LABOUR MIGRATION OF THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS TO LITHUANIA: RECENT TRENDS AND SOCIAL POLICY RESPONSES

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to discuss recent immigration trends, and the policies that have been adopted by the state to facilitate the process of the integration of immigrants and their access to the labour market. The first part of the paper discusses theoretical aspects of migration, and labour migration in particular. The second part of the paper is aimed at disclosing current immigration trends among third-country nationals in Lithuania. Labour migration and the migration policy framework in Lithuania are analysed, as are integration policies. The research results reveal that Lithuania lacks an effective migrant integration policy. The evaluation of the migration policy index allows us to conclude that the policy of the integration of immigrants is the area of migration policy that needs to be improved the most in Lithuania. Lithuania's score is lower than the average MIPEX country score, and together with Latvia it is one of the lowest in Central and East European countries. Lithuania's approach to integration is classified by MIPEX as *equality on paper*. While immigrants enjoy basic rights and protection in Lithuania, they do not enjoy equal opportunities to participate in society.
KEY WORDS: labour migration, third-country nationals, Lithuania, migration policies, integration.

Anotacija

Straipsnio tikslas – aptarti pastarojo laikotarpio imigracijos tendencijas ir migracijos politiką, kurios Lietuva imasi siekiant palengvinti imigrantų integracijos procesą ir jų patekimą į darbo rinką. Pirmoje straipsnio dalyje aptariami teoriniai migracijos ir konkrečiai darbo migracijos aspektai. Antroje dalyje atskleidžiamos dabartinės trečiųjų šalių piliečių imigracijos tendencijos Lietuvoje. Trečioje dalyje analizuojama imigracijos bei integracijos politika. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad Lietuvai trūksta efektyvios migrantų integracijos politikos. Migracijos politikos indekso (MIPEX) vertinimai leidžia daryti išvadą, kad imigrantų integracijos politika yra labiausiai Lietuvoje tobulintina migracijos politikos sritis. Lietuvos balas yra žemesnis už vidutinį MIPEX šalių balą ir kartu su Latvija yra vienas žemiausių įverčių Rytų bei Vidurio Europos šalyse. Lietuvos migrantų integracijos politiką MIPEX priskiria klasteriui lygybė popieriuje, tuo tarpu imigrantai Lietuvoje gali naudotis pagrindinėmis teisėmis ir socialine apsauga, bet neturi lygių galimybių dalyvauti visuomeniniame gyvenime. PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: darbo migracija, trečiųjų šalių piliečiai, Lietuva, migracijos politika, integracija.

Introduction

EU member states are a highly preferred destination for third-country nationals in order to find better living and working conditions (Mcauliffe, Triandafyllidou, 2021). From the beginning of the 2000s to nowadays, Lithuania has been an attractive destination country for economic migrants, from both geographically *close*

(Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) and *distant* (China, Turkey, etc) countries (Žibas, Platačiūtė 2009). The migration flows into the country were rather limited until 2010 and 2011. During the last few years (2015 to 2022), for Lithuania, as for other CEE countries, one of the biggest challenges has been in being a country of immigration. Recent realities, associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, the closure of the border in the Lithuania-Poland-Belarus triangle, and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, have pointed out some challenges that have become very acute with regard to labour migrants: the economic consequences of anti-epidemic restrictions, the issue of strengthening border control, bans on movement, the human dimension of the social protection of foreign workers, countering discrimination, etc (Kulchytska, Kravchuk et al., 2020).

According to reports by the Vilnius Bureau of the IOM, the number of third-country nationals that choose Lithuania as their country of destination is constantly increasing. Following the developments in 2022, the IOM reports that more than 71,000 refugees have arrived in Lithuania from Ukraine. Moreover, in 2022 more than 20,000 citizens of Belarus received a residence permit in Lithuania (European Migration Network, immigration to Lithuania statistics https://123.emn.lt/en//). According to the IOM, 145,000 foreigners currently live in Lithuania, which is more than 5% of the country's population. According to the Department of Migration, applications for temporary residence permits in Lithuania are constantly increasing. As of February 2023, a total of 310 applications for a temporary residence permit in Lithuania were received through the external service provider (1 February 2023). Of the applicant countries, the countries with the highest number of applications are Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, India, etc.

The increasing flow of immigration into the country determines the need for comprehensive integration measures. The formation of an effective policy in the field of migration regulation is of paramount importance for any country that engages in the global migration process. Despite the fact that Lithuania has improved opportunities and security for immigrants over the last few years, it still scores only 37/100 (MIPEX, 2020). Its score is lower than the average MIPEX country score of 49/100, and together with Latvia it is one of the lowest in the Central and East European countries.

According to Eurobarometer (2017), people in Central and East European countries overwhelmingly do not recognise the contribution of immigrants to the country's economic growth. Therefore, an increase in the frequency of cases of racism and xenophobia is observed all over the world, including towards migrant workers (Kulchytska, Kravchuk et al., 2020). Recent sociological research into trends of labour migration by third-country nationals in Lithuania investigated various topics, such as the challenges and opportunities during the integration pro-

cess of third-country nationals (Miežienė, Gruževskis, 2020), how learning the language of the host country provides opportunities for third-country nationals (Juškevičienė, 2023), and the role of migrant organisations in the integration of third-country nationals (Muraleedharan, 2020).

The purpose of the paper is to discuss recent labour immigration trends and policies that have been adopted by the state to facilitate the process of the integration of immigrants and their access to the labour market.

Research methods: scientific literature, migration policy, and secondary data analysis.

1. Theoretical background

Migration is defined as the movement of residents from one place of residence to another for the whole time or only for a certain period of time, crossing the administrative boundaries of the area. Migration is a complex phenomenon that affects the labour market. It affects the country's population, as well as the unemployed, and the employed labour force. In addition, migrants' remittances determine consumption and economic growth in the migrants' countries of origin. The migration of workers is primarily due to differences in wage levels between countries, and the movement of international flows of intellectual capital. Ravenstein (1885; 1889), the pioneer of the push-pull model of macroeconomic migration theory, put forward the idea that people migrate because of differences in economic opportunities, and that migration is usually directed to the largest industrial centres. According to the *push and pull theory*, an individual who decides to leave their country of origin is encouraged by push factors (high unemployment, poverty, etc) in the country of origin, and (or) pull factors (job supply, higher wages, better living conditions in the destination country) (Schoorl, 2005). Thus, migration is a response to labour supply and demand, and wage mismatches between locations (Todaro, Harris, 1969; Todaro, 1970). Regions offering relatively high levels of wages attract labour from areas offering relatively low wages, thereby increasing labour supply and causing wages to fall. Migration is a complex social and economic phenomenon that affects both the individual and the entire social structure. Emigration can be understood as the result of the interaction of macro (institutional factors) and micro-structures (emigrants' own beliefs, experiences, networks) in two territories (Čiarnienė, Kumpikaitė, Taraškevičius, 2009). The social network migration theory defines emigration as highlighting the role of migration networks, because the development of these networks is one of the most important reasons for migrating (Karalevičienė, Matuzevičiūtė, 2009; Čiarnienė, Kumpikaitė, Taraškevičius, 2009; Bijak, 2006; Stamm, 2006). Jennissen (2004)

distinguishes the main types of labour, return, asylum and chain migration. The definition of the most common type of labour migration reveals the movement of labour across borders. It involves highly skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled migrants. The concepts of migration, emigration and immigration are intertwined. Immigration is usually analysed at the policy level of the host country. The receiving country can divide immigration typology in different ways based on legal acts. The main forms of immigration are usually divided into legal and illegal immigration. Subgroups of legal immigration are distinguished as immigration on the basis of family reunification, or for educational, business or work purposes. Examples of illegal immigration include refugees, illegal border crossing, and more. The concept of immigration includes migration on various grounds, not only for a temporary stay or obtaining work permits in a country (Lenard, 2012; Skeldon, 2012). Immigrating persons can be divided according to the reason for their decision to emigrate: economic (labour migration), social (family reunification), humanitarian (refugees, asylum seekers), and cultural and historical. Different typologies of migrants are indicated in the scientific literature. Migrants can be classified according to the direction, channels and mechanism of migration, the length of the stay abroad, and the method of incorporation into the labour market. Smith (2017) distinguishes three types of immigrants: goal-oriented migrants (for financial realisation that was difficult to achieve in the country of origin); repeaters, return migrants (financial incentives encourage repeat migration); and permanent migrants (long-term destination-oriented migrants who decide to leave the country of origin permanently and move to the destination country). Leveckytė and Junevičius (2014) present a grouping of immigration to the European Union from third countries which includes legal (official), voluntary, forced and illegal migration and deportation. Voluntary migration includes temporary, circular and permanent migration, as well as migration for tourism purposes.

Labour migration

When people encounter challenges such as unemployment, low wages, poor employment opportunities, and precarious or bad working conditions in the country where they were born, they leave their country and migrate to other countries in order to be employed or live in better areas for jobs. Although economic reasons are the most widely discussed area in labour migration, political reasons, such as war and local crises, and natural disasters, such as earthquakes, fires, floods, etc, are also considered important causes of labour migration (Aykaç, Yertüm, 2016). Labour migration is becoming an important strategy, in which migrants pursue a variety of goals, not only by providing support to their family members and children, but also by ensuring personal and financial independence (Mavroudi, Nagel,

2016). A new country can be an opportunity for the increasing number of migrant workers who want to realise their goals abroad (Viningienė, Kirjavainen, Kuusisto, 2018).

Labour migration to Western Europe took two primary forms during the post-Second World War period. These are referred to as government-sponsored 'guest worker' programmes, and migration, motivated by differences in economic development between regions characterised by pre-industrial agricultural economies and regions with highly industrialised economies (Van Mol, de Valk, 2016; Guzi, 2021). In recent years, there has been increasing research interest in the impact of ethnicity on labour migration outcomes for third-country nationals in Europe (Bisin et al., 2011; Constant, 2014; Van Mol, Valk, 2016). Ethnicity can act as both a barrier and a resource for labour market participation and mobility, depending on how it is valued by employers and institutional actors. Ethnicity shapes the employment opportunities, the work conditions and the social integration of migrant workers in various sectors of the economy and in different countries. Ethnic identity has a significant impact on the economic behaviour of immigrants, the country of origin is an important factor influencing immigrant integration, and its effects are lasting (Constant, 2014).

Studies have found that immigrants of non-Western ethnicity are overrepresented in low-skilled and precarious jobs, whereas immigrants of Western ethnicity are more likely to have highly skilled and secure jobs (Muñoz-Comet, 2016; King, 2022). Other studies highlight the role of ethnic networks, discrimination and cultural capital in shaping migrant employment trajectories and outcomes (Bisin et al., 2011; Constant, 2014; Demireva, Zwysen, 2021; Guzi 2021). These studies highlight the importance of understanding the complex interplay between ethnicity, labour market institutions and migration policy in shaping the experience of third-country nationals in Europe. For example, a comparative study showed that immigrants are more likely to be employed in low-skilled jobs when a country with a prominent low-skilled sector and a restrictive immigration policy is combined with strong employment protection or a high degree of unionisation (King, 2022).

A study of low-wage workers in Norway suggested that ethnicity is a form of skill differently valued by employers, contributing to establishing and reproducing employment hierarchies (Friberg, Midtbøen, 2018). The study found that immigrants of Scandinavian and West European descent are more likely to have highly skilled jobs, whereas immigrants of non-Western origin are more likely to have low-skilled jobs. Another study found that employer perceptions and categorisations of migrant workers play a role in employment hierarchies (Orupabo, Nadim, 2020). Friberg and Midtbøen (2018) argue that the way ethnicity is valued in the

labour market is shaped by broader social and historical factors, such as colonialism and global economic relations (Jansson, 2020).

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2. Current immigration trends of third country nationals in Lithuania

It is estimated that since 1990, about 900,000 people have left Lithuania (approximately 24.5% of the total population). During the last two decades, several stages of migration can be distinguished in Lithuania. First of all, emigration from Lithuania after 2004 should be mentioned, since Lithuania joined the European Union (EU). Migration from Lithuania in the period 2010 to 2014 was the largest in the European Union, reaching 11 persons per thousand inhabitants (compared to about 8.8 persons in Latvia). In recent years, new trends in immigration to Lithuania can be distinguished, whereby the number of foreigners, especially third-country nationals arriving in Lithuania, is constantly growing. According to the Lithuanian migration yearbooks that publish updated information about the latest trends in migration (immigration and emigration), immigration to the country is increasing every year. Whereas the emigration flows from the country remained quite high until 2016, and then started to decrease, the immigration rate to Lithuania started to increase after 2015 (see Picture 1).

According to data from the Migration Department (2022), in the Republic of Lithuania on 1 January 2022, the number of foreigners living in the country exceeded 100,000. For comparison, on 1 January 2021 there were 87,269 citizens of foreign countries. The share of foreigners in the general context of the country's population was 3.12%. On 1 January 2020, 73,751 citizens of foreign countries lived in Lithuania, which accounted for 2.64% of all the country's population. The majority of foreigners living in Lithuania are citizens of third countries. At the
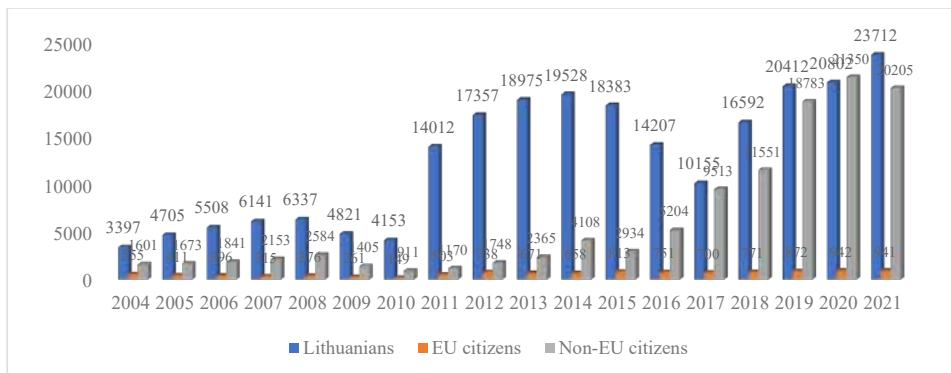
Picture 1. Migration trends in Lithuania according to citizenship, 2004–2021

beginning of 2022, 72,539 people lived in Lithuania with a temporary residence permit. Slightly more than 18,000 foreigners (18,337) were permanent residents.

The main reason why third-country nationals enter the country is for work. For example, in 2021, most of the temporary residence permits were issued on grounds of work (employment) (78%) and family reunification (11%). The number of temporary residence permits issued for work has been constantly increasing during the last decade (see Picture 2). During the last decade, the number of temporary residence permits issued for work increased by almost ten times.

According to data from the Department of Statistics (2022), about 90,200 people participate in the Lithuanian labour market. Citizens of third countries constitute about 80,000. The majority of them work in jobs requiring average qualifications (drivers, welders, concrete workers, plasterers, installers of metal structures, build-
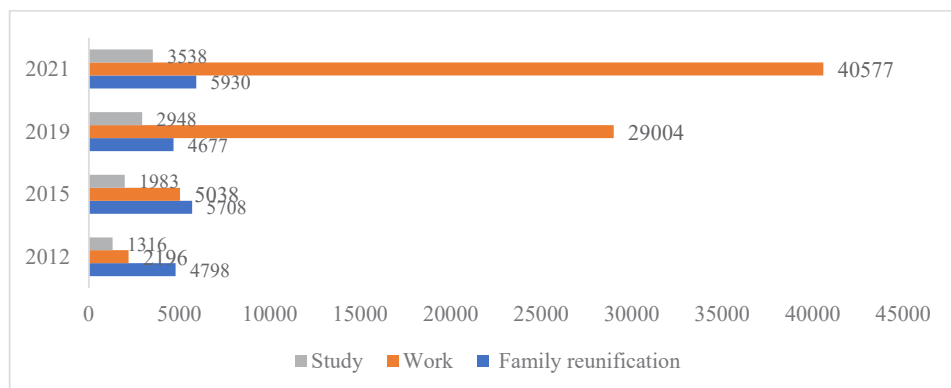
Picture 2. The grounds for issuing temporary residence permits (2012–2021)
Source: https://123.emn.lt/en//

ers, cooks, masons, electricians, butchers, fish preparers, etc). Among those who came to work, the largest groups are Ukrainian and Belarusian citizens (40,300 and 32,300 respectively). There are also Russians (approximately 3,900), Kyrgyz (2,600), Uzbeks (1,800), Azerbaijanis (1,300), Kazakhs (1,200), Tajiks (1,200) and Moldavians (1,000), and Indian (700), Turkish (500) and Nigerian (200) citizens.

3. The migration policy framework and the integration of migrants in Lithuania

Based on the general outlook for emigration trends to Lithuania after regaining independence in 1990, the first 'Immigration Law' (Imigracijos įstatymas) to regulate immigration into Lithuania came into force in 1991 (Republic of Lithuania, 'Immigration Law', Official Gazette, No. I-1755, 4 September 1992). It receded into the background in 1999 when the 'Law on the Legal Status of Aliens' (Įstatymas dėl užsieniečių teisinės padėties) was adopted. Since 1999, this law has been the main document managing the permissible number of foreigners in Lithuania and the main fields of immigration into the country. This regulation might be considered the beginning of the study of Lithuania's emigration and integration strategies. The asylum system has been operating in Lithuania since 1997 using the common principles of EU asylum policies, consolidated in the conventions of Geneva (1949) and Dublin (1990), the 'Law on the Legal Status of Aliens', and other related documents (Zibas, 2017). It is worth additionally highlighting that the year 2006 became a true turning point in recent Lithuanian history, given the context of immigration policies. The point is that until then, obtaining a work permit in Lithuania for non-EU citizens was extremely complicated. In 2006, the government of Lithuania simplified the procedure for issuing work and residence permits for immigrants whose professions were scarce in the labour market (Elsner, 2011).

A citizen of a third country (or a person from a third country) is a person who is not a citizen of an EU country and does not belong to a country that is part of the EU's free movement of people (Regulation [EU] 2016/399 of the European Parliament and the Council). Directive 2009/50/EC sought more favourable conditions and faster special permits for third-country nationals to live and work in the EU. Migration policy instruments regulate how people from third countries can access national labour markets. EU member states use different methods to regulate immigration flows from third countries. Analysing the conditions that countries at the EU level use to manage immigration flows from third countries, we can distinguish lists of professions, an analysis of the need for workers or the labour market, quotas and other requirements, and related criteria (e.g. with qualification level, salary, etc). For example, Poland and Lithuania have a list of professions that are required

by the labour market, while Switzerland has quotas, etc. Third-country nationals face relevant restrictions and strict rules and procedures. Specific restrictions on integration are provided for in the national laws of each EU country.

Residence in Lithuania of people from third countries is defined by the Law of the Republic of Lithuania 'On the Legal Status of Foreigners' (latest summary version as of 3 January 2021). For labour immigration, subgroups of low and highly skilled workers are distinguished, whose inclusion in the labour market in Lithuania differs in procedural composition. The 'blue card' directive (2009/50/EC 'On the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in order to perform highly qualified work') and the Law of the Republic of Lithuania 'On the Legal Status of Foreigners' (current version as of 3 January 2021) provide benefits for entry to Lithuania for highly qualified people from third countries. The benefit includes simpler and faster access to the Lithuanian labour market, with the possibility to bring family members; there are no bureaucratic procedures to meet the needs of the Lithuanian labour market. There are also opportunities to continue professional activities within the EU in other member countries. A foreigner may work only for the employer who undertakes to employ him and perform only the job function for which he was employed by that employer, except for exceptions specified in the Law of the Republic of Lithuania 'On the Legal Status of Foreigners'. Thus, highly qualified immigration to Lithuania for work purposes is facilitated based on the legal foundations of the Republic of Lithuania and the EU, so in this case the aim is to discuss both low and highly skilled labour sector representatives facing the manifestation of insecure employment in Lithuania. If a person intends to stay in Lithuania for no longer than a year, they can get a national visa; for longer, they need a temporary residence permit (which is issued for two or three years, depending on the employee's qualifications).

Migration policy instruments regulate how people from third countries can access national labour markets. The member states of the European Union apply different methods internally to regulate immigration flows from third countries. For example, Poland and Lithuania have a list of required professions for the labour market, and Switzerland has quotas. Third-country nationals face relevant restrictions, and strict rules and procedures. Specific integration restrictions are provided for in the national laws of each European Union country. In Lithuania, in order to employ a citizen of a third country, an employer chooses one of several methods: employment according to the shortage of professions in Lithuania, or a 'blue card' for highly professionally qualified employees from third countries. In addition, information about the shortage of professions in Lithuania is regularly published by the Migration Department. A 'blue card' can be obtained by a highly qualified specialist whose can meet the qualification requirements in Lithuania. The follow-

ing qualification requirements are applied: a person's salary in Lithuania must be at least 1.5 times the average monthly salary (gross). For a person whose salary is equal to or higher than three average monthly salaries, the process of issuing a 'blue card' is simplified; there is no need to apply to the Employment Service for the issue of a document of work conformity to the needs of the Lithuanian labour market.

Integration of third-country nationals in Lithuania

In 2018, Lithuania approved Action Plan 2018–2020 for the integration of foreigners into society. The plan aims at improving the implementation of the integration of foreigners and ensuring their successful integration into society. The 2018–2030 Strategy for Demography, Migration and Integration, approved in Lithuania in 2018, is aimed at increasing the opportunities for the integration of migrants, allowing them to invite family members, establishing schools for them and providing housing. Local ethnic communities are also expected to play an important role in the process of migrant integration.

The MIPEX (migrant integration policy) index, which measures eight areas of migrant integration policies, e.g. labour market mobility, family reunification, education, political participation, permanent residence, citizenship, anti-discrimination and health, is one of the tools aimed at measuring the quality of migrants' integration. Despite the fact that the latest MIPEX report states that 'over the past five years, newcomers to Lithuania can benefit from a few more opportunities for integration and a slightly more secure future in the country', and this is mainly due to the extra opportunities that emerged in the labour market, and the education and health system, in comparison to other countries, Lithuania's score is very low (37 out of 100 points) in 2019 (MIPEX 2020) (See Picture 3).

Lithuania belongs to a cluster of countries that are called *Equality on paper. Slightly unfavourable*. Among the leaders in the integration of migrants, there is a cluster of countries in the top ten with an average score of 75. Among them are Sweden (86), Finland (85), Portugal (81), Belgium (65), etc. The top ten countries are considered as adopting a comprehensive approach to integration that fully guarantees equal rights, opportunities, and security for immigrants and citizens.

MIPEX labour market mobility indicators consist of seven sub-indicators: immediate access to the labour market, access to the public sector, access to self-employment, access to public employment services, educational and vocational training and study grants, the recognition of academic qualifications, and economic integration measures. The score for labour market mobility has increased during the last few years, from 41 points in 2014, to 52 points in 2019. According to the country report of the 'Migrant Integration Policy Index' (MIPEX, 2019), Lithuania's in-
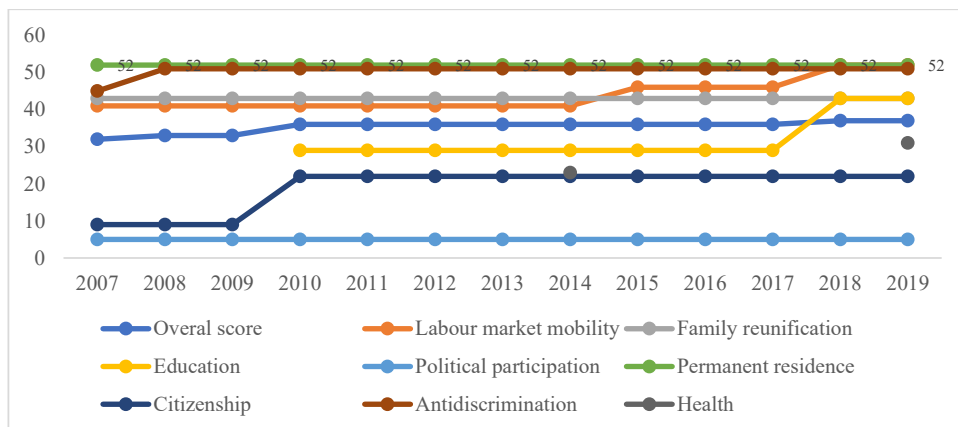
Picture 3. MIPEX (migrant integration policy) index for Lithuania (2007–2019)

tegration policies create more barriers than opportunities in the way of integration. This report shows that the status of labour migrants and their family members in Lithuania is one of the most vulnerable in Europe (Žibas, Petrušauskaite, 2015) in terms of working hours and methods, lack of initiative and co-workers' or customers' attitudes (Viningienė, Kirjavainen, Kuusisto, 2018), finding healthy conditions for labour market mobility, education, health, political participation, permanent residence, access to nationality, and anti-discrimination (MIPEX, 2019). However, only highly qualified labour migrants have the option to live with their family members in Lithuania; qualified labour migrants who have received work permits (e.g. welders, long-distance drivers, seamstresses) do not have this opportunity (Žibas, Petrušauskaite, 2015). As a result of the country's labour immigration policy, the job market in Lithuania is not appealing to labour migrants who wish to remain in the nation and integrate into its society (Žibas, Petrušauskaite, 2015). As an example, non-EU immigrants are legally 'tied' to their first job after coming to Lithuania, and they are not allowed to change it. However, migrants must leave the country straightaway if they lose their employment.

Conclusions

During the last few years (2015 to 2022), immigration flows into Lithuania, as in other CEE countries, have increased several times. The absolute majority of immigrants come to Lithuania for employment reasons (Mavroudi, Nagel, 2016; Viningienė, Kirjavainen, Kuusisto, 2018; etc). This is mainly determined when people encounter challenges such as unemployment, low wages, low employment

opportunities, and bad working conditions in their country of origin. However, Lithuania lacks an effective migrant and refugee integration policy. Despite the fact that it has improved opportunities and security for immigrants over the last few years, the country still scores 37 points out of 100 (MIPEX 2020).

The main efforts and improvements to the policy of the integration of foreigners and refugees are in the fields of the recognition of academic qualifications, economic integration measures for youth and women, educational guidance at all levels, measures to address the educational situations of migrant groups, administrative discretion, documentation for asylum-seekers to access the health system, involvement of migrants in information provision, and service design and delivery. In a global context, Lithuania is classified in the group of countries with a more unfavourable integration policy for migrants.

Lithuania's migrant integration approach is similar to that in most Central and East European countries (Latvia, Poland, Hungary). Its score is lower than the average MIPEX country score of 49. Its approach to integration is classified by MIPEX as *Equality on paper. Slightly unfavourable*. While immigrants enjoy basic rights and protection in Lithuania, they do not enjoy equal opportunities to participate in society (MIPEX, 2020). The evaluation of the migration policy index allows us to conclude that the policy of the integration of immigrants is the area of migration policy that needs to be improved the most in Lithuania. The highest migration policy index is attributed to Nordic and other EU countries, such as Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Belgium, etc.

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