



European  
University  
Institute

ROBERT  
SCHUMAN  
CENTRE FOR  
ADVANCED  
STUDIES

## **CARIM EAST – CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Co-financed by the European Union

### ***The demographic and economic framework of circular migration in Belarus***

**Anastacia Bobrova**

**Liudmila Shakhotska**

CARIM-East Explanatory Note 12/84

Demographic and Economic Module

September 2012



© 2012. All rights reserved.  
No part of this paper may be distributed, quoted  
or reproduced in any form without permission from  
the CARIM East Project.



## 1. Introduction and definitions

Defining and thus measuring circular migration is a difficult task. Its definition is far from clear either at an academic or at the political level. In a comprehensive article Newland (2009) tries to identify all definitional issues by summarizing four dimensions which have been used to approach circular migration schemes: 1. spatial, which involves both the origin and the destination country; 2. temporal, which includes both short and long term movements; 3. iterative, including more than one cycle; and 4. developmental, describing a win-win-win process implying benefits for the country of origin, the country of destination and the migrant himself.

When trying to measure this phenomenon, Belarus faces specific challenges as, at the time of writing, neither comprehensive statistics nor *ad hoc* surveys capture one specific trait of circularity, namely its repetitiveness.

## 2. Size and characteristics of circular migration in Belarus

Given the abovementioned limitations, this note will refer to the following two kinds of movements, which have long been as specific categories of circular migration (see e.g. Agunias and Newland, 2007):

- a) Temporary labor migration with permanent return. Here, international emigrants leaving to go abroad as counted in annual labour contracts in the period 1994-2011 are taken into account.<sup>1</sup>
- b) Temporary intellectual migration with permanent return. Here, because of data availability, we take into account the period between 2004 to 2008.

### 2.1 Temporary labour migration with permanent return

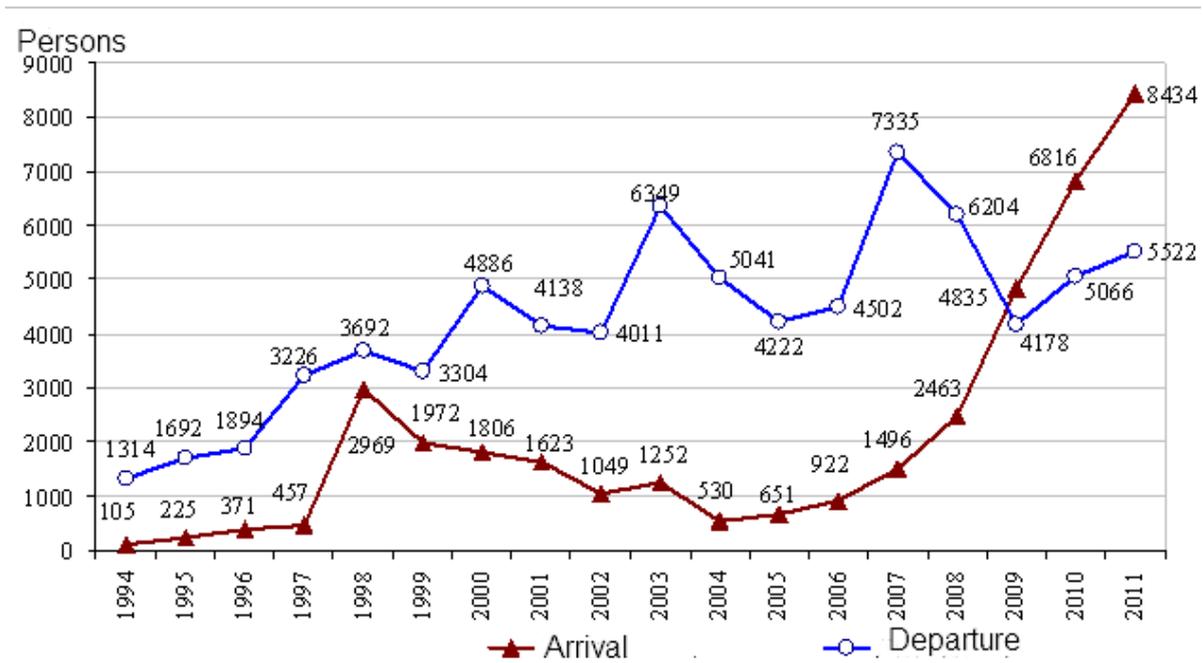
The first group is based on statistics of labour migration, which is, in turn, based on the data derived from the “Card of statistical registration of labour migrants emigration for work abroad”. The Department of citizenship and migration of the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Belarus is responsible for the record-keeping. These cards consist of the main migrant characteristics, such as age, sex, citizenship, education, employment, country of destination and period abroad. Since 1 April 1994 they have formed the basis of labour migrants statistics.

In 2011, almost 6,000 people left Belarus to work abroad. By law, they are circular labour migrants as they are obliged to come back to Belarus in order to renew their contract or in order to get a new contract. The employer also has administrative liability for the conditions of migrants’ stay. So, from a legal point view, all of the labour migrants in this framework can be considered circular migrants.

---

<sup>1</sup> Here, a major limitation consists of the fact that these data include all people regardless of their citizenship. So, a *labour migrant* is not necessarily a Belarusian citizen.

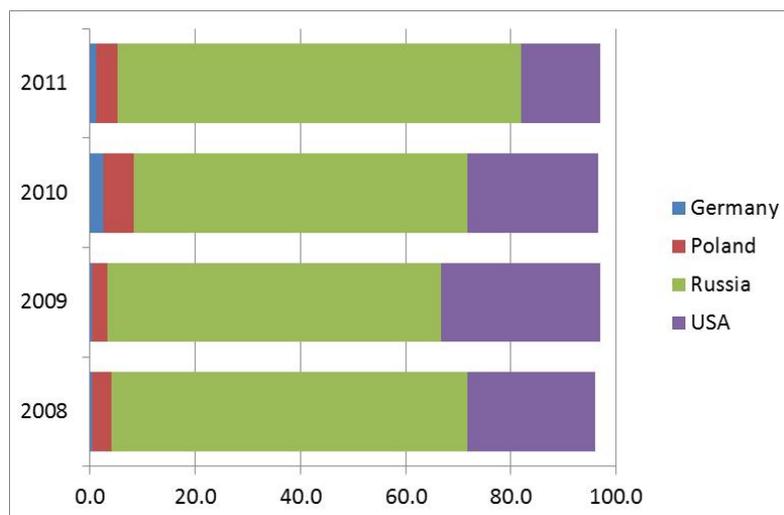
**Figure 1. Arrivals and departures of labour migrants from and to Belarus on the basis of official labour contracts and agreements, 1994 – 2011.**



Source: Registration cards for labour migration, Belarus

In the period 2000-2011, young people aged younger than 24 dominated labor migration (over 60%), which is to a large extent due to their participation in international educational and work projects during summer vacations. The main destination countries for labour migrants are Russia, the US, Poland and Germany (figure 2). These countries account for 97% of labour emigration from Belarus in 2008-2011.

**Figure 2. Temporary labour migrants leaving abroad for a period of up to one year by main countries of destinations, values in %, 2008-2011**



Source: Registration cards for labour migration, Belarus

Around 40% of those who departed are highly-qualified workers and specialists, employed in the service sector and low-qualified workers.

As in the case of temporary migration, the main destination country for permanent migrants is Russia, accounting for over 50% of all departures. Ukraine, Germany, Israel, and the US are among other popular destinations. Unlike temporary migrants, 90% of people whose departure is accompanied by change of permanent residence have received higher or specialized secondary education. Therefore, much is said of “brain drain”, “elite muscles” and “highly-qualified brides”.

## **2.2 Temporary intellectual migration with permanent return**

Intellectual migration is captured by data on researchers<sup>2</sup> moving temporarily to work abroad in accordance with their work institutions as recorded by statistical records.

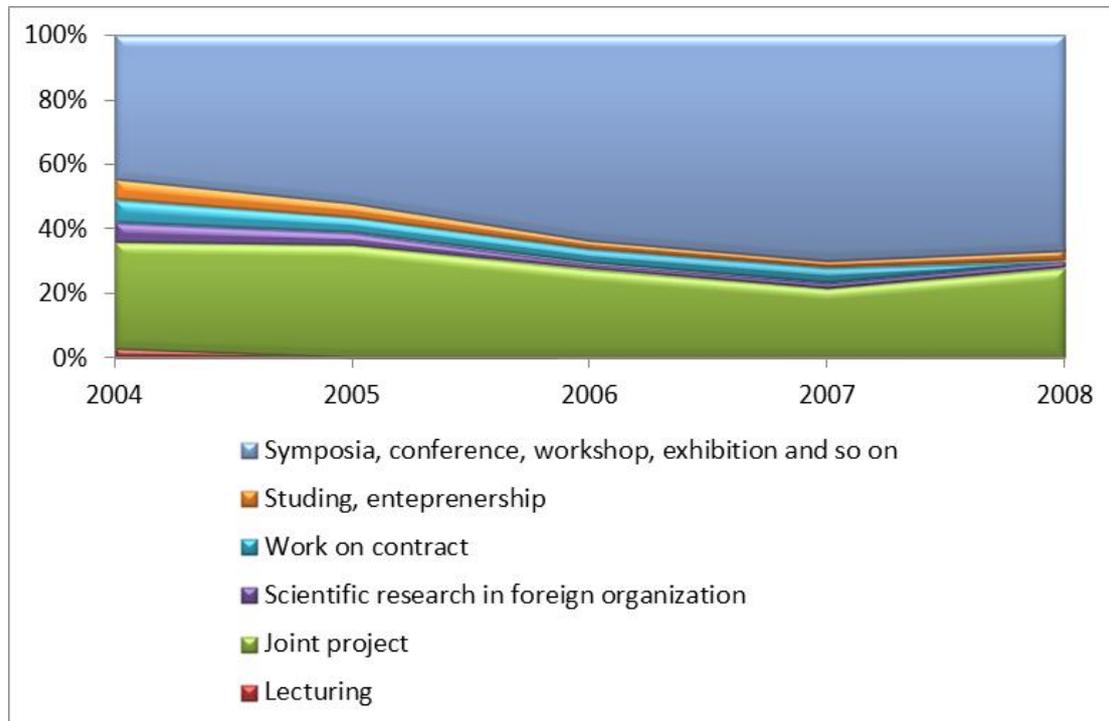
The so-called 2-science form (‘2-nauka’) allowed the accumulation of data for 2004-2007. This provided information not only about the number of researchers who went abroad and who came back. It also gave details of their sex, age, the branch of economy, the duration and purpose of travel, destination countries and research areas. In 2008 a new form of recording has been introduced and information is now available only according for age and academic degree.

Men prevailed among researchers who went abroad 2004-2008 (80%). During this period around 60% of those who left did not have an advanced academic degree. There were instead around 10% of PostDocs in Science and around 30% of Doctors of Science among all intellectual migrants.

At the same time one can observe age difference between those intellectual migrants who left the country temporarily and who came back and those who have not returned (i.e. permanent migrants). Young people aged 40 years and younger account for 55% of permanent migrants, while over 50% of return migrants were aged 40-59 years, 30% of whom were in the 50-59 age group (figure 3). This difference is explained by departure objectives. Young people leave to study abroad and then stay to work. Senior researchers are less inclined to emigrate permanently due to the social advantages they have accumulated in the home country, i.e. senior positions, bonuses, respect of colleagues etc. The main purpose of their departure is to participate in temporary joint projects, as well as symposia, conferences, workshops and exhibitions (figure 3). That is why duration of stay abroad equal to 3 months or less accounts for over 95% of temporary departures.

---

<sup>2</sup> Researchers include persons who have involved in scientific or educational establishment in Belarus. Having an advanced academic degree is thus not necessarily a prerequisite to employed there.

**Figure 3. Temporary intellectual migrants outflows by reason, values in %, 2004-2008**

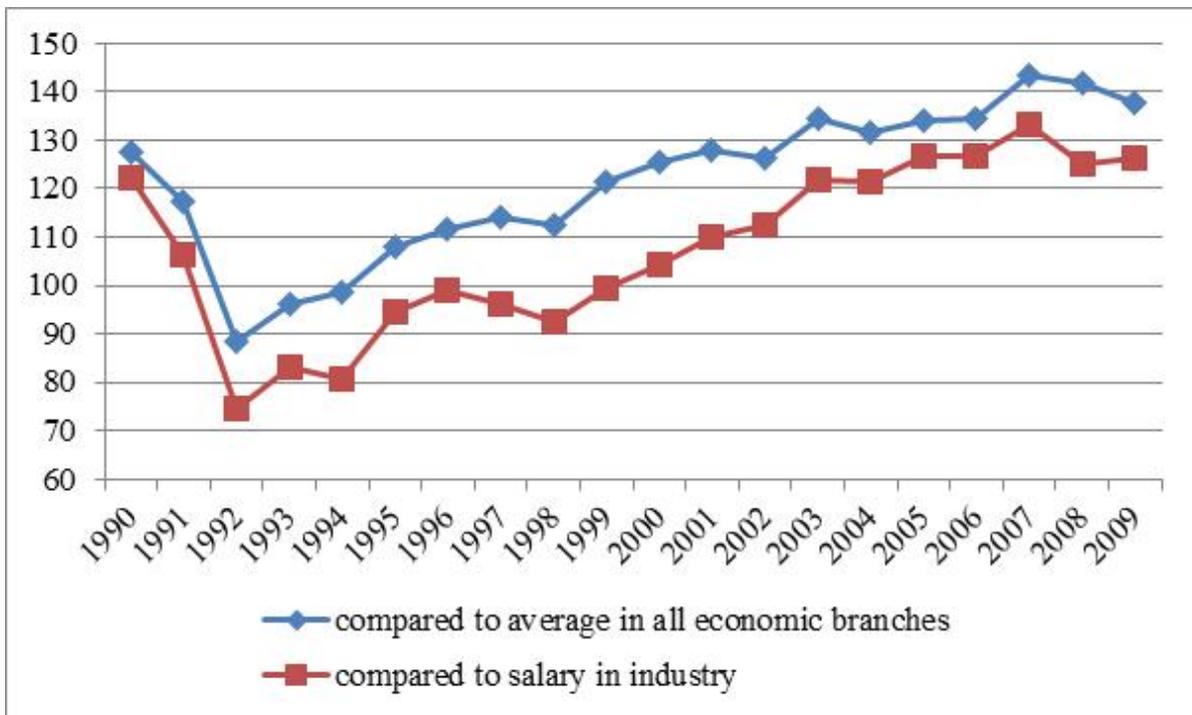
Source: Registration cards for labour migration, Belarus

In terms of destination countries, a similar situation is observed both in the case of temporary labor migration and temporary intellectual emigration. Russia is the leader here, followed by Germany and Poland. One can also observe an increase in temporary departures to Ukraine, China, Venezuela, and Kazakhstan. This increases the number of departures abroad, without reducing the Russian share, which stands at 60%.

Over 80% of researchers who temporarily worked abroad represent “science and scientific services”, which is due to the high share of scientific organizations among all research institutions in Belarus. “Education” and “industrial production” rank second and third. As for specific research areas, the highest activity is observed among employees in engineering (60%) and natural sciences (30%). According to the data for 2001-2007, engineering sciences accounted, instead, only for 10% and natural sciences for almost 70% among emigrating research and teaching staff.

There is an increasing probability that the problem of “brain drain” from Belarus, including the departure of young professionals, will gradually be transformed into the circular migration of research and teaching staff. It could be explained through the example of permanent migration. In the first years after the collapse of the USSR the number of migrants was very large due to newly achieved freedom of movement. But after several years migrants have decreased. The same situation was visible in scientific migration. As researchers had not been able or as they had not known about the possibility of working in foreign organization they preferred to find a job and to leave Belarus. Now they have a lot of information and they are able to combine their work in Belarus with temporary movement abroad. Also in 2000-2010, measures were undertaken to improve the income of researchers. The growth of prestige of scientific work in Belarus needs also to be noted. All these moments helped reduce the number of intellectual emigrants. Over recent years the remuneration of research labor became a priority compared to other industries. Figure 4 compares the income dynamics of researchers with the total population and the population employed in the industry sector.

**Figure 4. Dynamics of the average income of the population employed in scientific/educational institutions compared with other sectors (\*), 1990-2009**



Notes: (\*) 1. Blue line: average salary (population employed in scientific and education institutions/average salary (total employed population); 2. Red line: average salary (population employed in scientific and education institutions/average salary (total population employed in the industry sector).

Source: National Statistics Committee of Belarus, 2007; 2010; 2011.

The relative increase in income allows a reduction in the flow of permanent intellectual emigration but also brings back those who had already left. The Institute of Sociology at the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences carried out a monitoring study of research and teaching staff. This study demonstrated: “only in 2005-2007, 29 highly-qualified researchers, who had worked for a long time abroad, returned to scientific institutions under the aegis of the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences” (Artyukhin, 2008. p.133). It is rather a high number compared to the total number of emigrants in the Belarusian National Academy of Sciences 2001-2007, namely 59 (Artyukhin, 2008. P. 130).

An underdeveloped scientific infrastructure had a significant impact on the growing flows of scientific migration. It pushed researchers to carry out research and development in other countries, either temporarily or permanently. In 2006 there was already a twofold increase in the share of expenses in the infrastructure of public scientific organizations compared to 2001. However, after 2008 a constant decrease in this share has been observed and it went down to 6% of public expenses on science in 2010. Circular migration from Belarus will certainly take place given the underdeveloped research and technology infrastructure. As a rule, researchers carry out their work in laboratories abroad and they analyze the results upon their return to Belarus.

### 3. Conclusions and policy recommendations

It is difficult to correctly evaluate the consequences of intellectual circular migration. However it offers certain advantages for Belarus, compared to the permanent emigration of researchers. First of all, thanks to intellectual circular migration the loss of highly qualified intellectual personnel could be reduced. This is especially important in the present context. Second, the sharing of experience and the

acquisition of up-to-date knowledge enhances human capital and innovative potential. The use of expertise acquired abroad contributes to science-intensive production and increases Belarusian exports. In 2010 the volume of high-technology exports was equal to 2,213 mln. U.S. dollars, or 7.4 % of the total volume of Belarusian exports.

The problem of counting circular migration should also be noted. There is one source of data in Belarus: registration cards for labour migration abroad. It is important to resume the collection of special 2-science forms in all organizations engaged in research. It is also important to renew the survey of scientists provided by the Institute of Sociology, because it provided the only source of data on migration of the scientific staff. This survey was stopped in 2011 due to financial problems.

## References

- Agunias D.R., K. Newland. 2007. Circular migration and Development: Trends, Policy Routes and Ways Forward, Policy Brief, Migration Policy Institute.
- Artyukhin M.I. 2008. Migration of the population of the Republic of Belarus, Belarusian science [in Russian], Minsk.
- Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus. 2005. On employees who worked abroad in 2004 [in Russian], Statistical collections, Minsk.
- Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus. 2006. On employees who worked abroad in 2005 [in Russian], Statistical collections, Minsk.
- Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus. 2007. On employees who worked abroad in 2006 [in Russian], Statistical collections, Minsk.
- Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus. 2008. On employees who worked abroad in 2007 [in Russian], Statistical collections, Minsk.
- National Statistics Committee of Belarus. 2007. Yearbook 2006 [in Russian], Minsk.
- National Statistics Committee of Belarus. 2010. Yearbook 2011 [in Russian], Minsk.
- National Statistics Committee of Belarus. 2011. Yearbook 2012 [in Russian], Minsk.
- Newland K. 2009. Circular Migration and Development, Human Development Research Paper, 2009/42, UNDP.