



FEATURES AND TRENDS IN EXTERNAL MIGRATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

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Abstract

This study identified the major trends in external migration, typical of the current development stage of the Republic of Belarus and their effect on the economy. The consequences of the global financial and economic crisis had a considerable impact on migration flows around the globe. These processes are reflected in the growing tension in the labour markets in different countries. The basic features of the Belarusian labour market remain the low share of the private sector and excessive state interventionism. For the Belarusian economy, which is in transition, the initial inflow of foreign labour resources at the beginning of the 2000s has transformed into a clear trend towards an outflow of skilled workers. This trend requires a detailed analysis of current processes and identification of the major directions and causes of migration, especially in the depopulation processes observed. The analysis presented in this paper is based on data from the National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus and covers the years 2014-2018.

The comparative statistical analysis method used in the study (creating time series reflecting changes of the phenomenon over time) identified the current trends and characteristic features of internal migration processes in the Republic of Belarus. Moreover, the main directions of population movements were determined as well as the causes of changes in the structure and intensity of migration flows.

**CECHY I TENDENCJE MIGRACJI ZEWNĘTRZNEJ
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Słowa kluczowe: procesy migracyjne, emigracja, imigracja, Republika Białorusi.

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja głównych trendów w migracji zewnętrznej, charakterystycznych dla obecnego etapu rozwoju Republiki Białorusi i ich wpływu na gospodarkę. Konsekwencje światowego kryzysu finansowego i gospodarczego wywarły znaczący wpływ na zmiany w przepływach migracyjnych na całym świecie. Procesy te znajdują odzwierciedlenie w rosnącym napięciu na rynkach pracy w różnych krajach. Dla gospodarki białoruskiej początkowy napływ zasobów siły roboczej z zagranicy w 2008 roku przekształcił się w wyraźną tendencję do odpływu wykwalifikowanych pracowników. Trend ten wymaga szczegółowej analizy obecnych procesów oraz identyfikacji głównych kierunków i przyczyn migracji ludności. Analiza przedstawiona w artykule opiera się na danych Krajowego Komitetu Statystycznego Republiki Białorusi i obejmuje lata 2014-2018. Zastosowane w pracy metody porównawczej analizy statystycznej, budowa szeregów czasowych odzwierciedlających zmiany zjawiska w czasie, pozwoliły na zidentyfikowanie aktualnych trendów i charakterystycznych cech dla procesów migracji zewnętrznych w Republice Białorusi. Określono główne kierunki przemieszczania się obywateli oraz przyczyny zachodzących zmian w strukturze i intensywności przepływów migracyjnych.

Introduction

Globalisation is one of the major features of the modern global economy and it manifests itself in all the spheres of human life. Unification of the international legal system, simplified customs regulations in many countries and liberalisation of trade relations have resulted in lifting borders between countries and regions.

Being an open economy, oriented towards foreign markets and striving for its own position in the system of the international division of labour, the Republic of Belarus is fully exposed to the influence of global trends. The beneficial economic, geographical and geopolitical position of Belarus between rapidly developing global business centres, such as the European Union, the Russian Federation and the Asia-Pacific region are advantageous. The active position of the country as one of the initiators of establishing the Eurasian Economic Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States, close cooperation with countries in Western Europe, and membership of international organisations

largely determine the trends in economic growth. However, they are also accompanied by considerable external migrations (Kulakou & Tsimayeu, 2017, p. 49-60). The socio-economic crisis during the country's economic transformation has further accelerated the negative demographic processes. The basic features of the Belarusian labour market remain the low share of the private sector and excessive state interventionism. With economic integration constantly expanding, labour migration is becoming a real measure of the integration processes and a tool for regulating national and regional labour markets (Pirozhnik, 2016, p. 57).

Migration is one of the most important population issues and is regarded not only as a simple mechanical movement of people but also as a complex social problem which affects many aspects of political, social and economic life (Organiściak-Krzykowska & Machnis-Walasek, 2016, p. 92). This phenomenon should be considered in a broader context. It is a demographic, sociological, political, ecological, culture-related and economic issue (Kuciński, 2004, p. 8-20). The migration process factors can be classified into economic and non-economic. The economic nature of these factors arises mainly from uneven levels of labour force resources in different countries. This, in turn, contributes to the diversification of pay rates, employment opportunities, etc. The economic factors of migration include the will to improve one's standard of living, especially the living conditions (Thomas *et al.*, 2019, p. 1097). Contemporary migration takes the form of liquid migration, which is based on temporariness, flexibility and unpredictability of life trajectories (Engbersen, 2018, p. 63-77). "Liquid migrants" need to adapt to the flexible, deregulated and increasingly transnational labour market, which is associated with specific challenges. One of these challenges is the progressing precarisation of labour (Rodgers, 1989; Trappmann, 2011; Poławski, 2012; Standing, 2014) associated with a constant state of professional uncertainty arising from the lack of stable employment, periodical unemployment or specificity of the form of employment.

Migrations are considered from two points of view: co-development which engages migrants as promoters of development and the main sources of human capital in a country and the theory of dependence, which confirms that migrations deepen poverty in territories of their origin (Loterio-Echeverri & Perez Rodriguez, 2019, p. 141). The outflux of a qualified labour force relatively increases the supply of a low-qualified labour force in the domestic labour market. An oversupply of low-qualified labour force decreases the pay rates in those countries, while the pay rates of highly qualified workers increases, leading – at least in the short term – to the emergence of a "gulf of inequality" (Upreti, 2019).

The beginning of the social, economic and political transformations on the post-Soviet land was a stimulus for boosting the population migrations of the Republic of Belarus. The initial rapid outflow of the population was associated with a crisis in the economy, issues of national identity, political tensions and other factors. The population outflow decreased later, owing to the reforms

and relative stabilisation of the economy. However, the tendencies of the latest years indicate the existence of a number of issues in this area, which require attention from the state.

Analysis and interpretation of results

The liberalisation of the entry and exit procedures for citizens leaving the country during the initial phase of the sovereign Belarussian state formation became one of the causes of a growing threat of a labour force deficit in the national economy and the intensification of depopulation processes. It resulted in the need to initiate preventive measures by the state administration, with consequent stabilisation of the situation. Therefore, if, according to official data, over 35,000 people left the country in 1995, then the number had dropped five-fold by 2005, to 6,866 (Fig. 1).

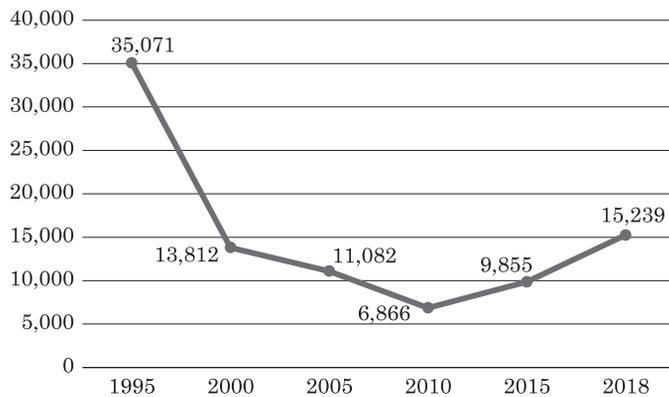


Fig. 1. Changes in the number of emigrants

Source: prepared by the author based on Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

A decrease in the number of people emigrating in the late 1990s and in the early 2000s is explained by the growth of the Belarussian economy, a lower inflation rate and the stabilisation of the labour market. Moreover, economic growth was accompanied by the implementation of the state's social policy towards population groups in a difficult social situation. This resulted in shifting the migration balance to positive values in 1996.

The global financial and economic crisis of 2008 caused the number of migrants returning home to increase. As a result of the liberalisation of legislation governing external labour migration, increased inflows into the labour market have been observed. The law of July 2011 abolished the requirements for licenses to attract foreign labour to the Republic of Belarus

and improved the practice of granting permits to employers (Pirozhnik, 2016, p. 57). In the case of Belarus, it was reflected in a nearly two-fold increase in the positive balance of international migrations, but also in changes in the geographic structure of migratory links. The share of the CIS (particularly Russia) in the structure of immigration decreased, and the share of the Baltic States and non-CIS countries increased. Opposite changes were observed in the emigration structure (Lebedeva & Timošenko, 2010, p. 254).

A new stage of migration of the Belarussian population, with a growing trend in the number of citizens leaving the country, started in 2014.

Entries into and exits out of CIS countries now account for the majority of the migration flow. During the past five years, the group comprised approx. 75% of immigrants and approx. 86% of emigrants (Tab. 1).

Table 1

Trends in external migrations in the Republic of Belarus

Specification	Years					2018/2014 [%]
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Influx						
Total	24,941	28,349	21,038	18,961	24,601	98.6
From CIS countries	19,855	22,505	15,615	13,305	17,008	85.7
From non-CIS countries	5,086	5,844	5,423	5,656	7,593	149.3
Outflux						
Total	9,219	9,855	13,098	15,087	15,239	165.3
To CIS countries	5,912	6,679	8,997	9,558	9,829	166.3
To non-CIS countries	3,307	3,176	4,101	5,529	5,410	163.6
Migration balance						
Total	15,722	18,494	7,940	3,874	9,362	59.5
With CIS countries	13,943	15,826	6,618	3,747	7,179	51.5
With non-CIS countries	1,779	2,668	1,322	127	2,183	122.7

Source: prepared by the author based on: Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

When analysing migration flows by destination, one should observe that the peak of the number of people entering the country took place in 2015. It is largely a consequence of the Treaty on establishing the Eurasian Economic Union coming into effect on 1 January 2015, which opened borders between the participating countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia). The political crisis in Ukraine was also a consequence. Moreover, immigration was seen to decrease during the following two years to 18,961 people, which is associated with the changes in legislation in the country, whose aim was to increase the involvement of the local population in economic activities and, in consequence, resulted in the saturation of the labour market.

An immigration level increase was observed in 2018, which can be attributed to the opening of a number of new enterprises, which – under investment agreements with China – employ foreign labour, especially from China. A 34% increase in the number of immigrants from non-CIS countries who arrived in Belarus in 2018 compared to 2017 contributed to this situation.

In terms of the trend regarding the number of emigrants, it was found to be increasing considerably. A rapid increase took place at the turn of 2015/2016 (from 9,855 to 13,098). This phenomenon is attributed to the synergy effect of two elements: a simplification of the procedure of transfer between countries within the EEA and the instability of the domestic currency market.

There was also a nearly equal growth of emigrants, both in the CIS countries and abroad, with the proportions between the numbers of people leaving for these destinations being approximately the same – 66/34% during the analysed period. The total number of emigrants increased during the past five years by over 65% and amounted to 15,239 people in 2018. These changes resulted in a decrease in the total migration balance by over 40%.

The directions of external migrations include mainly the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan (Tab. 2). Despite an increase of 16.8% in 2018 compared to 2017, the total number of those arriving from the Russian Federation decreased by 22.9% in recent years. 7,040 people arrived in Belarus from the Russian Federation in 2018.

Table 2

Trends in external migration flows in the Republic of Belarus by country

Country	Years					2018/2014 [%]	2018/2017 [%]
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018		
Influx							
Russian Federation	9,131	7,837	6,611	6,025	7,040	77.1	116.8
Turkmenistan	1,710	1,340	1,567	2,175	4,001	234.0	184.0
Ukraine	6,311	10,571	5,492	3,491	3,404	53.9	97.5
China	465	1,310	1,097	783	1,696	364.7	216.6
Kazakhstan	1,408	1,577	910	712	877	62.3	123.2
other countries	5,916	5,714	5,361	5,775	7,583	128.2	131.3
Outflux							
Russian Federation	4,669	5,137	5,912	6,125	6,732	144.2	109.9
Ukraine	429	893	1,809	1,781	1,411	328.9	79.2
Turkmenistan	371	327	803	1,185	1,118	301.3	94.3
Poland	231	319	318	472	765	331.2	162.1
Israel	275	286	520	788	761	276.7	96.6
other countries	3,244	2,893	3,736	4,736	4,452	137.2	94.0

Source: prepared by the author based on: Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

The number of immigrants from Ukraine increased rapidly in 2015 because of the difficult political situation in the country and of the war. However, as the situation stabilised and various agreements were signed, the migration of Ukrainian citizens towards Belarus decreased and they turned to countries in Western Europe.

Turkmenistan ranked second in 2018 in terms of the number of people coming to Belarus. The majority of migrants from Turkmenistan are students coming to this country for education. There are reasons to believe that 2018 will be a peak year and that we should expect the migration activity in this area to decrease, which is linked to legislative changes in the system of education in Turkmenistan.

The People's Republic of China deserves special attention in an analysis of migration flows. The number of citizens from this country coming to Belarus increased 3.5-fold during the past five years and amounted to 1,696. Although this number fluctuates, there is a clear growing tendency. This can be attributed partly to educational migration. However, this was caused mainly by expanding the investment cooperation between the two countries. China's interest in the Belarussian economy has been increasing since 2014, after the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries was established in 2013 and after Belarus joined the "One belt, one road" initiative, through which this country will be included in the "Silk Road economic belt" project (Zajceva, 2019, p. 36). Chinese investments in the Belarussian economy exceeded 1.5 billion dollars during the following five years (Statistical yearbook of the Republic of Belarus, 2019). At the same time, the participation of Chinese fixed assets, labour and services in investment projects should not exceed less than 50% of the total costs of each agreed individual project, which considerably limited the use of local means of production, including labour, by Belarus (Zajceva, 2019, p. 36-44). In consequence, the majority of immigrants are in the labour market.

People leaving Belarus usually go to the Russian Federation, which accounted mainly for an average of 46% of the total number of emigrants during the study period. Although this index increased by 44.2% in absolute values, it decreased by 6.5 p.p. in the relative share of emigrants to Russia. This is a consequence of the fact that Belarussians reoriented to Western Europe and other developed countries, particularly to the United States and Israel (Brunarska *et al.*, 2014). In 2018, 432 Belarussians left for the USA, which is 1.7 times more than in 2014.

External migration flows in the Republic of Belarus comprise mainly economic migration. The percentage of the working-age population entering Belarus and leaving this country was 65.4% and 77.5%, respectively, during the past five years (Tab. 3). Moreover, despite the current downward trend, there are twice as many working-age people entering Belarus than leaving it.

Table 3

Trends in external migration flows in the Republic of Belarus by age group

Age groups	Years					2018/2014 [%]
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Influx						
Pre-working age	4,430	5,346	4,058	3,666	4,040	91.2
Working age	15,831	18,386	13,339	12,293	17,368	109.7
Post-working age	4,680	4,617	3,641	3,002	3,193	68.2
Proportion of working-age people in the total number of people entering Belarus [%]	63.5	64.9	63.4	64.8	70.6	7.1 p.p.
Outflux						
Pre-working age	947	1,129	1,702	1,814	1,914	202.1
Working age	7,266	7,615	10,010	11,953	11,847	163.0
Post-working age	1,006	1,368	1,386	1,320	1,478	146.9
Proportion of working-age people in the total number of people leaving Belarus [%]	78.8	75.3	76.4	79.2	77.7	-1.1 p.p.

Source: prepared by the author based on: Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

People emigrate from Belarus mainly for economic reasons. The labour force moves to countries where income is higher. This is shown by Poland being the fourth most popular emigration destination, where the process of employment, admission to educational facilities and obtaining residence permits for citizens of Belarus is among the easiest in developed countries. As a consequence of this, the number of Belarussians emigrating to Poland has increased 3.3-fold since 2014 (Tab. 2), and the rapidly developing Polish economy needs a larger labour force. There have been immigrants from Ukraine that have been increasing the labour force resources in the Polish labour market for several years (Dluhopolskyi *et al.*, 2019).

The Russian Federation remains the main target country for economic emigrants from Belarus. Factors attracting Belarussians include: stable demand for employees associated with the demographic crisis in Russia, higher wages, no visa-related regime, low cost of transport and cultural and language similarity (Artûhin & Puškevič, 2014, p. 129).

It should also be noted that the official data concerning citizens of Belarus emigrating abroad do not reflect reality, because only a small portion of people emigrating to work in other countries are registered by the relevant authorities.

According to Lučenok and Kolesnikova (2015), the outflux of unregistered economic migrants from Belarus is more than 30 times larger than the registered economic migration; it is estimated to be more than 150 thousand a year. This study is based on statistical data for the period up to 2010, but it can be claimed

that the situation has not changed considerably. This fact is confirmed indirectly by a decrease in the number of people employed in the Belarussian economy.

An analysis of the areas of employment of the people who leave Belarus shows that majority of Belarussians leaving their jobs under agreements are employed in professions where only low qualifications are required, which include mainly manual work. The most frequent types of activities done by migrants include jobs in construction, transport, agriculture, service and recreation.

However, this has changed in recent years. Studies have shown that the number of unqualified workers has decreased by half (Tihonova & Krasinec, 2015, p. 18).

Approximately 40% of the people leaving the Republic of Belarus are university graduates. When increased by those with secondary education, their number will account for 67% (Tab. 4). Not all of them work abroad, but the outward trend in the movement of highly educated and qualified people is noticeable.

Table 4
Trends in external migration flows in the Republic of Belarus by education level

Level of education	Years					2018/2014 [%]
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	
Influx						
University	6,052	6,858	4,914	4,347	5,369	88.7
Secondary special	5,674	7,163	4,683	3,313	3,839	67.7
Vocational – technical	1,144	1,284	868	605	633	55.3
Lower than vocational	7,641	7,698	6,515	7,030	10,720	140.3
Proportion of university graduates in the total number of people entering Belarus [%]	29.5	29.8	28.9	28.4	26.1	-3.4 p.p.
Outflux						
University	3,465	3,322	4,431	5,310	5,489	158.4
Secondary special	1,824	2,435	3,347	4,294	3,311	181.5
Vocational – technical	269	417	556	532	547	203.3
Lower than vocational	2,714	2,552	3,062	3,137	3,978	146.6
Proportion of university graduates in the total number of people leaving Belarus [%]	41.9	38.1	38.9	40.0	41.2	-0.7 p.p.

Source: prepared by the author based on: Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

Until 2016, the negative impact on the Belarussian market was compensated for by citizens – university graduates arriving in this country; however, a negative balance has been observed in regard to this index (Fig. 2).

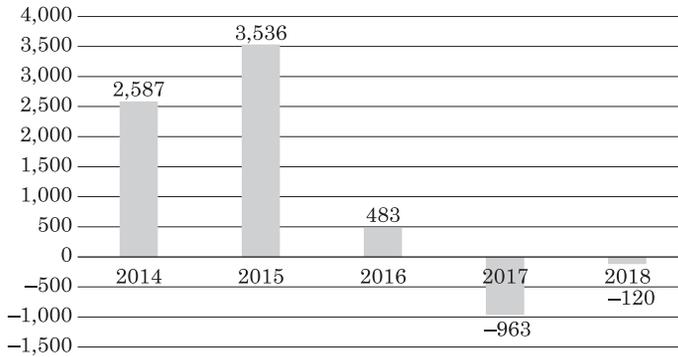


Fig. 2. Trends in the balance of university graduates

Source: prepared by the author based on: Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

This trend can be attributed partly to the intensive development of the IT industry in the Republic of Belarus, which supplies foreign markets not only with software but also with programmers. Belarussian programmers are highly valued in Western Europe and in the USA and they account for a considerable part of the number of professionals leaving this country. This is caused mainly by a significant difference in the wage level. Poland, Germany, Israel, the USA and China were the most attractive non-CIS countries for emigration among university graduates leaving Belarus in 2018 (Fig. 3). Their participation in the overall structure of migration flow exceeded 60% by the end of the year.

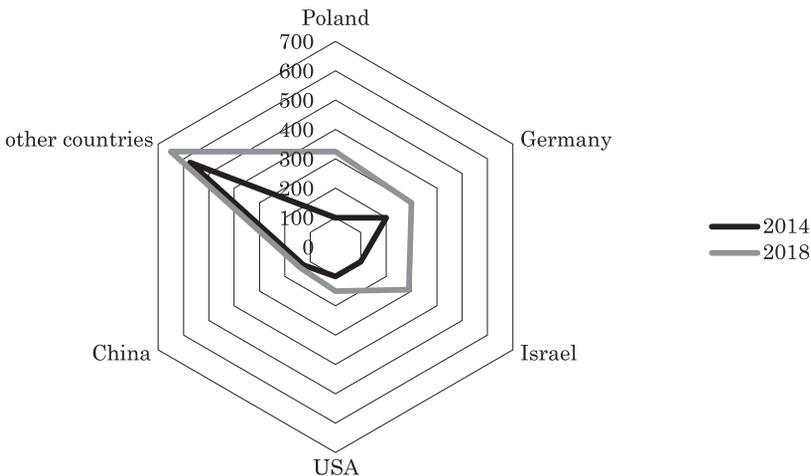


Fig. 3. Emigration preferences among university graduates, %

Source: prepared by the author based on: Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus (2019).

The structure of emigration flows differs considerably from the structure of immigration flows. Foreigners accounted for approx. 47% of all emigrants from Belarus. This group usually includes foreigners who graduated from universities and economic emigrants whose labour contracts expired, etc. Of the 1,118 people who left for Turkmenistan in 2018, 1,112 were citizens of this country, a definite majority of whom graduated from university in Belarus (Demographic Yearbook of the Republic of Belarus 2019).

Summary

Efforts observed in the contemporary world to unify and to liberalise relationships between countries have a considerable impact on a number of areas of social and economic life, including on migration processes. The analysis conducted in this study has identified a number of key trends in the Republic of Belarus at the current stage of development. Despite changes in the structure and directions of migration flows, CIS countries, particularly the Russian Federation, remain strategic partners of the Republic of Belarus in this sector, which is attributed to the historical relations between these countries as well as to the foreign policy of Belarus.

Migration flows can be divided into three main groups: economic migration, educational migration and refugees from regions where the political situation is difficult. An increase in economic migration from China should be identified within common business projects carried out in Belarus.

Income difference is the main reason for citizens emigrating. Over 77% of people leaving the country are of working age, which indicates that for the majority of them it is economic migration. This resulted in an increase in the number of Belorussian emigrants being interested in developed countries of the European Union, Israel and the USA. In terms of this parameter, Poland is ranked first among the European countries and fourth in general, which can also be attributed to the historical, geographic and cultural closeness of these countries.

In recent years, highly qualified professionals have tended to emigrate. Approximately 40% of emigrants are university graduates. It is partly a consequence for the demand for Belorussian IT professionals in the European labour market. It has also been found that the official statistics concerning people leaving Belarus do not reflect reality because not all emigrants are registered by the relevant authorities.

It is important for the Republic of Belarus to take a number of social and economic policy measures that will allow for a positive economic effect through moderate labour migration and the retention of highly qualified professionals.

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