

Foreword

Emigrants are increasingly seen as a key resource to support long-term economic growth in their countries of origin, not only providing remittances but contributing to development through investment, exchange, and intensification of networks. The worldwide stock of migrants has grown to comprise 3% of the world population, accounting for more than 232 million people in 2013. The notion of “diaspora” often includes descendants of migrants and more generally persons who maintain ties of some kind with a specific country of origin in relation to their migration background. This makes a broad pool of resources on which countries can draw.

How to gain from emigration is a pressing question in countries which are undergoing large emigration. The Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, are a prime example of countries where recent emigration has drawn the attention of policy makers looking to mitigate potential negative impacts of the departure of young and skilled emigrants as well as to support economic development. The latter two countries in particular saw outflows rise after accession to the European Union and peak during the severe recession in which began in 2008. These outflows, which have disproportionately involved young people, exacerbate a demographic situation in which Baltic countries face a rapidly ageing population and receive few immigrants themselves.

This publication underlines how the diasporas of each Baltic countries is far from homogeneous, consisting of individuals with different emigration histories, expectations, skills, degrees of attachment to the country of origin and of integration in the destination country. Designing policies which respond to such a heterogeneous and rapidly changing group is particularly challenging. It requires, as a first step, to have a sufficiently detailed and accurate picture of population groups in question, as well as an assessment of future labour market and skills needs. This is a prerequisite for providing them with more specific and targeted information on economic opportunities.

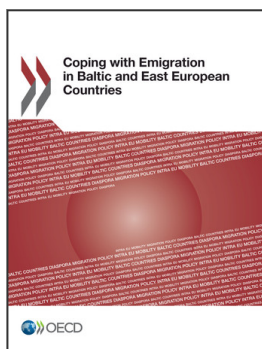
To shed more light on these issues, the OECD co-organised, with the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on 17 December 2012 a conference on the economic impact of emigration, exploring the challenges and policy implications of emigration in the Baltic countries. This was the first time that policy makers in the region came together to discuss the evidence on emigration and its impact, and to exchange their experience with representatives of OECD countries with longer experience of emigration and diaspora relations.

This publication compiles the material developed and discussed at the joint seminar. It takes stock of the current knowledge of emigration from Central and Eastern Europe, including the characteristics of past and present emigrants, their tendency to return or to remain abroad, and the economic impact of this movement on the origin country. It is well known that remittances from emigrants may act as a buffer during a recession in origin countries, but there are other effects on the labour market which are more ambiguous, including changes in the skill composition.

The publication also identifies policy instruments which have been put in place in OECD and other countries to engage diasporas. This appears particularly important, as recent emigrants are not all likely to return to the Baltic countries, and patriotism alone does not seem to be sufficient to keep ties. Even when migrants do not return to start businesses or put their knowledge to work in their origin country, there are still other means to keep them engaged, financially, scientifically or in entrepreneurial networks.

It was clear from the participants in the conference that there is no single institutional recipe for engaging diasporas and benefiting from emigration, but these countries have taken important steps to ensure that their citizens abroad are considered in policy developments at home.

It is our hope that this publication will contribute to a better understanding of the impact of emigration on countries of origin, and to help structure policies to increase positive impact and cushion any negative impact.



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