

Belarus's immigration policy: perpetuating a demographic crisis?

On 8 November, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka met with the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Lukashenka mentioned that the number of Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Belarus since 2014 has reached 150,000.

Over the past 20 years, the population of Belarus has decreased by more than 600,000 people. At a security meeting on demographics in August, President Lukashenka set a target [to increase Belarus's population](#) to 15 million.

In the context of low birth and high death rates, the Belarusian population can only grow due to an increased number of immigrants. However, Belarus still has no clear policy to encourage labour migration. Moreover, bureaucratic procedures, such as work permits, remain difficult to obtain for the majority of foreigners apart from citizens of CIS member countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine), especially Russians, which have special conditions for working in Belarus.

Labor migration: Ukrainian factor does not work anymore

Lukashenka stated that more than 150,000 Ukrainians have come to Belarus since the beginning of the war in Eastern Ukraine. This figure significantly differs from Internal Affairs Ministry statistics, which report about 42,000 refugees from Ukraine in the period 2014–2017.

The war in Eastern Ukraine indeed contributed to a growth in labour migration in Belarus, but not all Ukrainians who moved to Belarus stayed for long.



Ukrainian labour migrants coming to Belarus. Source: uainfo.com

“The situation with work in Belarus itself is quite sad: Belarusians lose jobs [or] take pay cuts from a salary that is already very small,” writes Ukrainian website *Workland*, which helps Ukrainians to find jobs abroad.

Workland reports that in Belarus it remains easy to get agriculture-related work, but there is almost no chance of finding an office position. The best that a Ukrainian immigrant can expect in Belarus is €150–200 per month.

Therefore, current conditions in Belarus are unlikely to bring large numbers of labour immigrants from Ukraine to Belarus. Indeed, now that Ukrainians have received visa-free travel to EU countries, they are even less likely to come. In the past year, Belarus has experienced a reduction in the number of immigrants—21,038 comparing to 28,349 people in 2015. The number of tourist visitors from Ukraine has also decreased by half from 10,000 in 2015 to 5,000 in 2016. Go ahead and [check my site](#) to find more information about the best law firm near

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Receiving a work permit in Belarus

Every year thousands of foreigners arrive in Belarus in search of work. Most of them come from China, Ukraine, Russia, and Uzbekistan. In the first quarter of 2017, 4,369 labour migrants came to Belarus, according to official statistics. So far, the vast majority (almost 80 per cent) of immigrants in Belarus are employed as labourers. At the moment more than 20,000 foreigners have the right to work in Belarus.

Enticing highly skilled employees to Belarus remains difficult. Anastasia Babrova at the Institute of Economics of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences lists a number of constraints. In previous years, a law on labour migration limited employment possibilities for foreigners in Belarus. However, in 2010 the government liberalised the law, which simplified the employment of foreigners in Belarus. In 2016, authorities revised the law again, increasing bureaucratic involvement in the work permit process. However, go ahead and learn [more here](#) about the most important laws about immigration.

Rules for receiving work permits in Belarus vary depending on a person's country of origin and occupation. According to the law on external labour migration, foreigners willing to work in Belarus need to receive 'special permission' approved by an executive committee and the police. From 2014–2015, the number of rejections of 'special permissions' decreased by 21 per cent, reports *lastrada.by*, the Belarusian arm of an international anti-human trafficking network.



Russian-Belarusian border. Source: bbc.com

Receiving 'special permission' remains the most difficult step for foreigners. They need to possess five years of experience in the relevant field. Moreover, a Belarusian employer needs to pay at least \$1,500 salary to the highly qualified foreigner. "This appears as a high threshold, taking into account the fact that the average salary in Belarus barely reaches \$500," said Babrova in an interview with *Naviny.by*, a news website.

Russian citizens face the least paperwork when it comes to labour immigration to Belarus. They receive a right to work in Belarus by registering in the population register within 90 days after arrival. Moreover, a Belarusian employer pays a regular salary to Russian citizens comparing to \$1500 for other foreigners.

Belarus's Migration policy supports citizens of particular countries. Different rules apply to citizens of Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Foreigners coming from these countries can work without special permission. The Eurasian Economic Union agreement (signed May 2014) created guidelines for granting CIS citizens the right to work in Belarus.

How to improve migration?

Conditions surrounding labour immigration to Belarus vary significantly depending on the country of origin. CIS countries have many favourable conditions for employment in Belarus compared with foreigners from other countries. The law remains even more welcoming for Russian citizens, who just need to register as a resident when they arrive.

However, to provide a migration gain in circumstances of growing emigration, the Belarusian government needs to review the policy on foreign labour migration. It seems overly optimistic to assume that qualified labour immigrants will choose to move to Belarus without additional incentives.

The most necessary policy changes are the simplification of employment procedures for foreigners outside the CIS area and the lowering of the obligatory \$1500 salary for immigrants to a more equal level with Belarusian salaries.

Additionally, Ideaby.org, a media platform created by young professionals who promote smart large-scale reforms in Belarus, notes that Belarus lacks accommodation even for its own citizens. This suggests the building of new living areas would also be needed to improve conditions for immigrants.

Another incentive could be 'the Belarusian card,' which would encourage the return of Belarusians to Belarus who also have citizenship of other countries. So far, it seems that the authorities are trying to patch the demographic hole with labour migrants. However, Belarus has an immigration policy that favours a select few countries, instead of liberalising the law and opening its doors to a more inclusive group of foreigners.