



Leverhulme Centre
for Research on Globalisation and Economic Policy

**Research paper
media briefing**

The role of ethnic discrimination in migration from Eastern Europe

by Tom Ivlevs

The failure of some of the EU's newest member states to respect their own ethnic minorities is fuelling migration, new research has revealed.

Analysis of migration intentions in Latvia, one of the so-called A8 nations, has revealed trends that could have implications throughout the Union.

The research, carried out by GEP – the Global Economic Policy Centre – shows Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia are more likely to emigrate because their mother tongue is not officially recognised by the State.

Rather than be forced to learn Latvian, many would prefer to move to another country offering better prospects – and learn a language like English instead.

GEP's Dr Tom Ivlevs, the author of the paper, said: "To a large extent, the example of Latvia can be generalised to other A8 countries where there are significant minority communities.

"A minor discrimination of any character, be it ethnic, linguistic, racial or religious, may lead to higher rates of emigration in minority representatives – and in certain cases the most skilled ones."

He said all new EU member and accession states are required to ensure the integration, respect and non-discrimination of ethnic and linguistic minorities.

"In Latvia minority schools are subsidised by the state and these support and encourage the learning of ethnic minority languages like Russian but at the expense of the state language. The problem is that only one language is recognised in the labour market – especially in the public sector – and that is Latvian. When these students graduate they are often highly skilled but find their mother tongue is not recognised in the workplace which leads them to be disadvantaged and increases their motivation to emigrate.

"This is at odds with the attempts of many 'old' EU states to limit the migration from Eastern Europe."

Research basis

Dr Ivlevs explored the links between linguistic discrimination, minority integration policies and the determining factors of emigration intentions (e.g. income) of ethnic majority and minority populations in Latvia.

The country, one of the A8 nations that joined the EU three years ago in its largest single expansion since its founding in 1957, is among the poorest in the Union. Some 41% of the population is made up of ethnic minorities, many of them former immigrants who arrived from Russia and other former Soviet republics between 1945 and 1991, and their descendants.

Yet Latvian is the only state language, with Russian officially unrecognised at state, regional or even municipal level.

Dr Ivlevs studied the emigration intentions among 1,060 members of the Latvian workforce, as revealed during a survey by the Marketing and Public Opinion Research Centre in December 2005.

Key findings:

- Ethnic minorities whose mother tongue is stifled are more likely to emigrate
- This is fuelling migration
- Two years ago one in ten Latvians planned to emigrate
- Of these, amongst 35-44 year olds, Russian speakers were twice as likely to emigrate as Latvian speakers.

Nearly one in ten of Latvia's 2.3 million population expected to emigrate. Ivlevs found that amongst these, in the productive 35-44 year age group for instance, Russian speakers were more than twice as likely as Latvians to want to emigrate. Dr Ivlevs believes Latvia has suffered a "minority brain-drain" - and that similar nations have suffered the same fate.

The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia became EU member states at the same time as Latvia, while Bulgaria and Romania joined earlier this year.

A8 nationals have the right to travel in the EU, although some European countries closed their labour markets to them. Britain was among the few nations that first decided to allow free access though now it is imposing conditions.

Dr Ivlevs warned: "This analysis is relevant to almost all Central and Eastern European countries that have recently joined the EU or expect to become a member in the future.

"Historically, the populations of these countries have comprised people with different ethnic, linguistic or religious origins. Some 6m out of 75m - or 8% - of A8 Europeans speak a minority language in their country.

"In the two newest members of the EU - Bulgaria and Romania - ethnic minorities make up between 10% and 15% of the population, suggesting that given the opportunity a significant number will want to move to Britain and other Western European states.

"If the EU and A8 countries want to limit migration they should be looking to tackle this problem by introducing more efficient minority integration policies in Eastern Europe so these people feel less discriminated against."

GEP - the Globalisation and Economic Policy Centre - is the major centre in Europe studying the impacts of globalisation and economic policy. One of the biggest of its kind in the world, the centre has an impressive international reputation. Its academics have advised the Treasury, the OECD, the World Bank and WTO.

GEP is keen to promote its research work and is committed to communicating its expertise through the media and to assisting journalists whenever able.

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Tom Ivlevs specialises in the field of migration. He is studying the relationships between labour migration and foreign investment; the role of ethnicity in determining migration flows; age-related determinants of attitudes towards immigration; and dual migration flows in Central and Eastern Europe.

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