

Summary of Key Findings: Study on Living and Working Opportunities in Regions as Drivers of Return Migration (Latvia, 2022)

1. Overall Trends in Return Migration

Return migration to Latvia has shown notable peaks in recent years, particularly in 2014 and 2021. However, the actual scale of return migration is likely higher than official statistics suggest, potentially exceeding 10,000 people annually. This indicates a stronger latent return potential than currently captured.

2. Regional Disparities in Employment and Income

Employment opportunities and wages are significantly concentrated in the Riga region. While Riga offers the highest number of vacancies, surrounding municipalities (e.g. Mārupe, Ādaži) provide the highest average salaries. Other regions lag behind, creating structural imbalance and limiting return migration outside the capital area.

3. Housing as a Critical Barrier

A major obstacle to return migration is the lack of available housing, especially outside Riga. The number of new housing units in regions is very low compared to demand. Without targeted housing policies and support mechanisms, return migration to regions remains constrained.

4. Key Drivers of Job Creation

Job creation depends on overall economic activity, especially the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. Key enabling factors include:

- wage subsidies,
- support for entrepreneurship,
- digitalisation,
- skills development,
- availability of housing.

Innovative and high-tech sectors are particularly important for attracting highly skilled return migrants.

5. Importance of Policy Alignment

Existing support mechanisms in Latvia are broad but could be more targeted. Greater alignment is needed between:

- business support programmes,
- education and skills development,
- regional economic strategies.

Tax incentives and predictable business environments are important to attract investment and talent.

6. Role of Remote Work and Mobility

Remote work opportunities can significantly improve return migration prospects, allowing people to live in regions while working elsewhere. Mobility support (e.g. transport subsidies) is also important.

7. Municipal Role and Challenges

Municipalities play a crucial role in integration and everyday living conditions (housing, education, infrastructure). However:

- many lack dedicated funding,
- there is a need for clearer national-level coordination,
- strategic direction is often insufficient.

Regional remigration coordinators are identified as one of the most effective support instruments.

8. Integration and Labour Market Entry

Better targeted training and requalification programmes are needed, particularly through the State Employment Agency. Flexible, employer-linked training (e.g. vouchers) could improve labour market integration.

9. Legal and Policy Framework

While Latvia's legal framework does not hinder return migration, it also lacks strong targeted incentives. Return migration is recognised in policy planning documents as a tool to address depopulation and regional disparities.

10. Best Practices and Support Mechanisms

Successful measures include:

- business incubators,
- special economic zones,
- grants and EU-funded programmes,
- networking and mentoring initiatives.

However, continued access to funding is essential for sustainability.

11. Key Recommendations (Overview)

The study recommends:

- expanding housing availability in regions,
- introducing targeted financial incentives (e.g. subsidies, tax relief),
- strengthening support for entrepreneurship,
- improving coordination between state and municipalities,
- enhancing communication with diaspora,
- supporting families (especially children's education and integration),
- developing regional infrastructure and services.

Conclusion

Return migration in Latvia is strongly influenced by economic opportunities, housing availability, and quality of life factors. A coordinated, multi-level policy approach is essential to unlock the full potential of return migration, particularly in regions outside Riga.

The full version of the study *“Living and Working Opportunities in Regions as Drivers of External and Internal Return Migration”* is available [HERE](#).

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