Return Migration Trends in Latvia: Re-attracting the Main Human Resource for Sustainable Regional Development

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Abstract—**This study is devoted to the research of human resources as a main source of sustainable regional development in Latvia. It is focused on two key concepts of human capital and migration. The aim of the study is to explore return migration geographies by looking at young return migrants as a resource and preconditions for sustainable regional development essential to Latvia.**

Return migration to the regions of Latvia is examined by two main research questions. What are the most recent return migrant characteristics in Latvia? How does return migration of young Latvians translates into regional geographies of return migration?

Drawing on most recent available statistical data we elaborate on the return migration trends in Latvia, look at particular geographies of return migrants to the regions of Latvia. Findings show that return migrants are working age accompanied with their offspring's, majority not married and return from another European country to the capital and other largest cities and surrounding municipalities. Even more, only ethnicity and country of previous residence serve as return migration predictor.

Keywords— return migration, regions, geography, and regional development

I. INTRODUCTION

Even thought, the majority of recent studies on migration issues in Latvia focus on emigration which in terms of numbers and topicality allocates the leading positions among researchers in Latvia [1, 2, 3]. However, depopulation issues like elsewhere in Europe particularly in peripheral parts along with demographic challenges push to seek return migration as resource of available human capital. There are studies on return migration in Latvia [4; 5, 6]. Similar to studies elsewhere in Europe aspects of internal regional geography of emigration and also return migration are examined and also noting the presence of importance of contemporary circular movements in Europe [7, 8, 9].

Human capital in the view of migration processes manifests as migrant's individual gain and investment in the form of knowledge including languages, information, ideas, obtained skills and professional competences among migrants are particularly worthy [10]. It was previously found that return migrants to more rural and peripheral parts bring potential of knowledge-based development [11].

Traditionally, return migrants are seen as potential human capital that can be reinvested in the country of origin. At the individual level, the attraction to the region or city of origin has important emotional aspect and belonging to the certain place [12, 6] as well as support of family [13]. Return migration decision making process is not easy it is combination of personal, family, cultural and also economic aspects [14, 15]. But turbulent politic and economic events as Brexit, refugee crisis and terrorism can be important trigger to promote return migration to more peripheral parts of the EU under the conditions if individual labour market niche thus economic needs are satisfied.

Despite the level of satisfaction, self-valued gains from the international experience and difficulties individual needs to overcome upon return feeling of belonging and longing for home often overcome the economic aspects of return [5].

Upon return reintegration process commence including re-accustomed in local environment and similar to the previous studies on Lithuanian and polish return migrants [13, 16].

Following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What are the most recent return migrant characteristics in Latvia?

2. How does return migration of young Latvians translates into regional geographies of return migration?

II. DATA AND METHODS

This study is based on descriptive and inferential statistics analysis of officially available data on return migration to Latvia provided by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia [17]. In the analysis we consider years 2014, 2015 and 2016 and also average calculations for

these years for several characterising features. Analysed data set is structured according to administrative data sets thus allowing identifying and distinguishing Latvian origin return migrant cohort from the overall in-migration turnover.

The framework of the study consists of three steps:

(1) we provide descriptive statistics on current return migrants to Latvia, considering three years (2014, 2015, 2016) and following variables: gender, age group, civil status, region of origin and country of previous residence. Countries of previous residence are coded: ES -28 (European Union countries), EFTA (European Free Trade Association countries), CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States countries) and other countries.

(2) we provide the regional municipality level analysis (see Figure 1) where only the share of young (aged 15 – 34) migrants are analysed and visualised on the map.

(3) we use inferential statistics and perform multinomial logistic regression in order to analyse predictors for regional differences of young return migrants in Latvia.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the main features and dynamics of return migrants to Latvia in 3 year period. In terms of gender balance in 2014 nearly 60% of return migrants were men, but in 2016 the proportion has changed and is rather equal (52 % men and 48% women). Age group structure of return migrants shows that constant majority of return migrants are aged 25 to 45 years of age accompanied with the second largest return migrant group aged 0 to 15 years of age suggesting that working age families with children are returning. Family status over the three year period remains rather steady with just over 70% per cent single, divorced and widowed persons who return and nearly 30% of married return migrants.

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURN MIGRANTS TO LATVIA IN PERIOD FROM 2014 – 2016

	2014	2015	2016	*Average*
Gender				
Man	59.0%	55.4%	51.6%	*55.6%*
Women	41.0%	44.6%	48.4%	*44.4%*
Age group				
0-15	19.8%	25.1%	25.6%	*23.2%*
16-25	8.1%	9.3%	9.0%	*8.8%*
26-45	45.3%	43.5%	44.0%	*44.3%*
46-61	21.3%	15.9%	15.0%	*17.7%*
62+	5.6%	6.2%	6.5%	*6.0%*
Civil status				
Single, divorced, widowed	73.1%	74.5%	71.2%	*73.0%*
Married	26.9%	25.5%	28.8%	*27.0%*
Region of origin				
Rīga	32.2%	34.5%	33.7%	*33.4%*
Pierīga	17.3%	14,7%	15.7%	*16.0%*
Latgale	15.6%	15.4%	16.0%	*15.7%*
Zemgale	11.8%	12.8%	12.1%	*12.2%*
Kurzeme	12.8%	13.0%	12.9%	*12.9%*
Vidzeme	10.2%	9.5%	9.6%	*9.8%*
Country of previous residence				
EU-28	82.5%	82.1%	83.0%	*82.5%*
EFTA	1.9%	2.5%	2.6%	*2.3%*
CIS	10.2%	9.3%	7.8%	*9.2%*
Other	5.4%	6.1%	6.6%	*6.0%*

Regional geography of return migration to Latvia shows that the majority return to core parts of Latvia. This corresponds to other studies core regions outnumber the returnees because of range of economic options [18]. On average in three year period 33% returned to Riga and 16% returned to Pieriga region. Among the statistical regions of Latvia in year 2016 the highest share returned to Latgale (16%), followed by Kurzeme (12.9%) and Zemgale (12.1%), but around 10% returned to Vidzeme. On average, 200-400 return migrants per year have returned to other cities of the Republic of Latvia. In terms of regions patterns of return migration the highest rates of return migration are typical of those municipalities that include cities that act as local economic and labour market centres. The most prominent examples are the counties of Talsi, Tukums and Ogre, which include centres of regional importance. In addition, Tukums and Ogre counties are located near Riga.

Geography of countries of previous residence shows that substantial majority returned from other European countries (83% in 2016).

In order to see the potential of return migrants as a human resource which is a precondition for sustainable regional development essential to Latvia we explored the geographies of current return migrants.
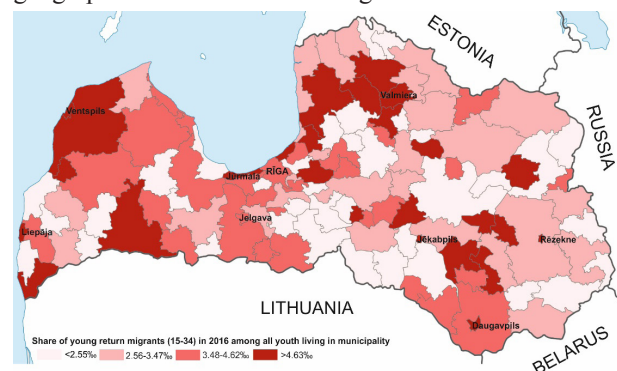

Fig 1. The share of young return migrants (15-34) in 2016 among all youth living in municipality

Results (Figure 1) reveal that young people aged 15 to 34 more prone to return to the cities (Rīga, Liepāja, Ventspils, etc.) as well as municipalities located around

cities attract most of young migrants who returned in Latvia. These findings accentuate the importance of economic activity as a driver for return migration as there attraction points of return migration are in or near cities. Unemployment rate in Ventspils, Valmiera, Rēzekne, assume that these findings explain why the municipalities near migrants to a similar extent as other cities in Latvia.

Daugavpils, Jelgava in 2016 was at least by 2% lower in the cities than in corresponding statistical region of these cities [19]. In Riga unemployment rate was less than 2 %, but in Jekabpils, Liepaja and Jūrmala unemployment rate was higher than in statistical region on average. We Jekabpils, Liepāja and Jūrmala do not attract young

TABLE 3

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AMONG YOUNG RETURN (15 – 34) MIGRANTS IN LATVIA, 2016

Variable	Rīga (n=479)	Vidzeme (n=148)	Kurzeme (n=210)	Zemgale (n=169)	Latgale (n=207)
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
Gender (base: Female)					
Male	1.09 (.80/1.41)	1.14 (.80/1.61)	1.16 (.85/1.60)	1.06 (.76/1.45)	1.23 (.89/1.69)
Age (base: 25-34)					
15-24	.98 (.68/1.41)	.85 (.51/1.39)	1.47(.98/2.22)	1.22 (.76/1.90)	1.14 (.74/1.76)
Civil status (base: married)					
Single	1.12 (.83/1.50)	1.07 (.72/1.59)	.92 (.64/1.31)	.85 (.59/1.24)	1.06 (.74/1.52)
Ethnicity (base: other)					
Latvian	**.58 (.36/.92)***	**3.94 (1.38/11.21)***	.70 (.40/1.21)	.62 (.35/1.11)	**.46 .25/.79)***
Russian	1.06 (.64/1.76)	1.25 (.40/3.93)	**.27 (.14/.52)****	.49 (.26/.95)	1.33 (.72/2.43)
Country of previous residence (base: other)					
EU 28	1.41 (.80/2.50)	**6.69 (1.56/30.11)***	**6.30 (2.28/17.39)****	**4.13 (1.59/10.76)****	**6.70 (2.20/20.37)****
EFTA	.59 (.18/1.90)	**9.65 (1.72/53.98)***	1.87 (.36/9.72)	1.08 (.18/6.49)	3.25 (.59/18.02)
CIS	**2.92 (1.28/6.67)***	1.25 (.01/15.40)	**4.58 (1.21/17.36)***	2.03 (.51/8.16)	**4.43 (1.13/17.30)***

*Note. Reference group: Pierīga (n=244). OR = Odds Ratio. SE = Standard Error. 95% CI = Confidence Interval. * p<.05; ** p<.01*

Municipalities located near to the border (except western part of country) and eastern parts of Latvia (Latgale) are less attractive to young return migrants. Border areas and parts of Latgale region can be classified as peripheral with minor economic activity as well as long term aging thus also depopulation processes and ethnic segmentation. For example, the unemployment rate at the end of 2016 in Latgale region was the highest in country (18%). This was two times higher than in other statistical regions and more than three times higher than in Riga [19].

A Multinomial Logistic Regression was used to analyse predictors for regional differences of young return migrants (Table 1). In analysis we used five predictors (variables). The reference category for the outcome variable was 'Pierīga region'. Each of the other five categories was compared to this reference group. The main interest of current analysis was focused on the relationship between gender, age, family status, ethnicity and country of previous residence. Results show that the differences among regions are based on two variables – ethnicity and country of previous residence. The probability of return to Riga is higher for return

migrants previously residing in CIS countries, but less for ethnic Latvians. The situation in Vidzeme is quite opposite. The results suggest that young Latvian migrants from EU 28 and EFTA countries more likely choose to return to Vidzeme. Ethnic Russian young return migrants less likely choose Kurzeme region for return destination. However, Kurzeme region attracts young return migrants from EU 28 and CIS countries. Young return migrants from EU 28 countries more likely will choose Zemgale region upon their return to Latvia. The probability to return to Latgale is higher for young migrants from EU 28 and CIS countries, but less for Latvians.

We explain the findings by ethnic compositions of statistical regions of Latvia. Young Latvian migrants less likely return to the regions where high share of Russian speaking population is located (Riga and Latgale – 54%), but more likely choose Vidzeme (Russian speaking population is less than 13%) [20]. Findings related to the country of previous residence of the return migrants partly confirm our assumption as well. Young migrants from CIS countries more often choose to return to Riga and Latgale. However, surprising that also Kurzeme region more likely attract young return migrants from CIS countries, although share of

Russian speaking population is only 24%.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The study aims to provide new knowledge on regional geographies of return migration to Latvia. By doing this we addressed two research questions. Firstly we looked at characteristics of the current return migrants. The analysis suggest that in 2016 gender proportion of return migrants is rather equal and there are also no gender based preferences in terms of region of return. Majority of the returnees are working age accompanied with their offsprings, but the share of close to retirement age constitute around 7% of all returnees in 2016. Majority return migrants come from other European countries and return to the core parts.

Secondly we explore regional geographies of the return and seek the preconditions of return migration within the characteristics of particular returnees. The findings suggest that only ethnicity and country of previous residence play role in the choice of the return migration destination. Young returnees after return settle in Riga, other major cities or local municipalities around the cities, but the return location is closely linked to the unemployment rate at the particular territory. More distant, peripheral areas of Latvia have lower potential of return.

There is a statistically significant result among ethnic Latvians who display higher probability to return from another European or EFTA country to Vidzeme, but lower probability to return to Riga and Latgale, but at the same time ethnic Russians act directly opposite. Ethnic Russians have lower probability to return to Kurzeme region. Return migrants from CIS countries show higher probability to return to Riga, Kurzeme and Latgale.

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