

## Migration from Post-Soviet countries to Poland and the Baltic States: trends and features

Vorotnikov, Vladislav V.; Habarta, Andrzej

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Vorotnikov, V. V., & Habarta, A. (2021). Migration from Post-Soviet countries to Poland and the Baltic States: trends and features. *Baltic Region*, 13(4), 79-94. <https://doi.org/10.5922/2079-8555-2021-4-5>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

## MIGRATION FROM POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES TO POLAND AND THE BALTIC STATES: TRENDS AND FEATURES

**V. V. Vorotnikov**  
**A. Habarta**

---

MGIMO University  
76 Vernadskogo pr., Moscow, 119454, Russia  
Institute of Europe Russian Academy of Sciences  
11/3 Mokhovaya ul., Moscow, 125009, Russia

Received 13.08.2021  
doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2021-4-5  
© Vorotnikov, V. V., Habarta, A., 2021

*This article aims to analyse migration from the post-Soviet space to the north-eastern periphery of the EU (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) and examines the hypothesis about these states, once countries of origin, turning into destinations for migrants. A change in the socio-economic paradigm and accession to the EU sped up economic development in the Baltics and Poland. Despite growing welfare and income levels and a decline in the unemployment rate, further economic growth was hampered by the outflow of skilled workforce and resulting labour shortages. In response, the governments of the Baltics and Poland drew up programmes to attract international labour. Soon these countries transformed from exporters of labour into importers. Unlike Western European countries, Poland and, to a lesser extent, the Baltic States are trying to attract migrants from neighbouring nations with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In the long run, this strategy will facilitate migrant integration into the recipient society. The Polish and Lithuanian governments are devising measures to encourage ethnic Poles and Lithuanians to repatriate from post-Soviet republics. To achieve the aim of the study, we investigate the features of migration flows, trends in migration, migration policies of recipient countries, and the evolution of diaspora policies.*

### **Keywords:**

EU, Poland, Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, post-Soviet space, international migration, diaspora, Karta Polaka, repatriates, diaspora policy

### **Introduction**

---

International migration is the natural process of human movement between countries for temporary or permanent residence [1]. As restrictions on the movement of goods, services and capital were removed at the turn of the 21st century, labour movement principles liberalised too. This phenomenon has many causes: some people seek a better life, and some jump at the only opportunity to sur-

---

**To cite this article:** Vorotnikov, V. V., Habarta, A. 2021, Migration from Post-Soviet countries to Poland and the Baltic States: trends and features, *Balt. Reg.*, Vol.13, no 4, p. 79–94. doi: 10.5922/2079-8555-2021-4-5.

vive. Researchers have recently shown an increased interest in the theoretical aspects of international migration and especially its social effects at the macro- and microlevel. This interest may explain the rapt attention this topic receives from economists, sociologists, political scientists and even cultural studies experts. There has been a growing number of publications analysing the causes of migration and its impact on labour markets, including competitiveness in the domestic market, salaries and the shortage or surplus of certain professionals. A strong contribution to the study of these pattern has been made by Jagdish Bhagwati [2], George Borjas [3; 4], Donald Davis and David Weinstein [5], Riccardo Faini [6], Rachel Friedberg and Jennifer Hunt [7], Daniel Hamermesh [8], Jörn-Steffen Pischke and John Velling [9], Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen and Ninna Nyberg Sorensen [10], Olga Potemkina [11; 12], and Sergey Ryazantsev [13; 14]. The literature on migration looks at various aspects of this phenomenon, and the academic significance of this increasingly multidisciplinary topic is growing. Not only does international migration have economic consequences, but it also has social and cultural dimensions. It results in both adaptation and social conflicts, both integration and disintegration. Migration adds to the cultural diversity of the receiving society through new forms of entertainment and new models of consumption, professional ethics, communication, and management. Migration also influences relationships in the family: either the family culture of receiving society imposes new behaviour models and social roles on newcomers or the existing norms change under new influences. Another prominent object of research is society's expectations and concerns, which go hand in hand with migration.

Thus, we are dealing with a phenomenon that is playing a growing role in the life of the society. As a social phenomenon, migration is intrinsic to social reality. Ignoring this fact may lead to the incomprehension of what drives people to move to a different country to pursue a better life.

This article aims to analyse the features of migration flows from post-Soviet states to the north-eastern periphery of the EU. The study focuses on four post-Socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. There is evidence that these states are turning from labour exporters, which they have been for the last 30 years, into an attraction pole for migrants. To prove this hypothesis, we attain several objectives. Firstly, we analyse migration flows from post-Soviet countries to Poland and the Baltics and relevant trends. Secondly, we investigate the characteristic features of migration policies of destination countries and the evolution of diaspora policies. The article examines Polish and Baltic regulatory acts and statistics. It also explores research publications and survey results from the four countries.

## Factors in migration

For most of their recent history, Poland and the Baltics have been labour exporters [15]. The last two hundred years of the countries' migration history have resulted in the emergence of large diasporas beyond their borders. The Polish diaspora is estimated at 20m people; Lithuanian, at least 1.3m; Latvian, at least, 370,000; Estonia, from 120,000 to 200,000 [16].

A change in the socio-economic paradigm, accession to the EU and ensuing economic growth improved citizens' well-being in these countries, which far outperformed other post-Soviet states (see Table 1). Salaries grew, unemployment rates fell, labour shortages occurred in agriculture, construction, and other industries. These trends put on the public agenda the need to facilitate foreign access to national labour markets.

Table 1

### GDP per capita in 2011 – 2020, 1,000 USD

State	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Poland	13.9	13.1	13.7	14.3	12.6	12.4	13.9	15.5	15.7
Latvia	13.9	13.9	15.1	15.7	13.8	14.3	15.7	17.9	17.8
Lithuania	14.4	14.4	15.7	16.6	14.3	15.0	16.9	19.2	19.6
Estonia	17.6	17.5	19.2	20.4	17.5	18.4	20.5	23.2	23.7
Azerbaijan	7.2	7.5	7.9	7.9	5.5	3.9	4.1	4.7	4.8
Armenia	3.5	3.7	3.8	4.0	3.6	3.6	3.9	4.2	4.6
Belarus	6.5	6.9	8.0	8.3	5.9	5.0	5.8	6.3	6.7
Georgia	4.0	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.0	4.1	4.4	4.7	4.7
Kazakhstan	11.6	12.4	13.9	12.8	10.5	7.7	9.2	9.8	9.8
Kyrgyzstan	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.3
Moldova	2.9	3.0	3.3	3.3	2.7	2.9	3.5	4.2	4.5
Russia	14.3	15.4	16.0	14.1	9.3	8.7	10.7	11.4	11.6
Tajikistan	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9
Turkmenistan	5.6	6.7	7.3	8.0	6.4	6.4	6.6	7.0	7.0
Uzbekistan	1.9	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.6	2.6	1.8	1.5	1.7
Ukraine	3.6	3.9	4.0	3.1	2.1	2.2	2.6	3.1	3.7

Source: based on World Bank statistics. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD> (accessed 10.08.2021).

The main economic factor that impels citizens of one country to move to another to improve their lot is income inequality, which is usually measured using GDP values. However, the four factors below have also been described as critical in the literature [17].

1. *The age structure of society.* A significant factor is the percentage of young people in the country of origin. Generally inclined to risk, youngsters are more

likely to migrate than their older compatriots. Since the real benefits of migration become apparent years after the relocation, it is much easier for those who have their lives ahead of them to take this step.

2. *Financial resources of potential migrants.* Resettling may be expensive: migrants bear both direct costs of legal or illegal travel to another country and those relating to settling into a new place and relocating the family. Many less fortunate people, although willing to move, cannot afford migration. Thus, moving to another country remains a prerogative of middle-income groups [18].

3. *Education.* Better educated migrants have greater aspirations and a stronger awareness of economic and social opportunities abroad. They have a much better idea of their prospects in the destination country.

4. *Community in the destination country.* The readiness to migrate grows as the amount and quality of information about the destination country increases. A potential migrant must be aware of the economic and social situation in the area they want to settle. In most cases, this information is provided by people with migration experience, chiefly the community in the destination country.

Analysis of migration from post-Soviet countries to Poland and the Baltics shows that the above factors did affect the decisions of migrants to relocate. Another considerable influence is the political instability in 'frontier' states. In Ukraine, political factors aggravated the economic well-being of citizens. They also redirected the flow of labour migrants, most heading westward now. This way, migration to the West has become much more substantial than before.

The potential effect of the 2020 events in Belarus is limited, estimated at several thousand people. Most new migrants come from two social groups — students and intellectuals. Young entrepreneurs (under 45) engaged in innovative industries, chiefly IT, accounted for another sizable proportion of the emigrants.

## **Trends in migration to Poland and the Baltics**

---

According to Polish statistics, the number of foreigners living legally in the country increased fivefold in the second decade of the 21st century, from 91,000 to 452,000 people (Table 2). Moreover, Poland has become an EU leader in residence permit issuance. Since 2014, the largest group of foreigners issued a Polish residence permit has been Ukrainian citizens. In 2011–2020, this number rose more than 18.5-fold — from 13,000 to 241,600 people. Ukrainian citizens comprised 53 per cent of all foreigners in Poland in 2020. Belarusians and Russians are also in the top five.

The number of Belarusians residing in Poland increased by 7.5, from 3,600 to almost 28,000 people; Russians, 1.6, from 7,500 to 12,200.

Table 2

**Number of foreigners with a Polish residence permit  
(2011 – 2020, people, by country of origin)**

State	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<i>Total</i>	91,258	105,067	115,413	128,620	165,369	218,775	272,269	320,569	391,234	452,091
Ukraine	13,026	15,529	16,970	22,242	45,157	78,451	114,974	147,903	195,606	241,612
Belarus	3,668	4,072	4,263	4,660	5,602	7,042	9,991	14,651	21,787	27,915
Moldova	369	405	394	477	508	749	1,001	1,194	2,300	3,660
Russia	7,586	7,978	7,804	7,509	7,397	8,192	8,966	9,803	11,105	12,279
Georgia	252	321	411	448	654	981	1,323	2,535	5,194	7,828
Armenia	1,503	1,951	2,004	1,840	2,088	2,454	2,611	2,772	3,013	3,131
Azerbaijan	131	165	185	175	320	559	713	895	1,142	1,545
Kazakhstan	524	550	604	681	759	951	1,039	1,122	1,468	1,700
Uzbekistan	215	240	276	348	536	1,079	1,543	1,650	1,477	1,835
Turkmenistan	33	46	49	48	61	87	85	103	123	133
Kyrgyzstan	45	43	69	66	108	166	261	345	371	0
Tajikistan	30	57	47	53	72	140	322	458	476	607

*Source:* based on statistics *Mapy i dane statystyczne imigrantów i służb migracyjnych Polski*, 2021, available at: <https://migracje.gov.pl/statystyki/zakres/polska/?x=1.3064&y=1.5202&level=1> (accessed 10.08.2021).

As mentioned above, the single most significant group of immigrants in Poland is Ukrainians. The strongest motive for Ukrainian emigration to Poland (along with the geographical, cultural, and linguistic proximity) is the economic conditions in the country of origin: the situation in the domestic labour market is far from perfect, whilst successive governments have failed to improve the country's economic performance. Moreover, Ukrainians are concerned about poor employment prospects and pervasive corruption at home. Substantial wage inequality and the devaluation of the hryvnia after 2014 urge Ukrainians to look for a stable source of income abroad. In the late 2010s, each tenth Polish company employed Ukrainian nationals (39 per cent of large companies; 21 per cent, medium; 6 per cent, small). Most of these businesses are engaged in manufacturing and services.

Since 2019, Belarusians have been the second-largest group of foreigners living in Poland. In 2020, 63 per cent of Belarusians obtained a work residence permit. Substantial groups of the country's nationals stated family reunion (22 per cent) and education (5 per cent) as the purpose of relocation. Since 2020, the number of Belarusians applying for international protection in Poland has increased. A total of 405 applications was submitted in 2020. The applicants declared the political tension building up in their homeland after the 2020 presidential election the reason to seek protection.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Raport dot. obywateli Białorusi, 2021, *Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców*, available at: <https://udsc.gov.pl/statystyki/raporty-specjalne/raport-dot-obywateli-bialorusi> (accessed 06.08.2021).

Most migrants in Poland are medium- and highly qualified Ukrainian, Belarusian, Armenian, and Russian citizens looking for a rewarding well-paid job. A survey of citizens of post-Soviet states staying in Poland with a residence permit was conducted in the first quarter of 2019 [19]. Seventy per cent of the respondents said that moving to Poland was beneficial for them, adding that they were planning to stay in the country.

Almost 60 per cent of the respondents admitted that they did not see a future for them in their native land, whilst 95 per cent were not satisfied with salaries and the level of economic development at home. About 30 per cent came to Poland seeking excellent medicine, good education, and efficient social security services. Over half of the respondents were convinced that they could earn much more in Poland than in their home country while doing less prestigious work (see Fig. 1).

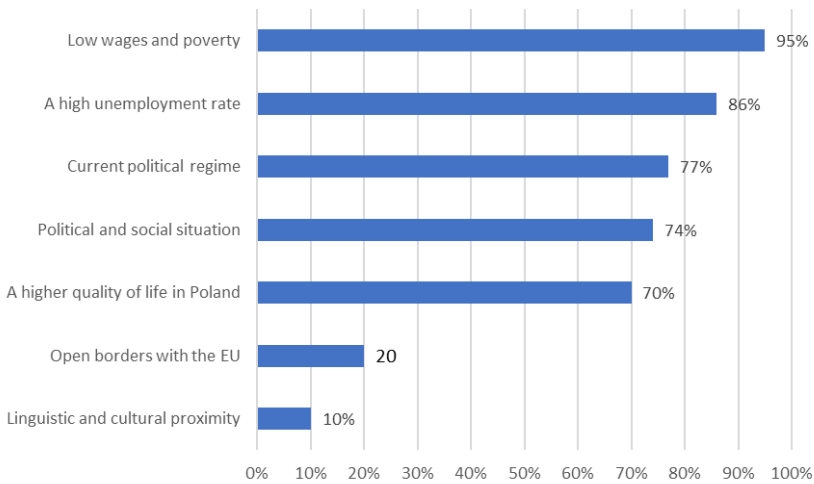


Fig. 1. Motives for economic migration to Poland from post-Soviet countries

Source: [19, p. 125].

Over 50 per cent of the respondents found it impossible to continue living in a country that flouted the law and cherished corruption. About 60 per cent were concerned about the volatile political situation in their homeland. Foreigners in Poland said they felt safer away from home and had better career opportunities there, mentioning the simplified company registration procedure as the much-needed boost to migrant entrepreneurship [19].

Accession to the EU made Poland more attractive to foreigners as a transition country and a place to study, work and live. Another advantage of the state is that it is a Schengen area country, and people coming there for a mid- or long-term stay can move freely across the Schengen Area.

The above holds for the Baltics, which have yet another advantage to migrants from the former USSR: Russian remains lingua franca in everyday life and, to a degree, business communication. The absence of a language barrier simplifies employment and the adaptation of potential migrants and their families.<sup>2</sup> This

<sup>2</sup> Į Lietuvą jie važiuoja su džiaugsmu: priežastys, kurios lietuviams nešauna į galvą. 2021, *Delfi.lt*, 2017.04.30, available at: <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/i-lietuva-jie-vaziuoja-su-dziaugsmu-priežastys-kurios-lietuviams-nesauna-i-galva.d?id=74469650> (accessed 08.08.2021).

circumstance, however, is a grave concern for Latvian and Estonian nationalists and populists (the National Union and EKRE), who see the Russian language and culture as a threat to national identity. Still, job listings from these countries point to a strong interest in the arrival of qualified specialists (for instance, IT experts) and skilled workers.

Information on immigration to the Baltics from the states of the former USSR does not abound with recent statistical and sociological data, as it does in the case of Poland. Nevertheless, the available information helps identify trends. Table 3, which contains data on the issuance of residence permits of all types to non-EU citizens, shows that the principal labour suppliers to the three states are Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. Undocumented labour migration from Ukraine to Lithuania (and probably Latvia) may also be substantial since Ukrainian citizens have the right to short-term stays in the EU, during which they can find employment and continue to work informally. Although it is impossible to estimate the number of such migrants statistically, the official Lithuanian website *Migracija skaičiaus* contains some useful information. Whilst 23,923 Ukrainians (32 per cent of all foreigners registered in the country) lived in the country officially as of 1 January 2020, the undocumented stay of another 724 people (37 per cent of the total number of undocumented migrants) was confirmed at the time.<sup>3</sup>

Table 3

**The number of first-time residence permits issued  
in the Baltics 2017–2019**

Destination country	2017			2018			2019		
	Country of origin	Number	%	Country of origin	Number	%	Country of origin	Number	%
Latvia	Russia	1,625	24.4	Ukraine	2,292	25.9	Ukraine	2,555	25.2
	Ukraine	1,528	23.0	Russia	1,837	20.8	Russia	1,827	18.0
	India	809	12.1	India	1,360	15.4	India	1,342	13.2
	Belarus	484	7.3	Belarus	633	7.2	Uzbekistan	1,040	10.3
	Uzbekistan	384	5.8	Uzbekistan	565	6.4	Belarus	768	7.6
	Other	1,817	27.4	Other	2,165	24.3	Other	2,611	25.7
Lithuania	Ukraine	4,725	46.3	Ukraine	6,041	49.2	Ukraine	10,218	47.7
	Belarus	2,874	28.2	Belarus	3,472	28.3	Belarus	7,121	33.3
	Russia	720	7.1	Russia	817	6.7	Russia	1,202	5.6
	India	371	3.6	India	381	3.1	India	368	1.7
	Syria	218	2.1	Moldova	143	1.2	Moldova	324	1.5
	Other	1,299	12.7	Other	1,413	11.5	Other	2,182	10.2
Estonia	Ukraine	1,336	30.5	Ukraine	1,649	32.1	Ukraine	1,909	32.1
	Russia	881	20.1	Russia	1,058	20.6	Russia	1,306	22.1
	Belarus	171	3.9	Belarus	220	4.3	India	291	4.7
	India	165	3.7	India	194	3.8	Belarus	281	4.5
	USA	155	3.5	Nigeria	180	3.5	Nigeria	236	3.8
	Other	1,672	38.3	Other	1,842	35.7	Other	2,096	33.8

Source: Eurostat, 2021, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat> (accessed 28.07.2021).

<sup>3</sup> *Migracija skaičiaus*, 2021, available at: <https://123.emn.lt/> (accessed 08.08.2021).



The main reason why people apply for a Lithuanian residence permit is employment (74.2 per cent in 2017, 77.5 per cent in 2018, 85.9 per cent in 2019), whilst in the other two countries, this and two other motives (education and family reunion) were stated almost equally frequently (see Table 4). This fact testifies to the success and consistency of Lithuania's policy to attract labour migrants from the post-Soviet space.

Table 4

**Prevalent motives for first-time residence permit applications in the Baltics, 2017–2019, per cent of the total number of applications**

State	2017 <sup>4</sup>	2018 <sup>5</sup>	2019 <sup>6</sup>
Latvia	Family, 31.0 Education, 24.1 Employment, 32.5	Family, 25.3 Education, 26.4 Employment, 40.4	Family, 23.8 Education, 25.4 Employment, 43.8
Lithuania	Family, 9.8 Education, 9.7 Employment, 74.2	Family, 8.2 Education, 9.7 Employment, 77.5	Family, 5.3 Education, 6.2 Employment, 85.9
Estonia	Family, 29.0 Education, 27.2 Employment, 35.0	Family, 34.3 Education, 24.7 Employment, 34.8	Family, 38.9 Education, 22.2 Employment, 33.9

Source: Eurostat. URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat> (accessed 28.07.2021).

Migrants from the post-Soviet space are not the only ones interested in moving to Poland and the Baltics, and the geography of recruitment by companies from these four states is also much broader than the countries of the former USSR. Migration satisfies the demand for human resources in the national labour markets. Most migrants from the post-Soviet space, especially Ukrainians and Belarusians, are qualified specialists with a good education, a fluent command of languages, strong work experience, and often special skills needed in the EU. Employers do not have to invest in the training of such new employees. It is assumed that migrant workers from post-Soviet states have high work motivation and take their jobs seriously. Employers often mention the readiness of nationals

<sup>4</sup> Residence permits for non-EU citizens. First residence permits issued in the EU Member States remain above 3 million in 2017, 2018, Eurostat, 25 October 2018, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/9333446/3-25102018-AP-EN.pdf/3fa5fa53-e076-4a5f-8bb5-a8075f639167> (accessed 08.08.2021).

<sup>5</sup> Residence permits for non-EU citizens. First residence permits issued in the EU Member States remain above 3 million in 2018. 20218, Eurostat, 25 October 2019, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet\\_file\\_entry/2995521/3-25102019-AP-EN.pdf/95e08bc8-476d-1f7d-a519-300bdec438cb](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/portlet_file_entry/2995521/3-25102019-AP-EN.pdf/95e08bc8-476d-1f7d-a519-300bdec438cb) (accessed 08.08.2021).

<sup>6</sup> First residence permits issued, by reason, 2019, Eurostat, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Tab1\\_First\\_residence\\_permits\\_issued,\\_by\\_reason,\\_2019.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Tab1_First_residence_permits_issued,_by_reason,_2019.png) (accessed 08.08.2021).

of these countries to work for a lower wage as a good motive to employ them (and reduce business costs as a result). Migrants do not expect a high salary, and it is easier to persuade them to work weekends and holidays. Nevertheless, what they earn in Poland is several times as much as they would at home.

Analysis of the Polish and Baltic labour markets and the migrant impact demonstrates that most foreign workers play a supporting role: they take low-paid jobs scoffed at by locals. Migrants are monopolising the market of second-rate jobs. Polish experts, however, believe that maintaining the current employment rate in the country in 2050 will require an 8 per cent increase in the proportion of migrants in the Polish workforce.<sup>7</sup> In the Baltics, this percentage must be higher to make up for the ongoing depopulation.

### **The legal framework**

Labour shortage prompted the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to liberalise labour and migrations laws. The process took place in 2006–2011. The new rules allowed foreigners to take temporary jobs without obtaining a work permit. At first, deregulation concerned citizens of neighbouring countries — Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Later, the more liberal regime applied to nationals of post-Soviet states participating in the Eastern Partnership programme — Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova.

Lithuania is also striving to modify its migration laws towards more employment opportunities and easier adaptation of newcomers from third countries. Although the Interinstitutional Action Plan for the Strategy for the Demographic, Migration and Integration Policy 2018–2030<sup>8</sup> targeted the diaspora and Lithuanian labour migrants returning to their homeland, it also emphasised the need for integrating third-country immigrants into society. On 1 March 2021, employment rules were simplified for final-year graduate and postgraduate students and qualified specialists.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Polityka migracyjna Polski*, 2019, Projekt z dnia 10 czerwca 2019 r. Departament Analiz i Polityki Migracyjnej MSWiA, p. 7, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Dėl Demografijos, migracijos ir integracijos politikos 2030–2018 m. strategijos įgyvendinimo 2021–2019 metų tarpinstitucinio veiklos plano 2.1.10 priemonės 2019 m. detaliojo plano patvirtinimo, 2019, *Dokumentų paieška — Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas*, available at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/c4eee772978011e9aab6d8dd69c6da66?jfwid=-rwi pzde7s> (accessed 08.08.2021).

<sup>9</sup> Declaration of the place of residence will be easier for aliens, 2021, *Migracijos departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos*, 01.03.2021, available at: <https://migracija.lrv.lt/en/news/declaration-of-the-place-of-residence-will-be-easier-for-aliens> (accessed 08.08.2021).

The latter category is a priority for the Latvian and Estonian migration policies. Nevertheless, despite the officially recognised demand for immigrants, these policies are not entirely successful. Estonia has launched a programme to attract migrants to the benefit of the national economy (see the *Work in Estonia*<sup>10</sup> website aiding migrants in job search and obtaining documents necessary for relocation). However, in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, amendments were made to the Alien's Act and the Obligation to Leave and the Prohibition on Entry Act, tightening up stay rules for non-EU citizens.<sup>11</sup> Various sources<sup>12</sup> stress that attempts to improve immigration laws encounter stiff opposition from society, whilst this whole domain remains highly bureaucratised.<sup>13</sup>

### **Policies on repatriation of Soviet-time resettlers and expellees**

A specific feature of Poland's migration policy is the ambition to bring home descendants of Poles who, for various reasons, ended up in the USSR after World War II. (Lithuania's similar attempts will be discussed below.) This initiative mainly concerns offsprings of people who held Polish citizenship before September 1939 and those who lived outside the Polish borders established by the Treaty of Riga of 1921.

Repatriation has garnered much attention from all post-1989 Polish governments. Negative demographic trends, population ageing, and labour shortages have put repatriation on the governmental agenda. The collapse of the USSR spurred the return of former Soviet citizens, including those who declared Polish origin.

The political and social changes in Poland and in what once was the USSR called for working out the principles of a national policy towards Poles residing

<sup>10</sup> Estonia. #1 country in the world of digital life, 2021, *Work in Estonia: Why Estonia?* available at: <https://www.workinestonia.com/> (accessed 08.08.2021).

<sup>11</sup> Foreigners from third countries who lose their jobs must leave Estonia, 2020, *ERR*, 02.04.2020, available at: <https://news.err.ee/1072360/foreigners-from-third-countries-who-lose-their-jobs-must-leave-estonia> (accessed 08.08.2021); The rules of foreigners staying, studying and working in Estonia are being rearranged, 2020, *Ministry of the Interior*, 17.09.2020, available at: <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/en/news/rules-foreigners-staying0-studying-and-working-estonia-are-being-rearranged> (accessed 08.08.2021).

<sup>12</sup> This thesis was central to the presentation given by Inta Mieriņa, the director of the project Well-being, Integration and Liquid Migration run at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology University of Latvia, at the workshop of the Immigration into Eastern Europe: new challenges held at the London School of Economics. See the video: Immigration into Eastern Europe: new challenges, 2020, *Migrācija LV*, 27.07.2020, available at: <https://migracija.lv/en/posts/2020-07-lse-immigration-eastern-europe/> (accessed 08.08.2021).

<sup>13</sup> Latvia — Immigration, Emigration, Diaspora, 2020, *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, 20.05.2020, available at: <https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/laenderprofile/northern-europe/308824/latvia> (accessed 08.08.2021).

in post-Soviet states. The first acts regulating this field emerged as early as the mid-1990s. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, ‘anyone whose Polish origin has been confirmed under the statute may settle permanently in Poland’ (Article 52, 5). Therefore, any person of Polish descent, regardless of their citizenship, has the right to live in Poland without limitations.

The Repatriation Act of 9 November 2000 identifies the territorial borders of repatriation, limiting its geographical scope to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and the Asian part of the Russian Federation. The law targets people of Polish origin who did not have an opportunity to return to Poland after World War II. It also sets the procedure for obtaining Polish citizenship by repatriating and governs how the authorities treat such people and their families.

The Repatriation Act was amended in 2017. The institution of the Government Plenipotentiary for Repatriation was established to coordinate the repatriation efforts of the authorities. Furthermore, tools were developed to support repatriates during relocation to Poland. Now those willing to repatriate could choose one of the three paths:

- to arrive in Poland, use the services of the repatriate adaptation centres, and receive financial support from the government for purchasing or renting accommodation;
- to arrive in Poland on the invitation of a municipality (gmina); the municipality will provide the family of the repatriate with accommodation fully furnished for living; in return, the gmina may receive a subsidy from the government;
- to arrive in Poland on the invitation of a Polish citizen or legal person providing the repatriate with accommodation for at least 24 months; repatriates coming to the country this way could count on financial help from the government for satisfying their accommodation needs.

According to Polish statistics, 8,665 applications for repatriation visas were submitted in 1997–2019. Approval was granted in 6,239 cases. Citizens of Kazakhstan submitted most applications (53.3 per cent). Ukrainians accounted for 17.5 per cent; Russians, 11.9 per cent; Belarusians, 11.3 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

After the 2017 amendments to the Repatriation Act, the number of applications from ethnic Poles willing to relocate to Poland, using the apparatus of the law, increased — from 486 in 2017 to 2,545 two years later. There was also a rise in the number of repatriation visas issued during the period — from 298 to 870.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Sytuacja demograficzna Polski do roku 2019, 2020*, Migracje zagraniczne ludności. GUS. Warszawa, p. 189–190.

<sup>15</sup> *Rocznik Demograficzny*, 2020, Warszawa, 2020, p. 466, available at: <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/rocznik-demograficzny-2020,3,14.html> (accessed 06.05.2021).

In 2007, the government adopted the law on the Pole's Card initially meant to strengthen ties between Poles residing in the post-Soviet space and their historical homeland. The card was to grant its holders certain privileges, such as the right to enter Poland without limitations, study at Polish universities and use emergency medical services. In reality, the Pole's Card turned into leverage in migration and diaspora politics.

A holder of the Pole's Card has the right to apply for a permanent residence permit and financial support to cover living costs in Poland. On 12 April 2019, the Sejm adopted an amendment to the law on the Pole's Card, which extended the geographical scope of the instrument to the whole world. According to preliminary estimates, 70 per cent of all permanent residence permits were issued to holders of the Pole's Card in 2017–2019.<sup>16</sup> In 2008–2019, about 143,900 Belarusians, 120,000 Ukrainians, 8,400 Lithuanians, 7,100 Russians, 3,370 Kazakhs, 2,070 Latvians, 1,800 Moldovans, 619 Uzbeks, 208 Georgians, 180 Azerbaijanis, 136 Armenians, 53 Turkmens and 23 Estonians obtained the Pole's Card. The rest of the world accounted for 636 documents.<sup>17</sup>

Repatriating descendants of political prisoners and deportees and their families is a priority of Lithuania's diaspora policy. In the post-Soviet space, most people of Lithuania origin live in Russia (see Table 5). Still, other countries also have the diasporas: about 25,000 Lithuanians live in Latvia; about 10,000, Ukraine; 7,000, Kazakhstan; from 5,000 to 30,000, Belarus (as estimated by Belarus and Lithuania respectively); about 2,000, Estonia.

Table 5

**The number of Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians in the RSFSR/Russia, people**

Nationality	1959	1970	1979	1989	2002	2010
Latvians	74,932	59,695	67,267	46,829	28,520	18,979
Lithuanians	108,579	76,718	66,783	40,427	45,569	31,377
Estonians	78,566	62,980	55,539	46,390	28,113	17,875

Source: census data.

Lithuanian researcher Rafael Muksinov cogently notes that most deportees and political prisoners returned to Lithuania in 1956–1959, and many of them resent Russians and Russia. 'Those returning to Lithuania after the 1990 inde-

<sup>16</sup> *Polityka migracyjna Polski. Projekt z dnia 10 czerwca 2019 r.*, 2019, Departament Analiz i Polityki Migracyjnej MSWiA, p. 7, 11.

<sup>17</sup> *Rocznik Demograficzny. 2020*, 2020, Warszawa, 2020, p. 466, available at: <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/roczniki-statystyczne/rocznik-demograficzny-2020,3,14.html> (accessed 06.05.2021).

pendence are better, and even favourably, disposed to Russia and Russians,' the son of a Lithuanian deportee told us in an interview. 'We survived in Siberia because common Russian people helped us.' Recent research has brought to light a weighty circumstance: not Moscow, but Vilnius represented by Antanas Sniečkus impeded the return of Lithuanian exiles. The reason was the fear of unrest that might have broken out because the houses, flats, and lands of deportees had been occupied by someone else [20].

The political prisoner and deportee repatriation programme has been running since 1992. 2,500 families from Russian and post-Soviet states expressed their desire to relocate to Lithuania. As of 2015–2017 (the 2018–2020 data have not been released yet), 2,052 families were provided with accommodation; over 5,000 people received financial support.<sup>18</sup> In 1992–2018, 32m euros was allocated to the construction and purchase of accommodation for repatriates; in 2018–2020, the government earmarked 1.17m euros for the purpose; the 2021–2023 expenditure is estimated at 1.3m euros.<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The labour markets of Poland and the Baltics suffer from a shortage of both qualified and low-skilled labour. These states give preference to immigrants from post-Soviet, mainly European, countries. The laws of Poland and the Baltics aim to attract qualified specialists, who nevertheless comprise a modest proportion of immigrants from the post-Soviet space. The four countries have been competing for IT specialists from Belarus and Latvia. Latvia is losing this competition to Lithuania, whilst both countries are less successful than Poland, which offers the best conditions for innovative small and medium enterprises.

As to low-skilled workers, the regulation in Poland and Lithuania is less strict than in Latvia and Estonia. The former countries seek to attract long-term migrants and eventually integrate them into society. The other two states, while recognising the inevitability of this measure, are apprehensive of attracting labour from the states of the former USSR: migrants from these countries speak Russian.

<sup>18</sup> Politinių kalinių ir tremtinių bei jų šeimų narių sugrįžimo į Lietuvą programos įgyvendinimas. 12/2019, 2019, *Ministry of Social Security and Labour*, available at: [https://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/veiklos-sritys/socialine-integracija/Tremtiniu%20informacija\\_2019-12.docx](https://socmin.lrv.lt/uploads/socmin/documents/files/veiklos-sritys/socialine-integracija/Tremtiniu%20informacija_2019-12.docx) (accessed 05.04.2021).

<sup>19</sup> Įsakymas dėl politinių kalinių ir tremtinių bei jų šeimų narių sugrįžimo į Lietuvą 2021–2023 metų veiksmų plano patvirtinimo. 2020 m. rugpjūčio 26 d. Nr. A1–777, 2020, *Teisės aktų registras – e-tar.lt*, available at: <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/1c1b98b0e79711e-a9342c1d4e2ff6ff6> (accessed 15.03.2021).

They are immersed in the Russian culture, which the local political classes consider a threat to national identity. During the Covid-19 crisis, Russophone immigrants proved the most vulnerable category in Latvia and Estonia.

The features of the immigration processes suggest that the four states have been turning from countries of origin into countries of destination. Whilst Ukrainian immigration into Poland and the Baltics is mainly for economic reasons (seasonal work, long-term employment in services), some newcomers from Belarus, Russia, and Central Asia look for political asylum. In the case of Russia, these are people associating themselves with the opposition to the federal authorities and members of North Caucasian ethnic groups.

Since August-September 2020, Poland and Lithuania have been aiding Belarusians who have lost their jobs for political reasons or cannot continue working and studying in their homeland (most of these people are not asylum seekers). The Polish plan 'Solidarity with Belarus' is an example of such assistance. Most of these programmes target students and researchers. They seek to attract younger audiences (about 10,000 Belarusian students study in Poland<sup>20</sup> and from 1,500 to 2,000 in Lithuania). In the long run, these programmes may result in a brain drain from Belarus, albeit over 80 per cent of Belarusian students studying in the EU used to return home before autumn 2020.

Finally, Poland and Lithuania have yet another immigration policy priority, which has a solid political and legal framework: diaspora repatriation. The Polish approach is the broadest. It targets hundreds of thousands of people and has both socio-economic and cultural-expansionist dimensions. The Pole's Card is used to expand the influence zone in the 'Eastern Borderlands' and accomplish the cultural and religious consolidation of the former lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth around today's Poland.

The trends described above mean that Russia has to be more active in the competition for attracting qualified labour from the European part of the post-Soviet space, especially Ukraine and Belarus, since migration from other countries to the Baltics and Poland is insignificant.

*This article was supported by the Institute for International Studies, MGI-MO-University, within project No. 2022-02-01.*

## References

1. Reinert, K. A., Rajan, R. S., Glass, A. J., Davis, L. S. 2009, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of the World Economy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.764.
2. Bhagwati, J. N. 2007, *In Defense of Globalization*, Oxford, p.344.
3. Borjas, G. J. 2017, *The Wage Impact of the Marielitos: A Reappraisal ILR Review*.

<sup>20</sup> Number of Belarusian students doubles to reach 10,000, 2020, *Vitebsky kuryer*, 22.08.2020. available at: <https://vkurier.by/211426> (accessed 08.08.2021) (in Russ.).

4. Borjas, G. J., Monras J. 2017, The labour market consequences of refugee supply shocks, *Economic Policy*, vol. 32, no. 91, p. 361—413.
5. Davis, D., Weinstein, D. 2002, Technological superiority and the losses from migration, *Working Paper*, no. 8971, Cambridge, MA, NBER.
6. Faini, R. 2007, Remittances and the brain drain: Do more skilled migrants remit more? *World Bank Economic Review*, vol. 21, no. 2, p. 177—191. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhm006>.
7. Friedberg, R., Hunt, J. 1995, The impact of immigration on host county wages, employment and growth, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 9, no. 2, p. 23—44.
8. Hamermesh, D. 1993, *Labor Demand*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.
9. Pischke, J.-S., Veiling, J. 1997, Employment effects of immigration to Germany: an analysis based on local labor markets, *Review of Economics and Statistics*, no. 79, p. 594—604.
10. Gammeltoft-Hansen, T., Sorensen, N.N. 2013, *The Migration Industry and the Commercialization of International Migration*, p. 1—286.
11. Potemkina, O. Yu. 2010, *Immigratsionnaya politika Evropeiskogo Soyuzha*, Moscow, Russkii souvenir, 129 p. (in Russ.).
12. Potemkina, O. Yu. 2020, Multilevel governance of the EU migration policy, *Sovremennaya Evropa*, no. 2, p. 100—110. doi: <https://doi.org/10.15211/SOVEUROPE22020100110> (in Russ.)
13. Ryazantsev, S.V. 2001, *Opyt i problemy regulirovaniya migratsionnykh potokov v stranakh Zapadnoi Evropy* [Experience and problems of regulation of migration flows in Western Europe], Moscow, Institute for Social and Political Research, 71 p. (in Russ.).
14. Ryazantsev, S.V., Tkachenko, M.F. 2010, *Mirovoi rynek truda i mezhdunarodnaya migratsiya* [World labor market and international migration], Moscow, Economy, 303 p. (in Russ.).
15. Vorotnikov, V. V., Habarta, A. A. 2016, The influence of labour migration on Poland and baltic states development, *Sovremennaya Evropa*, no. 6, p.125—136.. doi: <https://doi.org/10.15211/soveurope62016125136> (in Russ.).
16. Vorotnikov, V. V. 2018, Contemporary challenges to Diaspora policies of the Baltic states, *Sovremennaya Evropa*, no. 7, p.128—140. doi: [10.15211/soveurope72018137151](https://doi.org/10.15211/soveurope72018137151) (in Russ.).
17. Hatton T. J., Williamson J. G. Emigration in the long run: Evidence from two global centuries // *Asian-Pacific Economic Literature*. 2009. Vol. 23, № 2. P. 17—28. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8411.2009.01238.x>.
18. Reinert, K. A. 2015, *An Introduction to International Economics: New Perspectives on the World Economy*, 2nd ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 192—193.
19. Kruhlaya, M. 2020, *Imigracja zarobkowa obywateli państw byłego ZSRR szansą rozwoju polskich przedsiębiorstw, Współczesne problemy ekonomiczne w badaniach młodych naukowców*, T. 4. Teoria i praktyka, redakcja naukowa, Ewa Gruszewska, Białystok.
20. Muksinov, R. I. 2012, *Politika vlastei Litvy v otnoshenii svoei zarubezhnoi diaspory* [The policy of the Lithuanian authorities in relation to their diaspora abroad], Vilnius, Politika, p. 138 (in Russ.).



## **The authors**

**Dr. Vladislav V. Vorotnikov**, Director, Centre for European Studies of the Institute for International Studies, MGIMO University, Russia; Leading Research Fellow, Institute of Europe Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia.

E-mail: vorotnikov.vladislav@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3374-5677>

**Dr. Andrzej Habarta**, Leading Research Fellow, Centre for European Studies of the Institute for International Studies, MGIMO University, Russia; Leading Research Fellow, Institute of Europe Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia.

E-mail: a.habarta@inno.mgimo.ru

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4236-3777>

---