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Ethnic differences in integration levels and return migration intentions: A study of Estonian migrants in Finland

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Abstract

Background: Immigrants' desire to stay in the host country or return to the country of origin depends largely on the balance between their degree of integration in the host country and their level of attachment to the country of origin. Ethnic diversity is growing rapidly in European countries, including in migrant-sending countries. It may be expected that members of the ethnic minority population and the majority population have different degrees of willingness to engage in return migration depending on their different levels of attachment to their country of origin.

Objective: This study examines differences in the return migration intentions of members of the ethnic minority population and members of the majority population in the sending country. Specifically, we seek to answer two main research questions: (1) To what extent do members of the sending country's ethnic minority and majority groups differ in their desire to return to the sending country? (2) How does the degree of integration in the host country shape differences in the return migration intentions of members of the sending country's ethnic minority and majority groups?

Methods: We use representative survey data on Estonian migrants in Finland and apply binary logistic regression on our data.

Results: Results suggest that there are important differences in the integration levels and in the return migration intentions of the ethnic Estonians and the ethnic Russians from Estonia living in Finland. Despite being much better integrated into Finnish society than ethnic Russians, the ethnic Estonians are much more likely to want to return to Estonia. Indeed, our study shows that ethnicity is one of the most important personal characteristics predicting return migration.

Conclusions: There is no obvious negative relationship between integration and return migration. Being a member of the sending country majority population is associated with a stronger intention to return, even when the migrant is well integrated into the new homeland.

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