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Socio-economic development as a determinant of migration transition in Central and Eastern European Countries

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Abstract

Motivation: A concept that links the question of the intensity and direction of migration process with the process of socio-economic transformation is the migration transition theory. The migration transition comprises two phases. In the first phase, there is a significant increase in emigration processes due to the intensely increasing birth rate. In the second phase, on the other hand, an increase in immigration processes is observed, which is preceded or accompanied by a zero or negative natural increase. Currently, a similar change from negative to positive net migration balance can be observed in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Aim: The aim of this article is the evaluation of the intensity and directions migration processes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The research question is whether the positive net migration balances achieved by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can be considered as confirmation that these countries are in the second phase of the migration transition. The research question is validated by analysing statistical data (Eurostat) and the results of the European Social Survey, which is preceded by a review of the literature in question.

Results: As a result of the progressive socio-economic development, Central and Eastern Europe is attracting new residents. The scale of this phenomenon is evidenced not only by the number of registered migrations, but above all by the number of first residence permits for work, education and family reasons. Stable economic growth and increasing labour shortages have created ideal conditions for labour immigration in recent years. It can therefore be concluded that the socio-economic development of the macro-region under study has contributed to the second stage of the migration transition, characterised by a positive net migration balance.

Keywords: migration, migration transition, crude rate of net migration, Central and Eastern Europe
JEL: J11, J15, R10

1. Introduction

One of the contemporary global trends shaping socio-economic life is migration. While it can be noted that the share of migrants in the global population has remained more or less the same at 2.8%-3.6% over the last quarter century (McAuliffe and Oucho, 2024, p. 8), the issue of migration has attracted the attention not only of academia but also of the general public. Indeed, 'population migration is a big deal - so big that it shapes the politics of the United States and much of Europe' (Duflo and Banerjee, 2022, p. 25). This is because migration, unlike other demographic categories, is mostly explained by differences in the level of socio-economic development between receiving and sending regions of migrants. Moreover, most migration processes directly influence the transformation of social structures (Wiśniewski, 2020, p. 15), which has socio-economic implications.

A concept that links the question of the intensity and direction of migration process with the process of socio-economic transformation is the migration transition theory. Its origin should be linked to the example of Western Europe, which after World War II became an area with a positive net migration balance after many decades of emigration of citizens, in particular to the United States (Chesnais, 1986). Essentially, the migration transition comprises two phases, which are correlated with the phases of the demographic transition. In the first phase, there is a significant increase in emigration processes, due to the intensely increasing birth rate. This is a consequence of the falling death rate while the birth rate remains high. In the second phase, on the other hand, an increase in immigration processes is observed, which is preceded or accompanied by a zero or negative natural increase. Bearing in mind the positive net migration in the second phase, Dassetto distinguished three sub-phases. The first sub-phase involves the influx of low-skilled workers from countries with low levels of socio-economic development. The second sub-phase concerns reunification of migrant families, resulting in

numerous social tensions and increasing pressure on social infrastructure. The last sub-phase is related to a long-term process of immigrant integration and full participation in socio-economic life (Dassetto, 1990; Okólski, 2012).

Currently, a similar change from negative to positive net migration balance can be observed in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Comparing 2014 with 2022 in the group of countries studied in the article, the change from a negative migration balance to a positive one occurred in Bulgaria, Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. In the case of Czechia and Slovenia, the indicator reached positive values in both 2014 and 2022. As a result, the aim of this article is the evaluation of the intensity and directions of migration processes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, it should be noted that the current increase in immigration in the studied macro-region is accompanied by increasing instability of the macroeconomic and political environment, while 'the speed of change seems to be as, if not more, transformative than its direction itself' (Krastev, 2024). This is not without its impact on the intensity and sustainability of migration processes. Therefore, the research question is whether the positive net migration balances achieved by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can be considered as confirmation that these countries are in the second phase of the migration transition? In particular, are there indications that the positive net migration balances will be sustainable and long-term in accordance with the delimitation proposed by Dassetto? Similarly, the question of how the societies of the Central and Eastern European countries perceive themselves in terms of migration is also relevant. That is, whether they see themselves as emigration or immigration countries, and what consequences of the influx of immigrants are perceived in the countries surveyed. An analysis of openness to migration and an assessment of the impact of migrants on economic and social life, as expressed by the opinions of the inhabitants of the countries surveyed, may provide an indication of the long-term nature of the reversal of migration flows in favour of immigration.

The article is divided into four main sections. The first section discusses the literature on the demographic transition, i.e., the link between the socioeconomic transformation process and the directions and intensity of migration. The second section presents the research method, the sources used (Eurostat, European Social Survey), and identifies the countries under analysis. The next section presents the results of the analysis and conclusions regarding the link between the socio-economic transformation and demographic variables related to migration in selected Central and Eastern European countries. The final section summarizes the conducted analysis and answers to the research questions.

2. Literature review

Migration processes, although strongly correlated with the level of socio-economic development in terms of direction and intensity, are also linked to phases of demographic transition. The birth rate depends on the phase of demographic transition that a given country is in and, consequently, what number of people may become potential emigrants. Similarly, if a country has a negative birth rate, the intensity of emigration decreases and the number of immigrants increases.

The first demographic transition is characterised by an increase in birth rates and a decrease in death rates. As a result, there is a large natural increase, which declined over time towards a stationary population. This is linked to the transition from traditional reproduction to so-called modern reproduction, thanks, among other things, to birth control. The second demographic transition, on the other hand, emphasises the discontinuity of the transition and concerns demographic behaviour related not only to fertility but also to nuptiality. In particular, attention is drawn to the change in living conditions and attitude to having children, which is characteristic of most developed countries. In addition, remote communication technologies and mass media are spreading new views and attitudes in all regions of the world (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn, 2004, p. 22). In the second phase, the low fertility rate is not cyclical, but stable and determined by changes in values, e.g. the need for self-fulfilment, social acceptance of diverse lifestyles. Although the concepts of demographic transition do not directly take into account the impact of migration on the population, it is possible to find statements in the literature that low fertility naturally leads to an increase in immigration, while emigration reaches its maximum at the peak of the population's demographic development (Coleman, 2006, p. 402). In this situation, emigration has become the easiest regulator of population size, which helps to prevent pauperisation and lack of funds for living for a large part of the population (Okólski, 2021, p. 152).

Bearing in mind the facts mentioned above, migration is mostly explained by the difference in the level of socio-economic development between migrant-receiving and migrant-sending regions. The impact of socio-economic development on migration opportunities is positive but non-linear and resembles the S-curve typical of diffusion processes, i.e. it first increases rapidly, then stagnates or decreases, but never returns to low values. This is because socio-economic development entails an increase in life aspirations of citizens. Initially, this goes along with rapidly accelerating emigration, which declines only when the gaps in personal and professional opportunities between sending and receiving countries decrease significantly. At the

same time, as the original sending countries develop socio-economically, they gradually become more attractive to migrants from poorer countries. It can therefore be concluded that, as societies develop socio-economically, they tend to go through a characteristic sequence of migration processes (Haas, 2010, p. 19).

A concept that explains long-term structural changes in migration patterns by referring to processes of social and economic transformation, is the migration transition theory (Haas, 2010, p. 11). This concept makes international mobility easier to understand, while its name is used in different contexts, which causes ambiguous use (Okólski, 2021, p. 154). Similarly, the meaning of the concept of migration transition has evolved over time. In the 1970s, the idea of transition was associated with the process of modernisation. It was noted that there were specific patterns of upward mobility in space and that their regularity was an important component of the modernisation process (Zelinsky, 1971, pp. 221–222). Wilbur Zelinsky linked the different types of migration - rural-urban, urban-urban, borderland, international and circular - to a vital transition and corelated it with changes in society, i.e. premodern traditional society, early transitional society, late transitional society, advanced society and future super-advanced society (Zelinsky, 1971, pp. 230–231). Despite criticisms of the idea of a modernisation process, it should be recognised that this was the first attempt to place migration in the same framework as the other two demographic variables, i.e. fertility and mortality. Thus, it complemented the demographic transition theory, which took births and deaths into account. The transition could only be a true demographic transition if a third migration variable was included (Skeldon, 2012, p. 157)

The term migration transition was introduced largely independently of demographic transition theory, to describe the transition from net emigration to net immigration in the countries of western and southern Europe and eastern Asia (Chesnais, 1986; Fields, 1994; King et al., 1997). Chesnais is considered to be the main developer and populariser of the concept of migration transition, having introduced the idea of migration transition as a specifically European phenomenon, associated with the European model of modernisation. On the basis of this concept, it can be concluded that modern Europe is experiencing a long-term three-stage demographic cycle, i.e.: long-term stabilisation or stagnation of population, systematic population growth over two or three generations, and long-term stabilisation (or stagnation) of the state of population (at this stage without significant fluctuations over shorter periods), albeit at a much higher level than in stage one. The second stage of the cycle relates directly to the theory of demographic transition. Parallel to this cycle is the migration cycle, the first and third stages of which are characterised by a relatively low intensity of international migration. As a result, the phases of the migration transition are strongly dependent on, or

at least correlated with, the individual phases of the demographic transition (Okólski 2021, pp. 154-155).

Although it is likely that Chesnais was not familiar with Zelinsky's theory as published in Geographical Review, a specialised journal for geographers (Okólski, 2021, p. 164), links can nevertheless be found with Zelinsky's model (Skeldon, 1997, p. 52). As countries went through significant vital transitions, upward pressure was brought on wages. Consequently industrialisation moved to areas where labour was cheaper. In addition, capital-intensive industries associated with the development of economy based on knowledge and information technology were growing. As a result, not all the skilled labour required for this type of economy could be generated locally and global labour market for skills emerged. The above processes formed the basis on which the era of mass immigration appeared. The importance of the international migration transition model was that, unlike Zelinsky's transition, it was clearly linked to changes in the size and composition of labour force, as well as to changes in the economy. This helped to further explain the links between mobility and socio-economic change (Skeldon, 2012, p. 161).

The level of international migration, unlike other demographic characteristics, is explained by the difference between the level of socio-economic development of the receiving and sending migrants' countries (Wisniewski, 2020, p. 15). The higher level of development of the receiving country is reflected in various aspects of economic and social life relevant to potential migrants (for more details, see Truskolaski and Bugowski, 2024; Wickramasinghe and Wijitapure Wimalaratana, 2016, p. 16–18). Beginning in the late 19th century, the prevailing view in the literature is that people will move from low-income areas to high-income areas (Ravenstein, 1889). Similarly, neoclassical and other models of migration developed in the 20th century largely explain migration through geographic differences in wage levels as the primary motivating factor for the influx of migrants (Hicks 1932; Fei and Ranis 1961). Later scholarly work additionally takes into account income disparities arising also from non-wage elements (Harris and Todaro, 1970). Attention has also been paid to social, cultural or psychological factors, but in addition to the key role of economic factors (Todaro, 1976).

In general, it can be said that migration theories based on or drawing on neoclassical theories link the migration process to the economic calculus of profits and losses. However, wage and income differentials did not provide a complete answer to the causes of migration. A shift from the individual to the household perspective can be seen in The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM). NELM conceptualizes migration as a collective household strategy aimed at overcoming market imperfections and spreading income risk, rather than merely a reaction of income-maximizing individuals to expected wage differentials (de Haas, 2011, p. 9). In other words, some causes of migration should not be analysed at the individual level but at

the group level (family, community, society), because they are embedded in and reproduced by patterns of interpersonal relationships. In this context, the cumulative theory of migration is worth mentioning. The first migrants come from the middle levels of socioeconomic hierarchies, which means they have adequate resources to cover the costs and risks of emigration. Family and friends then leverage ties with these migrants to reduce the costs and risks associated with movement. As a result, migration networks are created, which increase the benefits of migration (Docquier and Rapoport, 2008, pp. 20–21). Therefore, it can be concluded that migration is determined not only by economic factors, but also by social and family ones. Furthermore, contemporary studies on the causes of migration differentiate motivation, for example, depending on the migrant's age. Depending on the stage of life, reasons for migration may include employment prospects, education, family, or lifestyle (Bernard and Kalemba,2022). Nevertheless, it should be noted that economic and social factors (prospects for higher wages, improved living standards, personal development, job opportunities, good welfare standards and labour demands) remain the main reasons for the decision to migrate (Urbański, 2022, p. 13).

In summary, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the level of economic development and population mobility patterns. At the same time, it should be stressed that the direction and intensity of migration are not entirely explained by the level of socio-economic development. Factors of a cultural or political nature are important in some cases. For example, the rise of populist or nationalist rhetoric may induce certain segments of society to emigrate, which is particularly true of managers or highly skilled workers (Vezzoli, 2024, p. 8). However, it can be assumed that such events are of an extra-coordinate nature that do not undermine the sense of looking for regularities in migration flows, despite important methodological limitations. On this basis, it is justified to conclude that a high level of economic development implies the emergence of an integrated migration system consisting of both global and local movements. In contrast, a low level of economic development corresponds to migration of a local nature (Skeldon, 1997, p. 52).

3. Methods

The research questions are (1) whether the positive net migration balances achieved by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can be considered as confirmation that these countries are in the second phase of the migration transition, and (2) are there indications that the positive net migration balances will be sustainable and long-term. These questions were validated by analyzing statistical data (Eurostat). The third research question, i.e. (3) how the societies of the Central and Eastern European countries perceive them-

selves in terms of migration, was answered based on the results of the European Social Survey (ESS). Data analysis was preceded by a review of the literature in question.

Eleven Central and Eastern European countries were included in the survey. It should be noted that this area is not clearly defined in the scientific literature. In this article it is assumed that the area consists of the following members of the European Union: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Croatia. The rationale for the above delimitation is common political and economic experiences, e.g. the transition from a command economy in the 1990s and the accession to the European Union at the beginning of the 21st century. Linking the relevant and common socio-economic events of the countries under study to the net migration balance is in line with the assumptions of migration transition theory. However, it should be borne in mind that although the migration transition process is common to European societies, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe form a cohort of countries where, for political and economic reasons, the process has been delayed for at least several decades (Okólski, 2021, p. 157), which justifies the selection of the countries included in the analysis.

With regard to the choice of years adopted for the analysis, 2014 and 2022 were chosen as marking the period when most of the studied countries went from negative to positive migration balance. In addition, in 2014, all of the studied countries were already members of the EU (Croatia entered the EU on July 1, 2014 as the last of the studied countries). In some cases, depending on the availability of data, the analysis was extended to 2008 and 2004, particularly with regard to demographics.

4. Results

With regard to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, there were doubts whether they would follow a similar path as the countries of Western Europe. It should be noted that the peak of emigration in these countries did not coincide with their peak in population growth. The highest intensity of migration processes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe followed policy decisions related to accession to the European Union (Black et al., 2010, p. 18). In other words, after accession to the Community, the increased level of emigration was due to the pre-existence of the so-called 'migration overhang', defining the number who were ready to emigrate but did not have the opportunity to do so for political reasons (Iglicka, 2020). Thus, on this basis, it can be concluded that in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the highest intensity of migration was not correlated with a demographic cycle characterised by high birth rates. On the contrary, the peak of immigration occurred in years when the countries studied achieved low fertility and natural change of population rates (Table 1.).

Nowadays, in Central and Eastern Europe, the number of immigrants exceeds the number of emigrants, which manifests itself in a positive net migration rate. According to Eurostat definitions regarding international migration statistics, an immigrant is considered to be a person who stays in his/her country of destination for a period of 12 months or more, while an emigrant is a person who leaves his/her country of previous residence for a period of 12 months or more (Eurostat, 2025c). At the same time, it should be noted that demographers, who introduced the concepts of the migration transition such as Zelinsky, did not explicitly define any numerical measures to describe this process. However, it can be assumed that while the demographic transition is described by fertility and mortality rates, there is also a need to analyse the migration transition using indicators - in this case migration rates (Wei, Jinju, 2021, p. 195). Data describing the net migration rate per 1000 inhabitants in the macro-region under study are included in Table 1.

It can be noted that the macro-region under study is currently experiencing a positive net migration rate. Despite the fact that for the Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia or Slovakia, the number of emigrants in 2022 was higher than in 2014, the number of immigrants in 2022 was higher than the number of emigrants in every country examined in the article (Table 2.). As a result, there is a reversal of the balance of migration flows. This is similar to the process observed in Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century, when overpopulation and emigration gave way to mass immigration (Okólski, 2021, p. 154). The reason for the change in migration flows is mainly due to the increasing level of socio-economic development in Central and Eastern Europe. In recent years, stable economic growth and increasing labour shortages have created ideal conditions for labour immigration, initially in low-paid domestic services and seasonal work in agriculture and construction, and later also in other sectors of economy (Górny and Kaczmarczyk, 2018).

A review of basic data describing socio-economic development confirms positive changes in the studied countries in this regard (Table 3). In the period 2024, the PPS indicator (purchasing power standard per inhabitant in percentage of the EU27 average) for selected countries ranged from 37% in Bulgaria to 76% in Estonia. Compared to 2014, the indicator level increased in all countries, i.e., from 3 percentage points to 20 percentage points in Lithuania. The greater attractiveness of the studied countries for immigrants as places to work and live is evidenced by indicators relating to unemployment and the standard of living. In the former case, the unemployment level ranged from 2.2% in Czechia to 6.9% in Latvia. Compared to 2024, the unemployment level decreased in all studied countries, i.e., from 1.7 percentage points in Estonia to 10.5 percentage points in Croatia. In the latter case, the level of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion ranged from 11.8% in Czechia to 34.4% in Romania. Compared to 2015, the level of the indicator

in question decreased in all countries except Estonia (an increase of 1.6 percentage points), i.e. from 0.8 percentage points in Slovakia to 12.2 percentage points in Hungary. A comprehensive discussion of socio-economic development indicators is a broad topic and would require a separate article.

It is not only positive net migration ratio that testify to the increasing level of socio-economic development and the rebalancing of migration flows. The immigration attractiveness of countries is also evidenced by residence permits issued to foreigners for professional, educational and family reasons. Taking Poland as an example, it can be noted that not only is a positive net migration rate recorded for registered migration since 2016, but also the highest number of first residence permits are issued to foreigners in the entire EU. On this basis, it can be concluded that Poland is currently undergoing a change in its migration system (Fihel, 2023, p. 271). The situation is similar in other countries of the studied macro-region (Table 4.). In 2022, the number of first residence permits exceeded one million in the studied macro-region, which is an almost fourfold increase compared to 2008. At the level of individual countries, a significant increase in the number of residence permits issued in 2022 can also be observed, particularly in Poland (44-fold increase). The exception is Czechia, where the number of permits slightly decreased by 12% compared to 2008 levels.

An important element in the analysis of residence permits for foreigners is the period of validity. Central and Eastern European countries differ in their permit granting policies. In the vast majority of cases, permits with a validity period of more than 12 months dominate the structure (from 50.1% in Bulgaria to 97.8% in Estonia). Only in the case of Poland and Croatia the share of long-term permits does not exceed one third and amounts to 21.7% and 28.1% respectively. For these countries, permits with a validity period of 6 to 11 months predominate. Overall, it can be seen that compared to 2014, the share of permits over 12 months is increasing in all countries (Table 5.).

Additionally, it is reasonable to ask to what extent temporary migration will lead to sustainability of migrants' integration into the societies of the countries studied. In other words, in which sub-phase of the second phase of the migration transition according to Dassetto's delimitation the countries under study are. An analysis of the reasons for residence permits can provide some information on the potential transformation of temporary residence into a permanent integration process in the host society (Chart 1.).

The dominant reason in most of the countries surveyed is employment (ranging from 28% in Estonia to 93% in Croatia). Family issues are another reason for granting residence to foreigners, with the highest share in Bulgaria, Czechia and Latvia (34%, 26% and 25% respectively). Education is also an important reason for a residence permit, in particular for Latvia (23%) and Czechia (19%). It should be noted that when comparing the data on first residence permits in 2022 in relation to 2014, first of all, it can be seen that they

have doubled. In addition, the structure of the reasons for issuing permits has changed (Chart 2.), i.e. in 2014 only in Poland the dominant reason was employment. On this basis, it can be concluded that in the period 2014–2022, the Central and Eastern European countries' economy developed a sustained and dynamically growing demand for labour force, which corresponds with an increasing number of foreigners. In addition, it can be assumed that the maintenance of a high share of education and family-related causes in 2022 for countries such as Latvia, Estonia and Czechia may indicate that they have reached the second sub-phase according to Dassetto's delimitation of family attachments and increased pressure on social infrastructure.

The presented data on registered migration and residence permits for foreigners indicate that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have reached the second phase of the migration transition, i.e. the number of immigrants exceeds the number of emigrants. In view of the indisputability of the statistical data, it is also relevant to ask whether the societies of the countries studied are aware of the reversal of migration trends and how immigration is perceived by them? In this context, the three-phase concept of the second stage of migration transition mentioned in the introduction can correspond with attitudes of the host country population. As in Dassetto's concept, three phases can be distinguished in the process of public perception as an immigrant country. The initial phase is characterised by disbelief, ignorance and even denial. In other words, societies are either unaware of the influx of emigrants or, given previous experiences of long-term emigration, there has not been any mental change in the aspect of immigration yet. The second phase involves legal solutions that integrate immigrants into the structure of society with a certain level of public discontent. In this phase, immigrants not only become visible in society, but also, through e.g. family reunification they trigger an increase in pressure on the wider social infrastructure, i.e. from security to education and social assistance. The final phase comprises a period of deep and sustainable integration, although it should be emphasised that this is a model situation (Düvell, 2018, p. 196).

A full answer to the question of perceptions of immigration in host countries would require interdisciplinary quantitative and qualitative research. However, the results of the European Social Survey (ESS, Round 10, 2020-2021) are worth mentioning here. Latvia and Romania were not included in the survey. Among the numerous modules of the survey, questions on immigration and its impact on economy can be highlighted (Chart 3).

When asked whether immigration is beneficial to the economy, respondents chose an answer on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning definitely unfavourable and 10 definitely favourable. In all countries of the surveyed macroregion, the predominant answer was 5 (from 19.6% in Slovakia to 26.8% in Estonia). Among the countries where respondents most often indicated an answer above 5 were Poland (54.1% of answers above 5) and Estonia (46.7%

above 5). Residents of Slovakia and Hungary perceive immigration the least beneficial for economy (55.3% of responses ranging from 0 to 4).

The overall assessment of the impact of immigration on life in a country was expressed in the question, whether the country has become a better or worse place to live as a result of the influx of immigrants. Here, as in the question on the economy, the predominant answer was 5 (ranging from 23.4% in Czechia to 36.8% in Estonia). Residents of Poland and Croatia were the most positive about the impact of immigrants, with 50.6% and 42.1% of responses above 5 respectively. It can be seen that in all countries except Croatia, the positive impact of immigrants was several percentage points higher for the question on the economy than for the question on living conditions in the country in general. The highest number of responses below 5 indicating a negative impact of immigrants in a country was recorded for Czechia and Hungary, i.e. 51.6% and 49.3% respectively.

The ESS also included questions on openness of residents to immigrants, with a distinction between foreigners of the same race or ethnic group and others. In the first case (Chart 5), the most open to arrival and residence of foreigners were citizens of Poland and Slovenia (82.9% and 82% of the responses allow a certain number of people and allow a large number of people respectively). The least welcoming to foreigners were the citizens of Hungary and Czechia (59.8% and 54.9% of the responses allow no-one and allow only a few, respectively).

Inhabitants of the surveyed macro-region were less open in relation to foreigners of a different race or ethnic group. In this case, the most open were residents of Poland and Croatia (64.9% and 61.3% of the responses allow a certain number of people and allow a large number of people, respectively).

It should be noted that the residents of Croatia were the least dependent in their response on race or ethnic group, i.e. 61.3% of responses to allow a certain number of people and to allow a large number of people in relation to another race or ethnic group and 71.2% in relation to the same race or ethnic group. In contrast, residents of Hungary and Czechia were definitely closed to foreigners of a different race or ethnic group (83.5% and 72.1% of the responses allow no-one and allow only a few, respectively).

In summary, based on the European Social Survey, the Baltic States, Slovenia, Croatia and Poland were the most open to immigrants and perceived the positive impact of immigration on the economy and living conditions. In contrast, Czechia and Hungary were the least open to immigrants and sceptical about the positive impact of migration on the economy and living conditions.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the macro-region under study is currently experiencing a positive net migration rate. In the past, unlike many countries that experienced migration changes in Western Europe, Southern Europe or Southeast Asia, high intensity of emigration was not primarily due to the demographic cycle, but was conditioned by socio-political events. Indeed, it can be noted that high emigration occurred after accession of the respective countries to the European Union with simultaneous low values of natural increase, which was caused by occurrence of the so-called migration overhang. However, stable economic growth and increasing labour shortages due to the mass exodus abroad have created ideal conditions for labour immigration in recent years. Consequently, Central and Eastern Europe from a macro-region being traditionally an area of mass emigration, has changed into a place attracting new residents.

The scale of this phenomenon is evidenced not only by the number of registered migrations, but above all by the number of first residence permits for work, education and family. It can therefore be concluded that the socio-economic development of the macro-region under study and the accompanying demand for labour force has contributed to the second stage of the migration transition, characterised by a positive net migration balance. However, it can be noted that, according to Dasseto's concept, particular countries are in different sub-stages of this stage. It seems reasonable to conclude that the first sub-phase involving the inflow of low-skilled workers from countries with a low level of socio-economic development is occurring in Poland or Romania, as may be evidenced by the dominant share of employment among the reasons for issuing residence permits to foreigners, the relatively high share of permits of less than 12 months' duration compared to the macro-region and the highest openness of the population to foreigners. The beginnings of a second sub-phase, involving the reunification of immigrant families, which causes numerous social tensions and increased pressure on social infrastructure, can be observed in Czechia, Estonia and Latvia. The rationale for this is the high share of education and family issues among the reasons for issuing residence permits, the high share of residence permits for foreigners with a duration of more than one year (about 90 per cent) and the relatively lower openness to migrants than, for example, in Poland, which may indicate emerging social tensions. For the remaining countries, it is difficult to clearly identify the nature of migration changes. Slovenia, for example, among the countries surveyed has the lowest level of net migration ratio and one of the lowest rates of issuing residence permits to foreigners per 1,000 inhabitants, with a high share of education and family

reasons in the issuance of permits. Hungary, on the other hand, has the lowest net migration balance (next to Slovenia) and the highest share of employment among the reasons for issuing residence permits. At the same time, it remains a reluctant country towards foreigners, i.e. as much as 37.8% do not accept any foreigner of a different race or ethnic group, another 45.7% accept only a few. With such an attitude of citizens, it seems reasonable to ask about the long-term nature of the positive net migration ratio in general. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that the studied macro-region as a whole has a positive net migration balance. Unless unforeseen events of an economic or political nature occur, it can be assumed that this trend will continue in the coming years. This assumption is not only justified by the analysis of migration data, but it is also conditioned by other demographic processes (ageing population) and the economy's need for labour force.

In addition to these considerations, it should be noted that migration research has its limitations. First, accurately determining migration levels is difficult, given the level of illegal migration. Second, the decision to migrate is multifaceted despite the dominant role of economic factors. Third, despite the finding that the countries studied achieve positive net migration levels, it is justified to question regional variations within the countries studied. In particular, whether positive net migration is characteristic of all regions within a given country or is concentrated in selected areas. This issue should be the subject of a separate study.

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Appendix

Table 1. Selected demographics of Central and Eastern Europe 2004-2022

State	Fertility rate			Crude rate of natural change of population			Net migration rate per 1000 inhabitants plus statistical adjustment		
	2004	2014	2022	2004	2014	2022	2004	2014	2022
Bulgaria	1.33	1.62	1.65	-5.2	-5.8	-9.6	-2.1	-6.6	4.2
Czechia	1.23	1.53	1.64	-0.9	0.4	-1.8	1.3	2.1	30.9
Estonia	1.47	1.54	1.41	-2.7	-1.5	-4.2	-2.7	-0.5	29.5

State	Fertility rate			Crude rate of natural change of population			Net migration rate per 1000 inhabitants plus statistical adjustment		
	2004	2014	2022	2004	2014	2022	2004	2014	2022
Croatia	1.43	1.46	1.53	-2.2	-2.7	-6	-6.8	-4.3	11.7
Latvia	1.29	1.65	1.47	-5.1	-3.4	-7.9	-9.5	-3.5	25.5
Lithuania	1.27	1.57	1.27	-3.4	-3.7	-7.4	1.8	-0.1	3.8
Hungary	1.28	1.44	1.56	-3.7	-3.4	-4.9	-0.2	-0.3	0.2
Poland	1.23	1.32	1.29	-0.2	0	-3.9	-4.5	-1	5.6
Romania	1.33	1.56	1.71	-2	-2.8	-5	0.9	-0.2	6.9
Slovenia	1.25	1.58	1.55	-0.3	1.1	-2.3	-0.2	0.3	0.2
Slovakia	1.25	1.37	1.57	0.4	0.7	-1.3	3.4	-6.1	3

Source: Own preparation based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024b; Eurostat 2024g).

Table 2. Number of emigrants and immigrants in Central and Eastern Europe

State	Number of emigrants				Number of immigrants			
	2004	2008	2014	2022	2004	2008	2014	2022
Bulgaria	:	:	28 727	13 175	:	:	26 615	40 619
Czechia	34 818	51 478	28 468	31 764	53 453	108 267	29 897	347 429
Estonia	2 927	4 406	4 637	9 657	1 097	3 671	3 904	49 414
Croatia	6 812	10 638	20 858	46 287	18 383	16 883	10 638	57 972
Latvia	20 167	27 045	19 017	16 680	4 844	4 678	10 365	38 708
Lithuania	37 691	25 750	43 874	15 270	5 553	9 297	33 544	87 367
Hungary	3 820	9 591	42 213	58 408	24 298	37 652	54 581	94 148
Poland	18 877	30 140	268 299	228 006	9 495	15 275	222 275	275 515
Romania	:	302 796	172 871	202 311	:	138 929	136 035	293 024
Slovenia	8 269	12 109	14 336	20 956	10 171	30 693	13 846	35 613
Slovakia	1 586	1 705	3 644	4 468	4 460	8 765	5 357	5 463

Source: Own preparation based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024a).

Table 3. Selected socio-economic data of Central and Eastern Europe

State	Purchasing power standard (PPS) per inhabitant in percentage of the EU27 average		Total unemployment rate - percentage of population in the labour force (age class: from 15 to 74 years)		Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex (percentage of total population)	
	2014	2022	2014	2022	2015*	2022
Bulgaria	23	37	12,4	4,2	43,3	32,2
Czechia	57	74	6,1	2,2	13	11,8

State	Purchasing power standard (PPS) per inhabitant in percentage of the EU27 average		Total unemployment rate - percentage of population in the labour force (age class: from 15 to 74 years)		Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex (percentage of total population)	
	2014	2022	2014	2022	2015*	2022
Estonia	58	76	7,3	5,6	23,6	25,2
Croatia	39	48	17,3	6,8	24,4	19,9
Latvia	43	53	10,9	6,9	30	26
Lithuania	46	66	10,7	6	29,4	24,6
Hungary	41	49	7,5	3,6	30,6	18,4
Poland	40	49	9,2	2,9	22,5	15,9
Romania	28	41	8,6	5,6	44,5	34,4
Slovenia	68	75	9,7	4	17,7	13,3
Slovakia	53	56	13,1	6,1	17,3	16,5

* data regarding 2014 were unavailable
Source: Own preparation based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2025a; Eurostat, 2025b; Eurostat 2025d).

Table 4. Residence permits for foreigners in Central and Eastern Europe

State	First residence permits per 1,000 inhabitants			Number of first residence permits		
	2008	2014	2022	2008	2014	2022
Bulgaria	0.52	1.22	2.38	3933	8795	15839
Czechia	5.91	3.37	5.04	61350	35458	53809
Estonia	2.9	2.45	6.25	3884	3222	8425
Croatia	:	0.79	14.87	:	3334	57330
Latvia	1.66	4.94	4.68	7706	9857	8790
Lithuania	3.54	2.47	11.72	5298	7252	31232
Hungary	3.73	2.15	7.12	37486	21188	68672
Poland	1.07	9.35	19.02	40896	355521	700264
Romania	0.94	0.52	2.22	19354	10294	42207
Slovenia	14.45	4.79	15.52	29215	9876	32781
Slovakia	1.49	1.02	5.05	8025	5510	27441

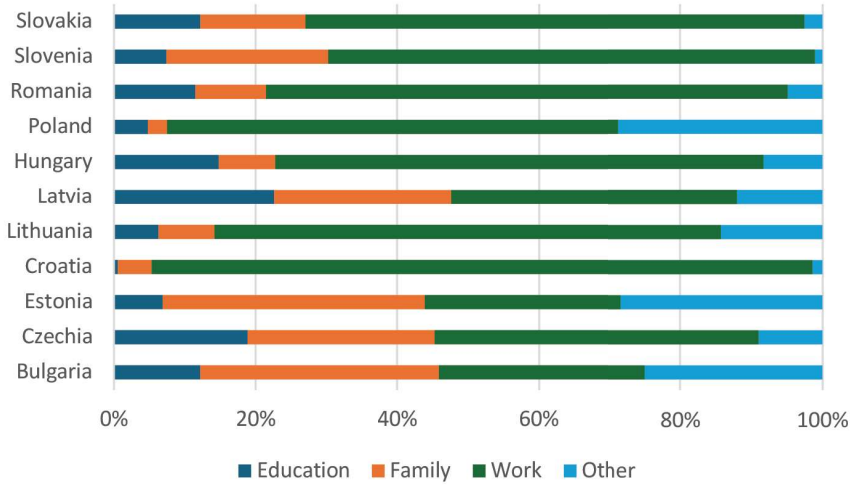
Source: Own preparation based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024c; Eurostat 2024d).

Table 5. Residence permits of foreigners by number and length of validity in Central and Eastern Europe in 2014 and 2022

State	Permits from 3 to 5 months		Permits from 6 to 11 months		Permits over 12 months	
	2014	2022	2014	2022	2014	2022
Bulgaria	876	290	4 434	7 606	3 485	7 943
Czechia	5 044	1841	3 573	5 201	26 841	46 767
Estonia	117	34	277	149	2 828	82 42
Croatia	276	13509	656	27 733	474	16 088
Latvia	327	308	8 743	3 731	787	4 751
Lithuania	163	262	922	1 073	6 167	29 897
Hungary	2 249	3073	6 086	10 745	12 853	54 854
Poland	105 372	59600	243 719	488 847	6 430	151 817
Romania	694	1409	2 090	4 924	7 510	35 874
Slovenia	1 062	2180	3 728	8 326	5 086	22 275
Slovakia	374	710	1 263	37 95	3 873	22 936

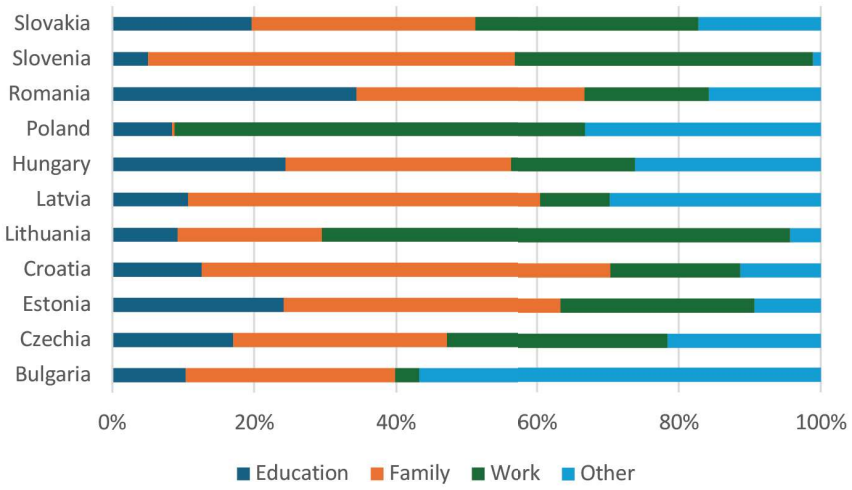
Source: Own preparation based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024c).

Chart 1. Reasons for first residence permit for foreigners in Central and Eastern Europe in 2022 (%)



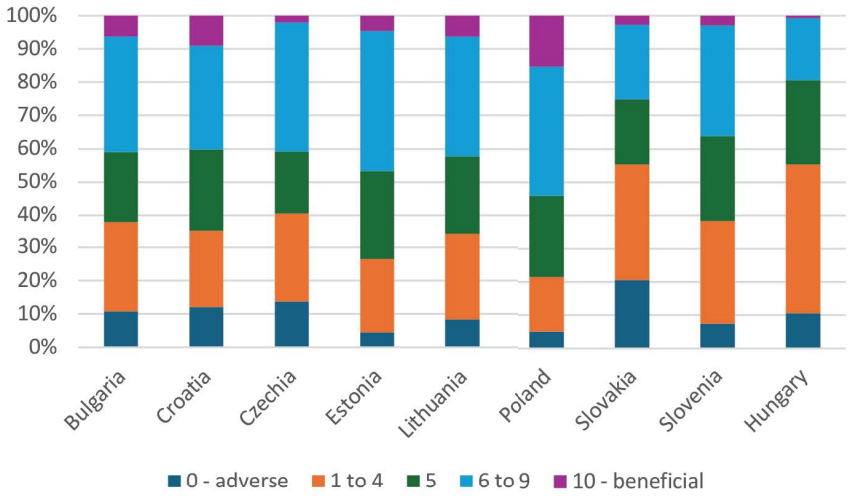
Source: Own preparation based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024e).

Chart 2. Reasons for first residence permit for foreigners in Central and Eastern Europe in 2014 (%)



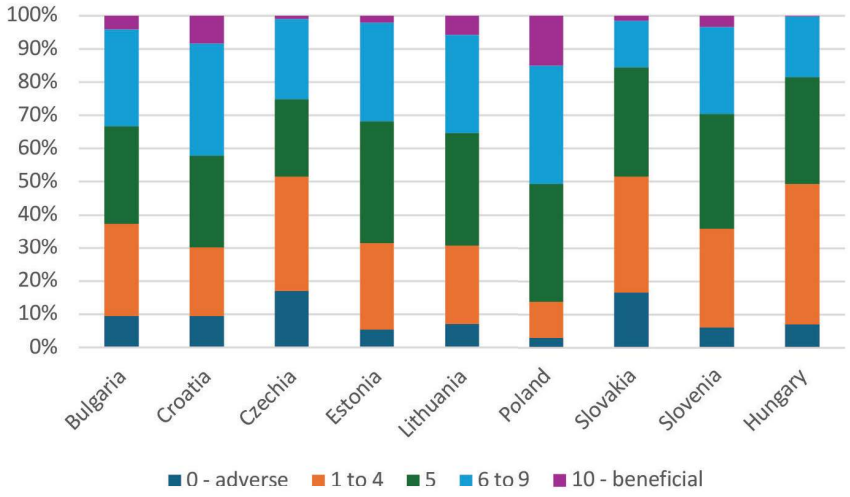
Source: Own preparation based on Eurostat (Eurostat, 2024e).

Chart 3. Is the fact that people from other countries are coming to live in the country generally beneficial or detrimental to the economy?



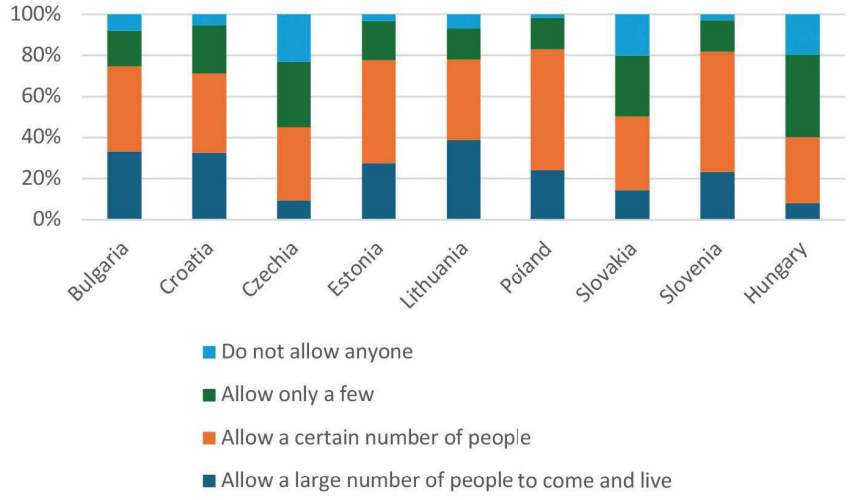
Source: Own preparation based on ESS (European Social Survey, 2020-2021).

Chart 4. As a result of people from other countries coming and living here, has the country in question become a worse or better place to live?



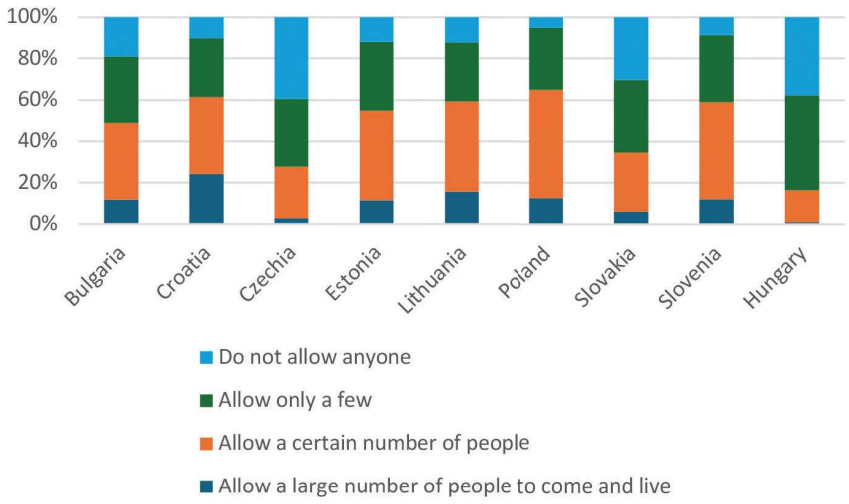
Source: Own preparation based on ESS (European Social Survey, 2020-2021).

Chart 5. To what extent should the state allow people of the same race or ethnic group as the majority of the population to come and live?



Source: Own preparation based on ESS (European Social Survey, 2020-2021).

Chart 6. To what extent should the state allow people of a different race or ethnic group than the majority of the population to come and live in the country?



Source: Own preparation based on ESS (European Social Survey, 2020-2021).