respondents than before (26% in the year 2010 against 42% in 2003), which indicates that the current expectations of the potential employees are better adjusted to the economic reality. They seem to realise that good education is not sufficiently

competitive at present. The new labour market that has accepted workers from the East is more approving for those who do the jobs rejected by their own citizens.

It is worth mentioning that the same factors which were perceived as advantages by some respondents were often or even more often mentioned as disadvantages (barriers) to take up employment in the EU by others. Knowledge of foreign languages, education or professional experience could serve as good examples here [see graph 5.]. The last factor was perceived as the biggest disadvantage (barrier) in taking up employment in the EU (45.6% of the respondents in the year 2003). Two other barriers mentioned most frequently were lack of foreign language knowledge and financial aspects (such answers were given by more than 27% of the respondents).

The results of the new research carried out in the year 2010 indicate meaningful changes of the students' perception of their disadvantages. A meaningful change that took place is related to the age factor. In the 2003 research only 3% perceived their age as their disadvantage on the labour market, in the 2010 research, the percentage increased to 16%. That change corresponds to the adjust that took place in relation to decrease of respondents perceiving their age as an advantage. Professional experience is another factor perception of which changed significantly. Lack of professional experienced was perceived as a barrier by 25% in the year 2010 which is almost 20 points less than in the year 2003. Interestingly, the respondents realised that having professional experience is a big advantage, but at the same time its absence is not perceived as a barrier in taking up employment abroad.



Graph 5: Percentage of respondents naming given factors as their disadvantages in searching for an employment in the EU

Source: Own calculations based on the research results.

The proportion of respondents who reckoned that having an own family might present a disadvantage in taking up employment abroad increased significantly. In the 2010 research the factor was mentioned by 19% of the respondents. At the same time financial difficulties became less problematic (8%). More respondents (34% in 2010 against 11% in 2003) did not perceive any disadvantages in searching for employment abroad.

Many of the respondents have problems with defining their real chance of taking up legal employment in the EU countries. In the year 2003 over 42% of them claimed they could not define their chances, 9.3% thought they had no chances at all, 39.8% were convinced that their chances are rather small, and in the opinion of 5.12% of the respondents their chances were good⁶. In the year 2010 the respondents' questions were proportioned in a different way. Over 50% could not define their real chances of taking up employment in one of the EU countries. Over 30% described their chances as small, and for 5% there are no chances at all.

Finally, as many as 10% of the respondents perceived their chance for legal employment in the EU as being a good one.

The 2010 research was supplemented with two further questions. The first one related to the source of information on previous employment abroad. Over 23% of the questioned students have worked abroad previously. The second question concerned their intention to go abroad for economic reasons. To the question "do you intend to go abroad to work there?" only 5.5% gave an affirmative answer.

6. Conclusions

The assumption that, during a few years that passed between the two researches, there took place a significant change relating students' attitude towards defining their chances on the EU labour market turned out to be true. In general, the respondents became more realistic about their assessments. There took place meaningful changes in relation to respondents' perception of the target countries, their advantages that could facilitate or barriers that could hinder taking up employment in the EU countries.

In the year 2003 nearly half of the respondents either defined their real chances of taking up employment on the European labour market as small or did not perceive any chances at all. In many cases the respondents' interest in the EU labour market is rather of a passive nature. Willingness of finding employment and declared readiness of taking up employment was not accompanied by sufficient knowledge to define real chances of their realisation. The situation concerned over 42% of the respondents. Only a little over 5% shown optimism and defined their chances as good.

⁶ Based on the research results.

In the year 2010 the proportion of the respondents unable to define their real chances of taking up employment in the EU increased to 50%. Furthermore, over 30% of the respondents described their chance as little, and 5% did not see any chance at all. Slightly more respondents than in the previous research defined their chance to get employment in the EU countries as good.

The two additional questions asked in the 2010 research gave some further information on the issue. Namely, almost 23.5% of the respondents have already worked abroad. The nature of their stay abroad was above all short-lasting. As far as the further plans are concerned, only 5.5% of the respondents declared an intention to go abroad for economic reasons. The remaining respondents do not intend to go abroad or do not know yet.

There is hope that the scale of emigration of young Polish citizens for economic reasons will decrease, which would be undoubtedly a positive phenomenon taking into consideration the development needs of the Polish economy.

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