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***Immigration policies in Lithuania:  
institutional and legislative developments,  
challenges and opportunities***

***Summary***

Analysing national programmes, state strategies and other documents that regulate immigration and migrant integration in Lithuania, this article provides an overview of policy priorities in this field before and after the enlargement of the European Union (EU). The main theoretical approaches of migration processes and policies are reviewed to conceptualise the field in which the Lithuanian immigration and migrant integration policies are to be analysed. The article covers different types of immigration, reveals main immigration trends and provides contextual information: policy responses and political discussions, public debates and societal attitudes towards immigration. It touches on the newest legislative and institutional developments in the field concerned and reveals that before 2014, immigration policy in Lithuania was based on the so-called *ad hoc* principle, while during the first half of 2014, a new trend emerged as the government adopted the ‘Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines’ and ‘Action Plan for Implementation of the Policy for the Integration of Foreigners’. At the same time, integration of foreigners as a new area of policy emerged in the Ministry of Social Security of Labour. Migrant integration is becoming a prioritised policy area. However, its challenging aspect has to be emphasised as

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deeper analysis of migrant integration infrastructure revealed that project-based activities, supported by the EU funds, have already managed to ‘change’ the implementation of migrant integration policy at state level.

**Key words:** Lithuania, emigration, integration of immigrants, migration policy

## *Introduction*

The decades from 1990 to 2010 mark a period of intense international migration in Europe, bringing forth various challenges for national and international state policies and calling for societies to deal with inter-cultural coexistence. The expansion of the EU in 2004 and ratification of the Schengen agreement in 2007 changed the geopolitical situation of the European continent. The ‘shifting’ of the EU border towards the East and the liberalisation of the freedom of movement within the EU became one of the most important factors encouraging the international migration processes.

In the context of international migration processes Lithuania is not an exception as it played (and still plays) an important role as a ‘sending’ country. The historical context shows that immigration in Lithuania experienced a moment of rupture over twenty-five years ago as it took on new forms. After Lithuania’s independence was restored, inter-republic immigration from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries to Lithuania became international. Therefore, given the political transformation, the same mobility of people took on a meaning: from immigration and migrant integration policies to attitudes toward immigration in societal and political levels. In the light of the immigrants’ countries of origin, their reasons for coming and their social and demographic characteristics on the one hand, and the technological development and EU integration processes on the other, immigration in Lithuania has become more diverse and more rapid and challenging.

### *International migration: theoretical approaches and concepts*

The above-mentioned EU integration processes stimulated new migration patterns and, eventually, new migration systems<sup>2</sup> which emerged in the context of the increased attractiveness of Central and Eastern European countries for non-EU immigrants.

Different theoretical approaches and levels of analysis can explain such migration systems. According to Thomas Faist (2000), the research on migration processes can be divided into *macro-*, *micro-* and *meso-*level analysis. Political, economic, cultural and

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<sup>2</sup> The migration system (as a process) is explained by migration system theory. This theory allows stable international migration systems to be identified. According to Massey et al. (1993, p. 454), a migration system is a stable (but not fixed) structure of migration flows over time and space, but varies across countries. Favell (2006, 2008) elaborates the processes of emergence of new migration systems after the enlargement of the EU in 2004.

demographical circumstances can be considered the indicators of macro-level analysis, individual values and aspirations to improve (or maintain) economic welfare and social status — indicators of micro-level analysis, while collective social networks and ties that are created by migrants, their friends, families, mediators and potential migrants are indicators of meso-level analysis.

In the light of multi-level analysis of international migration, economic migration theories<sup>3</sup> explain the origin of migration and emphasise the push and pull factors that are determined by macroeconomic factors and individual decisions regarding mobility, based on cost-benefit analysis (Brettell and Hollifield 2000, pp. 51–56). Social migration theories<sup>4</sup> explain the continuity of international migration and emphasise the importance of social networks, which give an indication of self-generated process to migration (Massey et al. 1993).

On the one hand, economic migration theories seek to explain the complexity of the beginning of the process; while on the other, they provide strong evidence for the importance of social aspects of migration (e.g. individually mobility based on analysis of the costs and benefits of migration). The main advantage of social migration theories lies in the explanation of migration (as a self-generating process) and migrant integration (as a follow-up of immigration) as these theories provide indicators for the analysis of migrant integration (both policies and processes). On one hand, migration networks might facilitate the decision upon migration (by providing information, assistance and services in the country of destination). On the other, it creates space for institutions and (groups of) individuals to perform different kind of activities: social assistance, employment, consultation, etc. (Massey et al. 1993). Such institutions and services create so-called migrant integration infrastructure, which is stable over time and space. The existence of social networks and integration infrastructure might increase international migration flow as it may increase the likelihood of migration by lowering integration costs.

Considering the above mentioned theoretical arguments, in this article, migrant integration is considered as inevitable result of immigration processes, with an impact on the macro- (immigration and migrant integration policies, societal and political attitudes), meso- (migration networks) and micro- (migratory behaviour) levels. If migrant integration on the meso-level is linked to the development of integration infrastructure through migration networks and activities of NGOs (which facilitates access to labour market, housing, education, health and social service sectors), migrant integration on the macro-level is linked to overcoming integration obstacles while using governmental resources. On the micro-level, migrant integration is linked to individual experiences.

Integration infrastructure, embedded in migration network of different types of immigrants, is linked to the concept of migrant integration policies, especially in countries such as Lithuania, where the process of implementing migrant integration measures is linked directly to the non-governmental sector. Integration infrastructure provides a basis

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<sup>3</sup> Such as Neoclassical Economic Theory, Theory of the New Economics of Migration, Dual Labour Market Theory, World Systems Theory.

<sup>4</sup> Such as Migration Network and Migration Systems theories.

for the exchange of information and mutual assistance, enhancing migrant integration in the labour market, education and housing sectors, as well as stimulates informal networks with the majority society and other immigrants. When the migration network expands, it allows expanding integration infrastructure and ensuring integration. If integration infrastructure is linked to the non-governmental sector, migration networks and mutual assistance, governmental resources are linked to national state policies, within which migrant integration policies are developed. However, in Lithuania, the entire migrant integration infrastructure is being developed at a non-governmental level and project-based activities, supported by EU funds, have already managed to ‘change’ both the development and implementation of migrant integration policies at the governmental level. In such a context, migrant integration policies in Lithuania have to be discussed (see chapters ‘The development of immigration policies’ and ‘Migrant integration policies’).

Summarising the methodological preconditions of migration processes, the combination of macro-, micro- and meso-level analysis is essential as it indicates the complete image of the immigration process, including development of immigration and migrant integration policies, key stakeholders of implementing such policies and other relevant indicators, such as public discourse and political debates around migration issues.

### *Migration trends in Lithuania after the restoration of independence*

The trend of emigration has been prevailing in Lithuania for many years. Emigration, which has a strong economical aspect as a motive for mobility towards the western part of the EU, continues to be the dominant migration pattern in Lithuania. After Lithuania regained its independence, net migration was negative and remained the same until now. Emigration flows were changing, with the peak in 2010. In 2010, Lithuania had the biggest negative net migration per 1000 population in the EU<sup>5</sup>. According to the data from Statistics Lithuania, in 2010, 83,000 people declared their departure from the country (compared with over 15,000 in 2005). Together with global economic changes and high unemployment rates, these trends could be explained by compulsory health insurance<sup>6</sup>, which started to be considered as a tool for measurement of actual emigration flows when people who had already been living abroad started to declare their departure from the country in order to avoid compulsory health insurance (EMN 2015).

Contrary to emigration, immigration flows to Lithuania started to increase from 2001 with the peak before global economic changes in 2008. In parallel to the economic growth, the EU enlargement in 2004 and the extension of the Schengen area in late 2007 made an impact on immigration flows to Lithuania. Labour immigration became significant, while flows of asylum seekers remained insignificant and stable. After global economic changes, immigration started to increase again and almost reached its pre-crisis level (see Graph 1). Together with a growing trend of immigration, legislative and institutional development

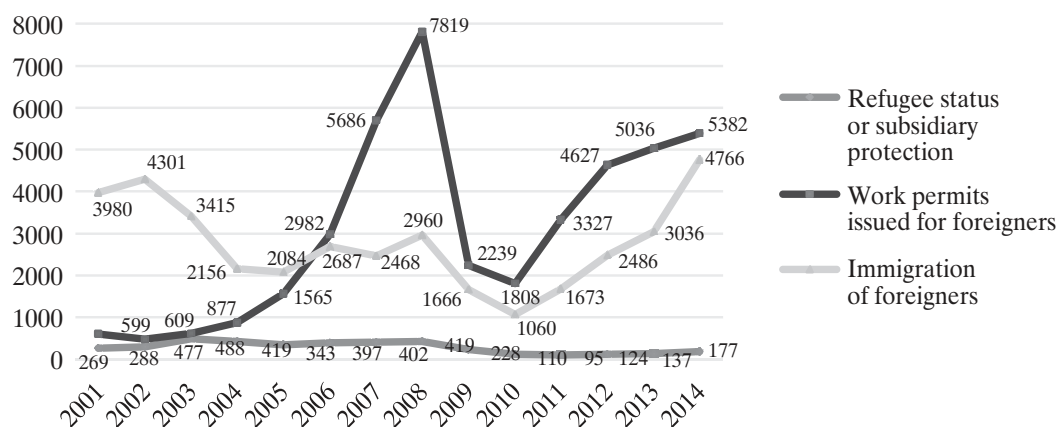
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<sup>5</sup> For more detailed data, see European Migration Network. Available at: <http://123.emn.lt/en/general-trends/lithuania-in-the-eu-context>.

<sup>6</sup> From January 2009, health insurance became compulsory.

in the area of immigration and migrant integration policies emerged. This development has led to political and societal debates about the socio-economic consequences of international migration in Lithuania.

**Graph 1. Immigration dynamics in Lithuania, years 2005–2014**



Source: Statistics Lithuania, Migration Department, Lithuanian Labour Exchange

Regardless of the increase of labour immigration to Lithuania, both the annual immigration flows and the total number of foreigners living in Lithuania remains small: 32,500 foreigners (0.98 per cent of the total population) lived in Lithuania in 2010. This number decreased to 29,600 (0.91 per cent of the total population) in 2011. However, after the global economic changes, the number of foreigners in Lithuania increased significantly: from 31,300 in 2012 to 35,500 in 2014 and 40,000 in 2015 (see Table 1).

Despite a relatively low number of foreigners residing in Lithuania and arriving in the country annually, labour-related immigration became visible in public discourse, as it has triggered debates on the demand for a new approach towards labour immigration and migrant integration policies in the media and among politicians (LSRC 2015).

**Table 1. Number of foreigners in Lithuania 2010–2015 (as of 1<sup>st</sup> January)**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Number of residents (millions)	3 137.0	3 052.6	3 007.8	2 979.3	2 944.5	2 921.9
Number of foreigners	32,500	29,600	31,300	32,300	35,500	40,000
Share of foreigners (%)	1.04	0.97	1.04	1.08	1.20	1.37

Source: Migration Department.

While summing up the immigration flows to Lithuania, several trends could be identified. Firstly, the vast majority of immigrants living in Lithuania and arriving annually to the country for various purposes have Russian, Ukrainian or Belarusian citizenship. However, during 2006–2008, the preconditions forming new immigrant groups from

China and Turkey were observed. Secondly, the distribution of immigrants by age groups allow the argument that Lithuania is a country attractive mostly for working age people from outside the EU. Thirdly, the distribution of immigrants by gender shows prevailing trends of men's immigration. However, as Erentaitė and Pilinkaitė-Sotirovič (2012) argue, circumstances of family reunification are related to women's immigration, and economic (labour) circumstances with male immigration. Fourthly, regardless of global economic change, family reunification is usually the first or the second biggest channel (after labour-related immigration) of legal immigration to Lithuania (although immigration of students and entrepreneurs is increasing as well). Fifthly, after particular restrictions of legal immigration channels, trends of undocumented immigration usually emerge. For example, an increased number of marriages of convenience (channel of family reunification) or fake companies (channel of legal activities). Such a trend is more related to the transit through the territory of Lithuania rather than to long-term residence in the country. Sixthly, the local aspect of immigration structure revealed that immigrants are mainly concentrated in the largest Lithuanian cities as around 70–80 per cent of them live in six municipalities. This means that the major Lithuanian cities are centres of attraction of immigration (Žibas 2009, LSRC 2014).

The analysis of the data<sup>7</sup> on immigrants in the largest Lithuanian cities revealed certain immigration patterns. Lithuanian cities attract different categories of immigrants. It can be assumed that Lithuanian cities have already formed certain, albeit small, migration networks. Eventually, the largest cities (Vilnius, Klaipėda and Kaunas) with more than half of all the immigrants in Lithuania and other cities with large share of them (such as Visaginas) certainly create common structural characteristics of immigration to Lithuania. For example, Visaginas could be characterised as a city with a relatively big number of permanent residents from non-EU countries and trend of family immigration, while the Vilnius region, Klaipėda and Šiauliai show trends of labour immigration and an immigration structure more diverse in terms of countries of origin (for example, migrant workers from Turkey and/or China). On the other hand, Vilnius and Kaunas are cities in which immigrants from non-EU countries are more likely to establish small or mid-sized enterprises (LSRC 2009, 2014).

### *The development of immigration policies*

Some issues of immigration policy in Lithuania are already resolved or are at least adequately addressed. When Lithuania regained its independence, citizenship issues were successfully resolved using the 'zero option of citizenship'. The asylum system has operated in Lithuania since 1997, using the common principles of the EU asylum policies, consolidated in the conventions of Geneva (1949), Dublin (1990) and in other EU documents. Labour immigration policy is regulated in the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens and national long-term strategies.

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<sup>7</sup> Data from the Residents' Register Service.

In Lithuania, immigration and migrant integration policies have not happened along the change in international migration processes. Immigration policy was based on migratory behaviour or on the so-called *ad-hoc* approach (LSRC 2014)<sup>8</sup>. Immigration flows started to be adjusted 1991, with Immigration Law (Official Gazette, 1991, no. 27-730) coming into force. In accordance with this law, an annual immigrant quota was adopted. It receded into the background in 1999, when the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens (Official Gazette, 1998, no. 115-3236) became the main document, regulating the legal status of foreigners in Lithuania and main areas of immigration management.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the strategy of Lithuanian immigration policy was associated with the restriction of immigration<sup>9</sup>. The situation began to change gradually, when large-scale emigration, especially after the EU enlargement in 2004, started to change the structure of the Lithuanian population and labour market. According to Krupickaitė and Poviliūnas (2012), the consequences of mass outflow of population became particularly noticeable during the economic growth period of 2005–2008 and global economic changes during 2009 and 2010. During the growth period in economy, labour force shortages emerged. At the same time, emigration of highly qualified specialists decreased the potential of the Lithuanian economy. In the context of economic growth and emigration, the unemployment rate has decreased from 23.2% in 2004 to 4.2% at the end of 2007. However, due to global economic changes, unemployment started to rise in 2008 and reached a peak of 18.3% in the second quarter of 2010, when emigration was again on the rise. However, with relation to emigration of highly qualified specialists, the challenge becomes bigger as one-way migratory flow emerges, where emigrants are not substituted by immigrants, neither in a quantitative nor in a qualitative way. Eventually, consequences arise as the country's investments in education of these professionals are lost; negative changes in the local labour market and demographic situation emerge. Finally, the average qualification level of the country's labour force declines, diminishing the economy's international competitiveness (Kazlauskienė and Rinkevičius 2006).

Eventually, since 2007, considering labour market-related challenges, the business sector began to discuss labour force 'import' from third countries, while the government not only started programmes of 'detention', clawing back emigrants, but also began to debate the guidelines in immigration policy (LSRC 2015).

Until 2014, Lithuania did not have a strategy of immigration policy based on long-term goals and priorities. Until recently, the immigration policy has been formed indirectly in long-term strategies such as the Long-Term Development Strategy of the State, Strategy of

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<sup>8</sup> Migration policy can be divided into programmatic and *ad-hoc*. In the first case, political decisions are made in respect of the political, economic and social context and in the second one — it is focused on short-term decisions, necessary for a specific period (Marmora 1999).

<sup>9</sup> While analysing immigration and migrant integration policies, the historical context has to be emphasised and considered as an absence of migrant integration policy (as well as implementation of strictly selective immigration policy) can be regarded as a political strategy related to immigration restriction in view of inter-republican migration, which took place during the Soviet period.

the National Demographic (Population) Policy and the Long-Term Strategy (up to 2015) of Lithuanian economy (economic) development' (Beresnevičiūtė and Žibas 2012). In view of the new challenges raised by contemporary migration processes, the government adopted the Economic Migration Regulation Strategy (2007), changed by the Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines (2014).

As Marmora (1999) argues, migration laws indicate the content of migration policies, while strategies and programmes show the relevance of migration policies in the context of the entire political agenda of the state. Eventually, while analysing all main governmental strategies<sup>10</sup>, this chapter discloses the main aims and priorities of the state in the area of migration and migrant integration policies. The aforementioned Law On the Legal Status of Aliens illustrates the administrative nature of Lithuanian immigration policies, as it is the only one document that regulates immigration and legal status of foreigners in an *ad hoc* manner. At the same time, strategies and programmes allows disclosing political attitudes towards migration issues.

The State Strategy of Long-Term Development (Official Gazette, 2002, no. 113-5029) was not directly related to the formation of immigration policies. The document highlighted emigration management and the consequences of this process. Illegal immigration was seen as a threat and the control of immigration was exclusively associated with consolidated protection from migration across the external border of the EU. The document did not provide specific measures of regulation of immigration.

The Strategy of National Demographic (Population) Policy (Official Gazette, 2004, no. 159-5795) revealed the main weaknesses of immigration management in Lithuania. However, among the opportunities, no long-term immigration policy was identified. Although the model of Lithuanian immigration policy was provided in a strategic vision (such as implementation of strict immigration policy for third country nationals), the practical means of its implementation were not declared.

In the Long-Term Strategy of Lithuanian Economic Development up to 2015<sup>11</sup>, immigration policy was defined as an inevitable necessity. The strategy emphasised strict immigration control without any specific policy measures. Nevertheless, legal and illegal immigration processes were identified as challenges.

Economic Migration Regulation Strategy (EMRS) could be considered as a response to demographic challenges caused by emigration, outlining long-term priorities of Lithuanian migration policy: return migration and emigration reduction. The main objectives of EMRS were: reducing the negative net migration to zero by 2012<sup>12</sup>, focusing on processes of return migration and regulating labour immigration from third countries. With regards

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<sup>10</sup> All main governmental strategies and programmes were taken into consideration, in addition to those in which the migration and demographic issue was even not reflected.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania, long-term strategy of the Lithuanian economy (economic) development up to 2015. Vilnius, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> The main objective was not accomplished as the mass outflow of population reached its peak in 2010. Consequently, in 2013, Lithuania had negative net migration of 5.7 per 1000 population (in 2013, only Latvia and Cyprus had bigger negative net migration in the EU).



to the last objective, clear targets to apply a selective immigration policy by defining geographic priorities (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and South Caucasus) and, at the same time, emphasising the regulation of immigration from non-EU countries were revealed.

In addition, a long-term vision of Lithuanian migration policy was defined in other related documents: Principles of Lithuanian Immigration Policy<sup>13</sup> and The Resolution on Confirmation of Landmarks of Lithuanian Migration Policy<sup>14</sup>. These documents set out the two dimensions of economic migration: regulation of regular immigration flows and migrant integration.

The analysis of the content of EMRS and other documents revealed six main questions. Firstly, before the implementation of EMRS, there were certain priorities of immigration policies which changed only gradually. Before and, to a certain extent, after 2004, the development of Lithuanian migration policies was concentrated on reducing emigration and promoting return migration. Secondly, after 2007, Lithuania's long-term immigration policy started to emphasise not only the challenges raised by emigration, but also the management of labour immigration. Thirdly, the management of legal immigration flows was the main priority. However, it only remained in the framework of the Law On the Legal Status of Aliens. Moreover, long-term immigration policy measures were not provided. Fourthly, migrant integration remained in the framework of priorities without any specific action plan. Fifthly, a 'selectively open' immigration policy was applied with the main aim of stimulating circular (temporary) migration. As temporary immigration 'safe' integration means, immigrants were (and still are) considered economic "recourse", which (without potential permanent residence and, at the same time, integration) are able to satisfy labour force demands. Sixthly, labour immigration policies were (and still are) are connected to the Lithuanian labour market, regulated in order to 'protect' internal labour force from external competition.

It has to be mentioned that EMRS and related documents were formulated under conditions of rapid economic growth and intense emigration. Many objectives that were set up in EMRS were relevant only for 2007 and 2008. Consequently, after 2008, when global economic changes emerged, there was no action plan to accompany EMRS. It could be explained by both a lack of funding and a high level of unemployment.

While analysing the content of immigration policies in Lithuania, one important distinction with regards to the time frame has to be made. Before 2014, migration policy was based on the so-called *ad hoc* principle. During the first half of 2014, a new trend emerged as the government adopted the Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines (Register of Legal Acts, no. 79, 22.01.2014), where the main priorities in an area of immigration were identified. The guidelines cover emigration, return migration, immigration, migrant integration, asylum, the fight against illegal migration and issues related to the institutional policy development. Regarding immigration policies, few key areas have to be emphasised: harmonising immigration policies with the EU legislation, attracting labour force from

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<sup>13</sup> Available at: <http://www.urm.lt/>.

<sup>14</sup> Resolution on Confirmation of Landmarks of Lithuanian Migration Policy. 03.12.2008, No. 1317. Available at: [http://www.lrv.lt/bylos/Teises\\_aktai/2008/12/11884.doc](http://www.lrv.lt/bylos/Teises_aktai/2008/12/11884.doc).

third countries (with some reservations<sup>15</sup>) and better regulating the different legal immigration channels. While analysing the legislative development of migration policies in Lithuania since the restoration of independence, it seems that the recent guidelines should be considered a backdrop to or the first step towards establishing a long-term migration vision. However, recent institutional developments (particularly, the initiative to close the Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior) has to be mentioned as it raises concerns about the effective implementation of migration policies in Lithuania<sup>16</sup>.

### *Migrant integration policies*

Contrary to immigration, the implementation of migrant integration policy was (and still is) based on the project-based activities of the EU integration funds. In the legal framework regulating immigration policy in Lithuania, immigrants are not singled out as a target group for integration policy. Although the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens declares integration into the country's political, social, economic and cultural life, priority is only given to foreigners who have received asylum in Lithuania.

In EMRS, migrant integration was described neatly by associating this process with a common EU policy (mainly with the EU funds). EMRS marked the absence of authority responsible for the coordination of migrant integration processes and long-term approach towards migrant integration policies. However, in 2007, 8 out of 35 migration policy implementation measures, and in 2008, 4 out of 22 were designed to regulate immigration and only one to integrate, which was related to the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (EIF).

The Principles of Lithuanian Immigration Policy provided guidelines for economic migration policy, while migrant integration was treated as a secondary factor, of which implementation was not necessary, but desirable in order not to lose 'investments' into immigrants. It was also noted that trade unions should be assigned with functions which could enable them to ensure the protection of immigrants and help distribute immigrants according to the demands of the labour force. The document declares that the integration processes should be carried out only for foreigners who have permanent residence permits in order to stimulate "brain circulation".

The Resolution 'on Confirmation of Landmarks of Lithuanian Migration Policy' (no. 1317, 03.12.2008) confirmed the necessity of long-term integration measures. It was stated that integration measures should be imposed only on foreigners with permanent residence permits. This document showed integration as one of the directions of

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<sup>15</sup> Regulations should not stimulate employers to use cheap labour from third countries without making all possible efforts to use the internal workforce.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Ministry of the Interior, all functions related to asylum procedures will be transferred to the State Border Guard Service, while the immigration procedures — to the Police Department. With such a reform, it seems that immigration policies are turning towards securitisation without an emphasis on human rights.

immigration policy development with a focus on implementing these principles with social partners (employers and trade unions) and, at the same time, using funding from the EIF.

### ***New approach towards migrant integration policies***

As it was mentioned above, during the first half of 2014, a new trend emerged as the government adopted Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines, where migrant integration issues were emphasised and, for the first time since Lithuania regained its independence, received a special status as prioritised policy area. According to the guidelines, migrant integration policies should ensure benefits offered by immigration, while foreigners should actively contribute to strengthening the state by participating in its economic, social and cultural life. In addition, the fight against xenophobia, discrimination and racism was emphasised, with the development of a tolerant society and multicultural attitudes. The most important principles of migrant integration are the following: ensuring human rights and equal opportunities in all areas of life, providing permanent residency and (or) citizenship, reducing social inequality, vulnerability and exploitation, observing work and living conditions, improving representation.

Along the Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines, Action Plan for Implementation of the Policy for the Integration of Foreigners (Register of Legal Acts, no. A1-683, 31.12.2014) and Decree of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on the Composition of Coordinating Working Group for Integration of Foreigners (Register of legal acts, no. 54, 22.01.2014) were adopted. At the same time, a new area of policy emerged in the Ministry of Social Security of Labour — integration of foreigners. Moreover, migration experts and practitioners started to develop the Strategic Document for Integration of Third Country Nationals<sup>17</sup>.

Such legislative developments show that integration of foreigners should become a prioritised policy area. However, regardless of the recent positive legislative developments, in the context of such policies applied in other EU member states, Lithuanian migrant integration policy evidences stagnation. According to Migrant Integration Policy Index<sup>18</sup>, no progress has been made in the field of implementation of migrant integration policies since 2007. In 2007, Lithuania ranked 20<sup>th</sup> among 28 countries, in 2011 — 27<sup>th</sup> out of 31, while in 2015 — 34<sup>th</sup> out of 38. The newest Migrant Integration Policy Index revealed that the country's labour market is not attractive to migrants who want to stay in the country and integrate. Schools are poorly prepared to accept children of immigrants, lacking basic infrastructure. Immigrants do not have equal access to general health services. Moreover, these people's right to participating in the country's political life is restricted as they cannot join political parties and associations. Finally, immigrants have to undergo a long and complicated process to become citizens.

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<sup>17</sup> For more, see: <http://ces.lt/en/projects/current-projects/the-strategic-document-for-integration-of-third-country-nationals/>.

<sup>18</sup> For more, see: [www.mipex.eu](http://www.mipex.eu).

National and regional level immigration research (Kovalenko et al. 2010, Bartušienė 2011, Žydžiūnaitė 2012, LSRC 2014) results also allow generalisations on the challenges of immigration in Lithuania. It revealed social differences between the migrants and the majority of the society and showed that integration measures are not applied with respect to immigrants living in Lithuania, which means that these individuals solve difficulties without support from the state. In such contexts, NGOs play a crucial role in implementing migrant integration policies. NGOs that received financial support from the European Refugee Fund have made well-coordinated efforts towards a common integration strategy as the number of refugees in Lithuania is minor and the infrastructure of integration is already in place. NGOs that received financial support from the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals have been dealing with other categories of immigrants from non-EU countries. In this case, it is more complicated to achieve a full-fledged outcome as the number of immigrants concerned is much higher, and the needs of certain immigrant groups are different in terms of legal status and the integration obstacles that immigrants face in Lithuania. Looking deeper at project-based activities supported by EU funds, it is clear that they have already managed to ‘change’ both the development and implementation of migrant integration policies at the governmental level. However, considering the new approach towards migrant integration policies discussed above, it seems that in the future, there should be synergy between state policies and non-governmental activities.

According to Leončikas and Žibas (2010), shortcomings in the area of immigration policies are: vulnerability of labour immigrants in the labour market<sup>19</sup>, limited implementation of integration policy measures, negative attitudes in the society, lack of information about living and working conditions, limited participation of immigrants in trade unions and negative reflections of immigration in the media. In addition, studies of public attitudes<sup>20</sup> demonstrate the growing social divide between immigrants and the host society and the prevailing negative hierarchy of attitudes towards different migrant groups.

In the context of integration challenges, refugee integration issues have to be emphasised. According to Žydžiūnaitė (2012), due to the absence of accommodation policy and restricted mobility in the country, refugees suffer from poverty and insecurity. Owing to the lack of political and public debates, the notion of a refugee is becoming political, encouraging hostility between refugees and the majority of the society. Due to the lack of consistency in the activities of non-governmental organisations, assistance to refugees is fragmented, unsystematic and short-term. Moreover, the analysis and systematisation of information about the implementation of the EU asylum acquis in

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<sup>19</sup> Vulnerability of migrant workers in the Lithuanian labour market was confirmed by Kaźmierkiewicz (2009) and in the newest research of the Lithuanian Social Research Centre (LSRC 2015).

<sup>20</sup> For more, see: <http://www.ces.lt/veikla-2/ziniasklaidos-stebesena/visuomenes-nuomones-apklauso/>.

Lithuania (Ethnicity Studies 2013<sup>21</sup>) identified the key shortcomings in implementing EU directives in Lithuania: limited and fragmented area of application, restrictions on the freedom of movement, material conditions of refugee reception and provision of medical services. The data have revealed specific shortcomings in the national legal regulation and practices that need to be addressed in order to avoid conflict between the EU asylum *acquis* and the national legal basis.

### *Current political debates, public discourse and societal attitudes*

Different ministries were involved in shaping migration policy in Lithuania. However, apart from the governmental level, immigration and migrant integration issues were not reflected in programmes of political parties and electoral campaigns. The Lithuania Social Research Centre (LSRC 2014) confirmed it. Contrary to immigration issues, which were not visible in political debates, emigration and its consequences were emphasised and discussed in view of challenges such as population decline, labour force shortages, stimulation of return migration, ‘detention’ of (potential) emigrants and maintenance or consolidation of networks with Lithuanian diaspora. In the latter case, Lithuanian migrant communities abroad are very active in lobbying for liberal dual citizenship policies. However, NGOs which are operating in Lithuania are more active in an area of implementation of migrant integration measures rather than in implementation of Lithuanian diaspora policies.

In terms of labour force shortages and increase of labour immigration in 2006–2008 and 2012–2014, intense debates on the need of labour force from third countries emerged. Among different interest groups, employers were the most active. Employers were in favour of more liberal admission policies in order to bring in migrant workers from outside the EU<sup>22</sup>. Demands for liberalisation of labour immigration policies had an impact on specific legal procedures. For example, the term of issuance of work permits for highly qualified migrant workers has been shortened and, at the same time, the requirements for the documents needed in such cases have been reduced (Leončikas and Žibas 2010).

In 2012, the intense political debate was revived, concerning the amendments of the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens. According to the European Migration Network (EMN 2012) report, a number of politicians considered the amendments too liberal. Evaluating a delay in transposing the Directive 2009/50/EC, the Minister of the Interior claimed that the delay in passing the law was determined by unwillingness of the Seimas to take over the legal norms of the EU, while employers considered labour immigration policy

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<sup>21</sup> Articles are available online at <http://www.ces.lt/etniskumo-studijos-2/isleisti-zurnalai/etniskumo-studijos-20131/>.

<sup>22</sup> However, according to the report of European Migration Network (2010), the prevailing viewpoints in the public discourse showed that instead of satisfying labour force demands by bringing migrant workers from outside the EU, Lithuania should make efforts to facilitate the process of return migration.

as restricting. The criticism was related to the bureaucratic procedures of employment of migrant workers and the *ad hoc* approach in satisfying labour force demand.

Along the debates discussed above, public and media attention to labour immigration processes significantly increased during 2006–2008 as publications on immigration processes became more frequent. As Leončikas and Žibas (2010) argue, the publications on immigration issues appeared after certain events. Most articles were triggered by certain legislative developments. No significant differences among media channels in terms of subjects covered were identified. Perceptions of threats (such as terrorism, crimes, riots, unemployment) and challenges (such as cultural incompatibility, racism and illegal work) prevailed in all topics concerning immigration issues<sup>23</sup>. However, the refugee issue and recent migration crisis in the Mediterranean revealed that the media attention might be even bigger than that related to labour immigration. In 2015, the largest increase in immigration-related articles and broadcasts in the media, which reflected the issue of refugee quota<sup>24</sup> in detail, deserve particular attention<sup>25</sup>. In this case, the division of opinions was revealed as public commentators and politicians had different attitudes towards the quota system and voluntary acceptance of the refugees. It seems that resistance to taking on the responsibility is much greater than willingness to accept the quota.

Despite the negative coverage of emigration issues, Leončikas and Žibas (2010) conclude that the media remains the only channel where challenging situations of the migrants can be at least given publicity. However, due to stereotypical coverage of certain immigrant groups (refugees or migrant workers in particular), such publicity tends to have negative connotations. For example, labour immigrants from third countries (especially from China and Turkey) were mentioned when covering the issue of illegal work, migrant exploitation and criminalisation. Immigration of the Chinese (unlike other immigrant groups) was clearly visible in the media and it has led to a debate about supposedly raised immigration challenges<sup>26</sup>. The Institute for Ethnic Studies confirmed such media response in 2014<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> For example, 'Immigration is a delayed action bomb', *delfi.lt*, 25.06.2006; 'A hundred thousand migrant workers will flood Lithuania', *delfi.lt*, 07.07.2007; 'Newcomers from the East are occupying free work places', *delfi.lt*, 02.08.2005; 'The test of globalisation is waiting', *delfi.lt*, 11.04.2005.

<sup>24</sup> Over the next two years, Lithuania will accept 325 refugees.

<sup>25</sup> For more, see: <http://www.mipas.lt/lt/naujienos>.

<sup>26</sup> For example, 'Chinese dream is their own Chinatown in Vilnius', *Balsas.lt*, 21.11.2007; 'Waiting for Chinatown', *VZ.lt* 26.11.2008; 'Chinese occupy garden-plots of Vilnius', *Alfa.lt*, 10.05.2008; 'Police of Vilnius dealt with problems of half a hundred Chinese at midnight', *VE.lt*, 14.08.2008; 'Chinese workers began raising the concerns', *VE.lt*, 06.04.2009; 'Lithuanians rent the Chinese', *Vilnausdiena.lt*, 31.05.2008; 'The slave market in Vilnius', *Vilniausdiena.lt*, 14.06.2008; 'Mobsters from Klaipeda victimise Chinese workers', *Lrytas.lt*, 31.07.2008; 'Workers from China in the spotlight of Migration Service', *15min.lt*, 18.08.2008, etc.

<sup>27</sup> For more, see the 'Trajectories and Evaluation Mechanisms of Integration of Third-country Nationals' project. Available at: <http://ces.lt/en/projects/archive/migration-research/the-trajectories-and-evaluation-mechanisms-of-integration-of-third-country-nationals/>.

Concerning political discussion and public discourse on migrant political participation, two main issues has to be emphasised: debates on the changes of the Law on Elections to Municipal Councils and on access of foreigners to political parties (Migrant Participation Project 2015).

On 20 June 2002, the Seimas amended the Constitution in order to extend electoral rights in local elections to all permanent residents of municipalities, including EU citizens and third country nationals. In 2002, the Article 119(2) of the Constitution was amended. As a result, similar amendments to the Law on Elections to Municipal Councils were adopted. It enabled EU citizens permanently residing in the country to vote and stand for election at the local level. According to Žalimas (2013), this measure was rather uncontroversial as it was considered an integral part of Lithuania becoming an EU member state. Moreover, it did not raise intense discussion as the number of foreigners with permanent residence permit in Lithuania was (and still is) very small<sup>28</sup>.

Contrary to the debates on allowing permanent residents to vote passively and actively at the local level, the possibility for foreigners (particularly EU citizens) to become members of political parties raised intense discussions among politicians and public commentators<sup>29</sup>. The EU also ‘joined’ the debate. As Seimas has banned foreigners from membership in political parties, Lithuania received a warning from the European Commission<sup>30</sup>.

As experts from the Lithuanian Red Cross Society argue, considering the recent debate and initiative of a referendum in order to decide whether foreigners should have the right to buy Lithuanian land<sup>31</sup>, it is clear that each attempt to give more rights to foreigners in different areas will face more resistance (Migrant Participation Project 2015).

Entire political debate around immigration issues could be illustrated through public opinion polls (or attitudes towards immigration). The analysis of public opinion polls

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<sup>28</sup> However, looking at recent debates on the access of third country nationals to political parties (see below), the argument of the small share of foreigners with permanent residence permits does not seem to be relevant any more.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Seimas resisted to the EU requirement allowing foreigners to establish political parties’, Infoplex.lt, 08.10.2013; ‘Foreigners will join political parties’, Lžinios.lt, 01.07.2013; ‘Europe forces Lithuania to elect foreigners. We will not be owners any more. We will be flunkies’, Respublika.lt, 10.05.2013; ‘Government agreed, that EU citizens would have a right to become members of political parties’, Ekspertai.eu, 17.07.2013; ‘Seimas bans foreigners from membership in Lithuanian political parties’, Lithuaniatribune, 08.10.2013.

<sup>30</sup> The European Commission asked Lithuania whether the rejected proposal was in line with the Community’s standards allowing EU citizens run for the European Parliament and municipal councils. In this case, emphasis should be put on the fact that the amendment was related to the electoral rights of EU citizens rather than to third country nationals or all foreigners residing in the country on permanent basis. Such a debate gives an opportunity to look at the general political attitude towards political participation of foreign population in Lithuania.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Land-sale to foreigners: will the ban be cancelled?’, Delfi.lt, 01.12.2013; ‘Who is buying Lithuanian land?’ Delfi.lt, 12.09.2013; ‘Seimas is in favour to ban land-sale to foreigners’, Delfi.lt, 12.09.2013.

(Beresnevičiūtė and Leončikas 2009; Žibas 2010; Vildaitė and Žibas 2010; Pilinkaitė-Sotirovič and Žibas 2011) revealed a more negative than positive image of immigration (along with immigrants). On one hand, a hierarchy of constant (negative) attitudes prevails in society towards different groups of immigrants (the analysis of generally prevailing public attitudes showed cultural insularity, which manifests in perceiving the migrants “differently”). On the other hand, the society is not well informed about the immigration processes in Lithuania. The mass media is, perhaps, the most important and mostly widespread form of public contact with immigrants. It can be argued that the information provided by mass media and the attitudes prevailing in public discourse have bigger importance to the approach in respect of immigrants so far, but not the social (direct) contacts. Finally, the prevailing opinion of the public reveals concerns about possible social upheaval or potential threats caused by the presence of immigrants in Lithuania.

### *Conclusions*

Summarising the analysis of the theoretical assumptions for migration and its continuation, it can be claimed that with regard to contemporary migration, social and economic migration theories must compliment one another. Economic migration theories emphasise the economic nature of migration, focus on migration motives at individual and family level and consider presence on the job market as the paramount factors conditioning migration. Social migration theories consider the migration process to be a continuous and integral part of life in contemporary society, where migration is situated in a network, that is to say, in the rules and societal norms of the countries of origin, transit and destination.

On one hand, the main Lithuanian immigration law illustrates the administrative nature of immigration policies, as it is the only document to regulate immigration and the legal status of foreigners. Furthermore, such policies are regulated in *ad hoc* manner. Although strategies and programmes allow the disclosure of political attitudes towards migration issues, immigration and migrant integration policies were not developed as a priority in the long-term strategies of the state as an emphasis was given to emigration and its consequences. The situation changed when the government adopted the Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines and other related documents, which can be considered as the basis of a long-term immigration policy.

The newest legislative developments in the field of migration management illustrate that migrant integration issues are emphasised as a prioritised immigration policy area. However, EU funds are considered the most important development tool for migrant integration. Consequently, the fragmented and project-based character of migrant integration processes without any progress from the political perspective evidences the absence of a systematic mechanism for implementation of migrant integration policies.

Regardless of the involvement of different ministries, employers could be considered a group most active and engaged in the development of labour immigration policy. However, employers are not active in providing integration measures for migrant



workers. When it comes to the development of migrant integration infrastructure, the non-governmental sector is directly involved in implementing integration policies thanks to EU funds. Regardless of this involvement, migrant workers remain one of the most vulnerable migrant groups in Lithuania.

While analysing political debates on immigration issues, one important aspect has to be emphasised: if debates on immigration are usually related to immigration dynamics, media coverage and legislative developments, discussions on emigration usually receive emotional character. Before 2008, the media concentrated on challenges posed by immigration to Lithuania in the general context of experiences of Western European countries, while after 2008, the focus shifted towards migrant workers and labour immigration. However, after 2009 and even global economic changes (2011–2015) the attention to labour immigration decreased, while the focus on emigration and its consequences remained visible. It could be explained by very intense discussions on refugee quotas in 2015.

The analysis of public opinion polls revealed that the biggest structural obstacle to integration is the negative attitudes towards immigration in general and different immigrant groups in particular. Such an obstacle affects different types of immigration, especially refugees and migrant workers. The analysis of public attitudes illustrates the cultural insularity of the society. This cultural insularity manifests itself in “perceiving the immigrants differently”). Along with the cultural aspect of attitudes, shaping the public perception is a strong economic aspect. It is related to the myth that taxpayers support immigrants. Moreover, there is a feeling of competition in society, considering both labour market and equal opportunities while accessing different social services.

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