
Determinants of Intercultural Conflicts Among Foreign Employees in Polish Organisations: Evidence from Ukrainian, Belarusian and Georgian Workers

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the article is to identify and analyse factors stimulating intercultural conflicts among foreign employees working in organisations operating in Poland, with particular emphasis on people from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia. The study also aims to understand how representatives of different cultures interpret and respond to conflict situations and to develop recommendations to support the effective management of diverse work teams.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A qualitative research method was used in the form of focus group interviews (FGI) with a group of foreign employees of Ukrainian, Belarusian and Georgian nationality. The sample was purposively selected and included people employed in various industries, including manufacturing, services and logistics. The analysis involved interpreting the participants' statements using a deductive approach.

Findings: The results of the study indicate that intercultural conflicts in organisations employing workers of the nationalities studied are most often the result of cultural differences, including communication styles, the disproportionate and numerical dominance of Ukrainian workers, a lack of intercultural competence among workers and management, and a lack of appropriate cultural diversity management practices. In addition, it was revealed that these conflicts are often hidden and masked by apparent interpersonal harmony.

Practical Implications: The recommendations can serve as inspiration for implementing diversity management strategies in organisations, improving intercultural communication processes, and designing training programmes in mediation and conflict resolution in multinational teams.

Originality/Value: The study brings new cognitive value through an empirical analysis of intercultural conflicts from the perspective of foreign employees, which is an area that has been poorly recognised in Polish organisational realities to date. The results obtained may serve as a reference point for further comparative research in the Central and Eastern European region.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, workplace diversity, conflict management, migration, organisational behaviour.

JEL Codes: M12, J61, Z13.

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1. Introduction

The dynamics of migration movements influence the cultural diversity of the environment of contemporary organisations. According to data cited by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), many member countries, including Poland, continue to experience record high immigration rates (OECD, 2024). The three most numerous nationalities diversifying the Polish labour market are Ukrainians, Belarusians and Georgians.

The dynamics of changes in employment structures correspond to migration dynamics. Initially, this mainly concerned workers from Ukraine who, after 2014, were economically determined to find a place to earn a living. At the beginning of 2022, the number of Ukrainian citizens in Poland was estimated at approximately 1.3 million (Duszczyk *et al.*, 2024).

Between 2020 and 2021, as a result of the presidential elections and the victory of A. Lukashenko, the influx of people from Belarus also increased. In 2020, 16.392 Belarusians had a residence permit in Poland, and as of 30 June 2024, there were already 133.000 of them (National Bank of Poland, 2024). At the end of the first decade of 2022, as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Polish society experienced an unprecedented mass influx of Ukrainians.

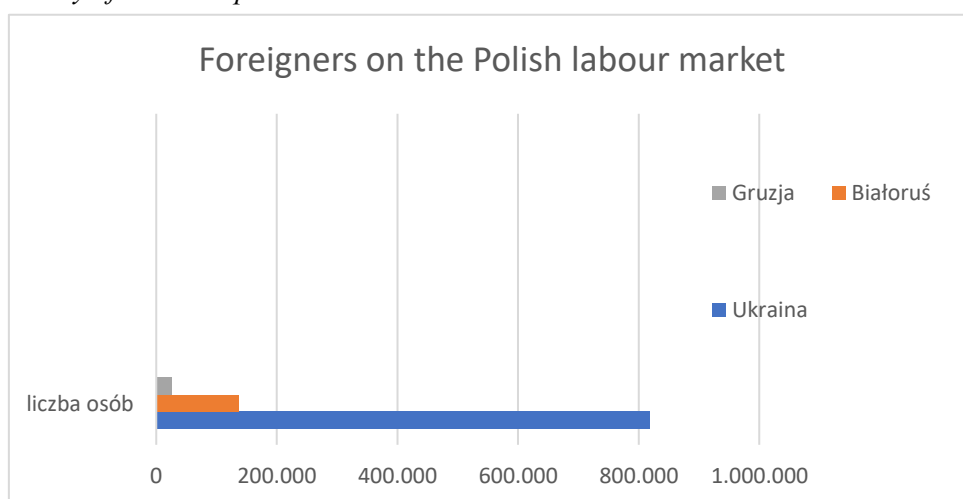
In July 2022, there were approximately 1.2 million people (Zawojcka and Siudek, 2022). Currently, they account for approximately 78% of all foreigners settling in Poland, and their number is estimated at 1.55 million people, excluding visa-free and visa traffic (Office for Foreigners, 2025). The third largest nationality whose representatives settle and work in Poland are Georgians.

In 2021, the number of people with a valid residence permit doubled compared to 2020 and exceeded 10.000 (Office for Foreigners, 2021). According to data on foreigners registered for pension and disability insurance at the end of 2024, the number of Georgians exceeded 25.000 (Social Insurance Institution, 2025). The diversification of employment on the Polish labour market was accompanied by changes in the regulations governing access to quick, legal employment.

Particularly noteworthy are the provisions of the so-called Special Act of 12 March 2022 regulating, among other things, access to work for Ukrainian citizens (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland, 2022), which, after recent changes in 2025, maintained the possibility of obtaining work without a special permit for persons of Ukrainian origin.

Thus, the high employment rate of Ukrainians, which stood at 78% in 2024 (National Bank of Poland, 2024), is likely to be maintained. The figures for currently employed persons (Figure 1) from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia give a clear signal of cultural diversification in organisations in Poland.

Figure 1. Number of foreigners registered for pension and disability insurance by country of citizenship



Source: Own study based on: Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (2025). *Information on the employment of foreigners in Poland – first half of 2025*; Social Insurance Institution (2025). *Foreigners in the Polish social insurance system 2024*.

Managers face challenges in various areas of human capital management. Managing cultural diversity in organisations in Poland is still a relatively new phenomenon. In Poland, the specifics of management activities in this area may be slightly different than in multicultural societies, but it is worth noting the trend of an increased influx of employees of other nationalities (Leoński *et al.*, 2020).

In practice, the cultural heterogeneity of an organisation's members means differences in organisational behaviour. National culture, including ways of thinking, valuing, behaving and communicating, is an important determinant of cooperation between employees. Gesteland's four groups of national cultures, including expressive vs. reserved culture (Olejniczak, 2014), show how important it is to be familiar with communication styles and the tendency towards reserved behaviour.

According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, people of different nationalities have different approaches to problem solving (Rozkwitalska, 2008). And according to Hofstede and his dimensions of national cultures, which occur in all nationalities in unique and different combinations, they influence the way of thinking, perception, shaping of needs and relationships (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2007).

Such differences can lead to tensions and conflicts between employees. Conflicts in organisations can be attributed to differences in perception, beliefs and values, which are fundamental elements of every culture (Koçak *et al.*, 2023). Conflict management is one of the key areas of diversity management (Warwas and Gross-Gołacka, 2019). It requires the identification and implementation of specific management solutions in multicultural organisations.

2. Literature Review

An organisation is primarily about people. There are always differences within an organisation that can cause tension and escalate into conflict, an inevitable phenomenon in employee relations (Haidarray and Anshori, 2023). However, the lack of appropriate preventive and remedial measures could have destructive effects on both employees and the achievement of organisational goals. There are always at least two sides to a conflict, and its complexity increases with the number of parties involved.

The parties to a conflict can be (1) individuals, (2) groups, or (3) organisations (Wachowiak *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, the parties to a conflict are in some way dependent on each other, the conflict triggers specific behaviours between the parties, it is often accompanied by strong emotions, and it begins when one party perceives contradictions between goals, tasks or behaviours, and the other party blocks and hinders their implementation (Kuc and Moczydłowska, 2009). The traditional view of conflict in an organisation was that it was destructive.

This thinking was revised by representatives of the interpersonal relations school, who recommended accepting conflict and focused on finding reasons for its occurrence (Robbins, 1998). Currently, it is recommended to treat conflict from an interactive point of view (Drabik, 2024; Robbins, 1998), which distinguishes between functional and dysfunctional conflicts.

Employee effectiveness will be important here. Conflict can affect an organisation in many ways, including reduced satisfaction, decreased efficiency, productivity and economic losses (Cheta-Maclean and Tobins, 2023).

The sources of conflict may relate to differences in individual characteristics, such as personality, views or beliefs (Drabik, 2024), which in the context of national cultures may relate to groups and their behaviours characteristic of different nationalities.

Managing conflicts in intercultural interactions requires a high level of cultural intelligence (Guo, 2025), without which it is difficult to diagnose conflict-generating factors among employees. Therefore, a high sensitivity to cultural differences in organisations, a conscious approach and facing the challenges posed by human capital that is diverse in terms of nationality are needed.

Key challenges include, among others, knowledge and acceptance of different value systems, attitudes and needs resulting from national culture and national management styles/models; creating an organisational culture that integrates multiculturalism, coordinating processes of learning to function effectively in a multicultural internal and external environment at the individual, group, organisational and international levels (Jamka, 2011).

An organisation can influence the emergence, course and resolution of conflicts among its members. Organisational factors related to, among other things, communication, procedures or employee education can have a positive or negative impact on employee behaviour (Madalina, 2016; Saini and Banerjee, 2024). Conflicts can be classified as:

- internal conflict (occurring within an individual)
- interpersonal conflict (usually involving two people)
- intragroup conflict (most often involving members within a team)
- intergroup conflict between groups or different teams (Madalina 2016; Gellert and Nowak, 2008).

Each of the above can escalate and be dysfunctional for the organisation. Identifying the source and type of conflict can help in choosing the right strategy and solution. In classical terms, there are five styles of conflict management: integrative, yielding, compromising, dominant and avoiding, which are classified in two dimensions: (1) focus on oneself (one's own needs) and (2) focus on others (Zakaria *et al.*, 2023).

Choosing an effective conflict management style can have a positive impact on employees. Studies on the relationship between style and employee engagement show significant correlations (Agbakwuru and Yusuf, 2021; Akhtar and Hassan, 2021). There is a link between the choice of conflict management technique and organisational performance (Shehu-Usman *et al.*, 2024).

However, it is difficult to identify a single correct and effective way of managing conflicts, especially when the parties involved are of different nationalities. The situation of diversification of employment structures in organisations in Poland requires caution in the context of the challenges and perhaps also the potential posed by conflicts between members of the organisation. It is therefore reasonable to ask about the determinants of conflicts among employees representing the three most numerous nationalities from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia.

3. Research Methodology

The main objective of the study was to identify factors stimulating conflicts between foreign employees working in organisations operating in Poland, with particular emphasis on employees from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia. This objective was developed into additional specific cognitive and practical objectives:

1. To examine the ways in which employees of different nationalities interpret and respond to conflict situations
2. Identifying individual, group and organisational factors determining conflicts in organisations
3. To define recommendations and good practices for effective management of intercultural conflicts in diverse work teams in Poland.

In seeking answers to the questions of how? and why? a qualitative approach was used, which primarily involves examining the decision-making process, in particular the actions that accompany it (Lisiński and Szarucki, 2020). Bearing in mind the challenges that could arise at the data collection stage, e.g., sensitivity in referring to one's own experiences, varying levels of language competence and superficiality in responding to questions, as well as the exploratory nature of the study, it was decided to conduct a focus group interview.

Representatives of Ukrainian, Belarusian and Georgian nationalities who had settled and found employment in Poland were invited to participate in the focus group. The sample was selected purposefully, according to the following criteria: nationality, legal residence, minimum 1 year of employment and experience of working in multicultural organisations.

The largest organisation in the West Pomeranian Province dedicated to migrants and refugees in Poland was asked to help find potential participants for the study. Preliminary interviews allowed us to select respondents who met the criteria. Their data, which was coded, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Characteristics of respondents in the focus group interview.*

Code	Nationality	Gender	Age	Education	Work experience in Poland
G1	Georgia	W	37	Average	7 years
B1	Belarus	W	29	Secondary	4 years
U1	Ukraine	W	50	Secondary	6 years
B2	Belarus	W	42	Secondary	4 years
U2	Ukraine	W	46	Higher	10 years
B3	Belarus	M	45	Higher	2.5 years
U3	Ukraine	M	41	Professional	7 years
G2	Georgia	M	46	Higher	1 year

Source: *Own study.*

The study revealed a wide range of respondents' experiences regarding difficulties arising in multicultural organisations in Poland. The collected research material was coded using the deductive method and analysed, which allowed the specific objectives and the main objective of the designed study to be achieved.

4. Research Results and Discussion

The research results show that employees from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia employed in organisations in Poland define conflict as: psychological tension, crossing someone's boundaries, "getting in someone's way" (taking things without asking, interfering with the way work is done, disturbing), and even one person persecuting another and mobbing. They unanimously recognised their nationalities as those characterised by greater ease in talking about various discomforts at work than their Polish colleagues.

Differences in cultural codes and communication styles were pointed out. Some of the problems in the communication process may be the result of distortions in the process of encoding and decoding the content of transmitted messages (Potocki et al., 2003). In intercultural communication, it is important to take into account differences in cultural values (Guo, 2020).

The study participants declared their willingness to receive constructive feedback if they did something wrong. This approach may suggest a relative openness to accepting criticism, provided that the message is formulated appropriately. In response to questions about how to react to and deal with conflict at work, respondents mentioned certain solutions and policies in organisations designed to prevent conflicts and their escalation.

Some employees signed anti-mobbing statements, while others had training or a so-called talk on the subject. Some companies have boxes for anonymous reports of problematic situations. Most of the interviewees considered this solution to be ineffective in terms of both anonymity and ways of resolving problems between employees. Representatives of the nationalities surveyed prefer open and direct resolution of growing misunderstandings.

This emphasises the need to manage conflicts in an open and transparent manner, without allowing them to escalate or destroy employee morale (Warwas and Gross-Gołacka, 2019). Conflict management is important at the individual, group and organisational levels (Haidarravy and Anshori, 2023). The collected data allowed for the coding of individual, group and organisational factors that determine conflicts among employees from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia employed in Poland (Table 2).

Among the former, personal language limitations, a lack of empathy and conflictuality were indicated, which respondents associate, among other things, with upbringing and education. Interestingly, all three nationalities spoke of mutual

similarities in their approach to conflict, while at the same time noting cultural differences that determine conflicts between them.

Belarusians are perceived as less temperamental, calm and conciliatory. Ukrainians and Georgians are perceived as highly temperamental and emotional, with the former often characterised by a loud tone of voice, greater expressiveness and dynamic body language. Sample quotes:

G1 *"I have more conflicts with Ukrainians. It really depends on the country. Yes, I have more conflicts with Ukrainians";*

B1: *"You know, when there are a lot of Ukrainians, and you're the only Belarusian, they'll be confrontational";*

U3: *"I think Belarusians are more calm," "We Ukrainians and Georgians are more emotional."*

Georgians are highly sensitive to the form of communication and easily enter into conflict when they perceive a message as hostile and aggressive. Against this background, the results of the study "Poles on Ukrainians" (CBOS, 2023) are interesting, as they show the Polish perspective of cultural proximity to Ukrainians, which is greater than that towards Belarusians or Georgians.

Table 2. *Individual factors stimulating conflicts among foreign workers from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia employed in organisations in Poland*

Individual factors	Group factors	Organisational factors
• A lack of Polish language skills causes confusion and a lack of understanding between employees • Upbringing • Education • Conflict-oriented vs. agreement-oriented attitude • Lack of mutual empathy	• Differences in norms and rules of functioning • Differences in temperament between cultures • Cultural differences in communication (verbal and non-verbal) • High sensitivity of Georgians to the tone of communication • Feeling of Ukrainian dominance due to their large numbers • Feeling of unequal treatment of foreigners (privileges of people from Ukraine regarding access to the labour market, bilingualism in documents, etc.) • Lack of knowledge of each other's cultural codes	• Low cultural sensitivity (everyone is "lumped together") • The lack of a single official language of communication leads, among other things, to a sense of discrimination against employees who do not speak Ukrainian • Lack of language support, especially in the adaptation process • Failure to comply with the requirement to draw up contracts in the language of the employer and employee • Lack of intercultural education • Open reluctance to hire employees other than Ukrainians (due to administrative difficulties – unequal access to the labour market)

Source: *Own study.*

An important factor negatively affecting the functioning of employees in organisations employing Ukrainian, Belarusian and Georgian workers is the large numerical disproportion between nationalities. Respondents feel the dominance of Ukrainians and, consequently, of the Ukrainian language, which is often used as the predominant language in work teams, quote:

B1 *"One Ukrainian woman complained to me that I speak Polish and not Ukrainian."*

Employees from Belarus and, in particular, Georgia experience discomfort in this regard, as well as more broadly in relation to unequal access to the labour market and the reluctance of employers to hire other nationalities. Research by Omisore & Abiodun (2014) showed that conflicts arise as a result of competition for dominance, leadership style or scarcity of shared resources.

In the organisations where the study participants worked, there are no regulations regarding the number of employees of different nationalities in work teams. In addition, the interviewees unanimously point to a lack of knowledge about each other's cultural codes, which hinders integration and leads to misunderstandings and conflicts. At the same time, they declare their willingness to integrate and the need for support from the organisation.

A lack of intercultural understanding, recognition of cultural and social differences, appropriate introduction to employee tasks and management of monocultural teams can lead to frustration (Anna Ścibior-Butrym, 2024). Foreign employees undergo a process of social and economic adaptation and acculturation in their new country of residence. The workplace can shape the acculturation process, especially in terms of adopting new values and practices characteristic of the new culture (Golańska and Posmykiewicz, 2025).

Research shows that among organisational factors, low intercultural sensitivity and limited forms of cultural diversity management in organisations are of great importance. Respondents who work in organisations with an explicit anti-discrimination policy and Polish as the dominant language point to the advantages of such solutions.

There was no full agreement on their validity. Employees were concerned about the need to improve their Polish language skills. They argued that they did not have enough free time to learn. The need to introduce solutions at the level of the country's migration policy and to ensure support from employers was mentioned.

The issue of employer support in migration policy appears in the assumptions of the "Comprehensive and Responsible Migration Strategy of Poland for 2025-2030" (Council of Ministers, 2024). In addition, there were references to perceived hostility

among Poles and discrimination against foreigners in promotion processes, which may herald broader intercultural conflicts within organisations.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study identified ways of interpreting and responding to conflict situations among employees from Ukraine, Belarus and Georgia. People representing the nationalities studied define conflict in a similar way and declare an open and transparent management style. They draw attention to the importance of intercultural communication and the lack of education in cultural codes, including the values held by employees.

By organising the data into the areas of individual, group and organisational factors, the most important determinants of conflict in organisations employing Ukrainians, Belarusians and Georgians in Poland were presented. Particular attention should be paid to aspects related to the number of Ukrainian employees, low cultural sensitivity in organisations and insufficient methods of managing cultural diversity.

An important factor influencing organisational behaviour, the occurrence and course of conflicts is the language barrier, which (as research shows) is most often ignored by employers. The following recommendations are important: recognising the differences between employees of all nationalities, supporting intercultural education, activities aimed at employee integration, learning the Polish language, maintaining a greater proportion of nationalities in employee teams, clear rules of communication, recognising and responding to conflict situations.

The research has its limitations, primarily due to the size of the sample. However, its exploratory nature may serve as a prelude to further in-depth research. The relevance of the issues studied concerns the socio-economic situation and is important in both cognitive and practical terms.

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