



Research summary: Lithuanian Emigration: Challenges and Opportunities

This research aims to summarise the preliminary insights, data and suggestions with regards to emigration and related issues. It does not seek to introduce a comprehensive action programme outlining how threats caused by emigration should be dealt with. Instead, the aim of this research is to generate public concern and initiate a dialogue between the society and government regarding this important issue.

Firstly, the research looks at the threats caused by emigration as well as its consequences. They include threats to civil society, intellectual potential of the nation (increasing alienation of Lithuanian political processes, weakening ties with the homeland, decay of community structures), image and reputation of the country in the world (export and internationalisation of crimes) as well as economic and social consequences (worsening demographic situation, loss of specialists and taxpayers).

Secondly, the research discusses the scale, directions and trends of emigration. According to data, provided by the Department of Statistics, around 303000 people emigrated from Lithuania between 1990 and 2003, whereas 15165 people emigrated in 2004 only. However, these numbers are not definite and they only help us imagine the approximate scale of the process. The population of Lithuania has been declining since 1992. Up until now it has declined by 250000 people. The majority of them go to the United Kingdom, Ireland or Spain. Moreover, according to some researches, after the accession to the European Union, the scale of emigration should increase even more and the number of emigrants should reach 320000 by 2008. After the sharp increase in emigration immediately after the EU accession, we should see a decrease and eventually normalisation in its numbers in the long-term.

Thirdly, the motives, causes and nature of emigration are analysed in the research. It is revealed that not only economic, but also social and cultural aspects play significant roles. Historical emigration experience is very important in this case. However, emigration as an economic phenomenon could be understood as a response to the opportunities of a better life. Its dynamics is affected by pushing (demographic and economic problems in Lithuania) and pulling (cultural compatibility, geographical location, higher income, better living environment in the economically stronger states etc.) factors. By analysing how themes of emigration are reflected in the Lithuanian national discourse, it is revealed that contemporary emigration is seen very negatively. It is also often politicised as a negative process. The causes and consequences of such approach should be further investigated.



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As a distinctive problematic phenomenon, 'brain drain' is also analysed. It has a huge negative impact on the development of Lithuanian science and the progress of the state in general. The loss of specialists (doctors, engineers etc) also leads to some very dangerous problems with regards to social infrastructure and quality of life. The cause of the brain drain is not only economic backwardness of Lithuania, but also flaws in its education system, government's position with regards to science and education (e.g. lack of financing) and lack of transparency. However, the brain drain in Lithuania could be considerably reduced by a fundamental reform of the system of science and education, combined with efforts to increase the prestige of scientific work in the eyes of government and society. Examples of the other strategies could also be borrowed from the policy measures aimed at stopping the process of brain drain in some other countries, such as Taiwan, Ireland, South Korea and Singapore. The option of 'scientific diaspora' could also be considered.

Finally, after a brief review of the current activities of state institutions with regards to emigration, preliminary conclusions and recommendations are presented. It is suggested that migration policy should be based on comprehensive researches, inter-disciplinary studies and accurate statistical data. Informative measures should be applied in order to increase people's awareness about the issue of migration and shape their attitudes as well as the public discourse towards it. Special attention should be paid to the issue of 'brain drain'. Possible measures could include various reintegration and student mobility programmes, changes in the funding of scientific research, development of research centres and promotion of ties with Lithuanian scientists working abroad. Actions to eliminate economic incentives for emigration should be taken as well. However, at the same time more attention should be paid to the maintenance of relationships with the emigrants, it would be valuable to increase their participation in the cultural and political life of Lithuania as well as provide them with some necessary legal support abroad. Furthermore, reintegration of the returning emigrants should be encouraged. Finally, it is necessary to strengthen dialogue between Lithuania and the immigrant-receiving countries, including their institutions taking of the migrants.