

# Between the Carriage and the Pumpkin: A Cinderella Moment for Lithuanian Migration Policy

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## Abstract

Migration has become the primary driver of Lithuania's population growth and a critical factor for its long-term economic and demographic sustainability. In this policy paper, we examine three interlinked dimensions of recent migration inflows: their demographic impact, the human-capital characteristics of migrants, and the cultural proximity of origin countries measured through secular and emancipative values. Using residence permit data for 46 origin countries, UNDP human-development indicators, and Welzel's value indexes, we revealed a structural shift from high-HDI and value-proximate migrants (primarily from Belarus and Ukraine) toward more diverse inflows from medium- and low-HDI countries with more traditionalist value profiles. While this diversification strengthens demographic resilience, it also increases the complexity of integration. The findings highlight a strategic paradox: Lithuania benefits from migration economically, yet its policy framework remains largely reactive, generating uncertainty for some of the most skilled and culturally proximate groups. Based on our analysis, we outline several policy directions aligned with the Lithuania 2050 strategy, emphasising the need to treat migration as a long-term investment, reduce uncertainty, and support family-based settlement as a foundation for sustainable human-capital formation.

**Keywords:** Migration to Lithuania, demographic trends, human capital of migrants, Welzel's value indexes, cultural proximity, integration policy, Lithuania 2050 strategy

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## Background

Migration should never be viewed outside its context. Its flows into Lithuania or Poland differ substantially from those into, for example, Germany or France, reflecting different income levels, welfare systems, and historical patterns of mobility. Public narratives circulating in high-immigration countries – as well as those emerging domestically – also shape perceptions in Lithuania, sometimes overshadowing local evidence and contributing to a distorted understanding of migration. The migration of recent years therefore requires an evidence-based assessment, particularly regarding its significance for Lithuania’s development.

Such an assessment was carried out by the IMF in several publications last year (see Box 1). The Fund’s experts demonstrated the importance of migration for Lithuania’s labour market, public finances, pension system, and economic growth. In this paper, we add to their analysis by focusing on how migration affects the country’s demographic structure, the quality of its human capital, and the value orientations of Lithuanian society.

### Box 1. Migration as a key economic resource for Lithuania: Recent IMF findings

In 2025, the IMF addressed the role of migration in Lithuania in several publications (IMF, 2025; Boer, 2025). Their findings can be summarized in two main conclusions: (1) migration played a critical role in helping Lithuania absorb the shocks of 2022 (the war in Ukraine and the EU energy crisis), and (2) migration is essential for the country’s long-term economic resilience.

**Without positive net migration, Lithuania’s labour force would be contracting due to demographic pressures.** The working-age population declined from 2.34 million in 1998 to 1.81 million in 2019 as a result of low fertility and high emigration. Only the recent inflow of migrants – primarily from Ukraine and Belarus – pushed this figure up to 1.89 million by 2024. According to Eurostat’s baseline population forecast, Lithuania’s labour force is expected to decline by around 1.3% annually between 2025 and 2030, implying a growing negative contribution of labour to potential economic growth.

**IMF estimates show a significant impact of migration dynamics on potential economic growth.** Using a Cobb–Douglas production function, the IMF models several migration scenarios:

- **Baseline scenario:** cumulative net migration of –20,000 people in 2025–2030 leads to a steadily declining labour contribution, reaching –0.7 percentage points of potential GDP growth by 2030.
- **Downside scenario:** cumulative net migration of –45,000 for the same period results in potential annual growth loss of 0.2 percentage points compared to the baseline.
- **Upside scenario:** cumulative net migration of +5,000 for 2025–2030 raises potential growth by 0.2 percentage points relative to the baseline.
- **“+0.7% Net Migration” scenario:** if net migration reaches +20,000 people *per year* (about 0.7% of the population, similar to 2020–2023 annual average), it fully offsets the negative impact of ageing and delivers roughly +1.5 percentage points of annual potential GDP growth compared to the baseline.

**Not only quantity of migrants, but also quality of their human capital matters.** In this context, the IMF emphasises the successful labour-market integration of Ukrainians, around 70% of whom “are actively participating in the labour market”, as well as the strong performance of Belarusian nationals, who – according to analysis by the Bank of Lithuania<sup>1</sup> – are predominantly employed in high-tech and other skilled sectors and only rarely found in low-skilled occupations. The IMF also emphasises the growing importance of return migration, which in recent years has become a net

<sup>1</sup> See Bank of Lithuania (2024), Box 3.

positive contributor to Lithuania’s population dynamics. In addition, non-EU migrants in Lithuania are more likely than native residents to become entrepreneurs, which further strengthens the country’s economic base. Migration has also helped reduce Lithuania’s traditionally high skills mismatch: it has begun to decline noticeably since 2020, as migration inflows increased.

**Migration has a positive impact on productivity (TFP).** The IMF explicitly links higher TFP to the inflow of workers with new skills and to knowledge diffusion. With the share of the population aged 60+ rising from 19% in 2000 to a projected 31% by 2030, the arrival of younger migrants is seen as essential for maintaining productivity and sustaining long-term growth.

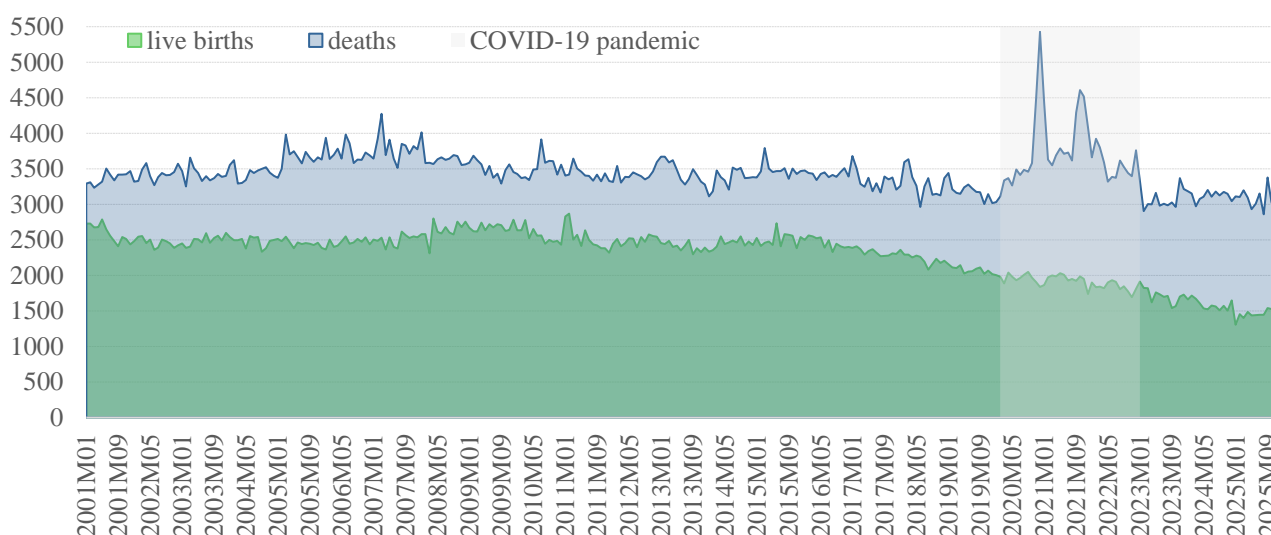
**Without sustained migration inflows, Lithuania will face significant fiscal pressures, particularly in the pension system.** IMF estimates indicate that, under current demographic trends, pension expenditures will rise from 6.4% to 9.6% of GDP by 2045. In this context, the inflow of younger workers (primarily aged 20–44) is a critical factor for maintaining the financial balance of Sodra and preventing further decline in already low replacement rate. Migration thus becomes a foundational condition for the state’s ability to meet its long-term social commitments.

## Demographic effects of migration

### Preventing depopulation

Over the past two and a half decades, Lithuania has experienced a natural population decline. The number of live births remained at around 2,500 per month from early 2001 to the first half of 2016, then began to decline and stabilized at less than 1,500 per month only in 2025 (Figure 1). Mortality gradually declined from its peak in 2007 (around 3,800 deaths per month) and exceeded 3,000 per month by the end of 2019, stabilizing at this level after the end of the coronavirus pandemic. Thus, Lithuania is currently losing approximately 19,000 people per year due to natural population decline.

**Figure 1. Natural population change (per month, seasonally adjusted)**



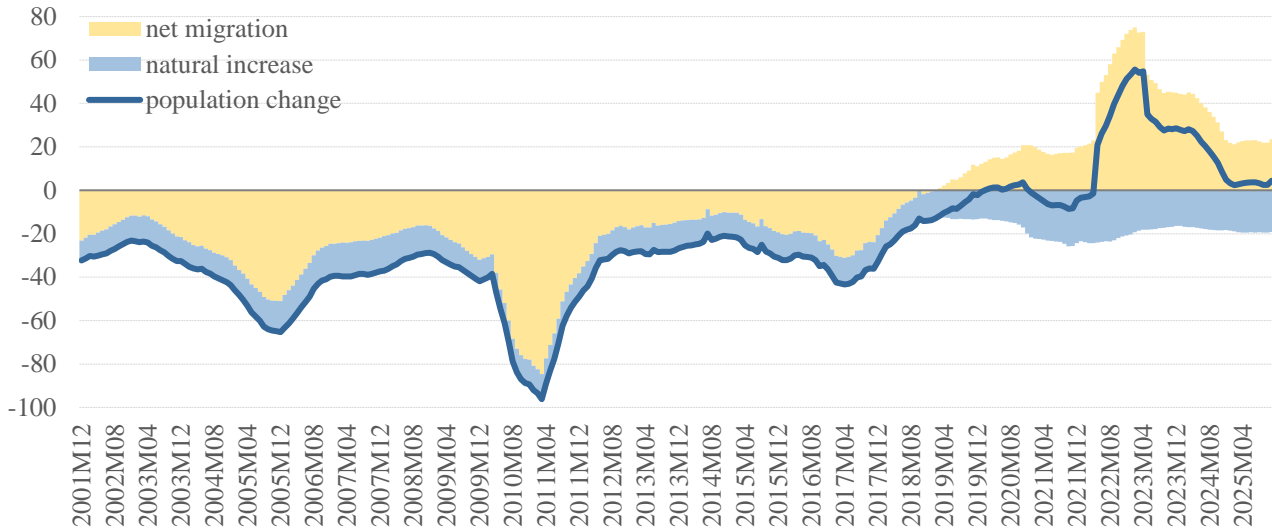
Source: own calculations based on the data of the Official Statistics Portal of Lithuania (hereafter – OSP data).

Until the late 2010s, Lithuania’s population decline was exacerbated by substantial migration outflows (Figure 2). Until 2017, net annual emigration never fell below 10,000 people, and between 2001 and 2017 the average net outflow reached 26.9 thousand per year<sup>2</sup>. Starting in 2018, however,

<sup>2</sup> Net migration data contains an outlier of 2010, when it reached –77.9 thousand. That emigration spike was mainly a statistical anomaly triggered by the amendment of Compulsory Health Insurance (PSD). Starting in 2010, the law required every registered resident to pay a fixed monthly PSD contribution regardless of income. As a result, thousands of people who were *de facto* living abroad but *de jure* registered in Lithuania suddenly began automatically accruing debt to Sodra.

Lithuania began to attract more immigrants – IMF (2025) attributes this shift to the rapid convergence of Lithuania’s per capita income toward the EU average – and net migration turned positive. Between 2019 and 2024, the average annual net inflow approached 32,000, exceeding the scale of natural population decline. Thanks to immigration, population of Lithuania has been growing, which is a key for addressing several structural economic challenges discussed in IMF (2025).

**Figure 2. Composition of population increase (thousand residents, 12-months moving sum)**



Source: own calculations based on the OSP data.

### Demographic dividend

The positive demographic impact of immigration becomes especially clear when looking at its age structure<sup>3</sup>. We distinguish between two equal six-year periods: 2013–2018 (negative net migration in every year, cumulative –90.6 thousand) and 2019–2024 (positive net migration in every year, cumulative +191.7 thousand). According to our estimates, during the first period the main outflow came from younger age cohorts: 20–24 (–39.7 thousand), 25–29 (–22.4 thousand), 15–19 (–14.3 thousand), and the three youngest 5-year cohorts combined (–15.3 thousand). In contrast, in 2019–2024 the largest net inflow came from the 25–54 age groups (+133.1 thousand). The five youngest cohorts contributed an additional +29.3 thousand on a net basis, while older cohorts aged 55–79 added +33.2 thousand (Figure 3).

These inflows had a substantial impact on the age structure of Lithuania’s population. In the core labour force cohorts (25–29, 30–34, 35–39, and 40–44), the population would be 10.6–19.1% lower in the end of 2024 had there been no net migration inflow since 2019. For the three youngest 5-year cohorts, the population would be 4.9–7.2% lower (Figure 4).

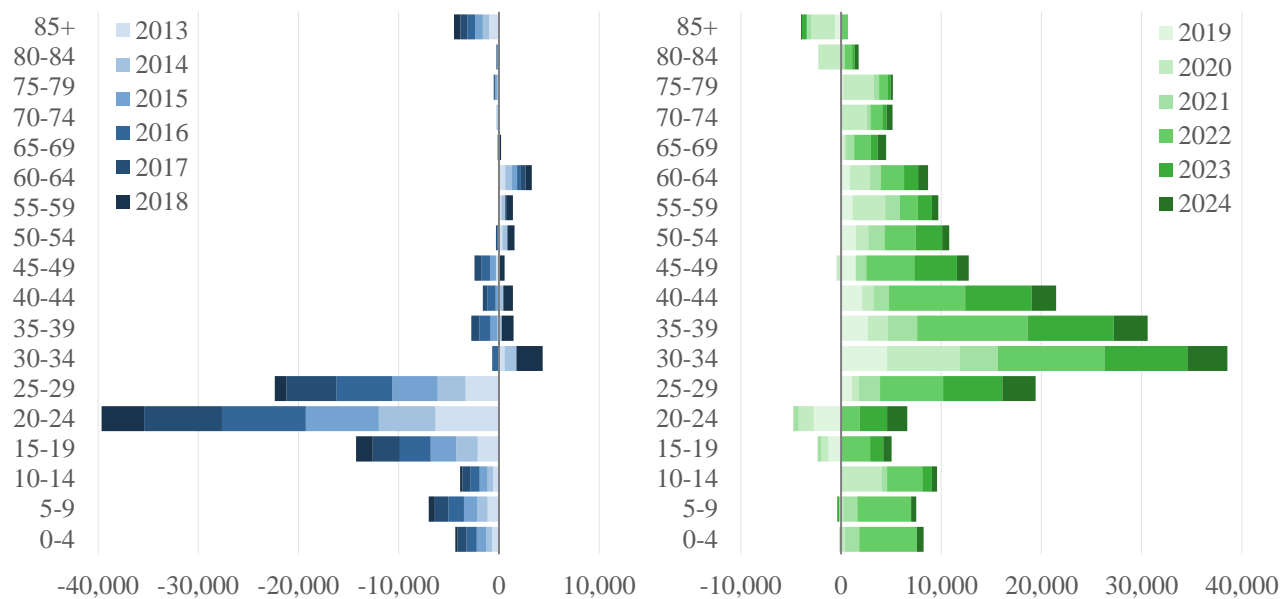
Employment rates clearly show why the recent migration inflows are so important for Lithuanian economy. In 2024, employment rate in 30–34 age cohort (benefited from migration the most) reached 98%. Other cohorts faced the most substantial net inflow of immigrants has also rather high employment rates, varying from 61.2% for 60–64 years to 88.5% for 35–39 years. In sum, our very rough estimates based on applying 2024 employment rates to actual and hypothetical population by age cohorts from Figure 4 gives us the total impact of 2019–2024 net migration inflow on employment

To avoid this automatic debt accumulation, many of them formally declared their departure, compressing several years of previously unreported emigration into a single year’s statistics.

<sup>3</sup> To estimate this effect, we apply the net migration components method:  $NM_t^i = \Delta Pop_t^i + Deaths_t^i$ , where  $NM_t^i$  is net migration in year  $t$  for one-year age group  $i = 1 \dots 85$  (with 85 is 85+age group),  $\Delta Pop_t^i$  is the population change in year  $t$  for age  $i$ , and  $Deaths_t^i$  – the number of deaths in year  $t$  for age  $i$ . For newborns group  $i = 0$ , the formula is adjusted to account for births:  $NM_t^0 = \Delta Pop_t^0 + Deaths_t^0 - Births_t$ , where  $Births_t$  stands for the number of live births in year  $t$ .

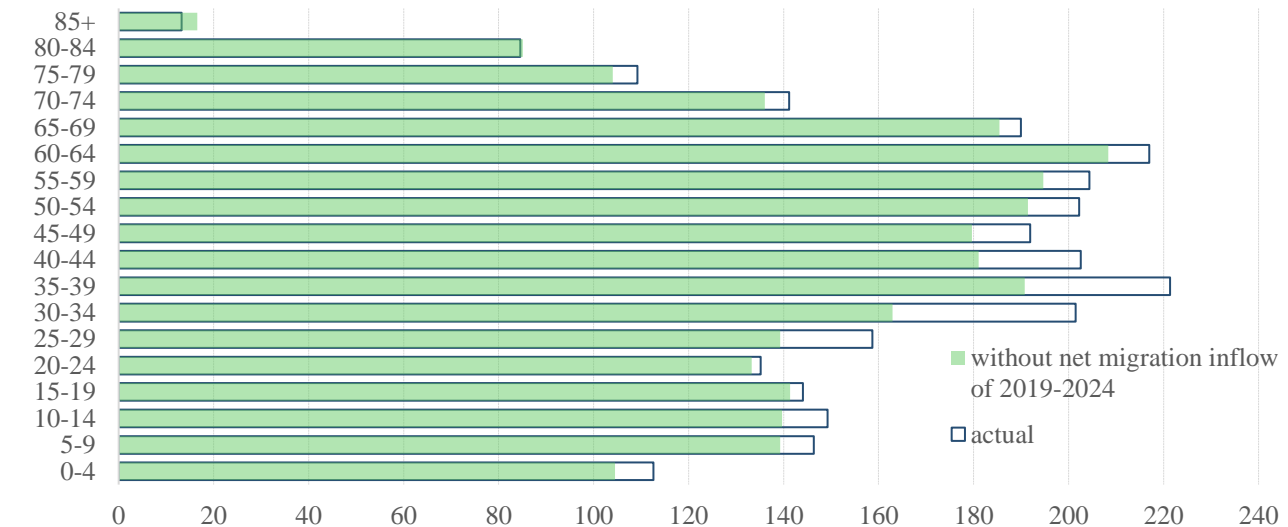
over 137 thousand, or 9.4% of actual employment in 2024. This is a very conservative estimate – one should take into account gender decomposition of migrants (more men than women) and higher employment rates for men and for Lithuanian migrants in particular.

**Figure 3. Net migration by age groups (2013–2018: -90,538; 2019–2024: +191,744)**



Source: own calculations based on the OSP data.

**Figure 4. The impact of net migration on population age structure, thousand (as of 2025-01-01)**



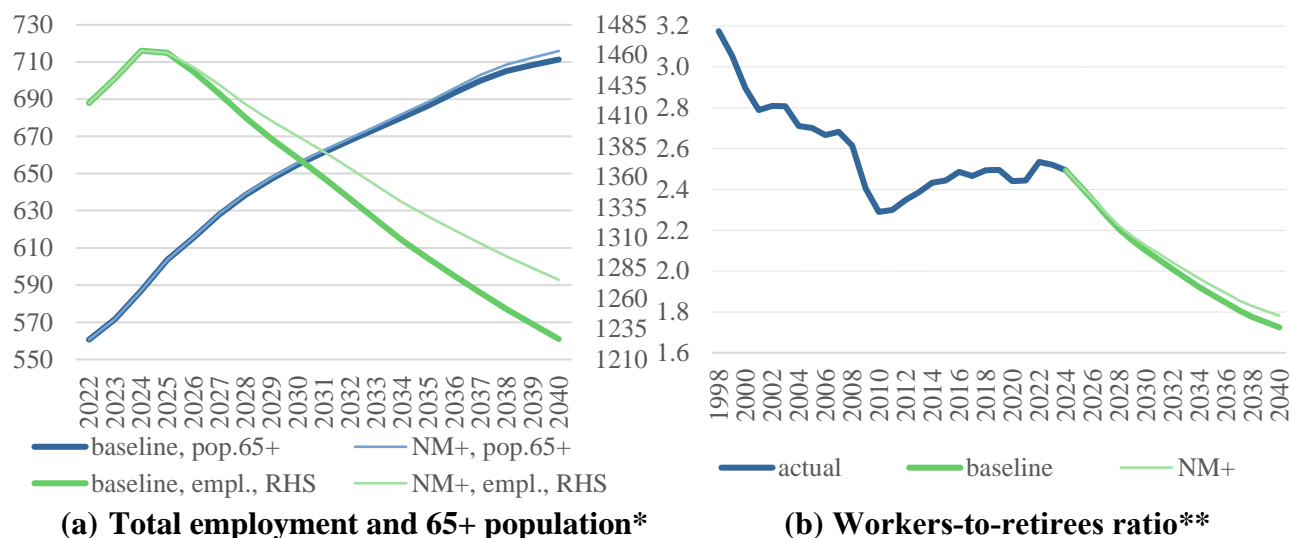
Source: own calculations based on the OSP data.

Available population projections (EUROPOP23<sup>4</sup>) demonstrate how vulnerable the Lithuanian economy is to migration assumptions. Eurostat assumes that net migration will return to the negative historical averages observed during 2013–2021, further driven down by the projected return of 67% of Ukrainian refugees to their home country over the next decade<sup>5</sup>. The baseline scenario implies a significant net migration outflow(-4,333 persons per year between 2025 and 2040 on average). Even the higher migration variant (one of Eurostat’s sensitivity tests) results in a mere stabilization of the population with a negligible average net inflow of only +214 persons per year.

<sup>4</sup> EUROPOP2023 – Population projections at national level (2022–2100), [https://doi.org/10.2908/PROJ\\_23NP](https://doi.org/10.2908/PROJ_23NP) and [https://doi.org/10.2908/PROJ\\_23NANMIG](https://doi.org/10.2908/PROJ_23NANMIG).

<sup>5</sup> For details, see [Population projections in the EU – methodology](#).

**Figure 5. Small of negative migration scenarios: Growing old-age burden**



\* 65+ population – beginning of the period. Since 2026 – forecast (actual 2025 data + annual population increases from Eurostat 2023 population projections, EUROPOP23, by 5-year age cohorts). Employment – period average. Since 2025 – forecast; assumption – constant age cohort-specific employment rates at the level of 2024. EUROPOP23 scenarios: “baseline” stands for *baseline projections* (age cohort-specific net migration stands at the average level of 2013–2021; it is also assumed that in 10 years starting from 2025, 67% of Ukrainians with special protection status return to Ukraine), “NM+” for *sensitivity test: higher migration* (additional net migration comparing to the baseline: +8.6 thousand in 2023, gradual reduction from 4.9 thousand to 4.1 thousand per year afterwards).

\*\* calculated as total employment divided by 65+ population (from Figure a). By retirees, we understand all persons reached 65 years, as the pension age in Lithuania is 65 years for both men and women; however, it is a proxy rather than a precise definition.

Source: own calculations based on the data of the OSP and EUROPOP23 data.

The old-age population (65+) under both scenarios increases from 603.5 thousand at the beginning of 2025 to 711.3 thousand (+17.9%) under the baseline scenario and 715.9 thousand (+18.6%) under the higher migration variant. Assuming constant age-cohort-specific employment rates, we estimate employment<sup>6</sup> for both scenarios: it declines from 1,463.7 thousand in 2024 to 1,226.7 thousand, or by 16.1% (baseline), and 1,275.5 thousand, or by 12.8% (higher migration variant) by 2040 (Figure 5a). As a result, the old-age burden increases dramatically: the number of employed persons per ‘potential retiree’ (65+) falls from 2.49 in 2024 to 1.72 in 2040 under the baseline scenario, and to a only slightly better 1.78 under the higher migration variant (Figure 5b). The historically lowest ratio (2.29) was observed in 2010, when Lithuania faced the aforementioned hike (statistical anomaly) in net migration outflow; under both scenarios, this ‘record’ will be surpassed as early as 2027. These results highlight the structural nature of Lithuania’s ageing challenge: without a substantial and steady inflow of working-age migrants, the pressure on the labour market and the pension system will inevitably grow.

*Countries of origin: Structural shifts*

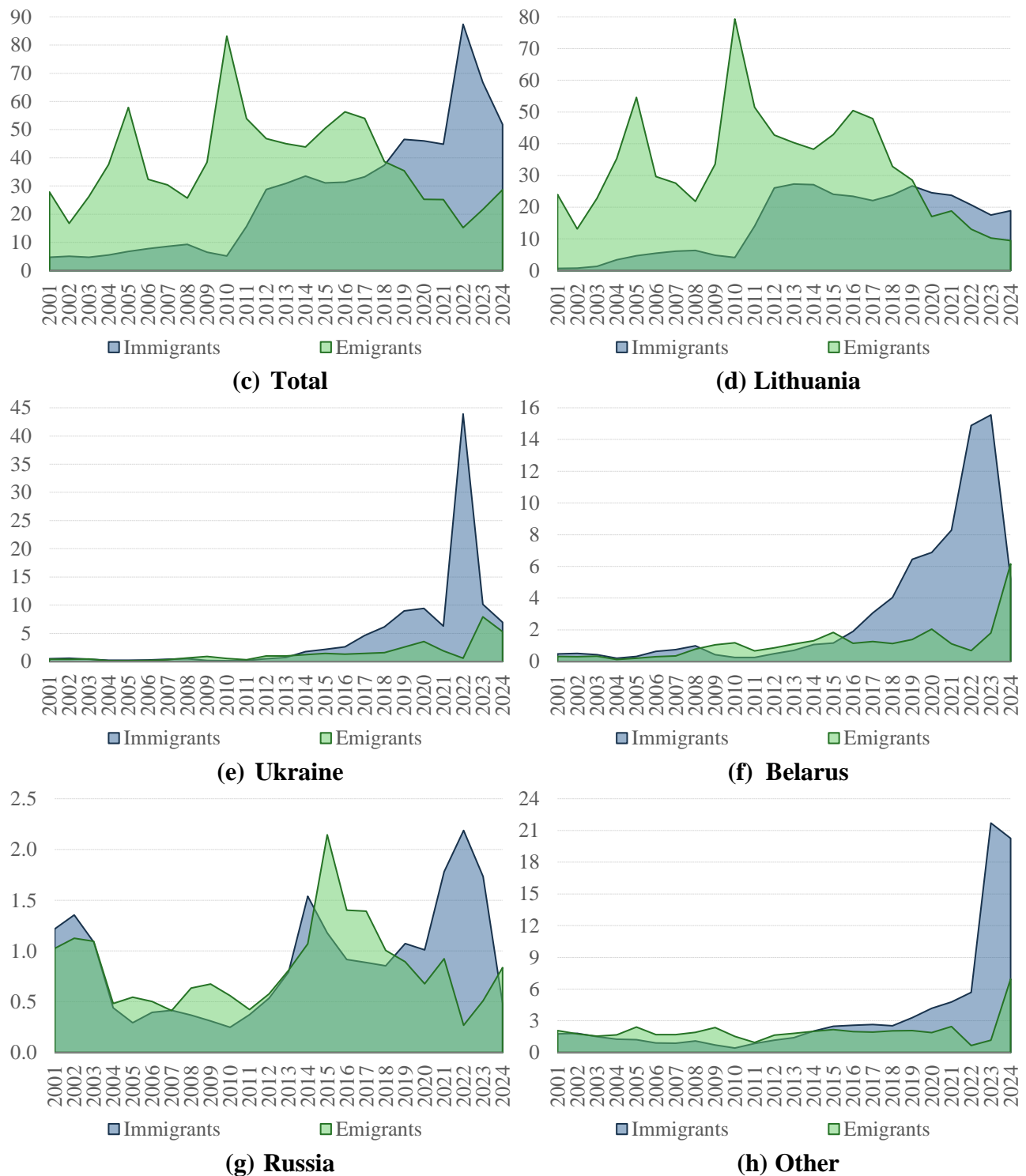
As noted by the IMF (2025), recent net inflow of migration has been driven primarily by citizens of Ukraine and Belarus. A net inflow from Ukraine began to emerge after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, although these early flows remained relatively small. Between 2017 and 2021, average annual net migration from Ukraine was around 4,900 people. The largest inflow occurred in 2022, the year of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, when net migration from Ukraine reached 43,300; thereafter, the inflow returned to roughly 2,000 per year. Net migration from Belarus turned positive in 2016, initially for economic reasons and later reinforced by political developments<sup>7</sup>, as well as by the effects of the war in Ukraine in 2022. The cumulative net inflow of Belarusian citizens into

<sup>6</sup> In all ages, i.e. including employed persons 65+ (79.2 thousand in 2024 and estimated 86.8 thousand in 2040).

<sup>7</sup> The suppression of protests after the 2020 elections and the subsequent – and ongoing – political repression.

Lithuania between 2016 and 2023 exceeded 50,000 people, nearly 40,000 of whom arrived during 2020–2023. In 2024, however, emigration of Belarusian citizens from Lithuania exceeded immigration again, resulting in a net outflow of almost 1,000 people<sup>8</sup> (Figure 6).

**Figure 6. Migration flows by citizenship, thousand individuals**



Source: OSP data.

However, it would be incorrect to attribute the entire increase in net migration solely to arrivals from these two countries. Russia should also be mentioned, although migration flows from Russia were much smaller in scale compared with those from Belarus or Ukraine. Beyond these groups, two

<sup>8</sup> Possible reasons of the outflow are discussed in Platūkytė, Shcherbina, & Chubrik (2025).

additional trends emerged. First, Lithuania has experienced a positive and steadily growing remigration of Lithuanians, resulting in net inflow of 7.3 thousand per year between 2020 and 2024 on average. Second, there was a substantial net inflow of other third-country nationals in 2023 and 2024 (20.5 thousand and 13.3 thousand, respectively). Taken together, between 2020 and 2024, returning Lithuanians and nationals other than those from Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia accounted for more than 80 thousand of cumulative net migration – only slightly less than the mutual contribution of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (100 thousand), see Figure 6.

Thus, Lithuania’s recent migration dynamics are far more diversified than a simple “Ukrainian refugees – Belarusian labour migrants” story. While inflows from these two countries played a major role in reversing long-standing negative migration trends, they were accompanied – and in recent years surpassed – by steadily rising return migration of Lithuanians and a growing inflow of other third-country nationals.

These trends indicate that Eurostat’s assumptions of negative or close-to-zero net migration are too conservative and increasingly detached from Lithuania’s actual migration reality. As noted by the IMF (2025), Lithuania has become an attractive destination for migrants due to its rapid income convergence toward the EU average. At the same time, Eurostat’s projections highlight the demographic and economic risks that would emerge if migration policy were tightened excessively. The growing diversity of migration flows also calls to strengthen Lithuania’s integration policy to maximise the economic benefits of immigration identified in IMF (2025) and Boer (2025).

### **Skilled or not? Quality of migrants’ human capital**

Data on migration flows from demographic statistics provide a clear picture of broad structure and long-term trends, but they are not sufficiently disaggregated for analysing the structure of migration in detail, nor are they updated quickly enough to capture the most recent developments. These limitations can be addressed by using statistics on the number of valid residence permits (stock indicator). Although such data are not synonymous with the actual number of residents (for example, residence permits may be held by labour migrants whose place of actual residence remains their country of origin; see Chubrik & Maslauskaitė, 2025), they offer timely and highly disaggregated information. For this reason, the subsequent analysis relies primarily on residence permit data.

Detailed monthly data are published by Migris. The most recent update (as of January 1, 2026) provides information on the number of valid residence permit holders by citizenship. The dataset is disaggregated into 46 countries of origin, which together account for 97.1% of all residence permit holders; 1.9% are citizens of other countries, and 1% are stateless persons. As of that date, citizens of Ukraine and Belarus alone held 60% of all valid residence permits, while migrants from the next ten countries accounted for 27.1%, including 6.3% held by nationals of Russia. At the beginning of 2023, Ukrainians and Belarusians held 75.9% of all valid residence permits, and the next top-10 countries accounted for only 15.1%, of which Russia alone represented 8.3%. This indicates a clear shift: a declining share of migrants from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, and a substantial increase in the share of nationals from other countries.

This shift is expected to affect the ‘average’ level of migrants’ human capital. As a practical proxy of its potential level with the required country-level disaggregation, one can use the UNDP Human Development Index and its components. Calculating a weighted average HDI for the 46 origin countries for 2023–2026 (using the number of residence-permit holders at the beginning of each year as weights and the HDR-2025 HDI values as the measure of human-capital quality) reveals a clear downward trend. In 2023, the average ‘migrant HDI’ stood at 0.798 (equivalent to the 76th position in the global HDI ranking – the level of Thailand, one position above China and eleven above Ukraine). By 2026, it had declined to 0.785 (equivalent to the 86th position – the level of Moldova, one position above

Ukraine). However, it is important to emphasise that the decline in the average ‘migrant HDI’ does not imply a deterioration in the ‘quality’ of individual migrants, but reflects shifts in the composition of origin countries.

Another way to assess migrants’ human capital quality through the HDI lens is to focus only on its education and health-related components – expected and mean years of schooling, and life expectancy at birth. The remaining element (gross national income) may reflect exogenous factors such as natural resource endowments or purchasing power parity distortions. Following the HDR methodology, we normalise the data for expected years of schooling (EYS), mean years of schooling (MYS), and life expectancy at birth (LE)<sup>9</sup>, and compute education and health HDIs for each country in the sample. We then plot each country along two axes: the closer a country is to the upper-right corner, the higher its human-capital level. To reflect the relative shares of origin countries, we use a bubble chart (Figure 7a, b).

Lithuania ranks very high in terms of the education component of human development ( $\frac{EYS+MYS}{2}$ ) – placing 15th out of 195 countries, and relatively high in terms of life expectancy (76th). Both indicators exceed the threshold for very high human development (0.8). On both dimensions, Lithuania outperforms its largest migrant-sending countries – Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. At the same time, these three countries also possess comparatively strong human capital endowments: all exceed the 0.8 threshold in life expectancy, and their education-related HDIs are close to that level, with global rankings of 63rd (Belarus), 66th (Russia), and 83rd (Ukraine).

However, as we noted above, the shares of all three countries in the total number of residence permit holders have declined substantially, while the shares of countries with lower educational attainment have increased (as reflected by the larger bubble sizes in Figure 7b compared with Figure 7a). Moreover, HDI-based measures should be viewed only as a proxy for potential human capital endowments. Actual skills, qualifications, and labour market performance of migrants may differ substantially from country-level averages. Thus, the variation in human capital characteristics across migrant groups may be even larger than suggested by HDI differences, as noted by the Bank of Lithuania (2024) for the case of Belarus.

When grouping migrants by the human-development level of their countries of origin along the same axes, a significant shift towards migrants from countries with medium and low human development becomes visible. At the beginning of 2023, residence permit holders were concentrated mainly in the very high and high human development countries (41.6 and 55.8%, respectively, Figure 7c), reflecting the dominance of citizens of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia among residence permit holders. By the beginning of 2026 the shares of these two groups had decreased noticeably – by 2.7 and 5.2 percentage points, respectively, while the share of migrants from medium human development countries increased by 6.7 and from low-HDI countries by 1.3 percentage points (Figure 7d).

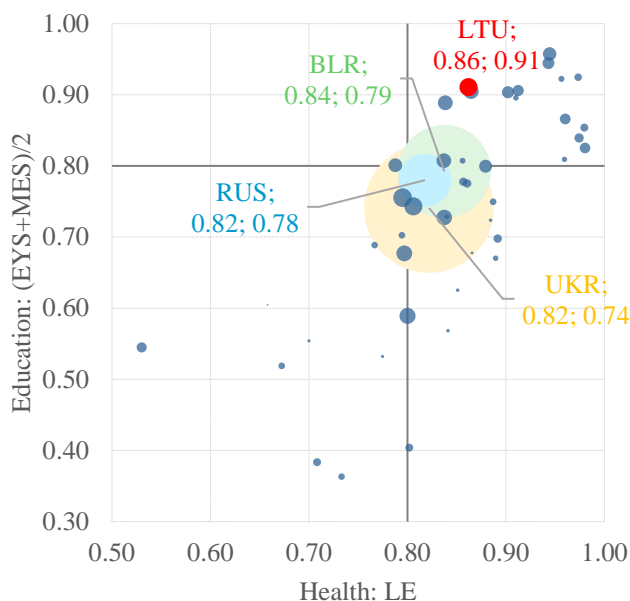
From these data, we see that Lithuania remains attractive to migrants from lower-HDI countries (potentially less skilled), while its relative attractiveness to migrants from higher-HDI origins (potentially with higher human capital) appears to be weakening. The relevant policy mix should aim to strengthen Lithuania’s competitive position vis-à-vis its EU neighbours in attracting high-skilled specialists, as well as improving the integration of lower-skilled migrants from less culturally proximate countries.

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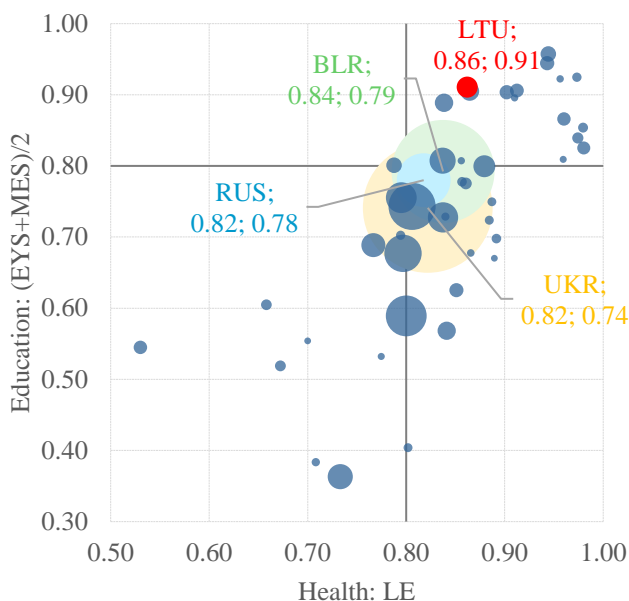
<sup>9</sup> For details, see UNDP (2025), p. 4.

**Figure 7. Human development of Lithuanian valid residence permit holders**

**By citizenship:**

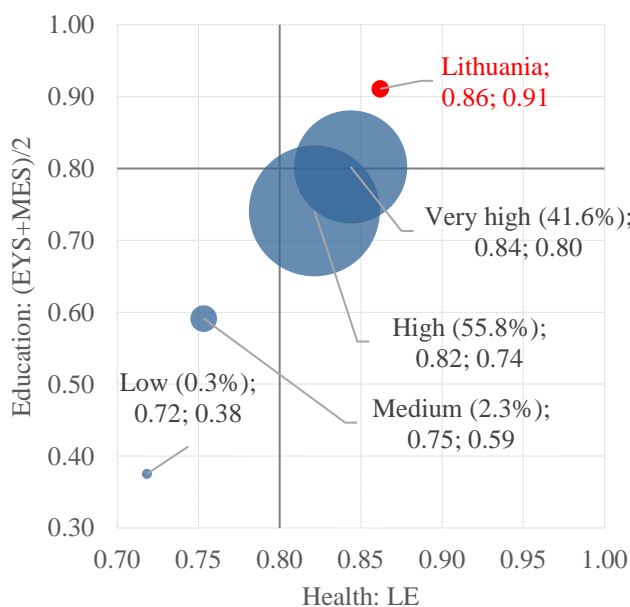


**(a) As of 2023-01-01**

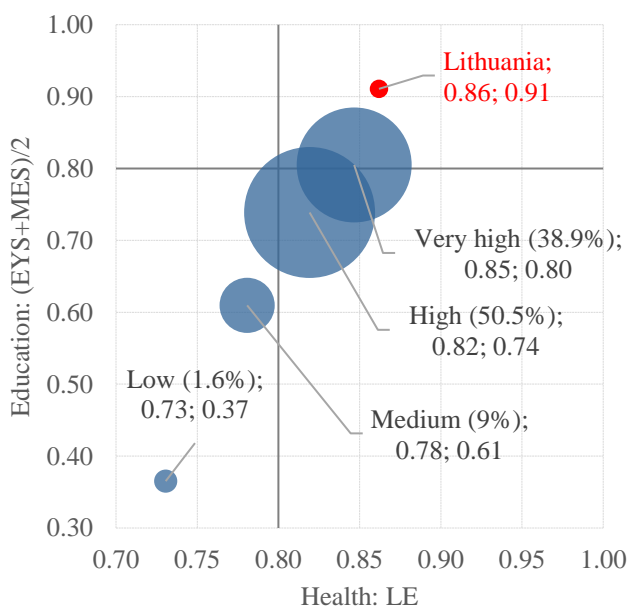


**(b) As of 2026-01-01**

**By human development groups:**



**(c) As of 2023-01-01**



**(d) As of 2026-01-01**

*Note.* Bubble size is the share of valid residence permits held by citizens of a given country/HDR-2025 country group in the total number of valid residence permits issued to citizens of the named countries (categories “stateless” and “others” are not counted, see Migris, IMIGRANTAI LIETUVOJE / 2026 m. sausio 1 d. duomenys).

*Source:* HDI and its components data – own calculations based on UNDP (2025) methodology and the HDR-2025 Documentation and Downloads, [Table 1: Human Development Index and components](#); valid residence permits data – IMIGRANTAI LIETUVOJE / [2026 m. sausio 1 d. duomenys](#) (see Annex).

### Cultural proximity of migrants: Values and culture zones

Cultural proximity matters when a country receives large numbers of migrants. Acculturation research shows that values and religious beliefs are the domains in which migrants tend to preserve their inherited culture, whereas in the domains of public institutions, work, and economic and social

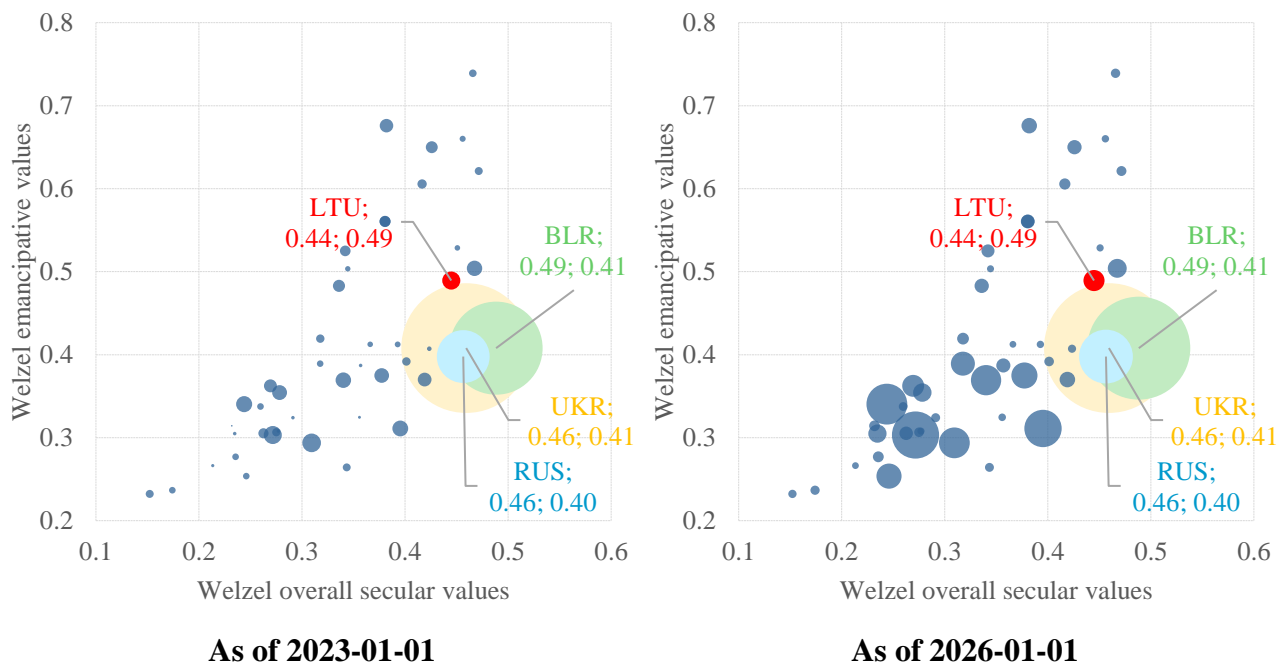
relations they are generally more open to the host country's norms and more willing to adapt (see, e.g., Navas et al., 2005; Navas & Rojas, 2010). Consequently, the greater the inflow of people whose value systems and religious backgrounds differ from those of the host society, the more challenging acculturation becomes – both for migrants and for the receiving society.

Earlier we demonstrated the growing diversity of third-country nationals residing in Lithuania. Here we discuss how this diversity changes migrant values landscape. For this, we use two indicators calculated from the World Values Survey/European Values Study (WVS/EVS) data: the Welzel Overall Secular Values and Welzel Emancipative Values indexes (Welzel, 2013). The first index reflects attitudes towards religion, authority, and moral traditionalism, and is constructed from WVS questions on the importance of religion and God, confidence in the church, the justifiability of abortion/divorce/euthanasia/suicide, and preferred child qualities (obedience vs. independence). The second index captures views on autonomy, choice, equality, and voice, and is based on questions about preferred child qualities (independence, imagination, tolerance), the importance of freedom of choice and control over one's life, the justifiability of abortion/divorce/homosexuality, gender-equality items, the importance of democracy, and political participation. Both indexes are normalised to range from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate stronger secular-rational or emancipative orientations<sup>10</sup>.

Unlike in the case of human development indicators, higher values on these indexes do not imply 'higher potential quality': countries with different index scores simply represent different attitudinal profiles regarding the phenomena captured by the WVS questions. The two indexes are positively correlated ( $r = 0.543$  for the full sample) and enable us to compare migrants' cultural backgrounds along two distinct axiological dimensions relative to the 'values endowment' of Lithuanian society.

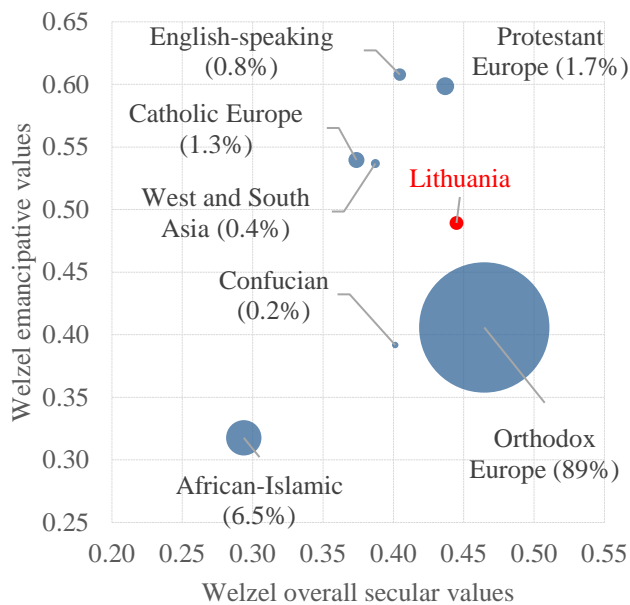
**Figure 8. Values of Lithuanian valid residence permit holders**

**By citizenship:**

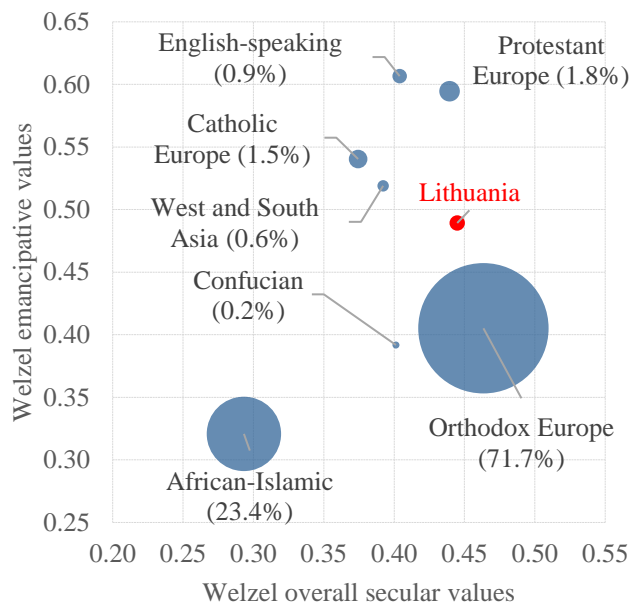


<sup>10</sup> Scales of the underlying question are initially built so that higher scores reflect more secular or more emancipative responses. The responses are then standardised and combined into their respective sub-dimensions, after which the resulting composite indexes are rescaled to the 0–1 interval to ensure comparability across countries and survey waves (Welzel, 2013).

## By culture zones:



As of 2023-01-01



As of 2026-01-01

*Note.* Bubble size is the share of valid residence permits held by citizens of a given country/culture zone in the total number of valid residence permits issued to citizens of the named countries (categories “stateless” and “others” are not counted, see Migris, IMIGRANTAI LIETUVOJE / 2026 m. sausio 1 d. duomenys).

*Source:* Values data – World Values Survey 7 (2023); valid residence permits data – IMIGRANTAI LIETUVOJE / [2026 m. sausio 1 d. duomenys](#) (see Annex).

For six countries not covered by the WVS/EVS, proxy values of the Welzel indexes were constructed using weighted averages of culturally and regionally proximate countries<sup>11</sup>. For all countries, the most recent available estimates of both Welzel indexes were used, as published in the 2023 release of the WVS Cultural Map (World Values Survey 7, 2023). Lithuania occupies a relatively high position on both Welzel dimensions: it falls into the fourth quartile of the secular-rational values distribution and the third quartile of the emancipative values distribution among its migrant-origin countries (Figure 8a, b). This places Lithuania among the most secular and moderately emancipative societies in the comparative landscape.

Recent shifts in the composition of migrant inflows mentioned above influenced this landscape: the number of migrants arriving from countries located in the first and second quartiles on both value dimensions has increased substantially (compare bubble sizes between Figure 8a and Figure 8b). During the last three years Lithuania have been receiving more migrants from societies that are, on average, significantly more traditional and less emancipative, which raises the issue of cultural distance between the arriving newcomers and the local society.

To assess how culturally proximate these countries are to Lithuania, we apply (in the absence of confidence interval boundaries for Lithuania’s own scores) a simple criterion: a country is considered ‘potentially value-proximate’ if its scores on both Welzel indexes deviate from Lithuania’s values by no more than one standard deviation, calculated across the 46 migrant-origin countries from Migris’s

<sup>11</sup> The weights reflect the perceived similarity of value profiles within each culture zone and therefore involve an element of subjective judgement. Specifically: Sri Lanka = 0.4·Myanmar + 0.3·Bangladesh + 0.3·Philippines; Afghanistan = 0.7·Qatar + 0.3·Yemen (secular values) and 0.3·Qatar + 0.7·Yemen (emancipative values); Cameroon = 0.5·Ghana + 0.5·Nigeria; Nepal = 0.5·Myanmar + 0.3·India + 0.2·Bangladesh; Syria = Iraq; Israel = USA. These proxies are used solely to ensure completeness of the comparative picture: together, these six countries accounted for only 1.3% of all residence-permit holders as of January 1, 2026 (0.9% as of January 1, 2023).

dataset. This approach yields a set of 14 countries that meet the criterion simultaneously<sup>12</sup>. However, the resulting list includes several cases that appear counter-intuitive (e.g., Lebanon, Vietnam, or China), while several culturally familiar EU countries (e.g., Poland, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Germany, or the Netherlands) fall outside this range. This reflects the fact that Welzel's indexes capture only two specific dimensions of value change – secular-rational and emancipative orientations – and do not fully represent broader cultural, historical, linguistic, or civilizational affinities.

These limitations naturally lead to the use of culture zones concept developed by Inglehart and Welzel to group countries according to deeper and more stable cultural patterns shaped by history, religion, and long-term social evolution (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; for the most recent map, see World Values Survey 7, 2023). The concept of culture zones offer a more robust way to interpret cross-societal value distances by shifting the focus from country-level gaps to differences between groups of culturally proximate societies<sup>13</sup>.

Lithuania belongs to the Catholic Europe culture zone; migrants from the other countries of this zone are not numerous (1.3% in the beginning of 2023 and 1.5 in the beginning of 2026, see Figure 8c, d). It is quite natural, as this group is represented by relatively wealthy countries, which limits economic incentives for migration to Lithuania. For the same reason, the share of migrants from Protestant Europe and English-Speaking zones is also low (1.8 and 0.9% of total residence permit holders as of January 1, 2026). Countries from West and South Asia and Confucian culture zones often have relatively high incomes to become donors of low-skilled labour attracted by higher salaries, and at the same time economic ties between Lithuania and these countries remain relatively weak to ensure substantial inflow of their expats – that is why their shares are low and stable.

The biggest shifts happened in the remaining culture zones – Orthodox Europe (with the core of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia's migrants), and African-Islamic countries represented by countries of Central Asia/South Caucasus (Islamic states) and South and Southeast Asia. Countries from the first zone are culturally close to the Catholic Europe countries (and to Lithuania, specifically), both in Traditional vs. Secular Values and Survival vs. Self-Expression Values axes (or Welzel's indexes described above). Countries from African-Islamic culture zone occupy the lower-left corner of the Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023, with far more traditionalist and survival-oriented values compared to Lithuania<sup>14</sup>. Between 2023 and 2026, the share of migrants from Orthodox Europe fell by 17.2 percentage points to 71.9%, while those from African-Islamic culture zone – rose by 16.8 percentage points to 24.3% (Figure 8c, d).

This shift reflects the effects of two major clusters of factors influencing migration: economic incentives for low-skilled labour migrants and the tightening of migration policy towards Belarusian nationals following their country's role in the 2021 instrumentalised migration crisis and its political alignment with Russia during the war in Ukraine (see Box 2 for details). This combination of factors creates an important context for Lithuania's migration and integration policy. On the one hand, the country faces the challenge of integrating labour migrants arriving from societies that differ substantially from Lithuania in their value profiles. On the other hand, it must avoid losing its attractiveness to highly skilled professionals and family migrants from culturally proximate countries.

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<sup>12</sup> Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Estonia, France, Israel, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, USA, and Vietnam.

<sup>13</sup> Migris's dataset encompasses countries from seven culture zones (as defined in World Values Survey 7, 2023): Protestant Europe (Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden); Catholic Europe (France, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain); Orthodox Europe (Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Ukraine); English-speaking (USA, United Kingdom); Confucian (China); West and South Asia (Israel, Vietnam); African-Islamic (Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Morocco, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Syria, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Zimbabwe).

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/images/Map2023NEW.png>.

## Box 2. Shifts in Lithuania's Policy Towards Belarusian Migrants, 2020–2025

Belarusian migration to Lithuania has been shaped by several overlapping crises and policy shifts since 2020. The initial wave of arrivals followed political repression in Belarus, when Lithuania introduced humanitarian exemptions, simplified entry procedures, and supported relocating Belarusian businesses and their employees.

The situation changed after 2021. The instrumentalised migration crisis at the EU-Belarus border triggered a state level emergency in Lithuania and placed Belarus under closer political scrutiny. Although the emergency regime primarily targeted Lithuania's own population, it marked the beginning of a more restrictive phase in its migration policy.

A further turn occurred after Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Lithuania suspended most visa services for Belarusian and Russian citizens and later adopted a dedicated law imposing temporary restrictive measures. Renewed annually, this law tightened security screening, limited access to visas and residence permits, and introduced differentiated rules for Belarusians and Russians, with the latter facing broader restrictions.

Political debates in 2024–2025 further securitised the environment. Proposals to restrict family reunification, revoke residence permits for frequent travel to Belarus (imposed on Russia's citizens), or equate Belarusian and Russian citizens gained visibility, even if many were not adopted. Border closures reinforced the perception of tightening control: two checkpoints were closed in 2023, two more in 2024, and in 2025 the remaining crossings were temporarily shut during the latest crisis.

Taken together, these developments shifted Lithuania's approach from humanitarian facilitation to a regime of heightened security and conditionality. For Belarusian migrants, this produced a volatile legal and discursive environment in which long term planning became increasingly difficult.

*Based on Platūkytė, Shcherbina & Chubrik (2025) and information from the open sources.*

### Key findings and policy implications

Lithuania's economic and demographic sustainability is dependent on migration inflows. The relevant strategic ambitions are described in the State Progress Strategy 'Lithuania 2050': "*Lithuania is an attractive country to live in, where talents from other countries willingly settle. Successful integration of immigrants helps address labour shortages, promotes the development of advanced industries, diversifies economic activities, and fosters new trade relations. More and more Lithuanians living abroad are returning to Lithuania. A wise demographic policy stabilises the number of population in the country. Long-term prospects for life and work in Lithuania are provided for arriving workers, while refugees are granted adequate asylum.*" (LRS, 2024, p. 44).

Our analysis allows outlining several policy directions aligned with this long-term vision:

**Migration as a strategic investment.** Migration is no longer a debatable phenomenon but the primary driver of Lithuania's population growth. As the IMF (2025) suggests, without this inflow, the labour force and pension system would face imminent contraction. Therefore, integration policy must shift from being viewed as a 'charity' or a 'social burden' to being a strategic investment in the country's economic and demographic resilience.

**Diversity as a stability factor.** Lithuania's migration is no longer a 'two-country story'. The steady rise in return migration and the diversification of third-country inflows create a more resilient demographic base. A policy that recognizes this diversity, rather than reacting to it with 'swings' of restrictive measures, can transform temporary labour flows into a sustainable demographic dividend.

**Mutual adaptation and the value gap.** At the peak of the recent immigration wave, Lithuania was primarily receiving value-proximate and often family-based migrants from Belarus and Ukraine.

Today, however, the ‘value map’ shows a growing share of arrivals from more traditionalist and less emancipative cultural backgrounds. Successful integration of culturally diverse migrants requires greater state engagement in managing intercultural communication and shaping public opinion to prevent alarmist narratives. This aligns with the ‘Lithuania 2050’ vision of a cohesive ‘community spirit’ where diversity is managed through shared democratic values and mutual commitment (LRS, 2024).

**Human capital and the migration policy paradox.** The HDI-based analysis reveals a significant gap in the human capital potential between traditional and new migrant groups. Migrants from Belarus and Ukraine often arrive with a ‘ready-to-use’ high human capital (as discussed in IMF, 2025; Bank of Lithuania, 2024). However, current policies sometimes penalise the most ‘proximate’ and skilled groups with legal uncertainty (Platūkytė, Shcherbina & Chubrik, 2025), essentially devaluing the very human capital Lithuania needs most.

**Overcoming predictive pessimism.** Current Eurostat’s projections rely on the assumption of a massive return migration of Ukrainians (67% of them leaving within a decade). However, our analysis of cultural proximity and human capital suggests that this group possesses high adaptive potential that could lead to much higher retention rates than Eurostat predicts. Our findings on cultural proximity suggest that the retention goals set in ‘Lithuania 2050’ are achievable if policy reduces the ‘swings’ of uncertainty that currently drive out some value-proximate residents and their families.

**The family dividend.** The young age structure of recent inflows (primarily 20–44 years) and the presence of families (Chubrik & Maslauskaitė, 2025) provide a unique demographic dividend. While individual labour migration addresses immediate workforce shortages, family settlement provides the necessary ‘anchor’ for long-term enrooting, contributing to future fertility rates and reducing the old-age dependency burden. This supports the Lithuania 2050 objective of population stabilisation. A sustainable mechanism for transforming temporary labour flows into permanent human capital can emerge only through a balanced policy that facilitates family integration and strengthens school-level integration of children with a migrant background (see Valstybės kontrolė, 2025). In this sense, Lithuania’s policy towards migrants stands at a “Cinderella moment”: the carriage is still intact, but only proactive, predictable, and family-oriented policies can prevent it from turning back into a pumpkin.

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## Annex. Data for Figures 7 and 8

Citizens of:	ISO code	Valid residence permits		% of total by 46 countries		HDR-2025 (2023 data)			Welzel values indices	
		2023-01-01	2026-01-01	2023	2026	Education index	Health index	HDI	overall secular	emancipative values
Ukraine	UKR	94891	79868	51.5	37.9	0.741	0.822	0.779	0.459	0.408
Belarus	BLR	48804	50286	26.5	23.9	0.792	0.837	0.824	0.488	0.408
Russia	RUS	15706	13723	8.5	6.5	0.780	0.818	0.832	0.456	0.398
Uzbekistan	UZB	1834	10545	1.0	5.0	0.743	0.806	0.740	0.272	0.303
India	IND	1458	7908	0.8	3.8	0.589	0.800	0.685	0.244	0.340
Tajikistan	TJK	1412	6611	0.8	3.1	0.677	0.797	0.691	0.395	0.311
Kyrgyzstan	KGZ	1960	4499	1.1	2.1	0.755	0.795	0.720	0.309	0.294
Azerbaijan	AZE	1353	4352	0.7	2.1	0.728	0.837	0.789	0.340	0.369
Kazakhstan	KAZ	1215	3233	0.7	1.5	0.807	0.837	0.837	0.377	0.375
Pakistan	PAK	244	2999	0.1	1.4	0.363	0.733	0.544	0.246	0.254
Philippines	PHL	244	2734	0.1	1.3	0.689	0.767	0.720	0.318	0.389
Türkiye	TUR	946	2278	0.5	1.1	0.800	0.879	0.853	0.269	0.362
Latvia	LVA	1333	1695	0.7	0.8	0.905	0.864	0.889	0.467	0.504
Georgia	GEO	1244	1611	0.7	0.8	0.889	0.838	0.844	0.278	0.354
Bangladesh	BGD	72	1581	0.0	0.8	0.568	0.841	0.685	0.235	0.305
Moldova	MDA	1066	1146	0.6	0.5	0.801	0.788	0.785	0.419	0.370
Germany	DEU	1031	1141	0.6	0.5	0.957	0.944	0.959	0.382	0.676
Poland	POL	824	969	0.4	0.5	0.904	0.902	0.906	0.336	0.483
United Kingdom	GBR	800	966	0.4	0.5	0.944	0.943	0.946	0.426	0.650
Morocco	MAR	71	945	0.0	0.4	0.625	0.851	0.710	0.357	0.387
United States	USA	712	908	0.4	0.4	0.906	0.912	0.938	0.381	0.560
Nigeria	NGA	582	860	0.3	0.4	0.545	0.530	0.560	0.263	0.305
Israel	ISR	656	853	0.4	0.4	0.866	0.960	0.919	0.381	0.560
Italy	ITA	640	806	0.3	0.4	0.825	0.980	0.915	0.342	0.525
Romania	ROU	399	660	0.2	0.3	0.775	0.861	0.845	0.318	0.419
France	FRA	492	595	0.3	0.3	0.839	0.974	0.920	0.417	0.606
Cameroon	CMR	249	560	0.1	0.3	0.519	0.672	0.588	0.236	0.277
Zimbabwe	ZWE	15	544	0.0	0.3	0.605	0.658	0.598	0.232	0.314
Spain	ESP	361	469	0.2	0.2	0.854	0.980	0.918	0.471	0.621
Armenia	ARM	385	438	0.2	0.2	0.778	0.857	0.811	0.275	0.307
China	CHN	401	438	0.2	0.2	0.698	0.892	0.797	0.401	0.392
Sweden	SWE	326	415	0.2	0.2	0.925	0.973	0.959	0.466	0.739
Egypt	EGY	248	404	0.1	0.2	0.703	0.794	0.754	0.174	0.237
Sri Lanka	LKA	71	382	0.0	0.2	0.724	0.884	0.776	0.291	0.324
Syria	SYR	353	379	0.2	0.2	0.404	0.802	0.564	0.343	0.264
Iran	IRN	250	371	0.1	0.2	0.750	0.887	0.799	0.260	0.338
Afghanistan	AFG	360	329	0.2	0.2	0.384	0.708	0.496	0.152	0.232
Vietnam	VNM	120	317	0.1	0.2	0.729	0.840	0.766	0.424	0.407
Algeria	DZA	49	273	0.0	0.1	0.678	0.866	0.763	0.356	0.325
Netherlands	NLD	207	261	0.1	0.1	0.922	0.956	0.955	0.456	0.660
Bulgaria	BGR	191	256	0.1	0.1	0.807	0.856	0.845	0.393	0.412
Estonia	EST	174	249	0.1	0.1	0.896	0.910	0.905	0.451	0.529
Nepal	NPL	60	240	0.0	0.1	0.532	0.775	0.622	0.277	0.308
Portugal	PRT	163	235	0.1	0.1	0.809	0.959	0.890	0.344	0.503
Ghana	GHA	59	218	0.0	0.1	0.554	0.700	0.628	0.213	0.266
Lebanon	LBN	174	217	0.1	0.1	0.670	0.889	0.752	0.366	0.412
Stateless	--	2380	2143	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other	--	2826	4157	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>LTU</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>0.911</b>	<b>0.862</b>	<b>0.895</b>	<b>0.445</b>	<b>0.489</b>

Note. Shaded cells – proxies (own estimates, see footnote 11 for detail).

Source: Valid residence permits data – IMIGRANTAI LIETUVOJE / [2026 m. sausio 1 d. duomenys](#); HDI and its components data – own calculations based on the HDR-2025 Documentation and Downloads, [Table 1: Human Development Index and components](#); Welzel indices data – World Values Survey 7 (2023), except proxies – own estimates.