

Economic Emigration from Poland to Latvia in 1928–1939*

Ekonomiskā emigrācija no Polijas uz Latviju, 1928–1939

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The economic emigration from Poland to Latvia was a consequence of the socio-economic situation in both countries. The internal determinants of emigration were agrarian overpopulation and poverty in the Polish countryside. In this situation, many people saw a chance to improve their lives abroad. The problem of the overabundance of labourers in rural Poland coincided with a period of economic growth in Latvia. At a time when Poland was struggling with overpopulation and an excess of labour in the countryside, the Baltic country faced scarcity of hands in agriculture. The emigration movement to Latvia lasted from 1928 to 1939. The number of Polish workers employed in Latvian agriculture is estimated at over 100,000 people. The aim of the article is to analyse the origins, course and consequences of economic emigration from Poland to Latvia during this period.

Keywords: Poland, Latvia, interwar, agriculture, seasonal emigration.

Ekonomiskā emigrācija no Polijas uz Latviju bija abu valstu sociālekonomiskās situācijas sekas. Iekšējie emigrācijas faktori bija agrārā pārapdzīvotība un nabadzība Polijas laukos. Šādā situācijā daudzi cilvēki saskatīja iespēju uzlabot savu dzīvi ārzemēs. Strādnieku pārpalikuma problēma Polijas laukos sakrita ar ekonomiskās izaugsmes periodu Latvijā. Laikā, kad Polija cīnījās ar pārapdzīvotību un darbaspēka pārpalikumu laukos, Baltijas valstī trūka darbaroku lauksaimniecībā. Emigrācijas kustība uz Latviju ilga no 1928. līdz 1939. gadam. Tiek lēsts, ka Latvijas lauksaimniecībā nodarbināto poļu strādnieku skaits bija vairāk nekā 100 000 cilvēku. Raksta mērķis ir analizēt ekonomiskās emigrācijas no Polijas uz Latviju izcelsmi, gaitu un sekas šajā periodā.

Atslēgvārdi: Polija, Latvija, starpkaru periods, lauksaimniecība, sezonālā emigrācija.

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Introduction

Economic emigration from Poland to Latvia in the interwar period was the result of the socio-economic situation in both countries. The immediate reason for this emigration was poverty in Poland, which most severely affected the rural population, and access to the foreign labour market. Agrarian overpopulation in Poland led to a constant increase in the number of “redundant people” in the countryside, comprising 3 to 5 million (almost 1/4 of the total rural population) in the interwar period. One of the ways to at least partially relieve this problem was seasonal emigration. Agrarian overpopulation and unemployment in the Polish countryside coincided with increasing labour shortages in Latvian agriculture, which were due to a reduced birth rate. During the war and the first post-war years, and the growing migration of the rural population to better-paid jobs in industry and construction all contributed to that shortage.¹ The number of foreigners employed in Latvian agriculture grew over time. In the seasonal year 1938/1939, about half of the 150,000 hired agricultural workers in Latvia were foreigners. The Latvian authorities regarded the growing dependence on foreign workers for further economic development as a problem, but they could not do without them. Until the mid-1930s, Lithuanians predominated among the foreign workers. However, in the following years, their place was taken by Poles.²

Legal basis for emigration

Until 1938, the movement of workers from Poland to Latvia was possible due to interdepartmental agreements concluded by the Polish side (Ministry of Social Welfare) with the relevant Latvian institutions,

which acquired the right to bring in foreign workers from the state authorities. From 1928–1935, these institutions were professional agricultural unions; from 1935, their role was taken by the Latvian Chamber of Agriculture. With seasonal emigration to Latvia constantly on the rise, an international agreement between Poland and Latvia became necessary to regulate the emigration movement. On 29 October 1938, the “Agreement between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Latvia on Polish agricultural, seasonal and other workers” and two supplementary agreements between the ministries of both countries (Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Treasury of the Republic of Poland and Ministry of Finance of Latvia) were concluded. The agreement guaranteed the emigrants, among other things, the same rights as Latvian workers in terms of labour protection, medical assistance, arbitration, and labour courts.³

Recruitment and transportation

At the highest level, the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were responsible for recruiting economic migrants to Latvia. At the medium level, the voivodeship authorities dealt with recruitment, which included, e.g., supervising recruitment, issuing passports, examining appeals against decisions of district administrative authorities and issuing re-emigration certificates. The lowest instance responsible for recruitment was the State Employment Agency. After the liquidation of this institution in 1934, the district authorities took over its functions.⁴

The Polish side defined the recruitment area. Its choice was guided primarily by geographical, economic and social considerations, such as proximity to Latvia,

fragmentation of farms, unemployment rate, and the number of redundant workers. The quota of emigrants was divided between individual voivodeships that met the above criteria.⁵ The emigrants obtained free visas issued by Latvian consulates.⁶

The analysis of the available sources shows that the supply of labour significantly exceeded the demand.⁷ State offices and agencies were overwhelmed with applications from citizens wishing to go to work abroad, who, for various reasons, had not been recruited.⁸

Recruitment was not always problem-free. Among the sources of difficulties were misunderstandings resulting from poor cooperation between the Polish administration and foreign representatives of the recruiting organizations.⁹ Another obstacle was inadequate selection of candidates. The criteria were supposed to be the applicants' economic situation, health condition, and agricultural skills. However, medical examinations were, in many cases, superficial and formal.¹⁰ Often everyone was accepted indiscriminately, except for those who had a contagious disease.¹¹ Moreover, the voivodeship authorities sometimes recruited urban dwellers who were not suitable for agricultural work in order to reduce unemployment in the country at all costs.¹² With time, this became a source of misunderstandings and conflicts.¹³ High competition for a limited number of available jobs led to corruption and abuse by local officials and recruitment officers.¹⁴

The transport of the contracted workers was organized by rail.¹⁵ On the journey from Poland to the place of work in Latvia, the worker covered 25% of the cost of travel to the Polish-Latvian border, whereas the Latvian side paid for the section of the journey leading through Latvia.¹⁶ Upon arrival, the emigrants, for the duration of the formalities related to their stay, were accommodated in distribution

points equipped with dormitories. Here, they were divided into smaller groups and directed to smaller distribution points. Employers chose workers who went with them to their workplaces, then all formalities were arranged and contracts were signed.¹⁷

Illegal emigration

In addition to the officially arranged recruitment, there was also illegal emigration to Latvia. Illegal emigration was local in scope and concerned two Polish counties adjacent to the Polish-Latvian border: Braślów and Dżisna in the Vilnius Voivodeship. The proximity and a certain leakiness of the state border meant that some residents of Polish border towns who, for various reasons, had not been recruited, could not resist the temptation to go to Latvia illegally and look for work on their own. If an illegal worker who had found an employer got caught, the Latvian authorities imposed administrative fines ranging from 10 to 20 lats (20 lats were equivalent to a month's wages). After paying this fine, the worker and the employer had to go to the local employment office to conclude an employment contract.¹⁸ The analysis of the available sources shows that this was generally not a crucial problem for illegal immigrants. However, if an illegal immigrant did not find a job, he was deported to Poland, where he could face several weeks of detention for crossing the border illegally.¹⁹

The Polish authorities tried to prevent illegal departures to Latvia. In March 1931, the Emigration Office (in Polish – *Urząd Emigracyjny*) applied to the officials of the Vilnius Voivodeship with a request to tighten border control to prevent workers without passes and contracts from crossing the Polish-Latvian border.²⁰ However, this did not seem to have been very effective.²¹

The scale of illegal emigration to Latvia is impossible to determine due to the lack of relevant statistics. The Latvian Chamber of Agriculture estimated the number of workers employed illegally in Latvian agriculture at about 5,000 people in 1935 and 2,000 (in 1936).²²

Illegal immigrants were in a much worse situation than their officially recruited colleagues. They could not conclude a contract and therefore were at the mercy of their employers. An illegally employed farm hand could not transfer the money he earned to his home country, and in case of illness or an accident at work, he did not have any social security.²³

The dynamics of departures, the number and characteristics of emigrants

The first seasonal emigrants from Poland appeared in Latvia in 1928. In the following years, the demand for labour in Latvia increased, because, after the global economic crisis, Latvian economy began to record rapid growth. It is impossible to determine the exact number of Polish economic migrants in Latvia. Official statistics only provide the number of departures, so, if emigrants went to Latvia more than once, they were counted several times. In addition, we lack data on illegal emigrants, the exact number of which remains unknown to obtain a complete picture. With a high degree of probability, we can assume that about 100,000 Polish agricultural workers passed through Latvia. At the beginning, the emigration of Polish agricultural workers to Latvia was seasonal. Typically, the season lasted for 7–8 months: from mid-April to mid-November. Some emigrants decided to stay in Latvia during the winter season, from mid-November to mid-April. As time

passed, more and more workers stayed on for the winter. In this way, emigration began to lose its original seasonal character and the characteristics of semi-permanent emigration. This shows that the workers found better living and working conditions there than in their home country.²⁴ In the late 1930s, the Polish authorities

Table 1.

Dynamics and number of Polish seasonal emigrants to Latvia

Year	Emigration	Remigration	Number of emigrants who stayed during the winter season
1928	1337	?	?
1929	654	?	?
1930	655	399	256
1931	1748	1471	277
1932	1882	1382	500
1933	4813	487	4326
1934	11 993	10 120	1873
1935	16 114	15 120	813
1936	19 620	17 250	2370
1937	22 831	19 219	3612
1938	17 844	12 103	5741
1939	12 000	?	?

Own study based on: Report of the 1st Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on economic and seasonal emigration, 1939. AAN, 2-1-9596, pp. 11–12; Report and conclusions submitted by a delegation from the Vilnius Chamber of Agriculture after a trip to Latvia on 5–10 October 1938. LCVA, 148-1-856, pp. 39–41.

recognized that the number of semi-seasonal emigrants outnumbered the seasonal ones. According to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were about 40,000 Poles working in Latvia in 1938, but only about 17,000 of them had signed up in the spring of the same year.²⁵

In terms of regional origin, agricultural migrants in Latvia represented a mosaic. However, the vast majority of emigrants were inhabitants of the Vilnius Voivodeship. In 1931, 82.4% of all Polish seasonal workers in Latvia came from the Vilnius Voivodeship.²⁶ In the mid-1930s, a gradual increase can be observed in the number of migrants from other parts of Poland (from the following voivodeships: Białystok, Nowogródek, Lublin, Łódź, and Warsaw). However, the 15 districts of the Vilnius and Nowogródek voivodeships were still in the lead. Of these, the four northernmost districts ranked first: Braślów, Dżisna, Święciany, and Postawy.²⁷

A characteristic feature of Polish seasonal emigration from Poland to Latvia was the preponderance of women over men.²⁸ The high share of women in the emigration movement was due to a lack of female rather than male workers in Latvian agriculture. The reason for this was that the Lithuanian authorities opposed the increase in women's quotas. Consequently, Latvia could count only on Poland.²⁹ The high percentage of women emigrating to Latvia was a negative feature of the emigration movement for Poland. It led to a scarcity of female labour in the emigrants' home regions, and because of the lower wages earned by women, the material benefits of emigration for the Polish state were reduced. Therefore, the Polish side tried to raise the percentage of men, but the authorities in Warsaw were not always able to force the Latvians to change their position.³⁰ Nevertheless, over time, the predominance of women

diminished: Between 1933 and 1937, the percentage of women decreased from 85% to 57%.³¹

The age structure of emigrants depended on the needs of employers. The reported demand was mainly for people in the prime of life. The majority of emigrants in Latvia were aged 20 to 29 (55–60%). The emigrants aged 30 to 49 (30%) ranked second. Among this group, many emigrated with their families. It is worth noting that there was also a large group of people aged 17 to 19 (7–12%), notwithstanding the fact that workers under 18 could not migrate legally. Seasonal migrants in Latvia were almost entirely recruited from the rural population: smallholders and landless. Owners of larger plots (over 20 ha) accounted only for a negligible percentage (less than 1%). The ethnic and religious composition of the emigrants was diverse because the majority of seasonal emigrants in Latvia came from areas with a very diverse religious and national structure. The dominant element among the emigrants were Roman Catholics, who constituted slightly more than half of all seasonal workers. The second place was taken by Orthodox believers, who accounted for over 1/3 of all emigrants. In the third place were the Old Believers, whose number never exceeded 10%.³² In terms of nationalities, Poles (approx. 60%) and Belarusians (approx. 35%) dominated. There were also representatives of other national groups (for example, Lithuanians, Russians). The high percentage of representatives of national minorities can be explained primarily by the area of recruitment, which comprised a significant percentage of non-Polish population. Traditionally, nationality in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic was identified with religious affiliation: Catholics were counted as Poles, Orthodox as Belarusians. However, this identification was only partially correct.

While among Orthodox peasants, the cases of stating Polish nationality were exceptions, among Catholics, the percentage of Belarusians was sometimes significant. Given this circumstance, we can assume that the number of emigrants of Belarusian nationality must have been slightly higher than the one listed in the official statistics.

Work organization and salary

Most of the Polish agricultural workers in Latvia worked on farms located in Zemgale, Vidzeme and Kurzeme, where the competition of workers from other countries was the weakest. Only a few Polish emigrants found employment in Latgale, the most impoverished part of Latvia.³³

Employment contracts defined the working conditions of seasonal workers in Latvia. They were signed by the employer, the worker and the local employment office. According to agreement, the worker was to perform the work indicated to him by the employer or his deputy and to handle the employer's goods and tools with care. Emigrants benefited from the same labour protection care, the right to work, professional organization, social and medical care, and assistance for the unemployed, as Latvian workers.³⁴ Each time the bilateral agreement for the current year was signed, the amount of the monthly remuneration of the seasonal worker was determined. Men earned slightly more than women. In winter, wages were naturally lower than in summer. Under the terms of the contract, the wages of a Polish worker were to be identical to that of a local worker, but in reality, Poles earned less. On average, the wages of Polish workers in Latvia were 18.5% lower than those of Latvian workers.³⁵ Thanks to the subsidization of agriculture by the Latvian authorities, it became possible to gradually raise the wages

of Polish workers at a time when wages in Latvia were decreasing. The officials in Riga were aware of the growing dependence of the further development of domestic agriculture on foreign labour, so they had to meet the expectations of Poles.³⁶

The workers could send the money they earned to their home country via postal orders. In 1936, a compulsory bank intermediation in transferring money abroad was introduced, along with a regulation of fees.³⁷ According to the data of the Central Statistical Office, PLN 7,730,000 were sent to Poland in 1937 and PLN 7,000,000 – in 1938. The actual size of the sums transferred was slightly higher because they did not include the money imported directly by the returnees.³⁸ Nevertheless, it was much less than contributed by the Polish seasonal workers who had found employment in Germany (in 1938, the sum amounted to PLN 33 million).³⁹

Relations with employer and local community

The Polish seasonal workers had daily contact with the employers and their families. The mutual perception of Polish workers and Latvian hosts were also influenced by differences in the approach to work organization. The average Latvian farmer who employed Polish workers did not come from a great landowning family but was an ordinary peasant, usually working together in the field with the worker. The Latvian hosts were very hard-working and physically strong, and they demanded the same from their employees. The personal participation of the host in all the work on the farm increased the pressure on the worker to work harder.⁴⁰ Not all emigrants were able to cope with this challenge. Having different standards at home, they sometimes rebelled against

the rules on Latvian farms, and the most desperate ones – about 10% of agricultural workers per year – even left their jobs after a few days and returned to Poland.⁴¹

As for the ability to adapt to local conditions and the pace of work, there were visible differences between workers from the Vilnius and Nowogródek regions and workers from the central and southern parts of Poland. The former did not have high expectations of their employers, and sometimes they did not even demand the standard provided for in the contract. Economic emigration from this region to Latvia had a long tradition, so the emigrants knew quite well what conditions awaited them and were prepared for them. Workers from the Vilnius region efficiently adapted to the local terms. Not only did they uphold their contracts, but were even willing to stay in Latvia during the winter season. Seasonal workers from other parts of Poland had other reasons. This group included people who had previously worked as seasonal workers in Germany. Hence, they could compare working conditions in Latvia with those in Germany.⁴²

In contacts with the employer, Polish workers mainly used Russian. Latvian farmers and Polish workers from the eastern, formerly Russian part of Poland knew this language relatively well,⁴³ whereas the workers from the central and southern voivodeships had trouble with it.⁴⁴In places of mixed nationalities (e.g. in Zemgale), the language of communication between workers and employers could be Polish or the Polish-Belarusian dialect. The latter was used to the same extent by both sides. As history shows, there were examples of immigrants gradually mastering the Latvian language to the degree that allowed them to communicate with employers relatively freely, especially on topics related to their work. This particularly applied to the workers who spent more than one season in Latvia.⁴⁵

Although Polish workers in Latvia had quite limited opportunities to interact with the local community, they could not fail to attract its attention. For most emigrants, contact with Latvian culture was a completely new experience. Poles admired Latvian farmers and were impressed by the modern agriculture in Latvia. In the eyes of Latvians, Polish agricultural emigrants were, to a certain extent, a showcase for Poland. The poverty of the emigrants resulted in the creation of a dubious stereotype of Polish workers within Latvian society. The Latvian press published articles about the lower level of personal culture, reckless and irresponsible behaviour of male and female workers. Some representatives of the Latvian political scene showed keen interest in the issue of Polish seasonal emigrants. This topic appeared in the discussion around the advisability of importing foreign labour. During the period of parliamentary democracy (until May 1934), articles about the unacceptable treatment of Polish workers appeared in the left-wing press. Among others, the Polish section of the Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party took the floor and spoke up for the workers. Social democratic politicians criticized the agricultural policy of the centre-right governments, blaming them for bringing cheap foreign labour into the country. These politicians, however, were not guided by concern for the welfare of Polish workers but by cold calculation.⁴⁶

Religious life. Customs

The time the workers spent abroad was not entirely consumed by work. Their spare time was spent differently depending on the situation and their preferences. Seasonal emigrants came from a conservative rural environment. The Polish-Latvian

agreement of 29 October 1938 included a provision that Polish agricultural workers had the right to receive spiritual care in Polish language and to participate in church services.⁴⁷ The push by the Polish side for the possibility of providing pastoral care to emigrants by Polish clergy was not only due to the desire to meet the spiritual needs of seasonal workers, but it had a broader political and national context. In Latvia, there was a relatively sizeable Polish minority, which was of Catholic faith. The authorities in Riga made every effort to replace the traditionally strong Polish influences in the church with Latvian ones. They wanted to prevent the newly arrived clergy members from Poland from conducting pastoral activities among local Poles.⁴⁸ The authorities in Warsaw, on the contrary, followed the intention of sending priests from Poland not only to lead the ministry among seasonal workers, but also to secretly conduct pastoral activity among the indigenous Polish population in Latvia.⁴⁹

According to the contract, the workers were entitled to one free Sunday a month, and the Catholic holidays of the Ascension of the Lord and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary were days off work.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, an examination of the available sources suggests that workers' attendance of the church services in Latvia left much to be desired. Sometimes, the hosts were reluctant to release workers for services, in most cases, however, emigrants did not attend church because of the distance from their workplace, since the network of Catholic parishes across Latvia was relatively thin. In addition, many workers preferred to work on Sundays, because for work in the field on Sundays or holidays the worker received double remuneration.⁵¹

Staying abroad caused changes in the behaviour of many emigrants. One of

the manifestations of these changes was sexual behaviour. Loneliness, the need to create close relationships, and the ease of establishing close contact because of the housing conditions facilitated sexual promiscuity among many young people. Accidental sexual contacts often resulted in unplanned pregnancies among young female workers. It is impossible to obtain statistical data on these incidents, but they were not marginal and isolated.⁵² In the vast majority of cases, the fathers of these children were Polish seasonal workers, rarely – the locals.⁵³ Illegitimate children became a source of problems for the Polish authorities, as their maintenance predominantly was left on the shoulders of the Polish consular service. In 1937, the Polish consular assistant finally sent the children back to Poland. This action was not only due to economic considerations, but also intended to prevent the Latvian authorities from assimilating the children into Latvian culture.⁵⁴ At the beginning of 1938, in consultation with the provincial authorities, the Polish Consulate in Riga organized a collective transport of illegitimate children who lived at the state's expense in Latvian nurseries.⁵⁵

The separation from the families, the low cultural level and the hard, stressful work often meant that the leisure time was spent drinking alcohol and partying. The Minister of Public Affairs of Latvia Alfreds Bērziņš believed that Polish agricultural workers were generally the element disturbing the peaceful life of the Latvian countryside.⁵⁶ There were cases when workers organized large parties, which caused dissatisfaction in the local community. Therefore, in June 1938, the Polish Consulate issued a communiqué informing that before scheduling a party, the relevant public administration must give its permit. Alcohol abuse was the most common cause of unpleasant incidents involving immigrants. It is impossible to determine

the scale of this phenomenon, but several examples allow us to conclude that such incidents were not isolated cases.⁵⁷ Naturally, such incidents were inevitable in such a large group of people. The analysis of the abovementioned incidents shows that the workers were both victims and perpetrators of brawls and murders, while the local population acted as external witnesses and observers. It is no coincidence that the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed regret that seasonal emigrants, in Latvians' eyes, undermined the image and reputation of the Polish state.⁵⁸

Contacts with the Polish authorities and the diaspora

After leaving Poland, the emigrants could receive support. Taking care of Polish citizens staying abroad was one of the essential duties of the Polish consular service. In Latvia, the affairs of economic migrants were dealt with by the Consulates in Riga and Daugavpils. The most common everyday activities of the consulates involved passport issue. The scope of duties of consular employees also included helping workers settle disputes between them and their employers. The workers complained to the consulates about working conditions and poor treatment by employers. The consular officers also made regular inspection trips to examine the working conditions of Polish employees. If the allegations against the employers were justified, consular staff sometimes advised the emigrants to take the case to court. Polish consulates in Latvia had a Legal Aid Fund to cover the costs of trials.⁵⁹

Providing all workers with proper consular protection was not an easy task. Most workers were unfamiliar with the law, many were illiterate and socially passive. Instead of asserting their rights or

informing the consulate about the harm incurred to them, they resigned to their fate.⁶⁰ In addition, diplomats could not reach all the corners where Polish emigrants worked, so some workers felt that the consular service did not fulfil its duties and did not provide proper care to Polish citizens working abroad.⁶¹

According to the Polish authorities, seasonal workers could become an impulse to revive the local Polish diaspora. The main link between the Polish minority and seasonal workers was the Polish weekly *Nasze Życie* (Our life), published in Riga. For this purpose, in 1936, *Nasze Życie* published a regular column entitled "The Corner of the Polish Agricultural Worker", devoted to the issues topical to seasonal emigrants in Latvia. The Polish authorities made every effort to encourage workers to read the newspaper and subscribe to it.⁶²

In 1938, in cooperation with the local Polish diaspora, the Polish authorities intensified cultural and educational work among the emigrants. They initiated activities aimed at associating them with cultural and academic organizations.⁶³ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs believed that Polish emigration to Latvia would increase the influence of Poles in the country.⁶⁴ According to the Polish-Latvian emigration system, apart from Sundays and holidays observed in Latvia, the Polish national holidays – 3 May (Constitution Day) and 11 November (Independence Day) – were also treated as holidays for Polish workers.⁶⁵ These holidays created opportunities to involve workers in their celebrations. In 1938, the Consulate in Riga, together with the local Polish community, organized celebrations of Constitution Day and Independence Day in the places with the most significant clusters of Polish seasonal workers. In 1938, they organized ceremonies in Jelgava and Liepāja with the participation of local Poles and seasonal workers.

The consulate in Riga assessed the results of the above undertakings very positively, and intended to continue them in 1939.⁶⁶

However, other accounts show that these cultural and educational activities did not have a great impact. Most seasonal workers were not interested in socio-cultural activities or in maintaining contact with compatriots living in the diaspora. They went abroad for bread and worked hard to earn as much as possible to support themselves and their families. Hence, they had neither time, strength, nor money to participate in social life. Contacts with the diaspora were sporadic. The above-mentioned weekly magazine *Nasze Życie* was subscribed to by only 2–3% of the workers, while the majority showed no interest in it. This was partly due to the significant percentage of illiterate and semi-illiterate emigrants.⁶⁷

Epilogue

The outbreak of World War II put an end to the emigration of Polish workers to Latvia. At the time of the German attack on Poland, there were thousands of Polish economic emigrants in Latvia. The results of the 1939 campaign directly impacted the fate of the emigrants. Most of the emigrants came from the areas that fell under Soviet occupation in the fall of 1939. In October 1939, part of the Vilnius region (including Vilnius) was handed over to Lithuania by the USSR authorities. It is known that in November and December 1939, some Polish seasonal workers left Latvia and went to places of residence in Poland. Based on data from the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ēriks Jēkabsons estimated that approximately 9,500 Polish workers left their jobs and returned home in the autumn of 1939, of which 8,000 left for the Soviet occupation

zone, while the rest left for the German one, whereas the majority of Polish economic migrants in Latvia decided not to return home after the outbreak of World War II. In May 1940, the number of Polish seasonal workers in Latvia constituted 16,214 individuals.⁶⁸ The fate of these people was influenced by the Soviet occupation (1940–1941, and subsequently – from 1944), as well as the German occupation (1941–1944). This topic will be the subject of further research.

Conclusion

Summing up, Polish seasonal emigration to Latvia was not a marginal phenomenon. Its share in the overall national emigration movement to European countries was, as follows: 17% in 1932; 25% in 1933; 53% in 1934; 78% in 1935; 66% in 1936; and 29% in 1937.⁶⁹ Economic emigration from Poland to Latvia was unique, as it began after a deep financial crisis and the sudden closure of economic immigration markets in other European countries.⁷⁰

From the Polish point of view, emigration to Latvia was primarily important for socio-economic development on a local scale, i.e. for the Vilnius and Nowogródek voivodeships in the north-eastern outskirts of Poland. Seasonal trips to Latvia left a permanent mark on the lives of the inhabitants of this region. In the 1930s, economic migration to Latvia became an indispensable part of the life of rural youth in this region.

Poles had different opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of emigrating to Latvia. For many smallholders and landless peasants, the cash brought from abroad was a significant help in securing the subsistence minimum in the face of unemployment in the country. In addition, the emigration

movement broadened the intellectual horizons of peasants who had not left their villages before. Therefore, emigration brought some temporary financial help to the peasants, while in the long run working abroad could not solve the problems of unemployment and overpopulation. Seasonal workers brought some savings home, but these

melted away quickly during the winter's inactivity. The Polish authorities were aware of the need to gradually reduce seasonal emigration and organize jobs for workers in the country. However, before this was possible, the profit gains from emigration had to be maximized to improve Poland's economic situation.⁷¹

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- ²⁵ Report and conclusions submitted by a delegation from the Vilnius Chamber of Agriculture after a trip to Latvia on 5–10 October, 1938, LCVA, 148-1-856; EDWARD KOŁODZIEJ. Wychodźstwo zarobkowe z Polski 1918–1939. Studia nad polityką emigracyjną II Rzeczypospolitej, Warszawa 1982, p. 232.
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- ⁴¹ STRANGA, Kārļa Ulmaņa autoritatīvā režīma saimnieciskā politika, p. 76; Pismo Konsulatu Polski w Rydze do MSZ, 09.03.1933. AAN, 64-1-89, p. 4.
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KOPSAVILKUMS

Ekonomiskā emigrācija no Polijas uz Latviju bija abu valstu sociālekonomiskās situācijas sekas. Iekšējie emigrācijas faktori bija agrārā pārapsdzīvotība un nabadzība Polijas laukos. Šādā situācijā daudzi cilvēki saskatīja iespēju uzlabot savu dzīvi ārzemēs. Darbaroku pārpalikuma problēma Polijas laukos sakrita ar ekonomiskās izaugsmes periodu Latvijā. Laikā, kad Polija cīnījās ar pārapsdzīvotību un darbaspēka pārpalikumu laukos, Baltijas valsti trūka darbaroku lauksaimniecībā. Emigrācija uz Latviju ilga no 1928. līdz 1939. gadam. Tiek lēsts, ka Latvijas lauksaimniecībā nodarbināto poļu strādnieku skaits bija vairāk nekā 100 000 cilvēku. Turklāt pastāvēja arī nelegālā emigrācija, kuras apjomu ir grūti noteikt.

Vairums poļu strādnieku devās uz Kurzemi, Zemgali un Vidzemi. Lielākajā daļā gadījumu mēs saskaramies ar sezonālās emigrācijas parādību, kad strādnieki pēc kāda laika atgriezās mājās. Ar laiku arvien vairāk strādnieku nolēma palikt uz pastāvīgu dzīvi Latvijā. Tādējādi pieauga to cilvēku skaits, kuri apmetās uz dzīvi Latvijā un saistīja savu nākotni ar šo valsti. Tas nozīmēja, ka Latvijā šie cilvēki atrada labākus darba apstākļus nekā savā valstī. Lielākā daļa strādnieku bija jaunas neprecētas sievietes.

Lai gan visas valsts mērogā sezonālajai emigrācijai bija maza nozīme Polijas emigrācijas politikā, Polijas ziemeļaustrumu vojevodistēs, kas atradās vistuvāk Latvijas robežai, tā bija svarīgs faktors, kas ietekmēja šo reģionu situāciju un attīstību. Par to liecina fakts, ka no Viļņas un Novogrudokas apgabaliem uz Latviju izbraukušo iedzīvotāju īpatsvars bija ievērojams attiecībā pret šo apgabalu kopējo iedzīvotāju skaitu. Vairāk nekā puse Latvijā iebraukušo poļu strādnieku bija šo novadu iedzīvotāji. Poļu strādniekiem Latvijā bija raksturīga kultūras un nacionālā daudzveidība. Pēc skaita dominēja poļi un baltkrievi. Bija arī lietuvieši un krievi. Pēc reliģiskās piederības viņi bija katoļi (65%) un pareizticīgie (35%).

Kopumā poļu darba ņēmēji pie Latvijas darba devējiem bija labi novērtēti. Poļu strādnieks bija lēts, tāpēc viņu labprāt nodarbināja Latvijas lauksaimniecībā. Poļi neradīja problēmas, bija fiziski spēcīgi un spēja ātri pielāgoties vietējiem darba apstākļiem. Tajā pašā laikā strādnieki no Austrumpolijas izradīja lielāku spēju pielāgoties jaunajiem apstākļiem nekā strādnieki no Rietumpolijas un Viduspolijas. Lielākā daļa no viņiem pirms došanās uz Latviju nekad nebija pametuši savu ciematu. Uzturēšanās Latvijā ļāva šiem cilvēkiem satikties ar citu kultūru. Daži no tiem piedzīvoja pat īstu kultūras šoku. Īpašu iespaidu uz poļiem atstāja augstais lauksaimniecības kultūras limenis Latvijā.

Poļu strādnieki netika atstāti likteņa varā. Viņi atradās Polijas konsulātu Rīgā un Daugavpilī juridiskā aprūpē. Salīdzinoši īsā laikā algotās emigrācijas uz Latviju problēma pārauga nopietnā ekonomiskā un sociālā jautājumā. Sociālās labklājības ministrija uzdeva

zinātniekiem izpētīt sezonālās emigrācijas uz Latviju būtību un perspektīvas. 1938. gadā tika noslēgti Polijas-Latvijas starpvalstu līgumi, kas regulēja poļu strādnieku lietas šajās valstīs.

Ekonomisko emigrāciju no Polijas uz Latviju pārtrauca Otrā pasaules kara sākums. Pēc 1939. gada daļa poļu strādnieku atgriezās dzimtenē – padomju un vācu okupācijas zonās Polijā. Tomēr daudzi no viņiem nolēma palikt Latvijā uz pastāvīgu dzīvi.