

Lithuania

Emigration continues to dominate migration movements in Lithuania, despite some increase in immigration flows since EU accession. In 2007, recorded negative net-migration was higher (in absolute value) than the previous year. This was mainly due to a new increase in emigration flows, after the contraction registered in 2006 (since 2004, the annual number of departures had exceeded 15 100, while in 2006 it declined to 12 600). Recorded emigration in 2007 was around 13 850. However, the official numbers reflect only those emigrants who leave the country for a period longer than six months, and notify their departure to territorial migration office. A special survey in the 2008 Labour Force Survey found that undeclared emigration still comprises about half of the total outflow from Lithuania. Thus, total estimated emigration for 2007 was around 20 488.

Since 2003, most emigration flows are directed to the EU, accounting for 66% of the 2007 total. The main destination country remains the United Kingdom, followed by Ireland, Germany and Spain. Outside the EU, significant outflows are traditionally directed towards the United States, Russia and Belarus.

Recorded immigration in 2007 was around 8 600, more than double the 2006 figure and almost three times higher than in 2003. Since EU accession, the main increase in immigration to Lithuania is due to inflows from EU countries. This reflects the fact that recent immigration to Lithuania has been more and more characterized as return migration, as most of the recorded immigrants are Lithuanian citizens who had previously left to an EU country. Around 6 140 out of the 8 600 immigrants recorded in 2007 were Lithuanian nationals returning from abroad, mostly from the UK and Ireland. These figures underestimate return migration, since many Lithuanian migrants declared neither their departure nor their subsequent return. A general trend of increasing returns over the period 2004-2007 can be confirmed. Recently released data for 2008 are in line with those for the previous years: 6 337 out of the 9 297 recorded immigrants were Lithuanian citizens.

Return migration emerged as a consequence of the growing labour shortages and of the improvement in wage levels that Lithuania experienced in the post-accession period. The economic recession and the sharp increase in unemployment that the country faced starting in the third quarter of 2008 (between April 2008 and April 2009, the unemployment rate rose from 4.3% to 16.8%), might interrupt this trend, despite government efforts to attract Lithuanian workers back.

Between January 2007 and June 2008, a total of 10 107 work permits were issued to non-EU nationals by the Lithuanian Labour Exchange, compared to 4 507 permits issued in the two year period 2004-2005. The sharp increase in labour migration to Lithuania is partly due to simplified procedures for issuing work and residence permits for immigrants in shortage professions, introduced at the end of 2006. However, the economic downturn is likely to reverse this trend.

Foreign workers in Lithuania arrive mainly from Belarus and Ukraine. Taken together, nationals of these two countries account for 74 % of all work permits issued in 2007. Turkish (7%), Russians and Chinese (5%) follow.

In order to develop a comprehensive immigration policy, in October 2007 a specialized Migration Policy Department under Ministry of Interior was established. In December 2008, the Government approved the Guidelines for Comprehensive Immigration Policy. The basic principles regulating immigration remain addressing domestic labour force shortages, and the compatibility of labour immigration with potential return of emigrant Lithuanian citizens.

On 30 March 2008, Lithuania became a full member of the Schengen Agreement (related amendments to the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens entered into force on 23 February). In July 2008 a new temporary version of the Law on Citizenship (valid until 1 January 2008) was adopted. Under this law, all children of a Lithuanian parent, regardless of their place of birth, and irrespective of other citizenship, acquire Lithuanian citizenship.

For further information:

www.migracija.lt/index.php?-484440258

www.socmin.lt/index.php?-846611483

www.ldb.lt/LDB_Site/index.htm