

Chapter 12

Return Migration Process in Policy and Practice



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12.1 Introduction

The return process to Latvia after a life spent in emigration is not a theme that has been examined in Latvia much until recently within research into migration processes. The need to improve collaboration with the Latvian diaspora, as well as to encourage and support the return of Latvian emigrants to Latvia has become an issue in Latvian policy during the last 10 years. As noted by several authors, the state's position on return migration and diaspora policy depends on perceptions of emigration (Boccagni 2011; Delano and Gamlen 2015; Sinatti 2015). Latvian diaspora work unfolded at a time when political rhetoric shifted from talk of 'betrayal' or 'ignorance' to emphasise that the diaspora is a part of the Latvian cultural nation (Dzenovska 2015). Although discussions on return migration policy in Latvia date back to 2008, there is a shortage of studies evaluating return migration policy from the perspective of returnees in Latvia. At the same time, other countries have analysed their return migration processes and conducted studies addressing their policies and programmes for return migration with those they target.

Over the past 10 years one of the most influential return migration projects in Europe has been the Re-turn project. Involving seven European countries (Germany, Austria, Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia), it aimed to push the topic of return migration onto the political agenda in Central European regions. The project resulted in a number of publications (among them, Nadler et al. 2016) which added to the existing literature on return migration in various other parts of the world, which includes Boccagni (2011), Cassarino (2008), Sinatti (2015), and Tejada et al. (2016).

Return migration studies suggest that 'returning' should be viewed as a part of the migration cycle, in that the willingness to return relates to the reasons for

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emigration in the first place and the subsequent experiences of a migrant in the host country. Cassarino (2008) suggests a three-stage approach for analysing return migration and re-integration into the country of origin. Stage one covers the pre-migration conditions; stage two looks at the migration experience and stage three analyses the migrant's conditions post-return.

A study of the return intentions of Latvian immigrants living abroad (Krisjane et al. 2016) has adopted this framework. Return migration is not viewed as the end of the migration sequence but rather as a precursor of circular migration (Cassarino 2004; Dustmann 2000; King 2012). It corresponds to observations that much contemporary migration is temporary (Dustmann et al. 2011; Engbersen and Snel 2013). However, one of the main trends revealed in the study is that respondents whose migration behaviour corresponded with circular migration are less inclined to return (Krisjane et al. 2016, p. 234).

Our study into the concept of return migration has been influenced by King (2000), whose definition of return migration is that it is 'the process whereby people return to their country of origin after a significant life period in another country'. Although we acknowledge that return migration may be embedded in a cyclical process of repeat migrations, in this study we focus on cases where return migration is perceived as permanent and that the returning migrants intend to live in Latvia permanently. We define 'return migrants' in our study as those who:

1. Have returned after living outside Latvia for at least 2 years;
2. Have lived in Latvia for a period of at least 2 years, and;
3. Consider their return permanent.

Bearing in mind the findings on return migration from other countries, this chapter describes return migration policy measures developed by Latvia's public authorities and evaluates these policies through the experiences and perspectives of return migrants. The article seeks to determine how, if at all, national policy has motivated emigrants from Latvia to return to their homeland and to identify which of the support measures offered are important to them. More specifically the main research questions of the chapter are:

1. What is 'return migration policy' in Latvia?
2. What is the response among Latvian migrants to this return migration policy?
3. What are the reasons for return for Latvian emigrants?
4. What theoretical models are manifested in the return migration of Latvian migrants?

To answer these questions, this article examines the main policy document of Latvian return migration, the *Return migration support action plan for 2013–2016*, to analyse the return policy-making process, the reasons for the initiation of this policy and its social and economic context.

Furthermore, based on the data from in-depth interviews with returnees, analysis will be conducted of their experiences of returning and their assessment of return migration support activities. The most significant reasons for return are outlined in

the following section, and return models identified in the theoretical literature in the context of stories by Latvian returnees are assessed in the conclusion.

Several models explaining the return processes common in the theoretical literature have been examined prior to the analysis of empirical data gathered in the research. It is important to note that all the models of return defined in the theoretical literature and examined in this article refer to situations where return is voluntary. There are cases of ‘forced return’ but this article does not examine them as its principal focus is on voluntary decisions to return to Latvia.

12.2 Theoretical Models of Return

Studies of migration processes that refer to a return to the country of origin started in the social sciences during the 1980s. There were some separate studies of return migration before that, but it wasn’t until the 1980s that studies of return migration were of a high enough academic standard to be included in debates alongside other academically scientific studies (Cassarino 2004).

One of the early theories that examined the phenomenon of return is neoclassical economics. It is based on the assumption that the main reasons for migration are the differences in the standard of living, including levels of salaries, in the host country and the country of origin. Here, the migrant is seen as a rational being that wishes to increase his income. Return migration is therefore examined as a failure of the planned migration, because the aim of getting a higher income has not been achieved (Todaro 1969).

Another course of economic theory – the new economics of labour migration or NELM – examines return migration as a part of the migration process and considers that in many cases a return is previously foreseen and planned; it is a calculated strategy. In a successful migration experience the individual obtains the planned financial or symbolic resources, like capital, savings, education, experience, knowledge or contacts and consequently returns to the country of origin (Stark 1991). Both economic theories mentioned are much criticised in the literature of social sciences because they ignore various important factors of context, both of the host country and the country of origin and do not deal with non-economic reasons of return migration. The dimension of success or failure is not the only one that is significant in making a decision about returning (Cassarino 2004, p. 4).

The approach of structuralism, when explaining the return process, attaches great importance to the factors of context in both the host country and the country of origin. A representative of this approach, Francesco Cerase (1974), distinguishes four different types of social factors influencing migrants to return home:

1. Return due to the failure to integrate. The decision to return is taken because the migrant has not succeeded in integrating into the society of the host country;
2. Conservative return. The planned objectives are achieved in the host country and so the migrant returns to his country of origin. However, his return does not

essentially change his situation within the social structure or cause innovations within society. The accrued resources are used for individual or family needs without an emphasis on development;

3. Return of pensioners. The elderly return to their country of origin with the aim of spending their old age in their native land;
4. Innovative return. These are migrants who return and are ready to use their accrued means and knowledge to start a new business or to implement other new plans in their country of origin.

It must be noted also that many authors acknowledge that the main motives for migrants returning to their country of origin are mostly non-economic. The main reasons for return are emotional. The most important among them are a sense of belonging to the places or country of origin, homesickness, or a return due to social bonds with relatives who have stayed in the native land. It is very rare that the economics of the country of origin develop so much that it offers an overall better standard of living than the host country (Markowitz and Stefansson 2004; Piotrowski and Tong 2010; Sussman 2010).

In an analysis of return processes, the planned duration and aims of the emigration are an essential feature. Gmelch (1980) identifies two basic features that are closely connected with the expectations of returnees before emigration: their planned duration in the host country and their reasons for return.

Gmelch (1980, p. 138) has established a typology of returnees, proposing three distinct types:

1. Returnees who planned a short migration and for whom return is connected to achieving emigration targets;
2. Returnees who planned a lasting and continuous migration but were forced to return due to external factors;
3. Returnees who planned a lasting and continuous migration but decided to return because they could not integrate into the host country or felt a strong bond with the country of origin.

Another theoretical course – the transnationalism approach – emphasises that a migrant's return to the country of origin does not necessarily mean the end of the migration cycle. Firstly, repeated migration is widespread nowadays. Secondly, 'back and forth migration' can be seen more and more often, related to the professional activities of the migrants and the regular and close cross-border contacts characteristic to it (Portes et al. 1999). Migrants maintain economic, social and political networks in several societies. The return of transnationals to their country of origin is greatly influenced by their identity and their attraction to their native land, to the lifestyle, or both. The return takes place when migrants have accrued sufficient resources – maybe financial, perhaps of human and social capital – and when the situation and context in the country of origin is favourable enough for maintaining mobility. In this model, a physical return to the native land does not mean that professional activities are also transferred. On the contrary, the migrant maintains regular and close cross-border contacts.

According to the theoretical framework on return migration policy-making, it has been stressed that in many countries return migration policy is initiated first in situations when emigration numbers increase significantly and the flow of human resources becomes a problem. The solving of this human resource problem requires the intervention of the state (Kacnarczyk and Lesinska 2012). Secondly, return migration is initiated in situations when the return of people to their country of origin is being considered as a solution to demographic problems or problems concerning the lack of a work force, and the country needs to motivate people to return. In this case, national policy may be made ‘active’ to stimulate and support the return flow – or ‘passive/reactive’ as a reaction to the consequences of emigration. The target group of these *reactive* policies is the actual returnees, with the aim of promoting the reintegration of this group into society after their return home. However, with policies that *promote* return the target group is the *potential* returnees, who are still living away. The purpose of the policy is to encourage them to return, increasing the benefits of return migration for returnees, which would include factors such as social, demographic, economic and financial capital (Kacnarczyk and Lesinska 2012, p. 29).

The approaches and theoretical models outlined above, namely, neoclassical economics model, NELM, structuralism approach and transnationalism approach, serve as a basis for the following analysis of the data relating to return models of Latvian migrants. We will identify these models where they appear and offer explanations for patterns emerging that do not fit these theoretical models.

12.3 Data and Methods

In order to understand the motivation and experiences of those returning to Latvia, as well as how this reality related to official return migration policy, policy documents were analysed and 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with Latvian returnees. They were drawn from within various groups of age and social status, who had left Latvia within a period from 1991 to 2011. The analysis of documents and in-depth interviews with returnees were supplemented by an analysis of the survey data of Latvian emigrants from *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey.

The main method of obtaining data in the research was in-depth partly structured interviews with returnees, who had returned to Latvia following a period spent in emigration. The average age of the returnees interviewed was 32.5 years: the youngest respondent was 25 years old with the oldest being 47 years old. There were 13 work migrants among the respondents (both highly qualified and averagely or less qualified), 4 students, who had travelled abroad to study, as well as one spouse of a national of another country. Of these respondents, 16 had emigrated to live in Europe (9 in Great Britain) and 2 went to the USA. The majority of interviews (15) were conducted in Latvian, but Russian was spoken in three. The average time spent abroad by returnees was 4.6 years. The longest emigration period among the respondents interviewed was 11 years, while the shortest was 2 years. All interviews were carried out from February to November 2014.

The document analysis is based on policy planning documents concerning returned migration from 2008 to 2015, with the focus on the *Return migration support action plan for 2013–2016* (The Cabinet of Ministers instruction no. 356 2013). The eight courses of practical action included in the *Return migration support plan* have also been discussed with returnees during the in-depth interviews.

The quantitative survey of Latvian emigrants is used to characterise the level of awareness of emigrants about the *Return migration support action plan for 2013–2016*. The quantitative survey of Latvian emigrants *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey was organized in a period from August to October 2014. A total of 14,048 Latvians living abroad and Latvian nationals from 118 countries participated in it. Weighted data representing Latvian nationals in emigration was used in the analysis. Data from the OECD, Eurostat, the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and Central Statistical Office of Great Britain and multiple imputation have been applied in weighing procedure. For more details on the survey methodology and data set see Mieriņa in this volume.

12.4 Findings

12.4.1 *The Process of Return Migration Policy Making*

Return migration policymaking in Latvia dates back initially to 2008, when the Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration Affairs prepared a draft report on the action required to promote the return to Latvia of Latvian residents who left in search of a job (ĪUMSILS 2008). It is stated in the highest-level national development planning documents (Saeima 2010, 2012) that for the purposes of return migration policy it is necessary to promote the return to Latvia of residents who have left, and to suspend new emigration flows. Due to the economic crisis and the structural reforms of the public authorities that followed it, the issue of the migration of the population lost its topicality – as did ways of dealing with its related problems. The intensity of emigration flows increased significantly in the years that followed. Policymakers gradually addressed these problems in 2011, when long-term forecasts of labour development were prepared based on demographic forecasts and analysis of data on migration flow. The development of the Return migration support plan in Latvia was initiated in 2012 on the initiative of the Ministry of Economics. The information report *On proposals for return migration support activities* (Ministry of Economics 2013) explains that insufficient labour supply is one of the main arguments for drafting a return policy that will promote the return of Latvian residents who have left, in order to reduce the need for immigration from other countries. Immigration is the other argument for a policy encouraging leavers to return. The document acknowledges that the mobility of foreign labour is unavoidable so therefore it is important for Latvia to control this flow, preferring instead those people who have previously lived in Latvia. Finally, one

separate aspect of return migration policy is the promotion of the contribution of the diaspora to the Latvian economy: not however in connection with money transfers to Latvia but instead the development of entrepreneurship and export. The contribution of the diaspora to overall Latvian growth in the context of return migration policy thereby becomes a factor encouraging return. The objective of the Return migration support plan is defined as ‘to determine particular support activities for those Latvian nationals who are living abroad and their family members, who consider the opportunity or have decided to return and work in Latvia or wish to establish their own company and develop business bonds with Latvia’ (The Cabinet of Ministers instruction no. 356 2013). The developers of the *Return migration support action plan* also positioned it publicly as a support policy and to enable practical help for people who have left Latvia and are either willing to return or have already decided to.

There are eight courses of practical action included in the Return migration support plan. Two of them can be defined as information support. The first is designed to ensure the provision of co-ordinated assistance with information on various issues related to a return. The second is to make bilateral information about the labour market available, involving both employers and employees. The Return migration support plan includes a separate scheme to promote employment that obliges public authorities to ensure those living abroad are able to use some means of virtual communication in the selection process of employees. Special attention is directed towards attracting highly qualified specialists, with the aim of encouraging young people who have studied at foreign universities to return to Latvia. Generating and developing economic partnerships with the diaspora is planned too, as well as supporting the civic activities of the diaspora and distributing information about opportunities for returning to Latvia. Measures to provide support so all family members of returnees can learn the Latvian language after arrival in Latvia are also factored into the plan, as well as developing and extending the support that already exists for schoolchildren to return and integrate into Latvian schools, as well as for their parents. Finally, the eighth course of action aims to extend the range of people who have returned to Latvia and are entitled to the status of *Repatriate*¹ as well as the financial assistance that goes with it.

From this analysis of Latvian policy documents, return migration policy can be said to address both *potential* returnees by stimulating their return, and *actual* returnees by helping them normalise their life in Latvia more successfully once they are back. The *Return migration support action plan* assigns great importance to the diaspora as well, thereby including people who most probably will not return to Latvia to live there permanently.

¹According to the Repatriation Law (Saeima 1995), a repatriate is a person who on his/her own volition makes a permanent move to the Republic of Latvia and if: (a) he/she is a citizen of Latvia (registered in the Population Register as a citizen of Latvia and who has received a Latvian citizen's passport); or (b) one of his/her parents or grandparents is a Latvian or a Liv and his/her Latvian or Livonian descent can be proved by documentation.

12.4.2 *Return Experience in the Context of Return Migration Policy*

The practical homecoming of returnees has been analysed alongside an assessment of support activities defined by the *Return migration support action plan*. The assessments of return policy and corresponding opinions about it, are based on the experience of returnees. Attention has been paid to those aspects of return that are directly connected to the experience of participants in the research, such as job searches, the integration of children at school, support for the learning of the Latvian language and housing issues.

Data from *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey indicate that 61% of those surveyed have not heard anything about the *Return migration support action plan*. Another 30% have heard of it but do not know exactly what it provides while just 9% were informed about the plan and its provisions.

The return intentions of Latvian emigrants were not related to their awareness of the Return migration support plan. Sixteen percent of all emigrants were planning to return within the next 5 years and only 7% of them were aware of the plan and know what it entails. Thirty percent of Latvian emigrants acknowledged that they did not intend to return to Latvia, with 12% of those emigrants being familiar with the *Return migration support action plan*.

It should be noted that those most familiar with the *Return migration support action plan* were emigrants aged 35–54 years. In this age group, 15% were aware of the plan and knew the kind of support measures available to them, while in the age group 15–24 years only 3% were.

During their in-depth interviews the majority of the return migrants acknowledged that they were very poorly informed about the *Return migration support action plan*. They recognised that they had heard something about it and vaguely read something about it, but could hardly remember where or any substantive aspects of the plan. When asked which kind of state support would be necessary and important to people either actually returning or planning to return, they mentioned the following aspects:

1. Support regarding employment, such as help finding work;
2. Raising the level of the minimum salary until it allows basic human needs to be met;
3. Provision of housing for the first 6 months of return;
4. Social assistance for provision of children's needs;
5. Support for pupils integrating back into the Latvian educational system.

Only some, not all, of these aspects have been included in the *Return migration support action plan*.

When interviewed about the process of return, the main focus for returnees was the theme of employment. Not so much, however, on support finding a job, but concentrating more on overall economic growth in Latvia as a pre-condition for

promoting return. Economic growth as a theme was covered via elements such as minimum salary, stability of work, job creation, the operation of major companies in Latvia and opportunities to develop one's own business. Essentially, people talked about the opportunity of ensuring their material welfare as a way of guaranteeing their return. One woman who returned from Ireland in 2011, Paula, now 30 years old, explains:

Job. Maybe we could start by stopping destroying all the big companies. [...] let them pay the minimum [salaries], but at least let those people who work here have that job. Let us keep what has remained here in Latvia. [...] From my minimum salary I could afford to maintain, for example, a car, an apartment, to travel to Latvia, to shop, to dress myself, to feed myself, to buy presents and to send them. I could do that from the minimum salary there. What is possible from the minimum salary here? Nothing. You cannot even pay [the rent] for the apartment. Therefore my point is: what can we dream about here? Why should people return? [...] There are many people who want to return if there was a job, but nobody is going to come working for minimum salary. No.

This excerpt illustrates an essential dimension of the way the target group views a return home. One can see that not only is practical support expected from the return migration policy, but this policy is also expected to promote that return, by fostering the overall – and mainly economic – development of the country.

The *Return migration support action plan* provides mainly information support for those looking for a job. The practical experience of returnees shows that models for finding work in Latvia vary a great deal and are determined by particular individual factors. Firstly, opportunities to find jobs in Latvia are determined by the requirements of the individual: the type of work, their remuneration and location. Secondly, education and experience are important factors. Several highly educated specialists have found they can be based in Latvia but work officially in some other country at the same time. Such opportunities are determined greatly by the specific skills of the particular professional. For example IT specialists or consultants in certain industries have more opportunities to work remotely, but these opportunities do not make themselves and a lot of effort can be required to live like that. Experience and contacts acquired abroad are especially important in this model and this is usually possible only for high-level professionals in certain industries.

The returnees interviewed for this research discussed their techniques for finding a job. One popular method was to contact previous employers at their place of work prior to emigration. Social contacts and acquaintances of friends and family played a significant role in looking for and finding a job, as the experience of 26 year old Alla suggests. She returned from the USA in 2014:

[I found a job] via acquaintances; via acquaintances of Mum. Not by myself, unfortunately. Such a job is difficult to find myself. It seems to me that in general many find jobs here through acquaintances in Latvia. If you don't know anyone then most probably you are not going to find anything.

Several returnees interviewed acknowledged that they did use various internet job sites to search for vacancies while in the host country, but the actual finding of

a job once home happened through social networks and previous work experience. The improvement of online job sites is one of the provisions of the *Return migration support action plan*, and while respondents assessed that support positively it was not so much for themselves but for other emigrants from Latvia, for whom they felt a unified source of information on work opportunities in Latvia would be useful.

One important area of support in the *Return migration support action plan* which stood out for returnees was help for children and their parents integrating back into Latvian schools. Returnees described the difficulties they encountered, such as complications when applying to register their children at schools in Latvia. The majority of returnees already knew their children were not going to get into kindergartens financed by municipalities because the children were not registered in time, but were indignant about facing problems getting their children into the first grade in schools in certain places. Emma, 30 years old, who returned from Great Britain in 2013, recalls:

It was difficult for us to get the children into school: that took me aback. How can it be? In the first grade! How many schools do we have [in the city]? They can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and they tell us that there are no places in any of them. No places? How can that be? Initially my sister went to find out. She went to all the schools and was told that you had to apply for children going into the first grade in February. [...] I called the director and they found a place. Because there are two [daughters], I understand, but it appeared incomprehensible to me that there are not [any places]. How can one say there are no places like that?

Secondly, parents particularly stressed the need for special support for learning the Latvian language. Drawing on their own experience, only a few children attended Latvian schools in the host country at weekends and had very little communication in Latvian with children the same age with regard to their social and psychological adaptation to a school in Latvia. When entering the first grade or later, the children of returnees initially have problems with the Latvian language, because preparation for school at kindergarten age has taken place in another language while abroad. Judging from their own experience, several returnees stressed that any plans to return should be in time for children to start school in the first grade, because re-integration in school later is much more difficult and more complicated for the child. Catherine, a 38 year old who returned from Ireland in 2011, said:

I think if parents are thinking about their children and wondering whether to return, then they should return so they can start learning from the first grade, because later it will be harder for them, when they are already eight or nine or ten, then they have to start learning here all over again in Latvian. It seems to me that is even more traumatic for a child.

When considering difficulties that children have encountered returning to Latvian schools, especially in the senior grades, returnees also mentioned differences between the educational programmes of the host country and Latvia and insufficient support for in-depth and individual studies of subjects, especially if those subjects were not included in the study programme of the host country.

The majority of returnees interviewed saw support for learning the Latvian language or improving knowledge of it in a positive light. Respondents separated their

needs regarding brushing up or improving their Latvian language skills from the help needed to teach Latvian to the families of returnees – that is, partners, spouses and children – whose native language is not Latvian. Language support for the families of returnees was assessed very positively, emphasising that language can be a hindrance for a family considering moving to Latvia.

The in-depth interviews with emigrants indicate that Latvian nationals who have families with host country nationals who are considered foreigners in the Latvian community are significantly less likely to consider returning or moving to live in Latvia. When speaking about themselves, most said they didn't need help with the language. One respondent said he was attending private Latvian lessons to improve his language skills after 7 years spent abroad. This experience may indicate that native language speakers who return will have varying needs. If respondents do not feel the need for such support (especially those who have spent a comparatively short time in emigration, such as up to 5 years), then it might be important both for Latvian children born abroad and for family members from other countries.

One form of support that is not included in the *Return migration support action plan* is finding housing in Latvia after returning. According to the results of the in-depth interviews this is a very important issue for the target group of the policy.

For some returnees it did not cause any problems because their return had been planned beforehand or the emigration had been planned for a definite term, so they kept somewhere to live in Latvia. Those who faced difficulties with housing had sold their properties in Latvia, or kept their homes in Latvia but found a job in another area; for example, living in a house in the countryside while their new job was in Riga.

Usually the solution was to rent an apartment but returnees point out that housing policy in Latvia is not friendly to 'incomers'. Municipalities do not offer apartments for rent as there are long queues for them, or they offer poor quality apartments where tenants must take responsibility for repairs in order to live there. There are also returnees who have purposely saved money to buy a house in Latvia when they come back. One example is 29 year old Una, who returned from Norway in 2013:

Unfortunately my husband's family house was sold, because his mother also moved to live abroad and sold that country house and farm. We did not have a place to return to. We lived for a while at my mum's and in a friend's house in the country. We searched for three months to find a house in Latvia, looking through the adverts and driving around through all the regions every week in order to decide which region we liked. We simply followed up every advertisement and went there one by one, watching, searching. In January we found this place where we are currently living and bought a small country farm with four hectares and a little house, and we moved straight away to our new farm.

If one can find a house, the moving process itself is not complicated. Many choose to bring back all their belongings from the host country. That can be done easily using the network of transport vans that has spread throughout Europe, especially if moving to Latvia from England or Ireland. Difficulties are mostly due to the lack of information about various administrative issues, and the returnees interviewed had mixed feelings about the information provided by the Return migration support plan. When considering what might be regarded as 'essential information'

for returnees, most wanted information relating to their re-integration into society, which can be broken down into the following areas:

1. An essential area is social protection. Social guarantees worry some returnees, especially those in average or low qualified work.
2. There was much uncertainty on tax issues, such as changes in tax rates, methods of payment, the rules on inheritance tax, returning overpaid tax, or ways to transfer from one country's tax system to another without being taxed twice? Returnees said they found their own answers to these questions by asking acquaintances who had experienced similar problems on their return, or they found people who could advise them.

Other areas causing concern for returnees were housing and getting children into the education system discussed earlier in this chapter.

Each re-integration process is different but many returnees observed that they felt like they hadn't left at all, because when they did return they felt like they had come back home to their own environment. Una, who returned from Norway, said:

We want to live in Latvia and finally we have found our place. Those six years we were away were full of never-ending questions for us about where we want to be, what we want to do. All the time there was a feeling that we were not in the right place: not in Norway, Spain, or Asia. It's only since we have found this house in Latvia – our house in the countryside – that we have a feeling we are finally where we are supposed to be, and that we can do what we like.

The opportunity to live in one's native country, speak in one's own native language and live in an environment one is accustomed to provides a feeling of freedom and self-confidence, but that has been heightened by the experience of life in other countries. However, for some returnees, re-integration did not take place so quickly. Paula, who is 30 and returned from Ireland in 2011 said she needed around 18 months to re-integrate:

Because you sit there, integrate and get accustomed to that system and how everything goes on there. It took me one and a half years before I got acclimatised here again. That's after five years away. If a person wants to return after ten years, after fifteen years, then I think that's terribly difficult. Very, very difficult.

When asked to assess the return migration support activities overall, research participants suggested that instead of promoting the return of people, efforts and resources should be put into keeping the existing human capital in Latvia, rather than allowing it to flow away to other countries.

A second factor mentioned was that an improvement in the economic situation and a rise in the overall welfare level of the country would have a bearing on the mass return of emigrants, coupled with tougher laws to crack down on bribery and corruption, and thus dispel the impression that results can be achieved through influence. There is also a sense that some policies are short-term solutions to particular and specific problems, like that of return migration. While this is presented as a significant policy, some returnees consider it under-funded, symbolic and not sufficiently developed to be effective.

Returnees interviewed were sceptical about whether the re-emigration policy would promote a process of return. For some, deciding whether to return to Latvia or stay in the host country was not determined by the support provided by the state, but by their own decision, reached independently. One example came from 30 year old Emma, who returned from Great Britain in 2013:

I didn't go home because of the plan. Let's be realistic. There's nothing so tempting that I would go home because of the plan. It all depends on people themselves. I went home with the aim of getting a job: I will live here and everything will be fine for me. [...] I think it's good to have the plan and it's an incentive for some people but my personal thoughts are that if a person wants to go home, they will go home without that plan. But the government has to do some work to deal with the problems that exist.

Respondents do not deny the need for a return migration support plan, because that demonstrates the state is at least prepared to help promote return migration. Thus – if nothing else – the return migration plan has a symbolic meaning. Nils, who is aged 27 and returned from Great Britain in 2011, said:

I have heard something about our government being interested in getting people abroad to return. To interest them in returning. That's what I've heard. [...] This issue has been discussed several times when I have been living in Latvia during the last few years. Considering the number of our residents, it's important for Latvia that people from abroad come back.

12.4.3 Reasons for Returning to Latvia

Homesickness is a characteristic common to returnees; one reason why they returned. It is one of the crucial aspects affecting a decision on return for both those who went to study abroad and gain new experience and those who emigrated because of the economic situation. Both groups of leavers emphasise a very strong wish 'to return home' or 'to their own environment' but – like Nils who returned from Great Britain – this feeling comes only when they have spent several years outside Latvia:

I decided to follow my inner feeling and intuition to return home. By following my intuition, under certain conditions I did not feel like staying in England anymore. I wanted to return to Latvia. In the same way I wanted to go to England, I wanted to return home.

The expression most often used by returnees in their interviews is 'to return home', but some, when describing it, speak about a place where a person can feel comfortable with themselves, in their own environment, where they can be themselves without any pretence or adaptation to others. Others stress the positive feeling of being in their native land and a sense of belonging, as well as that it is easier for them to live in Latvia, because, despite the economic difficulties and low wages, everything there is known and clear. Una, who came back from Norway, said:

I wanted that feeling of my native land, that feeling of belonging; that you know everything, where you have friends, where you have family. Because it is difficult to fit in there [in Norway] and get accustomed to life there. It is easier to live here and to communicate, to build your life here.

Homesickness often relates to longing for Latvian nature and weather conditions. Returnees especially mention the weather when they have lived for several years somewhere abroad, for example in Ireland or England. There, the respondents say, there are not four seasons as in Latvia, but only two – autumn and spring. There is no hot summer, when it is possible to swim in the sea, and there is no real winter either, with deep snow and temperatures well below freezing: in other words, the weather is not so extreme. One characteristic of the weather in Ireland or England that is mentioned often and which has left a lasting impression on returnees is rain. Catherine, 38 years old, who returned from Ireland in 2011, explains:

One reason I would not like to live there [in Ireland] for a long time or all my life is the weather. Awful, awful. When you go there for the first year, it's cool: minus one degree in winter is the lowest temperature. You can walk to work and back dressed in a jacket all year long. I enjoyed it for the first winter, when it was not cold, but then, when there is neither summer nor winter for years, but everlasting autumn and wind and rain... the sun rarely shines even on the best of days, then it gets so boring... It drives you into depression.

Returnees who lived in other countries, such as Switzerland or Norway, also missed Latvian nature. One of the female respondents acknowledged that nature in Switzerland is very beautiful but after she had lived there for a long time, she realised that it was a 'foreign beauty' and that Latvian nature was closer to her heart. Another participant, Una, who returned from Norway, complained about weather conditions there because her family wanted to grow food, but the conditions for gardening in Norway were very different to those in Latvia:

The first was the climate. We were not happy with the terrible cold and wet. We wanted to live in a country environment and grow everything ourselves, as much as possible, but nothing really came of that. Nothing grew there. It was too wet and there was no sun, and it was always cold for us ... such a lack of sun.

If homesickness and longing for Latvian nature are considered essential emotional background factors encouraging return, then family relations and a definite family situation are mainly the catalyst for, or a decisive factor in, making the decision to return to Latvia. These family situations can be very different. Firstly, a family has to be willing to be based in Latvia or a partner has to be willing to return. Secondly, many returnees evaluate their relationship with their parents while living abroad, and decide they would like to spend more time with them while they are alive. Their parents may be old or sick and need greater support. For many returnees, their decision to move back to Latvia was strongly influenced by a third factor: care for their children, especially in cases when children reaching their teenage years are not well adapted in the host country and are willing to return to Latvia. However, the decision to return in this scenario is most often connected either with the children starting school or with a baby being expected in the family and the parents wishing it to be born in Latvia. Martha, who is 34 years old and returned from Great Britain in 2010, said:

Firstly, I never liked living there. If the welfare was better here then many would return. At least, there is a big circle of friends of mine who would return. I returned because I did not want to live in London with a child at all. It simply seemed like a nightmare for me. [...] I

decided I had better put aside material values, and here is the countryside: we have the seaside five minutes' walk away, country life, friends, it is more free here. Yes, maybe those material values are not here, but on a domestic level, it seems to me that you can give more to your child.

Parents noticed their children assimilating into the local environment as soon as they went to the kindergarten or preparatory schools abroad. When living in England or Ireland, Latvian children switched to English when talking to each other because it was more convenient for them. There were parents who, aware of this assimilation of their children, took the decision that they wanted their children to be living in Latvia and to attend Latvian schools in order not to lose their Latvian-ness. One of them was 30 year old Emma who returned from Great Britain in 2013:

My girls turned English. They were four years old, and for little children the language changed very fast... , that is it; they do not know elementary words in Latvian any more. Even with us having a rule that we talk Latvian at home, when playing, they talked only in English. [...] They went to school, and everything went on in English for them.

Parents were aware that it would be more complicated to return once studies started outside Latvia. In the opinion of the parents, it would be significantly more difficult to integrate into a school in Latvia, especially because of the differences between the educational systems and study programmes at home and abroad.

Homesickness also operated on the level of language and the ability to speak in one's native tongue, where it's possible to express opinions and understand people better, for example, when health or medical issues have to be discussed, or in forming close social relationships. The language barrier and a lack of Latvians speaking the same tongue does not allow such bonds to be established. These concerns were expressed by Una, who returned from Norway in 2013:

We knew the language very well and we could communicate freely, but as soon as there was some more philosophical theme, the vocabulary was missing at once. However, in Latvia it is possible to establish very deep relationships with people exactly because of the language, because you can express yourself on complicated matters. The thing that was missing was that we could never express ourselves. You cannot make friendships with people [without that].

In their stories about experiences of emigration in Europe, returnees admit that if they did not have common life experiences and a deep knowledge of the national culture it was difficult to integrate within the society in European countries and make close friends there. Attitudes towards immigrants can be very positive and friendly, yet the main barrier is a lack of common experience and the unfamiliarity of local culture. This was encountered by 47 year old Charles, who returned from Norway in 2013:

They [Norwegians] are very open, very positive, open-minded. [...] Other matters cannot be overcome. They have another past, another language, another culture that you do not know. I do not know, do not understand, will never understand, who their Raimonds Pauls is [a popular Latvian composer] or what their *Limousine the Colour of Midsummer Night* [a popular Latvian movie] is. You watch and do not understand. It needs time. It needs decades.

On the one hand, for those Latvian emigrants who left in their childhood or as teenagers, it is easier to integrate because friendship circles are formed in youth. It is more difficult for an emigrant who has arrived in a country after the age of 30 to find friends because his colleagues have already established a circle of friends. On the other hand, young people are returning to Latvia who went abroad to study then realised their circle of friends was not forming as they would like. The cultural differences mean they struggle to enjoy their social life while abroad.

Two returnees, Una and Toms, are notable because they did not want to feel like foreigners all their life. They initially left Latvia planning to integrate fully in the host country. Una said:

Somehow the feeling emerged that we do not want to always be foreigners, because outside your native land you will never fit in. [...] We were always immigrants, although at the beginning we had planned to integrate and stay there all our lives.

Una and Toms are also notable because they decided to emigrate to escape the disorder in the social and political situation in Latvia at the time rather than for economic reasons. However, they were disappointed with their experiences living in Norway and realised that outside Latvia they would always be foreigners. A similar experience befell was 36 year old Zan, who returned from Switzerland in 2014. She admitted that although she was married to a Swiss man, she had encountered prejudices against Eastern Europeans. That was an important factor in taking the decision for the whole family to re-locate to Latvia:

When I started looking for a job, I realised that Switzerland is a rather nationalistic country. [...] If you do not talk in a fluent Swiss dialect, or are not with their own recognised universities... [...] So the choice was whether I started studying there, or I could work as a cleaner. [...] There are a terrible number of prejudices against 'Oslanders' – Eastern Europeans – and such a very critical attitude. People are very kind and polite, and kind of sincere, but so terribly narrow-minded and biased. [...] All those relationships are superficial. Also among friends. It was very difficult for me to integrate.

Several returnees who had studied in higher education worked in well-paid jobs abroad, but realised while living abroad that it was difficult for them to integrate in the host country in the social-economic sense, because, being immigrants, they were starting from a different position and were without accrued welfare and social contacts. The local specialists knew each other well and recommended each other, but immigrants from Latvia naturally had a significantly narrower circle of acquaintances. In many places a lack of knowledge of the national language can hold their careers back and also prevent them from reaching a certain level of welfare.

Our study shows that the expectations of returnees before emigration varied widely as to the planned duration of their emigration and its targets. There were respondents who had planned to go on a lasting and continuous emigration, building new lives in another country, becoming a long-term resident and integrating into its society. There were also those who did not have clear migration targets and who relied on hope: 'the life [there] will show us how much better it is, and opportunities will come up.' Another category of respondents linked migration with a very par-

ticular task, for example, earning enough to pay debts or to get away for the duration of the economic crisis in Latvia. For them, the logical decision was to return to Latvia when it was over.

In the cases of planned short-term or medium-term migration, it is a characteristic that the emigrant has relatives and property remaining in Latvia, for example, a house or apartment, which needs to be paid for. In these cases, being in the host country is connected only with a job and a purpose: how to earn more money and accrue some means. Part of the income earned is used for the rent or mortgage payments and for maintaining the family in Latvia. The daily expenses are kept as low as possible in order to save as much as possible, while at the same time close contact is maintained with relatives in Latvia. Trips to Latvia are made regularly or relatives are brought out to visit the host country.

Those emigrants who initially planned to stay in another country permanently but have now returned to Latvia fall into two different groups.

There are those who have realised that they over-estimated the potential benefits of emigration, and under-valued the advantages in Latvia. After being confronted with the host country's social, cultural and economic realities they have found that life conditions and opportunities in Latvia are better than in their host country. There was no need for them to emigrate looking for a better life and their illusions have collapsed. For this group the experience of emigration has been a reality check.

Then there are other returnees, who, on assessing their gains and losses, realise that returning to Latvia is a better option than staying in the host country, because the quality of life they can have in Latvia is similar to that in emigration, but they are at home. This involves a like-for-like calculation of quality of life against income. The income abroad may be higher, but so are the costs. Their argument might run: 'If we are no better off, is it worth living away from Latvia?'

Many returnees have travelled abroad with an open mind, with no definite plans about how long they might stay away or when to return. They admit the experience of migration has caused them to reassess their values repeatedly, leading to the realisation that, for them, non-material values are more important. Several respondents said the experience of migration has been positive and they got what they expected: money and experience. But the career opportunities abroad did not seem so tempting anymore, so they took the decision to return in order to live in Latvia, continuing to work and collaborate with partners they met abroad. They planned to keep receiving a salary, working there formally or rendering services in other countries, and also developing their business or services in Latvia. One example is that of Catherine, 38 years old, who returned from Ireland in 2011:

I felt that I can do a lot in England, that I can work in such a post, take on responsibility. [...] And you realise that you can. You believe in your powers. I don't think I would gain such experience in Latvia. I made money, I paid the loan, I spent money carefully. [...] I felt that I tried everything I wanted to. I got the experience I wanted. I could develop further in this career but it is not development for me. It is only making money, having responsibility; and it became uninteresting and boring for me.

12.4.4 *Models of Return in the Stories of Latvian Returnees*

If the experiences of the returnees interviewed are broken down into several models of return identified in the theoretical literature (discussed earlier), the conclusion must be that the approach of the neoclassical economics model cannot be applied exactly to them. This is when a return takes place due to an unsuccessful migration experience, that is; no opportunity has been found to earn more and have a higher standard of living. Return in this instance is mainly connected directly to a set of non-economic factors. In many cases the experience of migration has brought the realisation that a bigger income in another country does not necessarily mean a higher quality of life. Thus a re-assessment of values takes place.

There are returnees who, having weighed up the pros and cons, material and non-material, decide that returning to Latvia is a better choice than staying abroad. It cannot be said definitely that an unsuccessful migration experience is not a factor for some returnees. A point to consider here is that people who have come back might not want to characterise their migration experience as a failure, and so find reasons to justify their decision. On the contrary, returnees are keener to look at their return as a story of success. In general it is: they have acquired knowledge, experience and self-confidence, learned English, Norwegian or German, paid their debts and saved up some money that can now be invested in a house in Latvia, and so on.

Examining the return process from the classification of the types of returnees identified by Cerase (1974), it should be noted that both ‘conservative’ and ‘innovative’ return can be found in the stories of returnees. One example of innovative return is developing business ideas in Latvia and investing savings into that business. Another is applying knowledge gained abroad to Latvian situations, such as returning to Latvia to work in the hotel business or as a lecturer at a university.

From the approach of structuralism, factors of context appear in several of the stories of returnees as having a significant impact on their decision to return. These may include, for example, returning due to an inability to integrate in the host country because of prejudices and stereotypes there, as well as changes in Latvia’s situation, where the economic crisis eased a little between 2012 and 2014.

Several returnee stories indicate that people had planned to move abroad forever having lost the influence of the typical ‘pull’ factors – their relatives had emigrated as well and properties in Latvia had been sold. But they still returned to Latvia because the longer they lived abroad the more they realised they could not integrate fully into local society in the host country.

Therefore, out of the theoretical models of return identified within the research in the literature the model of the structuralism approach – ‘a return due to an inability to integrate’ – is definitely current in Latvia. However, the interviews that were conducted do not allow a judgement to be made on the other model of the structuralism approach – ‘a return due to ageing’ – that is, of pensioners coming back. This is because there are no returnees of retirement age among those interviewed. The average age of the returnees interviewed was 32.5 years old, with the youngest being 25 years old and the oldest 47 years old.

The current life models established by several of the respondents interviewed can be described as transnational, where – according to the transnationalism approach – a return to the country of origin does not mean the end of the migration cycle, and regular and close contacts are maintained across borders. In addition, professional operations are international or implemented in several countries. For example, one ‘returned’ interviewee went back again to Great Britain following a period of work in Latvia, in order to continue their studies at a higher level, while two other returnees have chosen a model of professional life that, while officially working mainly abroad, allows them to live most of the time in Latvia. Several returnees do not rule out the possibility of leaving Latvia again to live in another country for a period in order to improve themselves if they got a good job offer or opportunity. This is known as ‘open planning for the future.’ On the whole, the interviews with the returnees demonstrate that a transnational lifestyle can be established and maintained in Latvia encouraged significantly by the development of various electronic means of communication, cheap and available air connections and the establishment of transnational social networks.

12.5 Conclusions

An analysis of the development of Latvia’s return migration policy reveals that it emerged initially as an answer to a restrictive immigration policy and to challenges of demographic and employment policy that are connected to expected labour shortages in Latvia in the future. However, the *Return migration support action plan* itself is a set of particular support activities for those people who have already returned to Latvia or have taken the decision to return. Thereby the existing return migration policy consists mainly of support policies, not strategies for development. Its primary objective is not to stimulate the return process but to ensure practical assistance for the re-integration process in Latvia, mainly in labour markets and education. Opinions among the target group of the *Return migration support action plan* provided evidence that led to the conclusion that the plan was seen as a set of activities to facilitate the return of Latvian emigrants. Such an interpretation does not correspond with the objectives of the practical support provided and the aims defined by policymakers. At the same time, the perspective of the target group greatly influenced the critical assessments of the plan.

Those groups directly targeted in return migration policy – people who have returned or are considering returning – are not unequivocal in their assessment of the activities of the plan.

The results of the in-depth interviews lead to the conclusion that the *Return migration support action plan* has not had any importance in influencing decisions about returning. The majority of emigrants were poorly informed about these support activities and, when making decisions, relied on their own resources and opportunities, not the external support.

However, irrespective of this, the experiences of returnees showed that the activities included in the *Return migration support action plan* as a whole corresponded to the needs of the target group. This was especially the case in support for pupils re-integrating into the Latvian educational system, in the provision of access to information on various administrative issues connected with returning, and either learning the Latvian language or getting better at speaking it. One important form of support for the target group that had not been included in the *Return migration support action plan* was assistance with housing issues for the initial return period.

On the whole, the in-depth interviews with returnees showed that people who return to Latvia are diversified. There are differences in the length of time spent abroad, their host country, motivation, plans and expectations when leaving Latvia and their life experience and status while abroad.

The diversity of experience of the returnees allowed the analysis of very different reasons for return and the various dimensions of the return process. However, in this research there are also aspects uniting the returnees. Firstly, all the returnees have maintained Latvian citizenship, and that can be considered as a factor stimulating a return to Latvia. Secondly, most returnees maintained close bonds with Latvia – both emotional and economic – during their entire period of emigration. The majority of respondents had relatives still living in Latvia; many had or still have properties in Latvia and they maintained a strong social network in Latvia through close bonds with relatives and friends. One crucial factor influencing return was the duration of emigration, whether planned as short-term or longer-term. The longer people stayed abroad, the more difficult it was to return. These factors contributed to the decisions they made about returning, as well as facilitating their social and economic adaptation in Latvia after they came back.

An important conclusion that can be reached from the qualitative data gathered in the research is that the main reasons for returning are non-economic. If economic reasons dominate the reasons for leaving – alongside a wish to see the world or get an education – then coming back is connected with homesickness, a desire to spend more time with relatives in Latvia, a longing for Latvian nature, to speak Latvian and to live in the Latvian environment, while also eliminating the risk of non-assimilation for their children in the country they emigrated to. Some participants in this research reported difficulties of integration into the host country as an important reason for return. They did not feel accepted as their own by the local people and did not have close friends, neither was it possible to achieve the levels of income and social status that local people have. Perhaps migrants had solved the financial difficulties that caused them to emigrate originally.

Finally, if we look at the return stories of Latvian returnees from the perspective of the different theoretical models of migrant return based on studies in other countries, we can clearly identify three of them. There are cases of return as a calculated strategy when return is previously foreseen and planned. There are both types of stories among returnees – ‘conservative’ and ‘innovative’. In some cases, the resources gained are used for individual or family needs, for example, paying debts or earning the money for a new house. In other cases, return is innovative as new business is started or there is a carrier development. However, many stories of return

illustrate an inability to integrate into the host society because of status as a ‘migrant’ and the feeling of being a stranger in that particular society. In a few cases, we also observed the return of transnationals, who continued their professional activities at an international level. Preparation for return is made especially if a new business is being developed or a transnational carrier is maintained. However, in almost all cases, return is not spontaneous.

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