

Migration in Latvia: Global and Local Interactions

The aim of this paper is to describe, analyze and interpret the ongoing domestic and international migration processes taking place in the post-socialist realm following EU enlargement. The case of Latvia will be used as the empirical "well" of this study. The European Union enlargement and its free labour market are one of the key factors influenced migration processes in Latvia.

The migration processes face such social problems as comparatively high unemployment, lack of economic activity and demographic change, especially in peripheral rural areas and small towns. There are changes of traditional migration flow pattern as well as. Because many migrants previous from these areas went to larger cities then to capital for job. Nowadays they could go strait aboard for work.

The results from different studies and surveys indicated that the current new migration flows and new types of migration. In the survey of the project "The Geographic Mobility of the Labour Force" (Project Nr. VPD1/ESF/NVA/04/NP/3.1.5.1./0003 commissioned by the European Social Fund and the Welfare Ministry of Latvia and carried out by University of Latvia) which 8,005 respondents were surveyed has been analysed reasons for migration. People who move from Latvia to another country (most often a member state of the EU which has opened up its labour market) usually do not declare a change in their permanent place of residence, and that has nothing to do with how long they are gone – a few months, a year or several years. What is more, these migrants may emigrate just once and permanently, or they can have only periodic employment abroad. The main manifestation of such migration is that people declare their residence in Latvia and keep that residence so that they have a place to return to.

When asked why they would want to move abroad to find work, the vast majority of respondents (87.4%) said that it is because of higher wages. Many respondents spoke of better working conditions and social guarantees. Young people in particular spoke about the desire to gain new experiences and ensure better growth opportunities in the future. Asked where they would like to go, respondents most often spoke of Great Britain, Ireland, Germany and the United States of America. Most said that their choice in this regard was based on the place where they could earn the most money, on the fact that friends or relatives were already living there, or on the fact that they could already communicate in English or German. Survey data show that more than one-half of respondents with plans to decamp for another country were hoping to work abroad for no more than a year. It is difficult to know how many of those who have already emigrated will actually return to Latvia. Neither do we have a clear sense of whether someone who has been away for several years will be able to adapt to new circumstances in Latvia, or whether that person will be able to return to Latvia at all.

One of the most important things to do so as to prevent labour shortages and enhance productivity is to encourage people who have left Latvia recently to return home. This will require both economic and financial stimuli, particularly ongoing wage increases, changes in tax policies related to small business, and handling of a variety of social and educational issues.

Potential migrants who plan to move within Latvia, who agree or mostly agree with the idea that they might want to work abroad. Large group of migrants are also those respondents who probably will not move in Latvia, but would be prepared to find work abroad.

The internal migrants most frequently cited family circumstances followed by work and studies, and to a significantly lesser extent the purchase or construction of a new dwelling. The analysis of the answers concerning the respondents' plans to move allows us to be able to forecast future internal migration trends, suggesting that a large share of the respondents plan to move to the Riga agglomeration. Latvia has a monocentric urban system, with the capital city of Riga dominant in the structure. Riga's size and economical dominance in the wide vicinity have a strong influence on the development of settlements, population density, migration and economically functional interactions, both directly and indirectly. The rapid process of suburbanization is taking place in the Riga agglomeration.

One solution related to migration policy is to eliminate the causes which lead people to emigrate. Surveys of those who have emigrated show that the reason that they do so is that they want to earn more money.

Expanding the number of jobs in areas which are distant from the Latvian capital city would be easier if the following things were done:

- The infrastructure of mobility were developed, including inexpensive access to the Internet in all of Latvia;
- The formalities which relate to launching a new business in Latvia were simplified;
- Support were given to businesses which train their own employees;
- Opportunities for distance work were expanded;
- People who are not fully employed at this time were helped to get better jobs.

That means that the main requirement for reducing emigration volumes will be to raise wages, improve working conditions and enhance social guarantees so that they are as close as possible to those that are available in the host countries at this time.