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Report

LITHUANIA

Migration and demographic patterns in Central-Eastern Europe



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Report

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Abstract

This report is a part of deliverable "D.6.2. Report on migration and demographic patterns in the EU CEE countries and potential source countries" from the project FUME – Future Migration Scenarios for Europe (870649), financed with the Horizon 2020 programme. In particular, this country report focuses on critical analysis of immigration data from Lithuania. The analysis consists of an overview of stock and flow data on migrants including such dimensions as: age groups, gender, country of origin, education levels, and length of residence. This report is a first step in an analytical exercise, which aims to determine migration potential from and to Lithuania and furthermore, to provide necessary data input for fine-tuning of the FUME migration projection model.

The report presents the historical framework of the migration transition of Lithuania from migrant-sending to migrant-receiving country, major national groups of immigrants and their demographic structure. It also provides critical analysis on the validity of various statistical sources of data and draws some initial conclusions on the temporality/permanent nature of immigration in Lithuania. Lithuania, as other Baltic states included in this deliverable, shares some similar patterns of migration due to a common history, including Russian and Soviet political dominance, political oppression during the communist times, and settlement policies within the USRR. Yet, Lithuania presents also some different patterns from Estonia and Latvia. This includes, inter alia, the longer history and richer traditions of independence, which have an influence on more inclusive policies on immigration and citizenship than the other two Baltic republics.

1. Introduction

Lithuania shares some similar patterns as other Baltic states: Estonia and Latvia. All of these countries have very small populations: 1.33 million in Estonia, 1.893 million in Latvia and 2.795 in Lithuania (data for 2021, Eurostat, 2021). This factor, connected with a relative small area (Estonia – 43,432 km², Latvia – 64,589 km², and Lithuania – 65,300 km²), complicated historical ties with a neighbour with imperial traditions and aspirations (Russia), influences greatly contemporary migration and integration policies in these countries.

In the case of Lithuania however, the ethnic history of the Lithuanian nation is longer and more complicated than in the case of Estonians and Latvians. The Kingdom of Lithuania was created already in 1253, and in 14th century it was the largest European state. Yet, in 1386 the Grand Duchy of Lithuania entered in personal union with the Kingdom of Poland, and in 1569 the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth was established, which lasted till 1795 (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021b). During this period, in spite of being one of largest and more powerful political actors in Europe, the Lithuanian national identity suffered from Polonization – most of its elites were using Polish language and adopting Polish culture. The national revival of Lithuanians date to the 19th century, when the Lithuania was already under the Russian occupation (Valantiejus, 2002). The Russification policies adopted by Tzarist authorities for most of this period proved to be ineffective: the Lithuanian language, once spoken mostly by lower classes has been gradually adopted by Lithuanian elites to demonstrate one's national identity. At the same time, the 19th century is the first period of intensive migration from Lithuania. People were migrating mostly due to economic and political reasons (e.g., ethnic discrimination of Jewish people, oppression of Lithuanian nationalists, mandatory enlistment to Russian army); the most popular destinations were the US, Western Europe, and South Africa (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021b). The magnitude of this outflow is substantial: it is estimated that around 635 thousand persons migrated up to the 1939, which accounted for 20 percent of Lithuanian population, and out of these one-third moved to the US as the most popular destination (Thaut, 2009). Yet, out of these – most migrants left the country in 19th century and before First World War – as the number of emigres for in 1918–1940 period is estimated at mere 100 thousand persons. In the interwar period apart from traditional migrations to the US and Canada, also new destinations became increasingly popular: mostly Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. As for these first migration wave, it is also important to admit that the rate of return – in spite of declared temporary movements – was very small and stood at ca. 20 percent (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021b).

Lithuanians regained the independence in 1918 after the First World War. Nevertheless, the relations of the young state with its neighbors were tense in interwar period: Lithuania had to defend its territory from Bolsheviks and from Poles, who annexed the Vilnius Region in 1920. During the Second World War, Lithuania declared neutrality and was initially under German sphere of influence. In 1940 the Red Army entered the Lithuanian territory and the country has been annexed into the Soviet Union as the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. A wave of political refugees to West followed with 330 thousand Lithuanians fleeing to the US (Thaut, 2009). The Sovietization policy, interrupted only for few years by Nazi occupation, has started. As in other Baltic republics, Soviets organized the deportations of democratic opposition members into Siberia: only in four days, between 14th and 18th of June 1941, 40 thousand Lithuanian elites (researchers, teachers, doctors, and other tertiary educated persons) were forcedly exiled into concentration camps. This oppressive policy continued even after the Second World War: between 1944 and 1953 almost

120 thousand persons were deported to the North-Eastern provinces of the Soviet Union, which accounted for 5 percent of the Lithuanian population of that time (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021b). On the other side, the Soviets encouraged also the voluntary economic immigration, including the settlement of Russian-speaking population. For entire communist period of occupation the net immigration from Soviet Union accounted was between 6 to 8 thousand persons a year (Thaut, 2009). The Soviet occupation in this sense was – for most of the communist rule – a period of planned colonization, aimed to extinguish Lithuanian national identity and fully assimilate the local population into Soviet, Russian-speaking society (Annus, 2012). Under the communist rule, the emigration from Lithuania was permitted only (and also to very limited extent) within other Soviet Republics: some Lithuanians migrated in that period to Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021b).

Lithuania announced the restoration of its independence in 1990 and – after the failed Russian-sponsored coup d'état in 1991 – it has been recognized as independent state by the international community. Lithuania has undergone profound democratic and economic reforms in 1990s, experiencing rapid economic growth and becoming a member of WTO (2001), NATO (2004), European Union (2004), and OECD (2018). The migration processes, until 1989 halted by restrictive policies, were started in early 1990s. First, the wave of return migration to Russia of ca. 215 thousand Russian-speaking persons (1989–1996) (cf. Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021b) was initiated. As in other Baltic republics, in Lithuania many Russians constituted the administrative elite and/or were serving the Soviet army: after the dissolution of the USSR their presence in the independent Lithuania was no longer needed.

After migration of Russian-speaking population, the intensive out-migration of Lithuanian citizens started. In the 1992–2000 period the net migration was negative and stood at 20 thousand persons a year. In that time, most of migrants headed towards Poland, the United States, Germany, Israel, and Scandinavian countries (Thaut, 2009). Yet, the boom for migration was still to come. In 2004 Lithuania was admitted to the European Union: during the initial period of transitional arrangements, only few EU members states have opened fully its labor market to new members. Among them were the UK and Ireland, which became two major destinations: just between 2004 and 2008 48 thousand Lithuanians migrated into the UK, 25 thousand to the US, 20 thousand to Ireland, and 17 thousand to Germany. As Lithuania has been severely hit with financial crisis of 2007–2009, out-migration has intensified in the 2009–2014 period: 132 thousand Lithuanians migrated into the UK, 11 thousand to the US, 33 thousand to Ireland, 19 thousand to Germany. And 19.5 thousand to Norway. Then, the most recent wave of migration between 2015 and 2018 consisted of 76 thousand Lithuanians moving to the UK, 4 thousand to the US, 12.7 thousand to Ireland, 14.5 thousand to Germany, and 14.8 thousand to Norway.

Within these post-accession migrants, there is an over-representation of younger and better educated individuals than in the national average (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021c). As for the actual ethnic situation in the country (data for 2018), currently 84.2 percent of 2.8 million Lithuanian population are ethnic Lithuanians (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021a). Other important ethnic minorities are Poles, who compose 5.6 percent of the population, and Russians – 4.5 percent (cf. Carpinelli, 2019).



2. Methodology, Definitions and Sources

Methodological approach

Our study relies on a desk research method. In the period of April-August 2020, our research team has gathered data on immigration statistics in Lithuania. This report provides a critical analysis of this data, including assessment of data reliability. We extract data from the main statistical sources, including central statistical offices reports, existing surveys and studies, and administrative registers. The main focus is on immigration statistics: analysis of migrant flows and stocks. Then, this publicly available data are compared with the existing estimations on immigrant flows provided by Abel and Cohen (2019).

Definitions of immigrants in Lithuanian Statistics and evidencing of migrants in statistical registers

According to the official statistics portal – Statistics Lithuania – immigrants are defined as people, who have crossed the state border, irrespective of whether or not customs clearance has taken place (Statistics Lithuania: Dictionary of Statistical Terms). It is worth noting that this way of defining migration may be more accurate than solutions adopted by number of other European countries (e.g., Poland), where migration is strictly related to the registration of stay (either permanent or temporary). As described in the later section of this report, Lithuanian approach to monitoring the scale of migration seems to be more inclusive of unregistered persons or those exempted from customs clearance, as well as those who crossed (or even just attempted to cross) the state's border illegally. Furthermore, the precision of the governmental data is being constantly reviewed, as Statistics Lithuania also provides data on the so called "third-country nationals" who in fact left the territory of the country.



Picture: Kotryna Juskaite

3. Lithuanian diaspora

When it comes to Lithuanian diaspora, as for 2014 619.6 thousand of Lithuanians were living abroad, which accounted for 16.9 percent of the total population, with the largest diaspora centers located in the UK (19.9 percent of diaspora population), Russia (13.6 percent), Poland (10 percent), Canada (7.9 percent), Germany (7 per cent), Ireland (6.4 percent), and the US (5.8 percent) (cf. Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2020). Officially 700 thousand persons have left the country between 1990 and 2018. Yet, according to Lithuanian experts only 55 percent of migrants have registered their move, so the real figure for migration is nearly double as for official statistics (Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė et al., 2021c).

In spite of the fact that intensive emigration is a source of constant concern in a public debate, Lithuanian diaspora policy is far from being pro-active and directed towards encouraging return. Actually, the local experts indicate that there is a widespread consensus that Lithuanians abroad are in much better socio-economic

position than those living in Lithuania, thus they do not require any assistance (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė, 2020). Most of diaspora policies are directed into educational and cultural cooperation in diaspora, with a precise aim to keep the ethnic identity of its members. Lithuanian migrants are also encouraged to participate in national elections. Another element of diaspora policy is the approach to double citizenship. Although Lithuania has rather restrictive laws in this regard and having double citizenship¹ is possible only in special conditions, children can acquire a dual citizenship at birth. This implies that the child born of Lithuanian parents in the UK or Germany can have both the citizenship of the country of birth and the Lithuanian one.

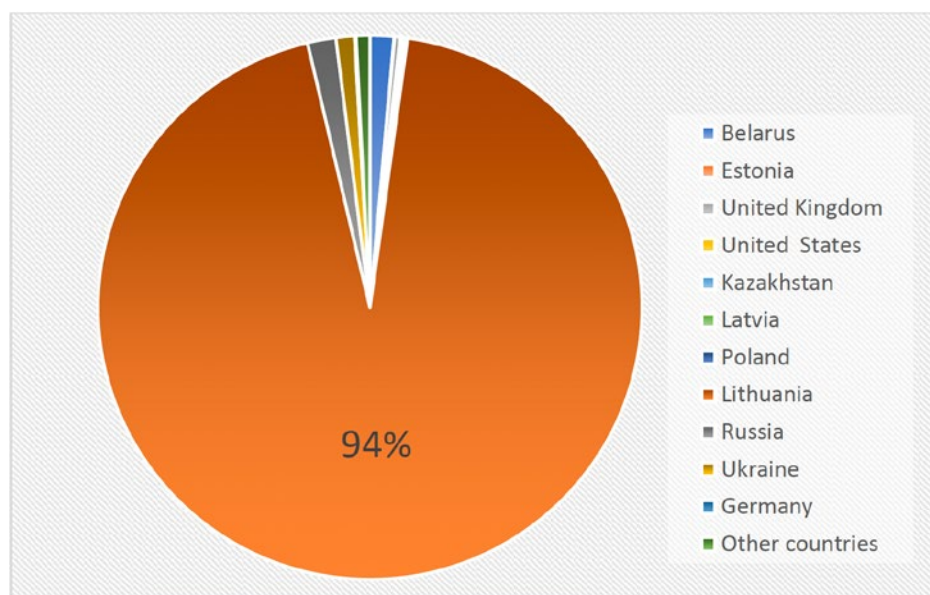
¹ As in the case of Latvia and Estonia, the restrictions apply mostly in the case of Soviet-origin immigrants in the country: they are unable to keep both Lithuanian and Russian citizenship. Yet, most of these persons – contrary to Estonia and Latvia – are eligible for Lithuanian citizenship. As the consequence, the percentage of stateless persons in Lithuania is marginal.

4. Immigrant stocks in Lithuania

The latest Statistics Lithuania's data indicates that the total resident population of Lithuania, at the beginning of the year 2021, amounted for 2 795 680 persons, while immigration flow in 2020 consisted of 43 096 persons. When looking at the percentage of residents by country of birth (and similarly by citizenship), it is clearly visible that Lithuania remains a much more homogenous state than its neighbours Latvia and Lithuania. Data from 2021 shows that 94% of all residents are born in Lithuania, 97% hold Lithuanian citizenship, and 85,5 % are ethnically Lithuanian.

Figure 1. Resident population in Lithuania by country of birth (2021)

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).

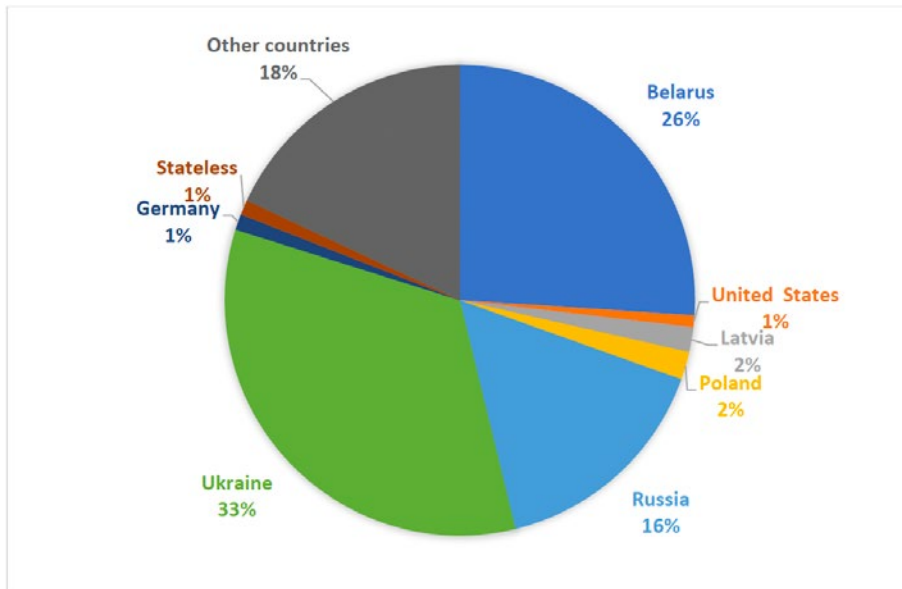


Most of the recent foreign population comes from the neighbouring countries or other Eastern countries in a close proximity. Amongst the foreign-born persons, the most common country of birth is Russia (in 47 204 cases), followed by Belarus (39 630), and Ukraine (30 626). Notably, 4.5% of the total resident population declares to be ethnically Russian, but merely 12.5 thousand holds Russian citizenship. The dominant citizenships among immigrants are Ukrainian (26 898) and Belarussian (20 799), other being: Polish, Latvian, and Russian (all amounting to less than 1,5 thousand), German, American or none (statelessness) (all of those three amounting to less than 1 thousand).

Yet, when it comes to ethnic origin, the situation is slightly more different. Indeed, as compared to other Baltic states, the Lithuanians are much more homogenous as when it comes to the ethnic composition: according to 2011 Census, Lithuanians composed 84.2 percent of the country population (2 million 561 thousand persons). The largest ethnic minority Poles accounted for 6.6 percent of the country population, and its number is gradually falling from 235 thousand in 2001 to 200 thousand in 2011. The Russian minority was comprised of 176.9 thousand persons, which accounted for 5.8 percent of Lithuanian population in 2011. The other three important minorities – Belarussians, Ukrainians, and Jews – make up less than 2 percent of the population (ca. 70 thousand persons) in 2011 (Government of Lithuania, 2021).

Figure 2. Resident population in Lithuania with non-Lithuanian citizenship (2021)

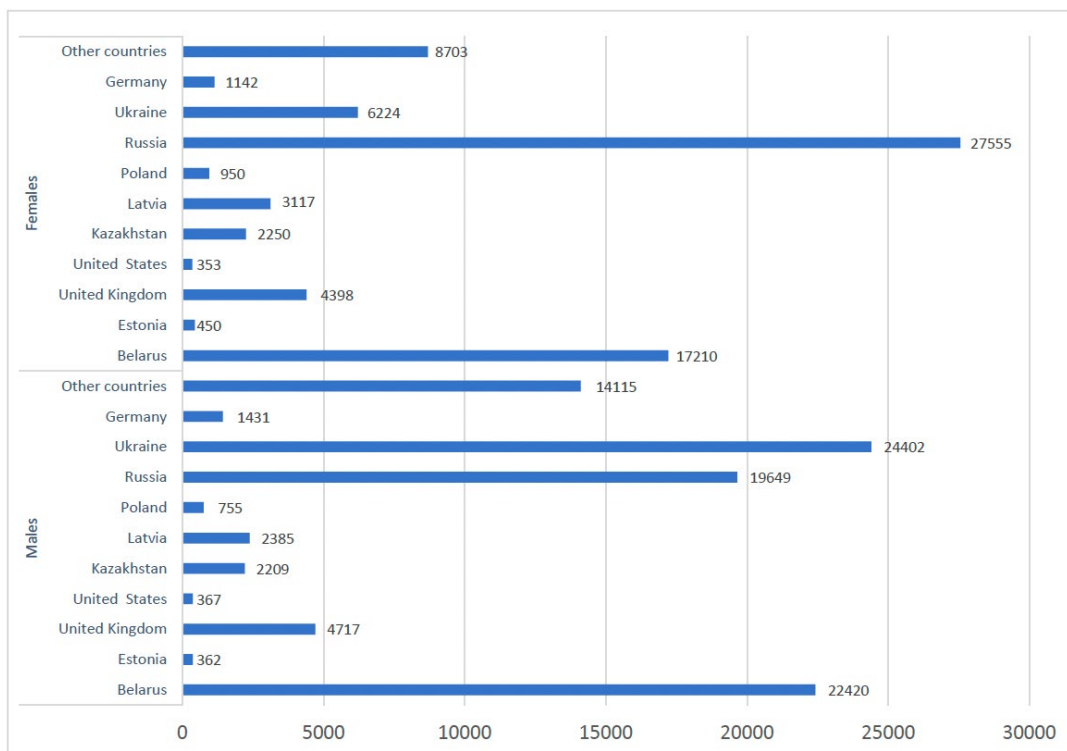
Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).



Regarding demographic characteristics of the population born outside of Lithuania, data shows firstly that the sex ratio within this population is significantly higher (ca. 128) compared to the total resident population (ca. 89), meaning the immigrant population is significantly more masculinized. The specific numbers of males and females by country of birth other than Lithuania can be seen on the Figure 3, where the dominance of Russian females, Ukrainian and Belarusian males may be seen (all of whom exceeds 22 thousand persons).

Figure 3. Resident population in Lithuania with non-Lithuanian citizenship, by gender (2021)

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).





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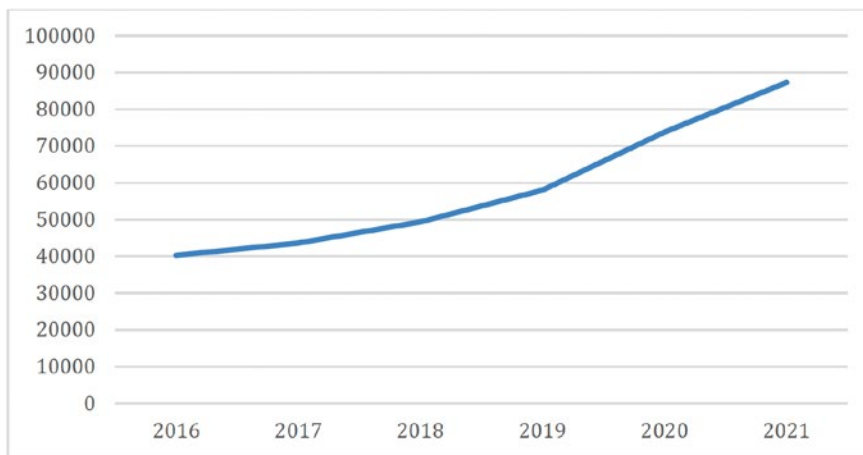
As stated earlier the statistics above should be supplemented by available information on persons who in fact left the territory of the country and by the number of people found to be illegally present within the territory of the country. Given the free movement of persons granted for European Union's citizens, such indications could be gathered for so called "third-country nationals". According to Statistics Lithuania, in 2020 475 third-country nationals in fact left Lithuania, mainly Belarussians (333), followed by Russians (104), and Moldovans (38). The numbers decreased compared to the previous year, when 547 citizens of Belarus and 274 Russians were reported to in fact left the country.

Regarding the third-country nationals found to be illegally present within the territory of Lithuania, the number amounted to 1 959 persons in 2020, and total of 11 197 persons between 2016 and 2020 (as of 30.04.2020). Majority of this population came from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russian Federation, with the number of Belarussians and Russians decreasing in the abovementioned period, but the number of Ukrainians increasing (317 in 2016 vs. 724 in 2020).

Summarizing the discussion on immigration stock, Lithuania is not a major destination for migrants in the region. However, the population of immigrants is rising steadily in recent years and from 2019 the country exhibits positive migration balance (see the next section). The foreign population stock has more than doubled from 40 thousand persons in 2016 to 87 thousands in 2021

Figure 4. Foreign residents stock in Lithuania

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).





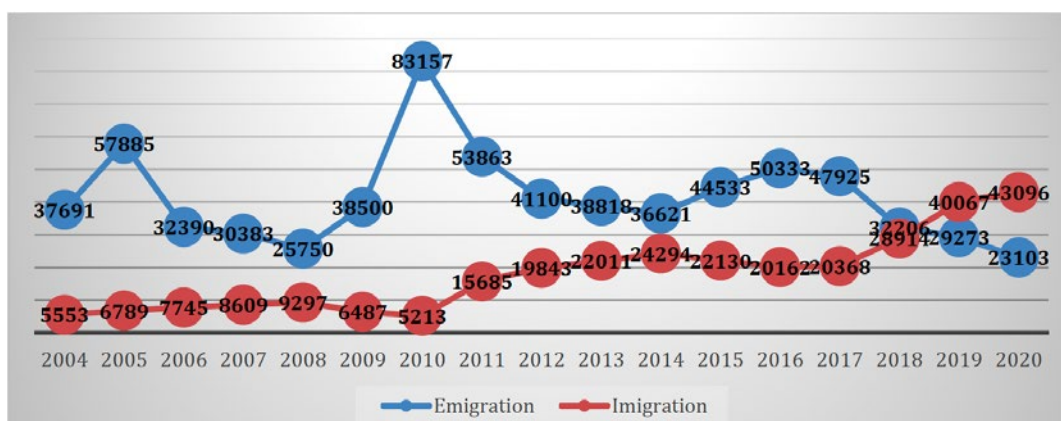
Picture: Egidijus Ta/Unsplash.com

5. Immigrant flows in Lithuania

As presented in previous sections, Lithuania has been a traditional nation and country of emigration for nearly 200 years. Only in recent years, thanks to improved economic situation Lithuania started to attract migrants, but still the magnitude of foreign inflow is limited. Only from 2019 onwards, the country has experienced a positive net migration (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Emigration and immigration flows in Lithuania between 2004–2020

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).

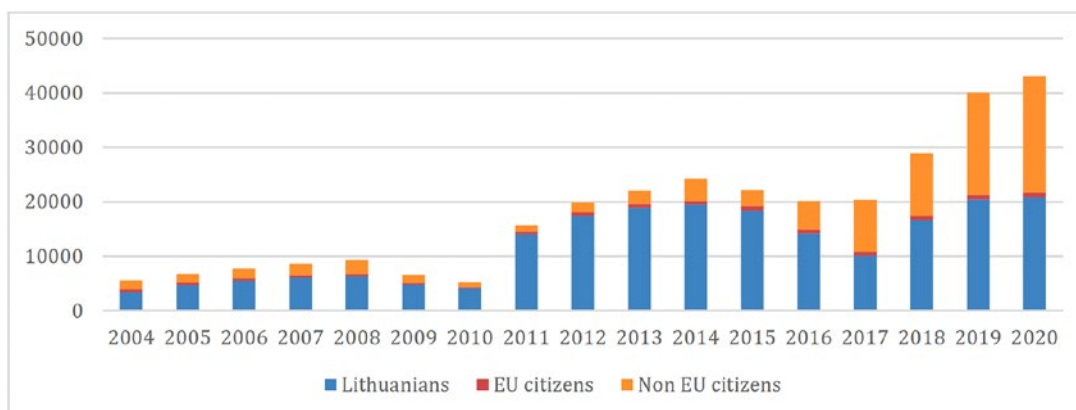


As for the post-accession period, the net migration still remains negative: between 2014 and 2020 703 thousand persons emigrated from country, while 306 thousands have immigrated.

Moreover, Lithuania remains completely marginal to intra-EU mobility: most of those who immigrate to Lithuania are either return migrants (Lithuanian citizens) or the third country nationals (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Immigrant flows to Lithuania by nationality between 2004–2020

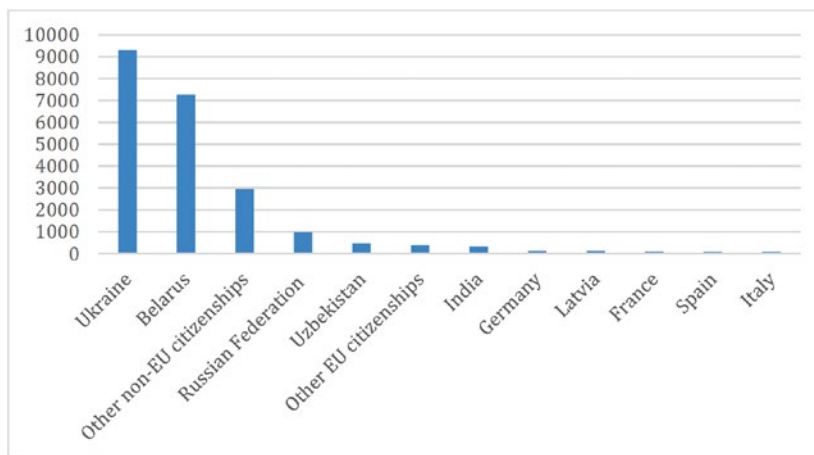
Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).



Consequently, for many years, most immigrants in Lithuania were returning Lithuanians. (about 82 per cent on average) The rest was EU citizens (about 3%) and non-EU citizens (about 15%). From 2017 this trend has been changing. In 2020 the proportion of returning Lithuanians was 48%, while the share of EU citizens decreased to 2%, but the share of non-EU citizens has risen to 50%. As in the case of its larger neighbour Poland, the largest new immigrant groups originate from Ukraine and Belarus (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Immigrants in Lithuania by country of origin (2020)

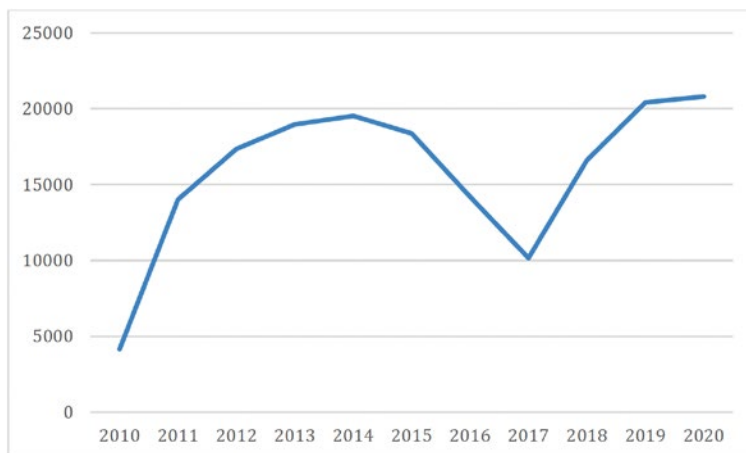
Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).



When it comes to return migration of Lithuanians, the numbers were rising steadily in recent years, with a short decrease in 2016–2017. This was probably caused by uncertainty stemming from Brexit referendum (2016), as majority of Lithuanians in the UK were unsure of their status in the country in the case of possible return to homeland. Nevertheless, the numbers are at best modest – in 2020 the number of returnees was the highest in post-accession period and reached 20.8 thousand persons.

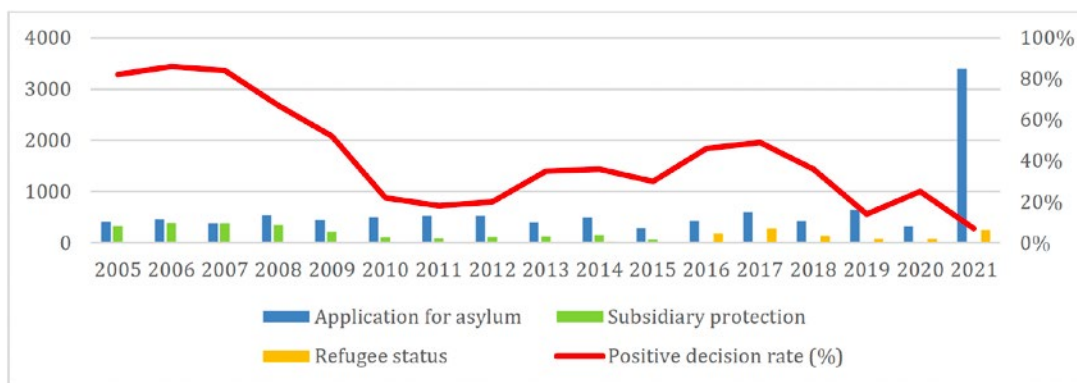
Figure 8. Return migration of Lithuanians to Lithuania

Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).



When discussing migration flows, we have also to mention the question of refugee arrival. For most of the post-accession period Lithuania was a marginal country for persons who applied for asylum. Situation has changed abruptly in 2021, when the Belorussian president Alexander Lukashenko has opened Belorussian borders to enable illegal migrants to move irregularly into the EU territory in Lithuania and Poland. Such move was perceived as a retaliation of Belorussian regime towards the EU sanctions (BBC, 2021). As the result, the number of applications for asylum in Lithuania has increased 10-fold: from 321 in 2020 to 3.4 thousand in 2021. At current stage, however it is difficult to make any predictions on the possible developments of this crisis. It is important to note that a major threat of a massive refugee crisis is associated with current situation at Russian-Ukraine border and a risk of Russian invasion into Ukraine (see next section).

Figure 9. Number of applications for asylum and other forms of protection by year
Source: Statistics Lithuania (2021).



When it comes to accessing the reliability of the existing estimations on immigrant flows provided by Abel and Cohen (2019), after comparing them with the official data we have to indicate that there is a great disparity. The estimates of Abel and Cohen capture quite well the out-migration in the 1990s. As for the 2010–2015 period, the main destinations for Lithuanians are correct, but the magnitude of flows is underestimated almost twice. Finally, the estimates of immigrant flow into Lithuania are completely different from official data, especially for 2010–2015 period. For instance, Russia is no longer a significant sending country (while Abel and Cohen estimated the inflow of ca. 20 thousand persons from this country), and Ukrainian immigration is under-estimated.



6. Scenario narratives for Lithuania

This section focuses on the existing migration potential of Lithuania as a sending and host country, taking into account the analysis of important push and pull factors from such important dimensions as demographic structure, economy, technology, social attitudes, governance indicators and existing cultural, economic and geographical bilateral relations with important sending and host countries. As such, these scenario narratives do not aim to foresee the migration future of Lithuania, but rather to outline the possible future directions in which demographic processes can develop, including international migration.

6.1. Analysis of country's migration potential

Lithuania has been an important migrant-sending country for last 30 years after regaining its independence. Yet, the migration potential of the Lithuanian population is expected to fall and is already expressed in recent data: as in 2010 officially more than 80 thousand Lithuanians left the country, the number of migrants for 2020 was just at 20 thousand. There are at least two factors who can contribute to this process: the first one is the migration transition, which already takes place in the country. As other countries of CEE, Lithuania is becoming a country of (net) immigration, with declining (albeit not disappearing) out-migration. The other factor is the demographic situation of Lithuania: its population is ageing very fast. It is expected that the current population of 2.8 million will drop to 2.68 million in 2035-2040, and to 2.56 by 2045-2050 (UNICEF, 2021).

6.2. Existing migration networks in Lithuania

Lithuania is a new country of immigration: actually the country started to attract foreigners only after EU accession in 2004. Most of immigrants come from neighbouring countries, such as Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Only in recent years new groups of migrants, originating from Africa, Asia and Latin America started to become visible (Muraleedharan, 2020). Consequently, even the well-established immigrant communities in Lithuania such as Armenians (Šimanskienė and Župerkienė, 2018) do not constitute a “critical mass” able to attract significant numbers of compatriots. Therefore, we argue that migrant networks in Lithuania as for 2022 are still *in statu nascendi*, and based on existing ones it is difficult to make predictions on the magnitude of future migration inflows.

6.3. Re-emigration policy

As argued in previous sections, Lithuanian diaspora is still relatively young and dominated by the first generation of migrants, who have left the country mostly after the EU accession in 2004. As a results, their links with home country both in terms of family, cultural, economic and even political ties are still strong. This in turn implies that re-emigration potential of ca. 700 thousand Lithuanian population living in diaspora is relatively high. Yet, in recent years return migration to Lithuania, albeit increased has reached a level of 20 thousand persons a year, which is still modest as for the needs of the state which is struggling with depopulation issues and rapid ageing. We have underlined that the current diaspora policy is mostly directed towards keeping the socio-cultural links with diasporans, i.e. keeping their ethnic identity and involve them in voting process during the national election. The aim of return to Lithuania is yet not very much pronounced. If the Lithuanian government wants to enhance return migration, some more active policies are needed, similar ones to Polish case in which tax incentives were offered to returnees.

6.4. Receiving refugees

Lithuania has not been a popular destination for refugees until 2021, with the outbreak of refugee crisis on Belarus border with Poland and Lithuania. Albeit for most refugees the main aim is to just transit the Lithuanian and Polish territory and arrive to Germany, a historic high of 3.4 thousand of applications were filled in 2021. Yet, the crisis is not over yet and it is hard to predict how many refugees from Middle East (esp. Iraqi Kurds) would be ready to come to EU via Belarus.

Actually, the most important event as for the moment of completing this report in January 2022 is the political situation in Russia and Ukraine. The risk of Russian military aggression on Ukrainian territory is the highest from 1991, and diplomatic talks are still ineffective. In the case of military conflict, we could expect at least 1 million refugees from Ukraine moving into West – most of them will seek asylum in Poland, where the biggest Ukrainian community is located, but also Lithuania will be an important destination.

6.5. Recruitment agencies

The role of recruiting agencies of immigrants in Lithuania is so far not properly addressed in scientific literature and thus is not discussed in this report.

6.6. Cultural and language proximity

As discussed previously, most of immigrants in Lithuania come from neighbouring countries such as Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. In spite of language differences (Lithuanian language is very different from already mentioned nations and also from Polish), all of these groups are Slavic nations with quite similar customs and even religion (usually Christian: either Roman Catholic or Christian Orthodox). Lithuania as compared to other Baltic States is slightly more liberal as for minority rights given to immigrant groups (albeit a problem with the surname writing is still an issue²). Therefore, we can expect that the biggest reservoir of new migrants, in spite of demographic decline in these countries are still Ukrainians and Byelorussians.

² The biggest problem faced by ethnic minorities is the transcription of their names and surnames, which is done into Lithuanian, for instance the famous poet Adam Mickiewicz is Adomas Mickevičius in Lithuania (cf., Jakučionis, 2021).



Picture: Kotryna Juskaite

Conclusions

Covid-19 pandemic has obviously impacted international mobility, also in Lithuanian case. On 16th March 2020 the government adopted very similar practices to the ones implemented in other EU countries: a complete lockdown of economy including the closure of national borders. Yet, as for January 2022 in spite of the fourth wave of covid-19 (omicron variant) the Lithuanian situation is relatively good, with two-thirds (66.4 per cent) of population fully vaccinated. It is therefore expected that in spring 2022 the situation in Lithuania will gradually stabilize, which implies a possibility of admitting not only future refugees, but also economic migrants.

Lithuania is undergoing a migration transition, and is becoming a net immigration country. These trends should be reinforced due to a number of reasons, including: a) relatively high economic development and favourable economic projections up to 2026 (cf. Statista, 2022), b) demographic pressure in the EU neighbourhood, especially in the MENA region, c) economic and political crises in neighbouring Ukraine and Belarus, d) demographic decline and expected workforce shortages in Lithuania, which can be partially compensated through migration.

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