

RETURN MIGRATION TO LATVIA: PROBLEMS, POLICIES, PERCEPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Inta Mieriņa

Scientific director of the ESF research grant «The emigrant communities of Latvia»



IEGULDĪJUMS TAVĀ NĀKOTNĒ

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Introduction

- **Latvian diaspora abroad is growing.** During the last 10 about 220 00 people moved from Latvia to some other country
- In Latvia emigration has primarily **seen as a loss of human capital**, in the context of a rapidly aging society
- Several **policy documents** have been developed, focusing both on:
 - Fostering return migration (target group: potential return migrants)
 - Helping to successfully integrate back into the society (actual return migrants), and
 - Strengthening ties and developing cooperation with the diaspora (in general, including those who will not return).

Questions

- What has been the effect of diaspora and return migration policies?
- Do the planned actions and services correspond to the needs and expectations of the target group?
- What other actions would be appreciated by them?

Data

- ESF project «**The emigrant communities of Latvia: National identity, transnational relations, and diaspora politics**».
 - Time of the project: 01/2014 - 08/2015
 - A team of 11 independent researchers and 5 experts
 - Almost **200** in-depth interviews
 - with emigrants in Germany, the UK, Sweden, Norway, the US,
 - with return migrants (18)
 - expert interviews (15)
 - **14 018** interviews with emigrants, 15+, in 118 countries
 - Other methods (FGD, participant observations, etc.)
- More information: **www.migracija.lv**

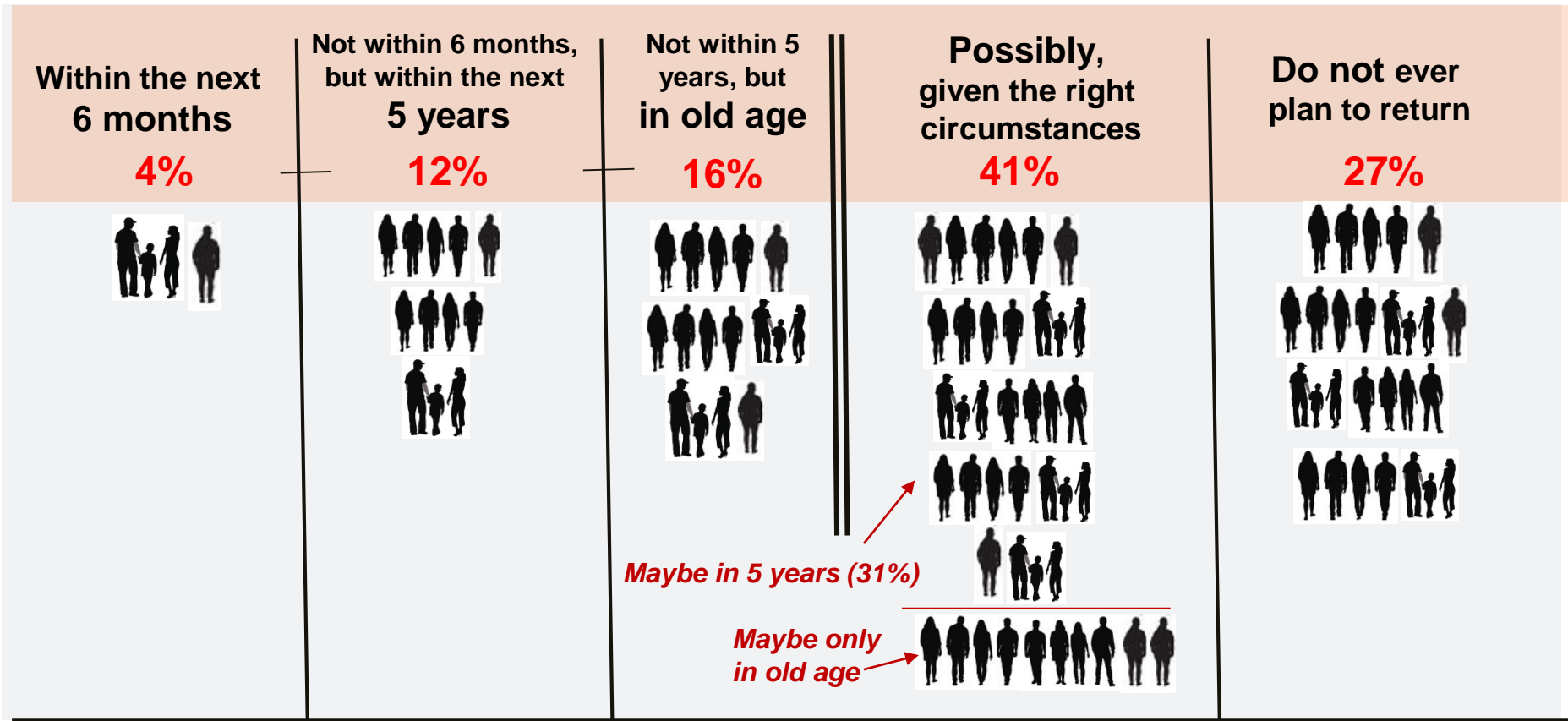
The structure of the presentation

1. Problems – difficulties that the diaspora and return migrants face
2. Policies – what policies are in place to address them
3. Perceptions – how they are perceived by the target group
4. Perspectives – what lessons and recommendations can be drawn

PROBLEMS

How many plan to return?

(of those who emigrated in 2000 or later)



A large group of potential movers, yet very few plan to return

Why people return?

Return-migration models (Šūpule and Kļave, forthcoming)

1. Neo-classical economics: returning due to **unsuccessful migration experience**
2. The new economics of labour migration: returning as a **success story**:
 - conservative
 - inovative
3. Structuralism approach:
 - returning due to **inability to integrate**
 - returning in **old age**
4. **Transnationalism**: returning does not mean the end of the migration cycle; transnational contacts and activities.

The case of Latvia

The reasons for returning are almost always **non-economic**.

- **Family and friends in Latvia** (for 47% of the recent, post 2000 migrants, it is a very important factor)
- **I miss Latvia** (29% very important)
- **Latvian language** (19% very important factor)
- Do not want to live as **strangers**, outsiders, 'lower class', inability to integrate
- The **gains of emigration do not seem significant enough** to stay abroad (re-evaluation of values)
- **Concern for children**
- **Overcame their financial difficulties** (eg., loans) or fulfilled their aims
- Want to **develop business ideas** in Latvia

What prevents from returning?

(those who left in 2000 or later)

- Lack of a **decent job offer** and **opportunities for growth**. 85% think that their chances of finding a job that pays adequately are poor. About a half of those for whom finding 'a decent job' is a problem could be attracted with a net salary of **1000EUR**. **Contacts mater a lot**, so in some ways their position in the labor market is weaker.
- **Instability and weak social guarantees**.
- Lack of a **home where to return to**. Currently about a half have a dwelling in Latvia. Only a few municipalities offer help.
- Ensuring **children a place in a kindergarden**, and **successful integration of school-age children** in the Latvian school system.
- Lack of belief in a **positive and stable development** of the country.

I can't find a decent job in Latvia	78,7
I would not get adequate social support (benefits, pension, etc.) in Latvia	76,7
I have settled down here, in my current country of residence	71,6
I have no opportunities for professional/career growth or entrepreneurship in Latvia	66,6
I am disillusioned with the Latvian state	62,7
I am not sure my child(ren) will receive adequate support while adapting to the Latvian system of education	51,7
Most of my family and friends do not live in Latvia	41,6
I have outstanding mortgage and/or other loans in Latvia	17,5
I would have language difficulties in Latvia	11,6

Note: % who find it very important or fairly important

Institutional barriers

- Potential return migrants are concerned about different social insurance issues, primarily **the impact of emigration on benefits and pensions**
- They often **lack information** and struggle to find it. 12% of diaspora members have failed to find some information related to returning:
 - Information related to reintegration in the society
 - Social protection and social guarantees
 - Taxes
 - Housing
 - Education (mainly, integration of children into the education system)

The subjective experiences

- For many, living abroad has **built self-confidence**, fostered ability to take responsibility for their lives and well-being, it has allowed to solve the financial difficulties, and led to examining their own values in life.
- Usually «returning home» is linked with **positive emotions**. Returning as brought greater freedom and a sense of confidence in their own abilities, facilitated by familiar cultural environment, possibility to speak their own language and a sense of being able to handle problem situations on their own, rather than wait for assistance from the outside. Those who have returned home feel **stronger and more efficacious** than before departure, with a clearer understanding of what they expect from life and where they want to spend it.

Common aspects

- Return migrants (and potential return migrants) are very different. What unites them:
 - Retaining **Latvian citizenship**
 - **Close ties with Latvia** – emotional (friends and family) and physical (a house, apartment, etc.).
 - Predominantly Latvian; feel **strongly attached to Latvia**.
 - Most have **lived abroad a relatively short period of time** (up to 2 years)
- These factors facilitated return migration as well as their integration back into the Latvian society.

POLICY

Main policy documents

- National Development Plan of Latvia (NAP) 2014-2020 one of the medium term goals is «**To reduce emigration and foster return-migration of Latvian nationals abroad**» with the related task being: „Fostering return migration and preserving the national identity of Latvian diaspora members abroad, including developing a global network, events in Latvia, availability of education and culture abroad, and reemigration support activities»
- In 2013 under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture **a diaspora working group** was established
- Main policy documents:
 - **Plan of remigration support activities** for 2013-2016
 - An **action plan for cooperation with the Latvian diaspora** in 2015-2017
 - The National identity, civil society and integration policy guidelines for 2012 -2018 note that a the specific policy direction is support for Latvians living abroad, reinforcing their sense of belonging to the Latvian cultural space that would motivate them to return to Latvia.
 - State Language Policy Guidelines for 2015-2020 envisage providing direct and mediated support for re-emigrants and their children - firstly, to provide Latvian language training for re-emigrants (**2.1.2. task**) secondly, to improve the professional competence of teachers' working with returning.

Plan of reemigration support activities 2013-2016

- Main goal:
 - to offer practical help to those Latvian nationals and their families who live abroad, who consider the possibility or have already decided to return and work in Latvia or those who wish to establish their own enterprise or develop business network with Latvia.
- Target groups:
 - Professionals who are necessary for the labour market; Emigrant families with children; Young people who have studied and gained work experience abroad; Young people who study abroad.

Plan of reemigration support activities 2013-2016

1. Development of **one-stop agency**
2. Availability of **labor market information**
3. Attracting **highly qualified return migrants** (eg., writing off student loans in certain areas)
4. Support for improving Latvian **language skills**
5. Promoting **cooperation with the diaspora**, creation and maintenance of business linkages, including measures to inform the diaspora on the current events in Latvia and support for entrepreneurs, consultations on how to start a business, etc.
6. **Support for pupils who return** and integrate into the Latvian school system
7. **Requirements of public administration** / local government institutions and state-owned enterprises when selecting staff (possibility of interviews via Skype)
8. Extension of the number of those people, who can apply for **repatriate status**

An action plan for cooperation with the Latvian diaspora

- This diaspora policy document compiles in one place more than 50 different activities into four lines of action:
 - Latvian identity and maintaining links with Latvia, spreading Latvian language and culture in the world
 - promoting civic and political involvement of the diaspora members
 - collaboration with the diaspora in the economy, culture, education and science
 - support for those who wish to return.

Execution of the policy activities

- Despite budget constraints, the **implementation of planned activities gradually takes place**, particularly with regard to support for Latvian language learning, ensuring access to information on job opportunities and cooperation with the diaspora.

PERCEPTIONS

Perceptions of the reemigration plan

Kļave, Šūpule 2015, Return migration policy in Latvia: instrument of human capital return or support for returnees, forthcoming

- **It is not well known** among the target group:
 - 59% of those who emigrated since 2000 have not heard about the plan. 31% have, but do not know what is in it; only 10% know what the plan envisions.
 - The target group **wrongly perceives** the plan as aimed at fostering return migration, and are **sceptical of the impact** of such plan.
 - A number of migrants perceive return migration policies as **only declarative**, aimed at attracting the electorate and gaining power.
 - Respondents believe that one should **focus first of all on improving the socio-economic conditions in Latvia**.
- Yet there are some **positive aspects too**:
 - Existence of such a plan **symbolically demonstrates that the state is interested** in fostering return migration and in the people who have left.
 - Overall the intended activities **fit the needs of the target group**, especially as regards to support for pupils, access to information, improving language skills, and student debt relief.

Focus on the young and highly skilled

- Attracting highly qualified specialists is evaluated positively. On the other hand, there are concerns that migrants will be sorted into some that the government wants to return, and others the return of which is not desirable, ie., that the support will be selective. Thus, the principle that **every national is equally important** for Latvia is violated. Moreover, respondents are concerned that this is a short term solution – people **might emigrate again**.

Returning does not mean staying

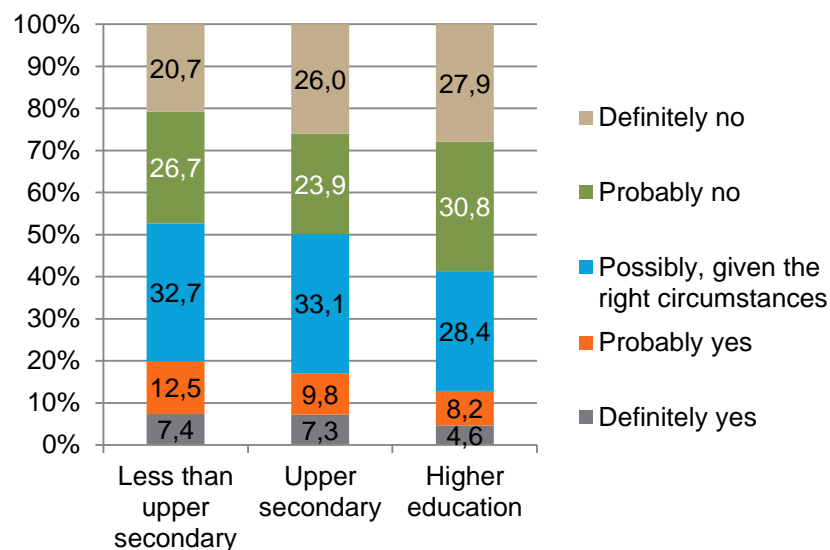
1. **Transnationalism** is increasingly becoming a characteristic of modern day migration:
 - 19% of the diaspora members live both in Latvia and an other country.
 - 25% of Latvian diaspora members **feel like citizens of the world.**
2. Moving back to Latvia does not mean that the person will stay: **at least 40%** of the diaspora members **have moved away from Latvia more than once**

PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

Who are those who plan to return?

(within the next 5 years, among those who emigrated in 2000 or later)

- Younger than 30
- Men
- Who are not using their qualifications or are using them just a little
- Have a more positive opinion on the economic situation of Latvia and how it is developing
- **With lower level of education (Fig.1)**
- Those who have acquired education in **agriculture (vs. those who have graduated in medicine/health sciences)**
- Those who **do not have children** (especially abroad)
- Previously lived in rural areas
- Have a family in Latvia
- Who live in CIS countries



The challenges for Latvia

- Geographic mobility is mostly beneficial to those who migrate.
- Emigration served as a strategy during the crisis to find employment and escape poverty, and reduced unemployment in Latvia (Hazans 2013). Remittances sent by relatives abroad were a crucial resource for many families in Latvia.
- However, emigration of younger and more skilled migrants could undermine the growth prospects in the future, rising concerns about the future consequences for the sustainability of the social security system, as well as its future competitiveness.
- Even though return migrants tend to be more productive (Hazans 2013) it does not compensate for the loss of human capital.
- Migration has also resulted in labour shortages in some sectors and in various social costs (Hazans and Philips 2011).
- Current policies have been addressing these risks, and exploring the potential of cooperation with the growing Latvian diaspora abroad, and they need to be developed further.

Thank you!

- We thank our supporters and everyone who took part in the survey:



- Contact: inta.mierina@lu.lv