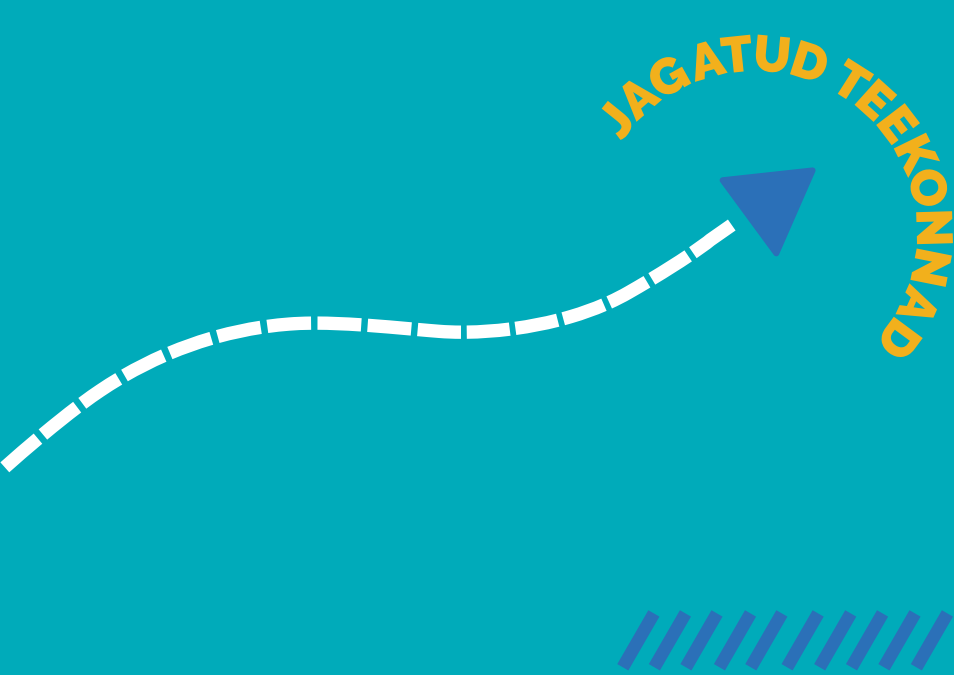





# TEXT FROM ONLINE COURSE “RÄNDEKOOL”

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## 8. EMIGRATION AND FOREIGN COMMUNITIES

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*So far, we have talked more about migration from the perspective of the destination country or the migrant. However, migration is also very relevant for many countries of origin. In this chapter, you will find out what problems, as well as opportunities, come with emigration and how countries try to make emigration work in their favour.*

The migration history of countries can be very different. As you know from **Chapter 3, "Why Do People Migrate?"**, migration occurs when the population in a country of origin grows rapidly, when some push factors force people to move or simply pull factors overcome the inconveniences of migration. In the following, we will look at four types of communities abroad, the impact of emigration on countries of origin and what policies countries apply to them.

### Countries not interested in emigration

In some cases, emigration is relatively small or imperceptible due to compensatory immigration. Usually, the state doesn't have many other policies for communities abroad other than providing consular services to its citizens living abroad: for example, the opportunity to renew their documents while abroad, to participate in voting, or to receive counselling or assistance in case of distress abroad.

Of course, this does not mean that emigrant communities could not become an important issue at some point. For example, until recently, the UK had no problems regarding how many Britons lived abroad and where they lived. There were even fewer concerns as to whether they would return. But then preparations began to leave the EU, and suddenly there was the question of nearly one million Britons who live in Spain for at least part of the year, and what rights apply to them after Brexit. In total, there were around [1.2 million](#) Britons in the EU at that moment, most of them pensioners. At the same time, 3.3 million EU citizens had moved to the UK from the EU Member States alone, and 2.1 million of them were active in the British labour market. It is no wonder, then, that the issue of emigration did not stand out. In reality, however, emigration does have an impact on the British economy. For example, it has been calculated that as much as £1.4 billion exited the country in the form of pensions each year to pensioners who spend this amount abroad.

### Emigration countries with declining populations

At the same time, for example, in many Central and Eastern European countries, emigration is a very important issue, usually in those countries where population development has reached a stage where the birth rate has already fallen. And when the last larger age cohorts suddenly had the opportunity to move freely in the European Union, the population shrank at a dizzying pace at times.

In Lithuania, for example, the population fell by as much as a quarter between 1990 and 2020: from 3.7 million to 2.8 million. The negative birth rate (–189,000 people) also plays a role in this, i.e., there are fewer births than deaths. But migration exceeds this several times (–710,000), and undoubtedly migration also affects birth rates as people leave Lithuania at an age where one typically starts a family. Emigration is also on a comparable scale in, for example, [Romania, Croatia and Latvia](#).

In recent decades, many people have also left Estonia, and similarly to other Eastern European countries, our birth rate has decreased (in 2020, an average of [1.58 children](#) per woman were born in Estonia, but to maintain a stable population, the birth rate has to be at least 2.1 per woman). Compared to 1991, when Estonia regained its independence, the population of Estonia had decreased by about [16%](#) by 2015. Yet, unlike many other Central and Eastern European countries, there are many circular migrants among Estonians. In other words, people go abroad for a few years but later return. Immigration has also helped to gradually turn the Estonian population back into growth.

Emigration countries with declining populations have begun inventing ways to deal with emigration. Experience in many countries has shown that return campaigns don't work: for a person to want to migrate, the pull and push factors are much more important than policies, i.e., how the economy is doing in both countries and what quality of life is affordable in both countries.

Therefore, these countries are developing strategies to adapt to emigration: it is important to reconnect with those who have already left and to inform them that their homeland has not forgotten them, and if they want to return, the doors are open. Many countries, including Estonia, have also developed support [measures](#) to help migrants return. For example, there are guidance materials on where and how to find a suitable job. It is quite difficult for a person who has worked in a large metropolis to integrate into a much less specialised and often quite networked labour market in a smaller home country, where everyone knows everyone, but yet he/she is a stranger. Finding a school and initial support for children is a separate challenge. Often, school-age children followed a completely different school programme in a different language in the previous host country. For example, in the eighth grade, it is quite hard to suddenly switch from Finnish biological terms to Estonian ones. And what about foreign language learning, for example? What if the rest of the classmates have already learned Russian since the fourth grade, but this was not taught in the British school curriculum?

Finding a family doctor and handling the bureaucracy with government authorities and local government can also be a headache because, like immigrants, returnees face many bureaucratic obstacles. The challenges regarding societal attitudes shouldn't also be underestimated. While there has been a lot of talk about anti-immigration attitudes, returned compatriots also often feel a certain alienation or at least lack of comprehension by the host society. Therefore, some transnational/diaspora policy measures focus on the society of the home country: for example, support is given to media programmes that help the society of the country of origin better understand the lives and challenges of returnees, but also to demonstrate the value of their knowledge and experiences.

Attempts are also made to connect those who remain abroad with the culture and economy of their homeland: to involve them as contributors to the country's development, as promoters of export or simply as practitioners of national culture abroad. For example, many countries including Estonia encourage people living abroad to contribute to civic as well as economic diplomacy. The role of the state in this instance could be to bring together a company that wants to expand into new markets and a compatriot who knows both the legal environment and business practices of the destination country.

## Countries that favour emigration

However, some countries in the world have a completely different demographic situation. For example, the Philippines: an archipelagic island country in Southeast Asia with a population of over 100 million that still in the early 1990s had an average birth rate of [four children per woman](#). The Philippines is one of the countries that indeed encourages its citizens to go abroad. The Philippines even has a separate entity, which seeks to ensure that emigration is organised effectively and is safe — e.g., so that migrants do not fall victim to human trafficking. This body is also committed to ensuring that overseas communities do not lose touch with their homeland. Even the education system in the Philippines takes into account the possibilities of emigration.

For countries such as the Philippines, emigration is important for at least two reasons: first, emigration helps keep the population more stable, and second, remittances make a very important contribution to the country's gross domestic product. In most cases, these are completely ordinary money transfers, where those who have gone abroad support close relatives, for example. In order to improve their living standards, the relatives are channelling money into the wider domestic economy, from which others are already benefiting. Remittances account for about [10%](#) of the GDP of the Philippines. Financial remittances are also discussed in more detail in **Chapter 9, "The Economic Impact of Migration"**.

However, some countries have gone a step further in maximising the contribution of their communities abroad. At the turn of the century, for example, Mexico launched the so-called 3+1 programme to motivate compatriots abroad who wanted to contribute to the well-being of their home village: for each peso sent by an emigrant, the local government, state government and federal government added another peso. Under this programme, a good number of Mexican municipalities developed, for example, proper sewerage, water infrastructure, power infrastructure or roads.

## Countries with diasporas

However, there is a fourth type of state that doesn't experience much emigration now but has had in the past. These are countries that have developed a diaspora. The term diaspora comes from ancient Greek and means scattered. The diaspora is a historical national community whose ancestors have left their homeland, but have managed to maintain their community and common identity abroad. One of the best-known diasporas is probably the Jews. For a long time, they were a nation without a state, but they were still united by their religion, culture and languages. They were also a community which so many countries inadvertently helped to preserve through policies of persecution and ghettoisation. However, there are also overseas communities that are much more diffuse, such as the Irish. There are an estimated [100 million](#) people with Irish roots in the world, but only around 5 million live in Ireland. Such a large community developed through the 19th and 20th centuries, largely from the descendants of the Irish who went abroad in search of a better life.

Estonia also has quite a large diaspora. It is estimated that there are a total of [150,000 to 250,000 Estonians](#) living outside of Estonia – this is almost one in five Estonians. Of course, this is a fairly diverse group. People have travelled at different times and in different directions. In the 19th century, Estonians mostly migrated to the Russian Empire – for example, when Estonia declared independence in 1918 there were [50,000 Estonians](#) living in St. Petersburg. However, in the middle of the 20th

century, the Second World War and the subsequent occupation forced tens of thousands of Estonians into exile in the West. Of course, diaspora is a somewhat strange term for the third wave of migration or for those who have left Estonia after the country regained its independence, but these people form an important part of a wider transnational Estonian community – a nation that maintains ties and common identity regardless of borders.

The diaspora in itself is a very exciting cultural phenomenon: it not only preserves the language and culture of the homeland but it also creates a kind of subculture of the diaspora, which over time begins to significantly differ from the language and culture of the homeland. For example, various [expatriate Estonian languages](#) have been studied, which indicate that over time, loanwords from the language of the host country will start to appear in the language, while archaic things that have already disappeared from the language of homeland Estonia might still be preserved. For example, in the American Estonian language, there are inflections that are no longer commonly used here. For example, they say, "Lapsed saivad kommi." But what we call "arvuti" is more often referred to as "kompuuter" in the diaspora.

The aim of diaspora policy is, above all, to use one's foreign communities as a kind of bridgehead: as advocates of one's country, language and culture abroad, which helps promote diplomatic relations between different countries, for example. Perhaps the best-known diaspora lobby organisation in the world is the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which has repeatedly prevented decisions in the United States that could be detrimental to Israel. Similarly, others also try to influence politics. For example, [JBANC](#), a lobby organisation representing the Baltic communities in the United States along with other representatives of the Baltic diasporas were largely responsible for Canada and the United States imposing sanctions on the so-called Magnitsky list of select Russian oligarchs.

Typically, the goals of diaspora policy are of course milder: for example, to support cultural exports or economic relations. An interesting example again relates to these 100 million Irish. In 2012, for example, Ireland launched a spectacular tourism project, [The Gathering](#), which invited all people with Irish roots to spend their holidays in Ireland. 100 million is a huge market!

However, for the identity of diasporas to be preserved and the connection with the homeland to be maintained, it is undoubtedly important to keep in touch with their communities abroad: to recognise diasporas, to preserve their culture and to provide language learning opportunities. For example, Estonia has a language camps project that enables Estonian children living abroad to come to Estonia in the summer, where they practice Estonian, discover the country and make Estonian friends, among other activities.

Of course, the diasporas have changed significantly in recent decades. While in the past the diaspora was still a community cut off from its homeland to some extent, today one can ask how cut off from the homeland can one be? In the Information Age, the press, culture and friends from the homeland are only a mouse click away, and international travel is also easier. Thus, the question is less about the policies that promote or maintain diasporas, but rather about policies that engage with transnational communities.

All in all, communities abroad are an important instrument of soft power. Of course, you may ask whether it is still right to keep in touch with one's compatriots, who, from the point of view of the destination country, should perhaps integrate locally? In Estonia we are proud of being a small, but still global nation and we are happy that it is easier for Estonian companies to reach new international markets or that Estonian children living abroad can also learn Estonian there or come to Estonia for a

language immersion camp. But when Russia pursues a compatriot policy and tries to spread its ideology among the Russians here to influence Estonian domestic policy through their foreign community, or recruit Russian-speaking youths into Artek camps, we perceive it as a security threat.

Therefore, transnationalism policy is quite a diverse phenomenon that can be developed both for the benefit of neighbourly and constructive international relations and for the integration of overseas communities, as well as for the opposite purpose. Depends on who's judging.

## Discussion points

- Think of an Estonian who has lived abroad for the last few years (a friend, relative, acquaintance or even a fictional character). Who is he/she and what does he/she do? Under what conditions could he/she consider returning to Estonia? What support might he/she need? Who can offer this support? (e.g., friends and relatives, society at large, state, local government, NGOs)
- Let's suppose that this Estonian can't or doesn't want to return to Estonia. Could he/she be useful to Estonia in his/her country of residence and how? (e.g., by sending remittances, mediating one's knowledge or skills to people living in Estonia, helping export Estonian culture or supporting Estonian companies' expansion abroad, acting as a citizen diplomat)

## Further reading

European immigration and emigration dynamics can be accessed at [KCMD Dynamic Data Hub](#).

Data on Estonian emigration and return migration are published by [Statistics Estonia](#).

You can read more about the policy aimed at overseas communities in Estonia and elsewhere in the chapter "Transnationalism Policies" of the *Estonian Human Development Report 2016/2017*.

An overview of the services and information offered to Estonian returnees can be found, for example, on [Eesti.ee](#).



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