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# Baltic State Migration System

## The Case of Latvian Immigrants in Sweden

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**ABSTRACT** The article focuses on the migration from the Baltic States to Sweden, with a particular focus on Latvia. Two historical turns in the Baltic States' recent history have contributed to an out-migration from the region—the restoration of independence in the early 1990s and accession to the European Union (EU) in 2004. Although these events were considered positive as they meant “open” borders for Baltic State citizens, lately the out-migration from Latvia has increased. Likewise, the global economic crisis that started in 2008 and the consequential unemployment draw attention to emerging patterns and the composition of emigrants to several destinations, but in this case particularly to Sweden. After the EU expansion Sweden did not receive as many Eastern European migrants as was expected at the time, but recent trends reveal that there has been a steady increase in the migration flow since then. The Nordic countries as a potential destination initially lacked pioneer migrants to establish social support networks that would attract newcomers, but this is now changing; statistics for 2010 show that the number of Baltic State immigrants in Sweden has grown significantly since 2008. With the economic recession and unemployment in Latvia in 2009, 2010 had even higher emigration activity than in 2004 just after the country's accession to the EU. Nordic countries emerge as welcoming destinations to recent migrants, who state that the proximity to their home country and the labour market opportunities are the main attraction but also that a positive view of Sweden and the Swedes plays a part. Contemporary trends of migration from the Baltic States and especially Latvia under conditions of economic downturn lead to emerging pattern of migration systems between Latvia and Sweden, combining a mixture of motives and diversity of the people involved in migration chains.

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**KEYWORDS** international migration, east-west migration, Latvian emigration, Baltic, migration system

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## Introduction

Despite the geographical proximity between the Baltic countries and Sweden as well as their historical links, migration streams are at a low level, as a result of the political barrier between the Soviet Union and the Nordic countries during the post-war period. In the early 1990s there were indications of an emerging migration system evolving between the countries around the Baltic Sea (Olofsson & Malmberg 2010). With the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union contact between the Nordic countries and the Baltic States was restored, for instance regarding restitution (Jørgensen & Stjernström 2008), and the establishment of Swedish companies in the Baltic States. This contact intensified after the expansion of the EU and the inclusion of new member states. In more recent years, the economies of the Baltic States have been severely struck by global recession. These historical events have shaped a migration system. In this article we focus on the migration between the Baltic States in general, and Latvia in particular, to Sweden.

According to Wadensjö (2007), since May 2004 Sweden as a destination has experienced increasing immigration, especially from Poland and the Baltic States, albeit not to the expected extent (Tamas & Münz 2006; Drinkwater *et al.* 2009; Olofsson & Malmberg 2010). Despite the geographical proximity and historical bonds, and the fact that Sweden did not apply transitional rules for migrants coming from the new EU member states, migration flows from Poland and the Baltics have become much greater to other destinations, for instance Ireland and the UK (Apsite 2011). According to Kahanec *et al.* (2009), almost 70 per cent of the immigrants from the EU8<sup>1</sup> have been absorbed by the UK and Ireland since 2003. A survey carried out in the Baltic countries a few years before the EU accession shows that the willingness to move abroad was not very high, and at the time few respondents had Nordic countries (including Sweden) as their preferred destination. Potential migrants more often choose Ireland and the UK due to easier access to the labour market in these countries and not least the fact that English is the language spoken there (Wadensjö 2007). Apsite (2011) reports that most Latvian migrants to Ireland and the UK migrate for economic reasons and tend to work in low-paid sectors.

For the Baltic States, access to the European common labour market has resulted in a negative net migration to countries with relatively higher wages. By the year 2000 net migration rates had turned positive in most EU10 new member states, and in 2005 the migratory balance was positive in all member states except Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the Netherlands (Diez Guardia & Pichelmann 2006).

Looking at recent emigration from the Baltic States, the immigration of men has increased rapidly since 2004 although there are still more female than male immigrants (Wadensjö 2007). A noteworthy aspect of this new emigration pattern is also that the composition of immigration from the three Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) to Sweden went through a change, with Estonian immigration—previously always the largest group of the three—significantly surpassed in volume by Lithuanian immigration (Olofsson & Malmberg 2010). In this paper we focus on Latvian migrants, a group that has also grown faster than the Estonian migrants during the past decade.

The aim of this study is to explore how the migration system between Sweden and the Baltic States developed over time in relation to the structural changes (independence, EU expansion, economic crisis). In addition, we also aim to study the motives and experiences of immigrants who have come to Sweden from Latvia.

This study addresses several research questions:

- How are historical events like independence restoration and accession to the EU reflected in migration inflows to Sweden from the Baltic States?
- Are there significant differences in the volumes and composition of Baltic State immigrant in Sweden at different stages?
- What are the main motives and reasons for Latvian women and men for choosing Sweden as their destination?

## Theoretical Background and Previous Research

Human mobility has become an inherent part of the global economy. As a social and economic process, globalization prompts a “proliferation of cross-border flows and transnational social networks” (Castles 2001) that connect migrants across transnational space. In a rapidly globalized world, the patterns of migration and migrants’ social relationships are changing fast. Migrants move in what are called “transnational social spaces,” which are the preconditions for and also the products of globalizing processes (Faist 2000). Migration is a significant event in the individual migrant’s life; it is not something undertaken lightly, without seriously considering its consequences (Lee 1966; Fielding 1992; Niedomysl 2010). According to Halfacree (2004) migration is a complex process, and besides previously dominant economic motives there are various non-economic factors such as family ties, amenities and cultural aspects that have been suggested as important

in understanding migration processes (Bailey & Boyle 2004; Bengtsson & Johansson 1993; Hedberg & Kepsu 2003; Lundholm 2007).

Neo-classical economic models of migration generally assume that individuals will choose to migrate permanently only if they receive a higher real wage in the receiving country than in the sending country (Massey *et al.* 1993). The labour demand in Sweden is an important attraction for Latvians, and the relationship between the Swedish and Latvian labour markets could be seen as an example of dual labour market theory (Piore 1979); migration flows are largely determined by labour demand characteristics at the destination, where the local population moves to more attractive professions while immigrants take up the “3D” (dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs (Favell 2008). Kahanec *et al.* (2009) stress that migration theories generally imply the significance of international differentials: net of migration costs in earnings and income levels; costs of living; unemployment rates; the quality of public goods; and the generosity of the welfare systems. This is often the case when characterizing mainly economic-driven connections between countries, but it is recognized that there is a strong association between permanent settlement and family reunification (Massey & Espinosa 1997) as well as intermarriage with natives.

Irrespective of motive, economic or otherwise, migrants may be positively or negatively self-selected with respect to their observable and unobservable characteristics, upon both entry and exit (Borjas 1987; Chiswick 1999; Kahanec *et al.* 2009). There seems to be an increasing consensus in the migration literature that, instead of being an aspect of income-maximizing behaviour by individuals, migration is often an aspect of livelihood strategies pursued by households to spread income risks and, if possible, generate income (remittances) which can be used to improve living standards or invest in housing, education or commercial enterprises. Migration then becomes a strategy to overcome the local market and other more general development constraints (Stark 1991; de Haas 2010). According to Massey and Taylor (eds.) (2004), the effects of (labour) migration are becoming increasingly multifaceted, for both the sending and receiving countries. However, in the case of the Baltic States more negative effects, like a loss of the economically active population, are recognized in the countries of origin more than in the receiving country. Furthermore, according to Salt (1987), people tend to move to places where the standard of living is better. However, this alone cannot explain the actual shape of migration patterns (Salt 1987: 243; Schoorl 1998) because, as argued by Meng and Gregory (2005), in most Western countries immigrants earn less on average, than the native-born, an earning gap that decreases as time spent in the host country increases.

In the literature there are several definitions of temporary and perma-

nent migration. According to Berninghaus and Siefert-Vogt (1988), a migrant typically only plans a temporary stay in the host country, but actually postpones the date of return such that return migration becomes less probable after some time. According to Piore (1979), a guest worker or temporary migrant is a target saver who knows exactly how much capital s/he needs. Permanent migrants, on the other hand, are the ones who change their place of residency. Pinger (2009) explains that they intend to “settle abroad” and do not want to return to their home country on a continuous basis. Temporary migrants are those who have spent no more than a year abroad or do not intend to stay longer and plan instead to return home for good.

Little existing research deals with the characteristics of permanent and temporary migration (Pinger 2009). Dølvik and Eldring (2006) characterize the case of the Nordic countries as having a modest inflow of individual job seekers, but with a current sharp increase in the posting of workers and low-cost competition from Poland and the Baltic States.

In the case of Sweden, Dølvik and Eldring (2006) explain that there is growing interest in the posting of workers in Sweden for often temporary, low-skilled occupations that include lower costs and enhanced flexibility. Although there are no reliable statistics on the volume and composition of this mobility, most of the service migration takes place through the posting and hiring out of workers, although self-employment is also prevalent. The main flows are found in the construction industry, but an increased use of subcontractors and hired labour from the EU8 is also reported in the manufacturing, service and agriculture/horticulture/forestry industries.

Besides the economic drivers, social motives—particularly intermarriage—can be an important component in understanding a migration system. In the literature, intermarriage is considered a major indicator of the quality of the relationships, or “social distance,” among groups and the “cohesion” of societies (Monden & Smits 2005). In describing the east-west migration of Bulgarian females, Lalioutou (2010) discovers that they were driven by a variety of factors, including the need for better material and professional resources, political and existential dissidence, personal and intimate relationships, love, curiosity and desire. As Mahler and Pessar (2006: 27) argue, migrant women are generally more likely than men to develop personal and household strategies consistent with long-term or permanent settlement abroad. A considerable proportion of all Baltic immigrants, especially women, engage in intermarriage with Swedish men. According to Niedomysl *et al.* (2010), immigrant women from Russia and the Baltic States are a relatively new phenomenon in Sweden (since the fall of the Iron Curtain) in terms of intermarriage with Swedish male partners, compensating for the now much lower volumes of Polish women, who were the majority

group during the 1970s and 1980s (Niedomysl *et al.* 2010). In contrast, other findings by Meng and Gregory (2005) on intermarriage in Australia show that male rather than female immigrants are more likely to intermarry. Intermarriage with the host country population has long been considered vital to immigrants' societal (Dribe & Lundh 2008) integration and economic assimilation, which are generally understood to be an accumulation of the knowledge of the customs, language and opportunities to find good jobs in the host country (Chiswick 1978; Meng & Gregory 2005).

The probability that an immigrant will intermarry may also be affected by the length and permanency of his or her residency in the host country. Therefore, male Baltic State immigrants—who are often involved in temporary single or repeated economic migration moves—do not identify as much with the host society, or more often maintain transnational relationships. Meng and Gregory (2005) found evidence that immigrants who have been in the host country for a longer period may have a better understanding of the culture there than more recent arrivals and may therefore relate better to potential spouses from the set of available natives. In addition to a better understanding of the culture, Fischer and Malmberg (1998) and Bevelander (2000) found an improved labour market position for East European migrants with longer durations of residence in Sweden (Olofsson & Malmberg 2010). As a general observation, Rauhut (2004) argues that immigrants from Eastern Europe can be integrated into Swedish society more easily than those from more distant locations. Although empirical findings show great differences between the labour market performances of East Europeans and native Swedes (Bevelander 2000; Olofsson & Malmberg 2010), there are a number of highly skilled professionals from the Baltic States living and working in Sweden. This opportunity provides a field for professional career growth.

As found by Baker and Benjamin (1997), immigrant women from an intermarried family do better on the labour market than their counterparts from a non-intermarried family. The authors interpret this phenomenon as an outcome of an investment strategy that differs according to family type (Meng & Gregory 2005). Because females who move to Sweden for marriage may face various different obstacles (Olofsson & Malmberg 2010), they can quickly develop new contacts in the new country, but marriage migration often results in relative isolation, as contact with other immigrants from the same country may not be as frequent. Initial or pioneer migrants in this context create an attractiveness of a destination; therefore the circulation of migrants, both those who are well-educated and others and in both temporary and permanent systems, is crucial for triggering increases in migration, for the diffusion of information about the place of destination, and

for the success of previous migrants by also possibly functioning as a good example for potential followers (Gurak & Caces 1992; Faist 2000). Thus, networks may serve as a key element in facilitating community formation and permanent settlement (Portes 1995).

## Data and Methods

This study is based on two sources of data, Swedish register data and a web-based survey exploring Latvian citizens currently living in Sweden. The register data deals with the characteristics of Baltic State immigrants in Sweden based on time-series and cross-sectional data. The data was extracted from the ASTRID database at the department of Geography and Economic History at Umeå University. The data set includes information on an individual level on demographic and socio-economic characteristics of all people born in the Baltic States residing in Sweden, as well as all those who migrated from the Baltic States to Sweden between 1985 and 2008. In order to be registered as a permanent immigrant in Sweden and appear in the data set, a person must have an intention to stay in Sweden for more than one year. The analysis includes descriptive statistics analysing trends and composition, intermarriages and occupational clustering of the Baltic State immigrants in Sweden. Furthermore, four years were chosen for the cross-sectional part of the study: 1985, as this is the first year of data available that represents the Baltic State immigration activity during the Soviet period; 1991, representing the independence restoration; 2005, showing the changes taking place after accession to the EU in May 2004; and finally, 2008, representing the latest composition of Baltic State immigrants in Sweden. In addition, we looked at available statistical data for 2009, which revealed the current situation linking the Baltic State region and Sweden. A lack of sufficient data forced us to exclude temporary migrants from this study.

The qualitative part of this study deals with Latvia in particular. In order to understand immigrant experiences in Sweden, this part of the study discusses results from a web-based survey combined with more in-depth questions. Data from 122 respondents was collected via a locally popular Latvian social website, [www.draugiem.lv](http://www.draugiem.lv). Data collection took place in October 2010 and was designed and distributed electronically. Various issues like motives and actual reasons for moves, social contacts, occupational changes, communication channels with Latvia and other Latvians in Sweden were addressed in 19 questions, and individuals were invited to participate through the website's discussion board and those who were located in Sweden at the time were then individually contacted via the website. However, participants themselves chose whether to complete the survey;

therefore self-selection has to be taken into account. This study thus concentrates on individual-level experiences of Latvians in Sweden.

The website contains a primary audience of around 2.6 million registered website users, composed of both people living in Latvia and Latvians living abroad. The foreign location is identified by the user's IP address.<sup>2</sup> At the end of 2010, the estimated count of website visitors in Sweden was around 1887<sup>3</sup> per day. This social website for individuals living abroad is a virtual connection point with their families and friends back home.

The combination of the two sources enables us to describe the general trends and development, but also to obtain insight from the perspective of the migrants.

## Results

### Baltic State Immigrants in Sweden. General Description

The official Swedish registers allow us to follow individual immigrants born in the Baltic States and migrating to Sweden from 1985 to 2008. It reveals a steady increase in Baltic State immigrants during this period, starting at a very low level. Data from 1985 reveals that as few as 34 people emigrated from all the Baltic States to Sweden that year. However, in that year 16,050 people born in the Baltic States already resided in Sweden, a group consisting mainly of immigrants who had come until the end of the Second World War. In the year of independence restoration, 1991, the number of immi-

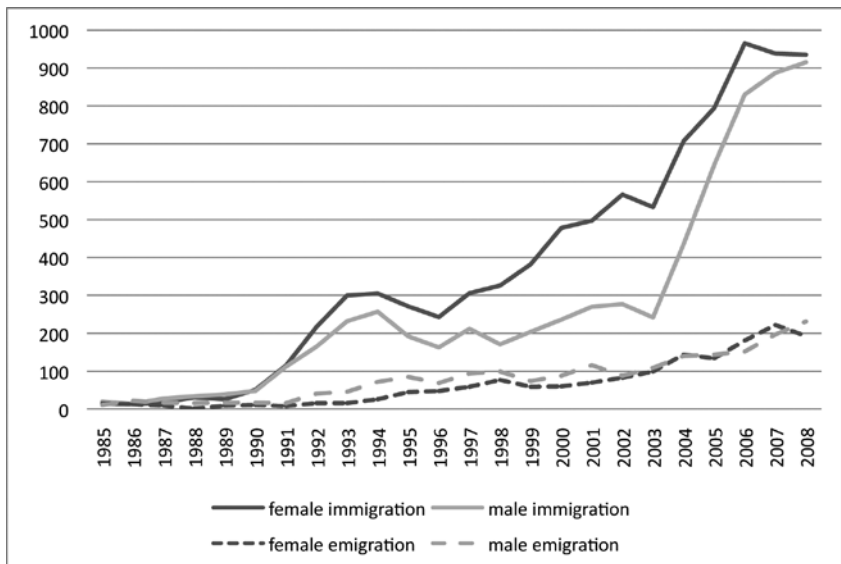


Fig. 1. Migration trends between the Baltic States and Sweden, 1985 to 2008 (source: ASTRID).



grants increased to 224. In 2005, the year after the Baltic States' accession to the EU and entrance onto the free European labour market, the number of immigrants from the Baltics to Sweden increased to 1,438. As many as 1,850 Baltic State immigrants arrived in Sweden in 2008. Furthermore, data from Statistics Sweden show that there was an even higher number of immigrants the following year in 2009, reaching 2,620. Also according to Statistics Sweden, in 2010 there were 21,431 persons born in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania living in Sweden.

Fig. 1 shows a wave pattern with peak points of immigration at the beginning of the 1990s and after 2004. However, Baltic State citizen emigration from Sweden has remained fairly steady, with only a slight increase during all the included years.

There are slightly different immigration trends for Baltic State male and female immigrants (see Fig. 1). Until independence restoration the numbers of immigrants, both women and men, were rather equal. To some extent, the immigration trends reflect historical events like independence and EU membership. Immigration increased during all periods, peaking in 1993 and 2008. Since 1990 there have been more female than male immigrants from the Baltics to Sweden. It is worth noting that although women outnumber men, the emigration numbers are much more similar, suggesting that women have historically been more prone to stay. Fig. 1 shows a gradual and consistent increase of female immigrants, while the pattern in the Baltic States is one of sharp increase after the EU expansion. By 2004, the rate of

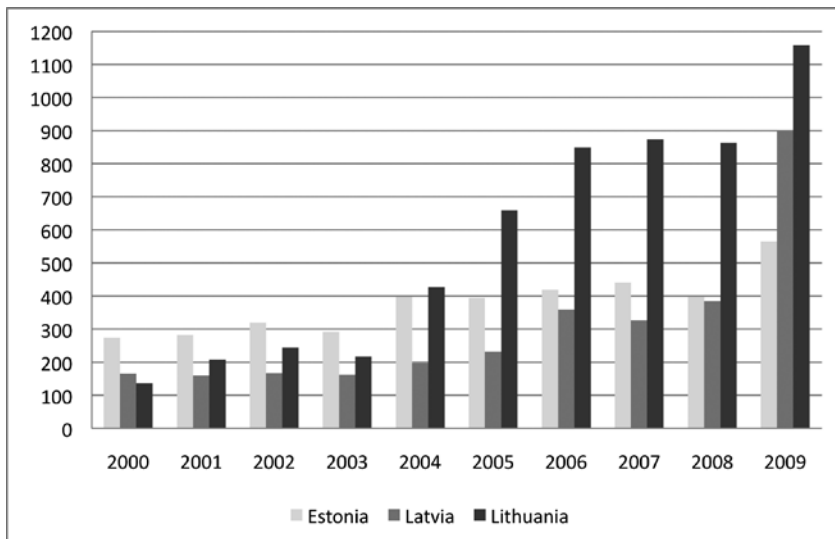


Fig. 2. Number of immigrants from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to Sweden between 2000 and 2009 (source: Statistics Sweden).

male immigrants had started to increase faster than that of females and the numbers had converged.

As shown in Fig. 2, Estonian migrants used to be the dominant group of Baltic immigrants in Sweden, but this trend has changed. After 2004, when all three countries joined the EU, Lithuanians became the dominant group in numbers, despite being the most remote in terms of geographic location but greatest in population. We also recognize another shift, in comparison to the neighbouring countries: Latvia experienced a sharper increase in emigration to Sweden starting in 2008 compared to the other Baltic countries. This can mainly be explained by the effects of the economic downturn, uncertainty and constraints in economic development.

There is also a significant change in immigrant age composition over time, shown in Fig. 3. There was a fairly equal distribution by gender in 1991, when nearly 40 per cent of registered immigrants in Sweden from the Baltic States were under age 20 (1985 is excluded from this analysis as there are too few observations). By 2005 the age composition had changed, and now the significantly dominant group for both genders were immigrants aged 21 to 30 years followed by males aged 31 to 40 and children up to ten years old. The age composition of Baltic State immigrants in 2008 does not differ significantly compared to 2005; however, there are considerably more male immigrants in the 21–30 age group. In both 2005 and 2008 an increase of economically active working-age Baltic State citizens moving to Sweden

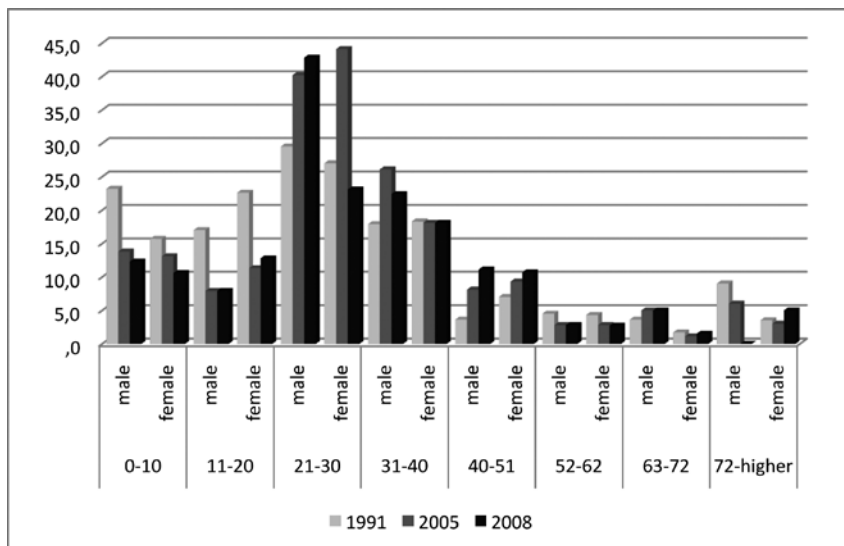


Fig. 3. Age structure of Baltic State immigrants in Sweden in 1991, 2005, 2008 (per cent) by gender (source: ASTRID).

is noteworthy, suggesting that Sweden, after being recognized as a potential destination, has attracted individuals often enticed by economic motives and higher prosperity potential.

The web-based survey data from 2010 describing Latvian immigrants in Sweden is in line with these findings, and the age group composition among respondents is dominated by the 20–30 year age group. The main motive for men was economic and for women family reunification. These results are in contrast to those found in similar research conducted at the University of Latvia targeting Latvian immigrants in the UK, in which work and family motives were not gender-related. Both male and female migrants initially migrate with economic motives but further social network expansion attracts more followers with family motives.

### Marriage to Co-Ethnics or Swedes?

An indication of different motives by gender, in the case of Sweden, was also found in the register data. Niedomysl *et al.* (2010) also found that females from the Baltic States and Russia more often marry Swedish males, compared to Baltic males marrying Swedish women. This finding is also confirmed in the present study. Another motive for migration to Sweden is family reunification with co-ethnics.

We have compared partner's country of birth (Baltic States or Sweden) for immigrants who immigrated in 1991, 2000, 2005 and 2008 after a period of three years, respectively, for 1994, 2003 and 2008. For people who arrived in 2008, the same year was used as the year of reference as this was the latest data available.

Most immigrants are young and unmarried (see Fig. 1). Baltic State women intermarry and choose relocation to Sweden more often than men do. This finding in our analysis was confirmed through a Chi-square test, in which we found a statistically significant difference between genders in terms of intermarriages for people who immigrated in 2000, 2005 and 2008 and have spent three years in Sweden (see Table 1). For the first period in the early 1990s, gender differences were not statistically significant. In general more men tend to have co-ethnic partners, but the Baltic State women—notably in the 20–30 year age group—tend to migrate single or in a relationship with Swedish men. Among the women who entered Sweden in 2000 and were married three years later, the majority were married to Swedish men. However, intermarriage does not seem to have increased in more recent years. Among those who entered Sweden in 2005, the most common origin of their spouses was the Baltic States.

Besides family reunification or family formation with a Swedish partner, another strong migration driver is economic motives. This is confirmed

	Civil status 1994 for immigrants (age >18) arriving 1991		Civil status 2003 for immigrants (age >18) arriving 2000	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Not married	38 (51 %)	49 (58 %)	101 (70 %)	219 (56 %)
Married to Swedish	4 (5 %)	6 (7 %)	18 (12 %)	98 (25 %)
Married to Baltic	25 (34 %)	25 (30 %)	14 (10 %)	16 (4 %)
Married to other	7 (9 %)	4 (5 %)	12 (8 %)	59 (15 %)
Total	74 (100 %)	84 (100 %)	145 (100 %)	392 (100 %)

	Civil status 2008 for immigrants (age >18) arriving 2005		Civil status 2008 for recent immigrants (age >18)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Not married	319 (61 %)	360 (57 %)	598 (78 %)	546 (70 %)
Married to Swedish	11 (2 %)	77 (12 %)	10 (1 %)	36 (5 %)
Married to Baltic	148 (28 %)	121 (19 %)	126 (17 %)	133 (17 %)
Married to other	42 (8 %)	72 (11 %)	29 (4 %)	63 (8 %)
Total	520 (100 %)	630 (100 %)	763 (100 %)	778 (100 %)

Table 1. Adult (>18 years) Baltic State immigrants' intermarriages three years after immigration in 1991, 2000, 2005 and 2008 by gender (source: ASTRID).

in the web-based survey, which indicates that around half of the Latvian respondents came to Sweden due to economic motives, especially young males. In Sweden as well as the UK (Apsite 2011) economic reasons for migration have surpassed private reasons, a change that took place after the EU expansion, which offered increased employment options. Similar to the UK, Sweden's Baltic State immigrants are concentrated in low-skilled primary or secondary service occupations throughout the research period. In addition, however, there is a rather high number of highly skilled professionals working, for example, in education and engineering. Data from 2008 illustrates this, with the construction sector being the largest for men and the cleaning sector the most common for women. It is worth mentioning that this is a representation of the Swedish official statistics and carries a certain bias regarding the number of employed people, as we exclude temporary

immigrants who stay in Sweden less than a year as well as undocumented immigrants and those who are officially employed by companies based in the Baltics. The web-based survey data reveals similar characteristics in the ASTRID data, in which Latvian immigrants in Sweden are employed in both highly skilled occupations and low-skilled labour work. Results from the web-based survey among 122 respondents reveal occupations and sectors for employment that are mentioned more often—in Latvia these are students, project managers, construction workers, shop assistants and employees in the service sector, and in Sweden they are construction workers, students, the self-employed and those working in the service sector as well as those who are currently not working. The most common occupational transfer within the same occupation involves students, construction workers and employees in the service sector. A high number of those not working or currently unemployed can be explained by the number of young women who move to Sweden to establish families with Swedish partners or reunite with their co-ethnics. Thus, maternity leave and homemaking are common occupations. However, results from similar research on Latvian immigrants in the UK (Apsite 2011) show more dramatic differences between occupational changes in Latvia and the UK, and that most immigrants hold low-skilled jobs and only an insignificant number work in highly skilled occupations. Even though a move to the UK would seem easier in terms of language and migrant network support, as a destination Sweden seems to have a tendency to attract more skilled and highly motivated immigrants.

### Experiences of Latvian Immigrants in Sweden

We have identified two dominant motives behind Latvian immigration to Sweden: in the web survey, slightly less than half of the respondents place themselves in the economic migrant group and almost as many have moved to join their family members, both those of Latvian origin and Swedish partners. In addition to these two dominant groups there are also adventure-seekers and students. The web-based survey includes 73 female and 49 male Latvian immigrants, aged 18 to 66, in Sweden. The highest proportion of respondents represents the 20–40 year age group, with the highest peak at 25–26 years of age. The length of stay in Sweden varies. More than half of the respondents have been in Sweden for more than a year and are considered permanent migrants. However, just below half have been in Sweden for less than a year, and even though they express a wish to be living in Latvia in five years, most of them believe that this will not be possible and that they will remain in Sweden.

The web survey reveals several rather different reasons for choosing Sweden as a target destination, and this decision has often been carefully

thought through because the Swedish language adds constraints for new immigrants to overcome. There may be very different motives, including very general ones like “I wanted to try how it would be to live abroad,” mostly expressed by young respondents. In terms of destination choice, geographic proximity plays an important role, with immigrants stating that “Sweden is much closer in distance than the UK and Ireland.” There are also very subjective positive emotions concerning Sweden:

My dream since childhood was to study in Sweden, because I really like the Swedish culture and mentality. Before moving to Sweden I visited here a few times and since then I have really loved this country.

Proximity to home, labour market opportunities and a positive image promote Sweden as a potential destination for immigrants with various backgrounds. Sweden is not only a destination offering low-skilled jobs with Latvians massively contributing to a process of brain drain, but is rather viewed more as providing opportunities for them to secure better life conditions for themselves and their families.

### Do Latvians Move to Sweden for Work?

As the unemployment rate in Latvia increased from 10 per cent in 2008 to 17 per cent in 2010, employment opportunities or “escape” from unemployment are expected to have been reinforced as a motive for moving to Sweden. As expressed by a male construction worker (38):

Sweden is the best country in terms of work and attitude towards guest workers. Here you have to prove yourself and if you’re a good construction worker you’ll always have work to do. Swedes prefer that a person speaks bad Swedish rather than good English, so that’s one of the investments I had to make to be able to work here. Yes, work, because I’m here with my colleagues from Latvia and my family lives back in Latvia. I’m very satisfied with the work and living conditions here, as are the others I know. Most probably I won’t be going back to Latvia in the next five years—only if there’s more or less appropriate employment and wage level in Latvia.

Changes in occupation after changing the place of residency, however, are not as dramatic as in the case of Latvians in the UK (Apsite 2011). There are significant differences between a respondent’s occupation in Latvia before emigration and the occupation held in the UK. Nine out of ten Latvian immigrants in the UK are working in low-skilled jobs, mostly in agriculture and picking-packing factories (Apsite 2011), compared to the results of the web-based survey in Sweden in which more often respondents re-

ported occupational transfers in sectors like IT, education, engineering, forestry, medicine and construction. Persons with work-related motives are mostly male respondents. The actual reasons are rather different, varying from business trips or employment in Sweden through employers in Latvia. However, the most common reasons for moving are still unemployment, loss of job in Latvia or a need for financial resources. As this quotation from a woman now working in various jobs within agriculture reflects:

As a teacher, I didn't have work anymore. The salary I was making wasn't even enough for my daily trips to work. I'm a single mother with two sons, six and eight years old.

A similar quotation reflects the struggle of dealing with monthly payments: "I had to move because I had to make my mortgage payments, and back in Latvia I couldn't find employment for a long period."

The latest economic crisis in Latvia has caused many, both male and female informants, to consider economic moves. The following quotation illustrates teachers' lack of opportunities in Latvia and the decision to move to Sweden and work as a teacher there:

I had a big study loan to pay back, and in my profession [primary school teacher] in Latvia I couldn't find a well paid position and Sweden is close to Latvia and has a good economy as well as a positive social and emotional environment.

Along the same lines, the following example illustrates a position change from being a highly qualified project manager in Latvia to working in a construction field in Sweden:

After our economic boom years it's impossible to survive with today's ridiculous salaries. And the state isn't even on my side: from my salary of 1,500 lats I receive only 390 lats, which is very disappointing. What else can I do? I have to move and work abroad!

Although Sweden is perceived by many migrants as an attractive country to live in, most of the Latvians participating in the survey stated that they would like to return to Latvia but that there are obstacles that make them believe they will not be able to do so within the near future.

### Do Latvians Move to Sweden for Family Reasons?

The second main group of people with motives similar to those in the UK study are respondents who have moved to Sweden to join their family members already living there. The results reveal that women from Latvia often

move to Sweden because of intermarriage with Swedes. Women often mention that they “mainly had private reasons;” “there was nothing negative that pushed me away from Latvia.” In these cases no economic push factors determined their decision to move; on the contrary, many of them faced a hard decision in order to make their relationship work:

I had only private reasons—I met a Swedish guy and we understood that if we wanted to be together I would have much higher chances of succeeding in Sweden than he would in Latvia.

Or a quotation from a woman who lived under very good conditions in Latvia and had a well-paid job at a prestigious company: “The reason I moved was my husband, who is from Stockholm.”

One of the interviewees is certain that “Swedish men are more serious and responsible about family values and children,” therefore Latvian women often intermarry with Swedish male partners. Alongside intermarriage and permanent settlement in Sweden, social networks that are maintained between Sweden and Latvia can attract potential new immigrants:

My sister is married to a Swede and has lived here since 2000, and we decided that life in Sweden is better for work and studies, so I moved to Sweden as well.

Social ties have a very wide range of possible followers, starting with under-aged children at the time of the move: “My mum married a Swede and I came with her.” The older generation is more often welcomed by their children: “Back in Latvia my life conditions were average, but my daughter is married to a Swede and lives in Sweden, so I came to live with her.”

For those who choose Sweden due to the free education available to EU member state citizens, the length of stay in Sweden may gradually and naturally change from one semester to a permanent stay and settlement. As a country, Sweden appears to be strategically interested in highly skilled professionals and attracts them through various benefits. A man who came to Sweden as a forestry student says:

I was noticed at my university in Latvia, and applied for the IKEA scholarship for master studies in Sweden. The rest just came in addition to that, and after spending some time here I realized that this was the place where I wanted to develop myself.

Latvian student migrants in Sweden are young people who are not planning to work in low-skilled occupations but rather to find opportunities to gain knowledge and experience. However, there is no certainty regarding return



plans, as Sweden currently offers wider development. And as these migrants are mostly in the young adult category, initial study motives may in time change into permanent settlement with subsequent prevailing motives.

## Discussion

The background of this study is the discussion about Eastern Europeans moving to the West; more precisely, the Baltic States as a region of emigration and emerging new receiving countries being not only English speaking, but also others. In a historical context the Nordic and Baltic hemispheres are closely interrelated, only interrupted by a cold war that occasionally divided Europe into two separated parts. This was quite noticeable in the northern context (Nordic and Baltic countries). The present study could also be understood as a study of the normalization of the migration patterns in this northern hemisphere.

Citizens of the Baltic countries have enjoyed free movement and travel only since the beginning of the 1990s, and have had access to significant opportunities to work abroad without institutional restriction since 2004 when all three Baltic States entered the EU. A more recent economic downturn has affected many Baltic State citizens, as economic conditions in the countries of origin deteriorated and many chose to move abroad to find employment. Sweden and the Nordic countries in general, has long been a destination for citizens from across the Baltic Sea. But recent historical events have accelerated a rapid increase in emigration from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to Sweden, and the migrant composition has converged in terms of motives and gender.

Swedish statistics reveal that there has been a massive increase in officially registered immigration, from very low in-migration numbers in 1985 to around 2,600 immigrants from the Baltic States in 2009. In addition to this permanent migration, there are also temporary and undocumented labour immigrants who are unaccounted for. The composition of the Baltic State immigrants differs significantly when comparing certain years. In terms of volume, since the early 1990s Sweden as a destination has been more attractive to female than to male immigrants. This shifted in 2003, however, when men's immigration increased more quickly than women's; this coincides with the opening of the free EU labour market. In recent years there has been a rapid increase of young, working-age, male immigrants who regard themselves as economic migrants more often than females do. The increased migration of this group has thereby evened out the gender imbalance in more recent years.

Results show adverse gender composition when comparing economic

and family reunification groups. With reference to results from the ASTRID database, male respondents are far more frequently represented in the economic labour migrant group and female respondents are strongly represented in the family reunification group. This means both that females are more involved in relationships with Swedes and also that Latvian males come to work in Sweden and, after settling in, invite their families from Latvia to join them. This is also confirmed by Niedomysl *et al.* (2010), who find that immigrant women from Russia and the Baltic States are a relatively new phenomenon in Sweden and are surpassing the previous dominance of Polish women. Sweden as a potential destination is becoming attractive and accessible through the development of social networks, and Latvian immigrants are eager to learn the language and overcome bureaucratic constraints to being successful.

In addition to employment opportunities another family-related group, family reunification and intermarriage with Swedes, stood out. Women from the Baltic States intermarry with Swedish-born partners more often than men do, and therefore choose a permanent life in Sweden more often than men do. Both the statistical analysis of the register data and the web-based survey confirmed these gender differences regarding immigration motives. In contrast to other research in which Baltic State immigrants hold low-skilled jobs, this study highlights that many Baltic immigrants in Sweden are also employed as professionals in several fields, like IT, engineering, banking and education. Occupational diversity excludes Latvian concentration in the lower occupational status. And more often than in the UK, Latvians experience occupational transfer. In this respect, there seems to be a difference compared to Latvian immigrants in the UK whereby a considerably larger proportion may be referred to as low-skilled labour, often working in agriculture, cleaning and picking-packing factories and also whereby more immigrants report that they are overqualified. This suggests that Sweden requires a greater investment from the immigrant to succeed in Sweden—for instance learning the language or finding employment, although few migrant support networks are available. It is possible that the motives for migrating to Sweden are more multifaceted than the mere pecuniary.

Agreeing that temporary migration can be beneficial to both the countries of destination and origin (Dustmann & Kirchkamp 2002; Amin & Mattoo 2005; Pinger 2009), we argue that contemporary trends in migration from the Baltic States and especially Latvia under conditions of economic downturn lead to a change in and mix of temporary and permanent migration. There is an emerging pattern of a migration system that combines a fluidity of motives and migration chains promoted by social networks

whereby temporary migration can lead to a permanent stay: partners follow partners, children follow parents and parents re-join their adult children. Based on current research, the Nordic countries emerge as one of the new destinations for Eastern Europeans in search of better paid employment and higher quality of life, instead of the previously popular English-speaking countries, which today in 2011 also suffer from high unemployment. Close geographic proximity with transportation links might develop channels that sustain a more active transnational social space between the Baltics and the Nordic countries.

Sweden and Latvia can serve as examples of how an uneven economic development within the European common labour market can enhance migration systems and, further, that this migration system in just a few decades can evolve into a transnational social space in which people meet and become aware of opportunities and living conditions across countries.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<sup>2</sup> Internet Protocol address.

<sup>3</sup> Source: [www.draugiem.lv](http://www.draugiem.lv); access date 13 December 2010.

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