

TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES: NAVIGATING IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN LATVIAN MIGRATION NARRATIVES

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Abstract

The paper explores the intricate dynamics of migration within the context of societal cohesion and identity formation. Migration is not just a mere relocation; it's deeply intertwined with broader social transformations. Migration patterns in Latvia reveal a consistent population loss due to emigration, yet the connection between emigrants and their homeland is resilient, particularly through family bonds. By examining the Latvian experience since the country's independence in 1991, we aim to analyze the sense of belonging of Latvian emigrants and uncover factors crucial in shaping migrants' identities and maintaining ties to their homeland. Our study integrates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a holistic understanding of this phenomenon by analyzing data from large-scale surveys of Latvian emigrants alongside personal narratives collected from the Latvian National Oral History Collection.

Using longitudinal data from surveys conducted in 2014 and 2019, for the first-time researchers have been able to track changes in the sense of belonging not only among different groups of Latvian emigrants but also at the individual level. Both the duration of time spent living abroad and the wave of immigration play a significant role in changes in sense of belonging. Social ties and family also hold substantial importance. Preservation and strengthening of a national sense of belonging over time are influenced by connections with family and close friends living in Latvia, as well as property ownership in Latvia. Participation in diaspora organizations also promotes the maintenance of national identity awareness.

Other indicators that affect belonging include subjective factors—general life satisfaction fosters a positive sense of belonging to both the host country and the country of origin, while life dissatisfaction significantly promotes alienation and a sense of non-belonging. Separation from loved ones, often a cause of unhappiness in family life, and overall dissatisfaction with life can hinder the growth of a sense of belonging to the host country.

Keywords: migration, sense of belonging, identity, migration narratives

1. INTRODUCTION

Global processes, characterized by the free movement of people and the advent of modern technology, have dramatically reshaped our understanding of identity and belonging. These rapid changes compel us to constantly re-evaluate the question “Who am I?” and to consider our sense of belonging. We are driven to delineate what is common between “us” and “them”, to understand where the boundaries lie between “ours” and “others”.

These questions are also of utmost importance in Latvia, given the country's small population and significant emigration over the past decades, which poses a substantial challenge. With just under two million residents, Latvia has become a typical 'sending country' in Europe, especially impacted by the 2008 financial crisis, which led to unprecedented emigration rates. Since regaining independence in 1991, Latvia has experienced a consistent population loss due to migration, with emigration outpacing immigration. Since 2000, about 10% of the population has emigrated. Recent trends indicate that more families are emigrating with their children, planning to settle abroad permanently while maintaining strong ties with those remaining in Latvia. These connections help preserve Latvian identity abroad, emphasizing the role of family in maintaining language, values, and cultural traditions.

Considering these growing emigration trends, it is increasingly crucial to analyze both the theoretical and empirical aspects of identity and belonging among the Latvian diaspora, which is sometimes referred to as the “fifth region” (in addition to Latvia's four existing regions). This analysis sheds light on how these dynamics influence the sense of self and community of Latvians in a globalized world. Understanding the interplay between migration, identity, and belonging can offer valuable insights into how Latvians navigate their transnational lives and maintain their cultural heritage while adapting to new environments.

Research into these areas not only enhances our academic comprehension but also has practical implications for the social integration and cohesion of Latvian society. By understanding the factors that influence identity and belonging among emigrants, policymakers can develop strategies to support the diaspora in maintaining their cultural ties while fostering successful integration into host societies. This dual focus can help mitigate feelings of alienation and promote a sense of belonging both abroad and at home. Furthermore, such research can inform initiatives aimed at encouraging return migration, thereby addressing demographic challenges and enhancing the social fabric of Latvia. The insights gained can also contribute to a broader discussion on how small nations can preserve their cultural heritage in an increasingly globalized world.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Identity and Belonging in Migration: A Theoretical Approach

Considering the widespread nature of contemporary international migration which is driven by a variety of causes and factors, there are now unparalleled connections, overlaps, and identities that span across borders. Both navigating and researching these dual or multiple connections and various feelings of belonging has thus become a crucial and relevant challenge which lends itself to different conceptual approaches. These approaches have evolved in recent decades, emphasizing action, individual agency, and the importance of choice.

Most discussions about migration and mobility, old and new belongings, and the distinctions between “here” and “there” often play out on a national scale, a seemingly self-evident frame of reference. This occurs even though the nation is not a natural entity of a unified community with a clearly delineated territorial base, despite growing emphasis on the transnational character of migrant experience. For migrants themselves, the homeland and the level of nationalism can be highly significant units of meaning, but also powerful images that risk overshadowing a wider diversity of subjective experiences (Stock 2017).

Approaches to identity analysis are based on several common assumptions: identities develop in a social context, shaped by cultural, temporal, and spatial conditions. They are viewed as life-course projects, recognizing that this process never ends. Identities evolve in diverse ways, which can overlap and conflict, balancing the individual's need to belong and fit into a group with the need to be different. Summarizing theoretical approaches to identity research, Matthew Hornsey examines the various strategies people use to balance their need to belong to social groups with their desire to maintain individuality (Hornsey & Jetten 2004). Belonging is not a static state achieved once and held forever. It is an active process that must be maintained and renegotiated as the world and individuals change.

Scholars have pointed to an increasing fluidity of contemporary lifeworlds on many levels, as well as a seemingly growing desire of individuals and groups for stability that is perceived to be waning. In a world where mobility has tempered the stability of locality, there seems to be a growing need for 'rooted' identifications (Stock 2017). In the context of migration, which involves the physical process of movement and the continuous redefinition of one's identity (Frideres 2002), the dynamic aspect of identity is particularly emphasized. Identity is understood as a constructible, evolving phenomenon rather than a fixed or static one (see: Bokser-Liwerant 2002; Rummens 2001; Rashid 2007). When moving to another country, an immigrant often internalizes a new national identity (psychological acculturation), even if this means identifying with a culture whose values and traditions are significantly different from those of the country of origin. Through successful internalization, a new national identity

forms for the individual, a process associated with successful integration (Grant 2007; Baffoe 2011). However, this does not imply that the individual abandons or should abandon their previous identity.

“Identity” extends beyond an introspective, reflective understanding of oneself to encompass how an individual or group relates to others, or distinguishes themselves from them. This situational aspect highlights the fluid nature of identity, as individuals constantly re-evaluate and adjust their sense of self throughout their societal existence, especially in the context of modern, flexible social processes and structures (Boland 2020).

The desire to belong – to form deep connections with others, to identify with cultural and subcultural groups, and to feel integrated within surrounding systems – seems to be ingrained in our biology, down to the level of the human genome (Slavich & Cole, 2013).

The process of identification, rather than having identity as its result, is more effectively explored through the study of belonging. However, these aspects are closely intertwined and difficult to separate in everyday consciousness. Within the empirical framework of this article, the characteristics of the identity of Latvian nationals living outside Latvia are derived based on measurements of closeness of belonging. These measurements clarify belonging to social groups, communities, places, and specific territories. One’s sense of self is shaped by primary social and environmental contexts, which both reinforce and challenge one’s subjective feeling of belonging. This sense of belonging is influenced by interactions with people, objects, and experiences within the social environment, all of which dynamically interplay with an individual’s character, experiences, culture, identity, and perceptions (Allen et al. 2020).

Quantifying sense of belonging allows researchers to understand its varying intensities and impact. This approach is widely utilized in sociological research because it offers a nuanced perspective on how individuals connect with their environments and communities. In Latvia, studies have frequently employed this method to explore the identities of different groups, notably youth (see: Koroļeva & Rungule 2013; Rungule & Koroļeva 2014). These studies highlight how belonging can be measured and analyzed to provide insight into identity formation.

Allen et al. identify four interrelated components of belonging that arise from and are supported by the systems in which individuals reside: 1) competencies for belonging (skills and abilities); 2) opportunities to belong (enablers, removal/reduction of barriers); 3) motivations to belong (inner drive); 4) perceptions of belonging (cognitions, attributions, and feedback mechanisms – positive or negative experiences when connecting). As a dynamic social system, these four components continuously reinforce and influence each other as an individual navigates various social, environmental, and temporal contexts and experiences (Allen et al. 2020).

Both life in Latvia and emigration can be seen as sources of belonging. However, the process of developing feelings of belonging is complex and often internally conflicting. A person who has left their homeland and moved to another country searches for new objects of belonging, creating new attachments to places and groups in the host country while navigating internal contradictions between the desire to be similar and belong and the desire to remain unique and different. This journey is individual, and migrant belonging can always be perceived as a “too close or too weak” identification that never achieves a perfect balance between belonging to the community of origin and the host country (Hall 1996).

Social networks are extremely important with regard to mobility, yet their role is still not fully understood. Existing diasporas in the receiving country serve future emigrants as both a gateway and a safety net, reducing various moving costs and risks by providing information channels and ensuring necessary help in terms of housing, money, logistical support, and advice during times of need (Koroļeva & Mieriņa 2014). While some emigrants assist their friends and family in moving abroad, others find that family and friends at home can become obstacles to emigration or lead to re-emigration. Emigration can create bridges between countries and communities, facilitating economic ties, innovation, and an exchange of knowledge. Conversely, strong bonds with the existing diaspora from one’s home country can act as a barrier preventing immigrants from successfully integrating into the local community.

The formation and transformation of feelings of belonging in emigration is a crucial subject of research because the preservation of a connection to the country of origin and the development of new attachments in the host country significantly influence a person's decision to stay abroad or return home.

Migration literature highlights several factors that can impact migrants' feelings of belonging, identity transformations, and the formation of new identities. Key factors include the duration of time spent in the host country, acquisition of official citizenship, cultural compatibility or incompatibility between the country of origin and the destination country, and experiences within the host society (Krzyzanowski & Wodak 2007, Grant 2007).

Highlighting the emotional dimensions of belonging and identity awareness, the role of family – including relationships with children, parents, and other relatives – and friends in both the country of origin and the host country is crucial. The family emerges as a key player in migration dynamics, shaping strategies for survival, integration, protection, and support. Throughout the migration process, various changes in family life can lead to new and unique configurations of social relationships and emotional bonds, as well as economic and cultural exchanges. Additionally, the family significantly influences subsequent changes, such as the duration and evolution of the migration plan (Crespi 2020). Focusing on family experiences, Daniela Sime examines the strain that migration places on family relationships, emotional disturbances and threats to an individual's sense of belonging and ontological security. She highlights how these internal insecurities and perceptions change over time depending on family circumstances and instability (Sime 2018).

Researchers also point to the delicate balance between the economic benefits of migration and its emotional costs, such as loss of contact with children and family members and erosion of social support networks. Maintaining transnational connections with family members left behind is important for many migrants, but the ultimate goal is often the physical presence and closeness with loved ones (Skrbiš 2008).

This article aims to analyze identity and sense of belonging among different groups of Latvian emigrants and, using longitudinal data, identify factors that have influenced changes in feelings of belonging at the individual level over the course of five years.

2.2. Methods

The analysis of the sense of belonging in this study is based on a unique empirical dataset derived from both quantitative and qualitative sources. The quantitative data comes from two stages of a longitudinal study of Latvian emigrants and return migrants. The first wave, conducted in 2014 under the ESF grant “Latvian Emigrant Communities: National Identity, Transnational Relations, and Diaspora Policy”, surveyed Latvians living outside Latvia. The second wave, conducted in 2019 under the Latvian Council of Science grant “Research on Well-being and Social Integration in the Context of Liquid Migration: A Longitudinal Approach”, included both emigrants and return migrants. This analysis focuses on respondents who participated in both waves (n=1073, weighted data), providing a rare opportunity to track changes in sense of belonging over time at the individual level.

A 5-point rating scale measured belongingness to various social and territorial groups in both stages of the study. Additionally, a 4-point scale assessed closeness of attachment to specific places. In the next step cluster analysis (using the k-means method) was used to group respondents into typological categories based on their sense of belonging, similar to the methodology used in the 2014 survey (Koroleva 2019).

To assess changes in feelings of belonging over the five-year period, an index was created, categorizing respondents into four groups: (1) weakened sense of belonging, (2) consistently weak belonging, (3) strengthened sense of belonging, and (4) consistently strong belonging. These categories were analyzed using logistic regression models to determine the influence of various demographic, social, and economic factors on changes in sense of belonging.

The study also incorporates qualitative data from the Latvian National Oral History Archive, which includes around 40 life story interviews with post-independence emigrants. The life-story method offers a comprehensive view of migration experiences, allowing individuals to articulate their motivations,

adaptation strategies, and personal evaluations of their new lives. This qualitative approach provides depth to the quantitative findings, highlighting the personal and emotional dimensions of migration.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Identity and belonging of Latvian emigrants

As in other studies, our data show that emigrants feel the closest sense of belonging to their immediate social groups – family and friends (Koroleva 2019). These feelings remain relatively unchanged over five years, regardless of the emigration experience. In this article, we focus on the signs of belonging that characterize national or transnational identity and longitudinal survey data indicate a general decline among emigrants in their sense of belonging to Latvian national identity. Figure 1 depicts the strength of sense of belonging in 2014 and 2019, combining the categories “very and somewhat belonging”. Meanwhile, columns 3 and 4 of this table reflect a weakening or strengthening of the sense of belonging at the individual level.

Specifically, feelings of belonging to Latvia decreased from 68% to 59%, and to the place of departure from 79% to 70% (Figure 1). Conversely, over the past five years, respondents' sense of belonging to their current place of residence increased significantly (from 47% to 60%), as did their affiliation with residents of their host country (from 48% to 63%) and their immediate neighborhood (from 44% to 68%).

These changes reflect individual-level fluctuations and highlight an overall trend: belonging to Latvia, its people, and all things Latvian has weakened more often rather than strengthened. In contrast, significant positive changes are evident in attitude toward the host country, particularly regarding the place of residence, its inhabitants, and especially neighbors. A sense of belonging to the current place of residence increased for 24% of respondents, to residents of the home country for 23%, and to immediate neighbors for 33%, suggesting successful integration into the host country and its society (Figure 1).

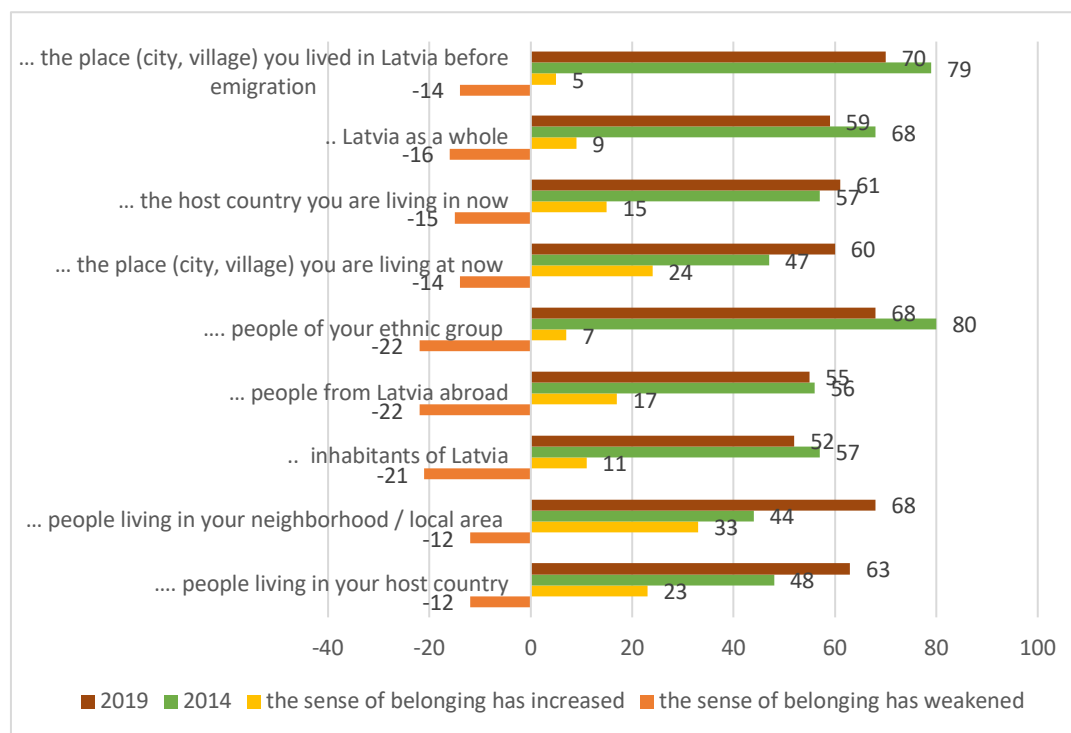


Fig. 1. Sense of belonging in 2019 and changes in sense of belonging since 2014 (%)

Source: authors' estimates based on longitudinal data of emigrant surveys (n=1073), 2014 – 2019

The 2019 survey data reveal that, compared to 2014, national identity among Latvian emigrants no longer dominates over new, foreign identities. The proportion of respondents who feel a closer connection to their host country than to Latvia has increased. However, questions about belonging to Latvia encompass more than just territorial attachment – they also touch on other dimensions of national identity (political, cultural, psychological). These aspects likely explain the differences in feelings of belonging compared to specific places in Latvia. While 70% of emigrants feel closely connected to their place of departure, only 59% feel a close connection to Latvia as a whole. Meanwhile, 61% feel equally connected to their host country.

Cluster analysis was conducted to characterize various dimensions of identity within the emigrant community. This helps to group diverse measurements and allows for the definition of internally homogeneous typological groups within the emigrant community according to the dominance of a specific sense of belonging in individual consciousness. For this purpose, correlation tables and standard residuals calculations were used. Based on both the statistical characteristics of cluster analysis results (gradation of scales, filling of clusters) and interpretation considerations, a 4-cluster variant was chosen for further analysis as optimal from several cluster analysis results: (C1) “Integrated in the host country, closely belong to Latvia”, (C2) “Fully integrated in the host country, alienated from Latvia and Latvians”, (C3) “Weakly integrated in the host country, moderately belong to Latvia”, (C4) “Weakly integrated in the host country, closely belong to Latvia” (see Appendix A).

Next, we will examine these typological groups, comparing the intensity of the sense of belonging in each, sketching portraits of groups and looking for sociodemographic variables that affect belonging to a certain typological group.

3.1.1. Cluster 1: Integrated in the Host Country, Closely Belong to Latvia

The first cluster comprises emigrants who have largely integrated into their host country while maintaining a strong attachment to Latvia and everything Latvian. This group shows a high sense of belonging to their current place of residence, its inhabitants, and the neighborhood. For instance, 82% feel a strong connection to the residents of their host country, compared to 63% of the overall survey sample, and 83% feel connected to their immediate neighborhood, compared to 68% in the total sample (Figure 2).

Interestingly, successful integration into the host country does not conflict with maintaining strong national feelings, suggesting the formation of a transnational identity. This is indicated by the significant proportion of emigrants who feel a strong connection to Latvia (75%) and its residents (75%) (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Ethnic identity is particularly strong in this cluster, with 89% feeling a connection to people of their nationality and 82% to other Latvian immigrants, compared to 55% in the total sample. They also feel connected to Europeans and the global community.

Transnational identity is vividly expressed in the qualitative interviews. One respondent (woman, born 1968, moved to Sweden in 1997, interviewed in 2010) clearly illustrates this dual sense of belonging: *I am still a citizen of Latvia. /.../ Home can be anywhere, even in Antarctica, but I will still be Latvian all my life, no matter what. The fact that the mentality regarding some household things and some values changes does not change anything. I am not a nationalist, but it's a kind of belonging. I don't know what it is related to, or the feeling when I was growing up, when there was something in Latvia that had to be protected, cherished and preserved so that it would not be destroyed. I haven't thought about it specifically, but it's Latvian belonging, cultural heritage, it's just there, it's not even a debatable thing. /.../ I feel like my home is here [in Sweden]. The natural environment here resembles Kurzeme [a region of Latvia]. I miss my loved ones, I miss the language itself, the opportunity to hear their language. When I go to Latvia, I always have partial bitterness. About two or three days pass and I want to go back.* (NMV-3703) (Here and hereafter: The text of each interview is indicated by an abbreviation, where “NMV” refers to the collection of the National Oral History archive, followed by a reference to the serial number of the interview in the collection.)

Another respondent (woman, born 1973, moved to Great Britain in 1999, interviewed in 2010) reflects this sentiment, highlighting the emotional connection to Latvia: *No one will take that link [with Latvia] away from me. /.../ Yes, and my language and everything else. In principle, it seems to me that everything*

related to Latvia would be a pity to lose, if you think about it. I can't pick one thing. I usually say that my emotional home is there [in Latvia] and this [in Great Britain] is my practical home. Other people in Latvia, when I say that I must go home now (after living in Riga for a week), they say: 'How? You call England your home?' I say, 'Yes, this is my practical home. Latvia will always be my emotional home.' (NMV-3415)

According to the quantitative data, this is the largest cluster, with a significant representation of diverse emigrant groups. Notably, there is a higher proportion of individuals who have lived outside Latvia for a long time or their entire lives, particularly those who emigrated before 1991 or between 1991 and 2003. Recent emigrants (post-2011) are less represented. The cluster has no significant gender differences but includes more elderly individuals (retirement age) than other clusters. Most members have lived abroad for over 15 years or their entire lives and generally have completed secondary education. Latvians dominate this cluster, with fewer Russian emigrants, and Latvian is predominantly spoken in the household. Citizenship status is not a major differentiator, although there are fewer non-citizens of Latvia (Koroļeva 2020).

Integration is facilitated by having relatives and friends already living in the host country. Those with family remaining in Latvia maintain strong ties, while having friends from Latvia in the host country strengthens their attachment to the host country as evidenced by this quote of the previously mentioned respondent living in Sweden: *There are about ten Latvians who live here permanently. We are of different groups, different ages, and different backgrounds. It makes a difference whether you grow up in the city or the country, but I think it really doesn't matter to a certain extent. If we knew each other in Latvia, we would also have very good relations. It just somehow happened that we stick together, we have some common qualities that maybe are not immediately apparent, but which create that common feeling.* (NMV-3703)

This cluster includes a significant number of respondents who live with their family or parents' family in the host country, providing stability and peace, aiding their integration while maintaining their connection to Latvia.

The cluster has a significant number of pensioners and those categorized as “other” (e.g. housewives). They exhibit high levels of satisfaction with life and greater trust in the Latvian government. Both permanent residents abroad and liquid migrants (those who alternate between living in Latvia and abroad) are proportionally represented. Participation in diaspora organizations is notable, indicating this identity model is typical of socially active emigrants. For example, the previously mentioned respondent living in Great Britain was actively involved in the activities of a Latvian school in London: *This is our goal – to provide Latvian culture to these young children. I would very much like to believe that we also teach the Latvian language to some extent, but I think that the philosophy of the Latvian school is the Latvian culture and traditions, Latvianness and such things – to teach them and place it inside them. Even if the knowledge they take away from the Latvian school is in English, they have learned something about Latvia and Latvianness, gained some knowledge.* (NMV-3415)

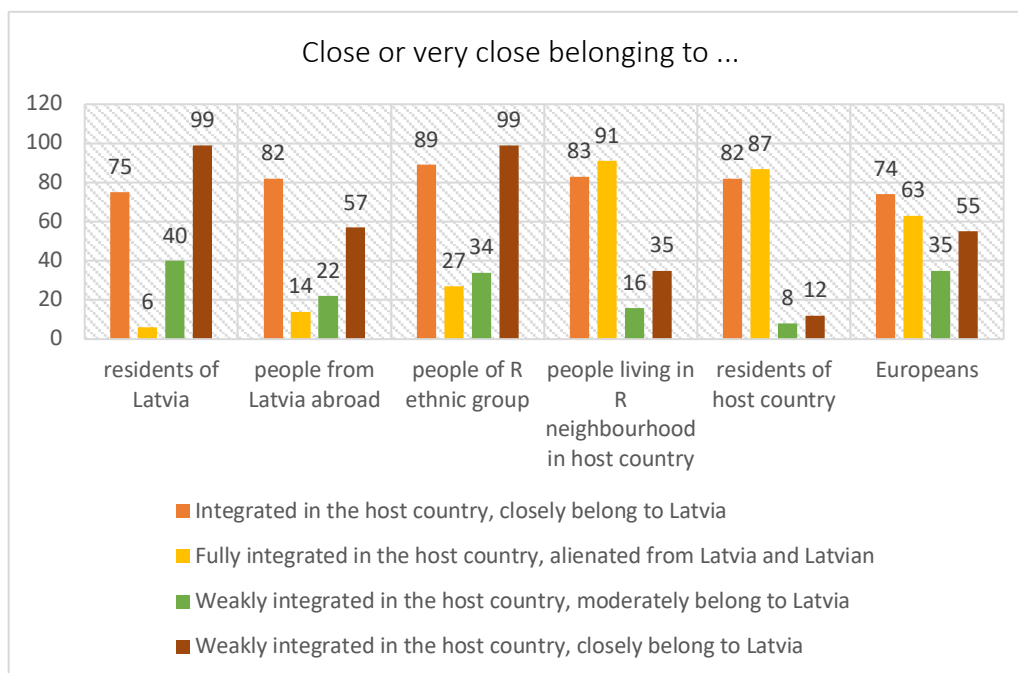


Fig. 2. Intensity of belonging to social groups in different clusters, 2019 (%)

Source: authors' estimates based on 2nd wave of longitudinal survey (n=1073)

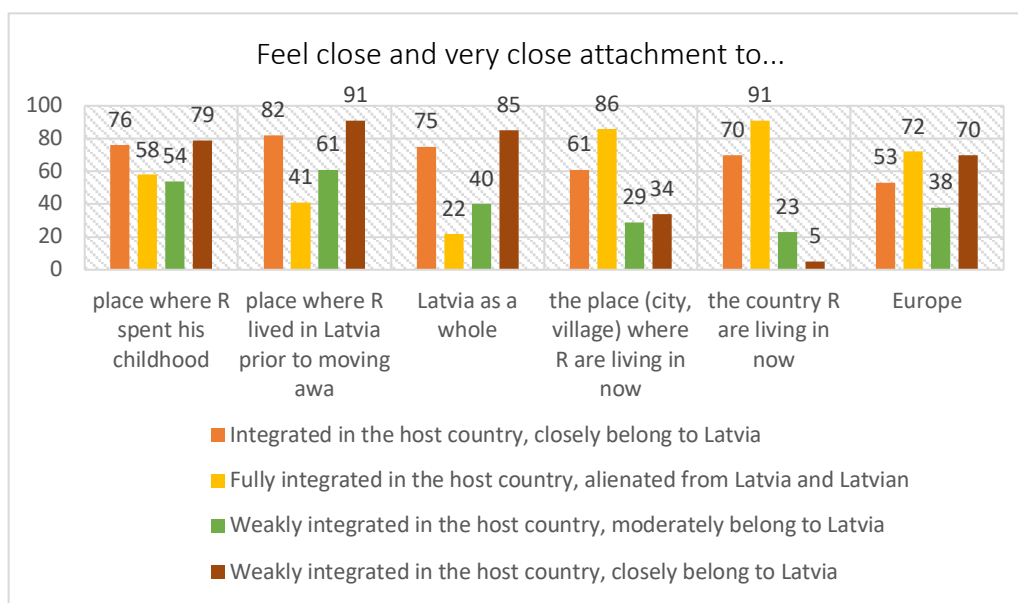


Fig. 3. Intensity of belonging to place in different clusters, 2019 (%)

Source: authors' estimates based on 2nd wave of longitudinal survey (n=1073)

3.1.2. Cluster 2: Fully Integrated in the Host Country, Alienated from Latvia and Latvians

The second cluster is characterized by a high or complete degree of integration into the host country, coupled with a negative attitude toward Latvia and its national identity. This group exhibits strong ties to residents of their host country (87%), their immediate neighborhood (91%), their specific place of residence (86%), and the country itself (91%) (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Conversely, they show significant alienation from Latvia, with only 6% feeling a connection to the Latvian people and 14% to other

Latvians abroad. Only 22% feel a close connection to Latvia itself. A quote from a respondent (man, born in 1980, moved to Sweden in 1998, interviewed in 2017) illustrates this aspect well: *Here [in Sweden] it is easier to communicate with everyone. Financially, too, of course, there are fewer problems. For example, you know that you will be paid on the 25th of every month. If you ask someone for something, you will get it. It is easier to trust people; you won't be fooled. That is my experience. ././ I feel calmer, better in Sweden. When I have been in Latvia for two weeks, I am already stressed.* (NMV-4567)

This group likely comprises individuals who left Latvia under challenging circumstances, possibly driven by economic hardship or social vulnerability, and who harbor negative feelings toward their country of origin. This assumption is supported by the fact that a larger share of this group feels connected to the places in Latvia where they spent their childhood (58%) or lived before emigrating (41%).

Cluster 2 predominantly includes recent emigrants, particularly those who left between 2000-2003 and during the economic crisis of 2009-2011. It lacks representation from individuals born outside of Latvia, those who have lived abroad all their lives, and those who emigrated before 1991. The demographic is younger, primarily aged 25-34, with fewer individuals aged 55 and older. Women slightly outnumber men, and there is a higher representation of Russian ethnicity, with household languages often being the language of the host country or another foreign language.

Integration into the host country is facilitated by the presence of family or relatives already there, along with close friendships with locals or immigrants from other countries (*My best friend was already here in England and quite a few acquaintances already at that time. Classmates and even childhood friends, one could say, were here. It was 2004, I think, one of those years when quite a few left. ././ For many people here in London, life is so fast-paced that people come and go. As well, I had a best friend from Croatia who lived next door, who is now back home. And then there was one from Poland, a former colleague. And then it's just like that – those contacts come and go. But there are basically a few people who stay.* (NMV-3416)). Members of this cluster often have someone to rely on in their host country for support in times of illness, financial need, or emotional distress. They typically live with their family or in shared households with non-relatives.

Conversely, their connections to Latvia are weaker. Few members have family or property in Latvia, leading to reduced social contacts with their home country.

Cluster 2 includes a higher proportion of wage-earners and new mothers on maternity leave, with fewer pensioners. They tend to come from affluent families that manage daily expenses easily or very easily. Satisfaction levels are high, with a significant lack of dissatisfaction in all areas of life. Trust in the Latvian government is notably low or non-existent, reflecting their overall detachment from Latvian national identity.

This group is the least socially active part of the diaspora, with little to no involvement in diaspora organizations. Permanent residency abroad is more common than alternating between living in Latvia and abroad.

3.1.3. Cluster 3: Weakly Integrated in the Host Country, Moderately Connected to Latvia

The third cluster is characterized by weak integration into the host country and moderate attachment to Latvia. Respondents in this group feel largely disconnected from their host country and its residents, but also maintain a relatively weak connection to Latvia, except for the specific places in Latvia where they spent their childhood or lived before emigrating. This sentiment is best characterized by the narrative of a respondent living in Sweden answering the question about his ties with Latvia: *Our home is here. Our belongings are here, and our pets are here. From our travels, we return here. Although Sweden may not be our home either, this place [where we are living now] is our home. – Why? – I do not feel at home here, but at the same time, neither do I feel at home in Latvia. My home is at my job. I am focusing on my work.* (NMV-4570)

Only 16% of respondents feel a sense of belonging to their immediate neighborhood, and only 8% feel connected to the residents of their host country (Figure 2). Their attachment to their current place of

residence is also low, with 29% feeling closely connected to the host country and 23% to their specific place of residence (Figure 3). Their Latvian identity is slightly stronger. About 40% feel connected to the people of Latvia and 34% to their ethnic group. Notably, 40% feel a sense of belonging to Latvia, and 61% feel connected to the places in Latvia where they spent their childhood or lived before emigrating, indicating nostalgia and longing for their homeland.

This group predominantly includes recent emigrants, particularly those who left during the post-crisis period (2009-2011) and those who have been abroad for a shorter time (up to 10 years). Unlike other clusters, a significantly larger portion of this group is male. There is a slight overrepresentation of individuals aged 33-54, with fewer young people under 24. More respondents in this group are of Russian ethnicity and maintain Russian as their household language. This cluster has a notably low level of education.

These individuals often did not have family or friends waiting for them in the host country. They tend to live alone and have weak social ties, lacking people to rely on for help during illness or financial emergencies. A significant number have family members or friends still in Latvia, explaining their stronger connection to their place of origin, but they lack friends in the host country. The group mainly consists of wage earners, with a notable absence of students and the unemployed. They generally come from relatively poorer families and struggle to cover daily expenses, indicating financial hardship.

Satisfaction levels do not significantly affect their belonging to this cluster. Trust in the Latvian government is extremely low among this group. This is a particularly passive group in terms of participation, with few engaging in any organized activities, whether in the Latvian diaspora or local communities.

3.1.4. Cluster 4: Weakly integrated in the host country, closely belonging to Latvia and Latvians

This group exhibits weak integration in their host country but a strong connection to Latvia and the Latvian language. Unlike previous typological groups, they show limited attachment to their current homeland and its inhabitants, suggesting incomplete integration as witnessed by the quote from this respondent (woman, born in 1992, moved to Sweden in 2015, interviewed in 2017): *No family, no friends [here]. /.../ I feel completely isolated here. If it wasn't for my boyfriend, I wouldn't have made it and would have left. About deciding to come here... I thought for a long time. "The reason" was that my boyfriend worked here – that was the biggest driver. Of course, the salary offered here is also completely different from what I earned working as a nanny or as a cook. After a couple of weeks, I got used to it; now I'm used to it, but I still want to go home. We are doing everything to get home as soon as possible.* (NMV-4560)

As witnessed both by the sentiment of the quote, as well as quantitative data, representatives of this cluster maintain a profound national identity, particularly with Latvia, evidenced by intense feelings of belonging. A vast majority feel closely connected to Latvia (85%) and their specific place of origin within the country (91%) (Figure 3). Conversely, their connection to their current place of residence and neighbors in their host country is notably weaker.

Demographically, this group comprises primarily young individuals, including those aged 15-24 and 35-54, with a notable presence of individuals who have alternated between living in Latvia and abroad for 5-10 years. Educationally, they are predominantly highly educated Latvians, often with family ties and property in Latvia. Socially, they lack strong connections in their host country and often struggle financially, with a majority from less affluent backgrounds.

Occupationally, they consist of students, those studying abroad, self-employed individuals, entrepreneurs, and the unemployed. Financially, they face difficulties in meeting daily expenses. Satisfaction with various aspects of life is generally low, with a significant proportion dissatisfied, particularly with family life. However, there is a relatively high level of trust among this group.

A prime example of this type of emigrant is a respondent who spent more than ten years in various European countries, initially due to her studies, later partly driven by economic circumstances, and partly because of her interest in international society. She lived in countries such as Estonia and Belgium (Brussels). While she fitted in well on one hand, she did not feel a true sense of belonging. She explained,

I felt that something soulful was missing in that society. I couldn't explain many things to them – like at the Song Festival when all chakras are open; it's a different state, not just standing and singing. There's something more. I realized I couldn't convey that feeling from the heart and soul. Everything was so calm, predictable, and orderly. (NMV-4489)

Furthermore, during her time spent abroad, her partner was a local from that country. It was only after returning to Latvia and meeting her current partner that she realized, *I had forgotten how beautiful it can be to meet someone who has had similar experiences. Perhaps the world of impressions is different, in different dimensions and areas, but it complements those core values of how the hay was mowed in the countryside, and that it's similar.* (NMV-4489) This narrative illustrates the typical traits of Cluster 4 emigrants: despite adapting to life in a foreign country, they struggle to feel fully integrated, primarily due to an unbridgeable cultural and emotional gap. At the same time, their deep-rooted connection to Latvia remains strong, influencing their sense of identity and belonging.

3.2. Factors Influencing Changes in Sense of Belonging

In paragraph 3.1. the percentages shown the changes of belonging of Latvian emigrants between the two survey waves. To delve deeper into these dimensions and their characteristics across different groups of emigrants, we examine the specific factors influencing these changes. To assess the factors influencing changes in sense of belonging, three logistic regression models were calculated, considering the following change categories as dependent variables: (1) weakened sense of belonging to Latvia and Latvian identity, (2) strengthened sense of belonging to Latvia and Latvian identity, (3) strengthened sense of belonging to the host country and its inhabitants (see Appendix B).

3.2.1. Emigration Experience: Duration and Reasons

The length of time spent abroad significantly influences an individual's sense of belonging and potential identity transformation. The longer the time outside the country of origin, the greater the likelihood of successful adaptation and integration into the host country, forming a stronger bond with both the host country and local community. However, time spent abroad does not have a straightforward impact on belonging to Latvia and Latvian identity. The wave of emigration is more explanatory. Since 2014, the sense of belonging to Latvia has significantly decreased among those who emigrated during the economic crisis and post-crisis period (2009-2011). This group generally held a negative attitude towards Latvia, likely due to economic conditions and reasons for leaving, often including family separation. Such attitudes are well characterized by one respondent's reflection on her grandparents' views regarding the possibility of the family returning to Latvia: *They are angry; angry at the country [Latvia] and not at us. They told us: You have the right to a better life. You have the right to choose where you will work. I have a sense of security in Sweden that everything will be fine. There will be a job for me, there will be a salary for me, I will buy a ticket for our grandmas so they can come and live here with the children.* (NMV-4561)

The respondent's experience illustrates a broader sentiment among those who left Latvia during this period: a deep-seated frustration with the country's inability to provide economic stability and opportunities, leading to a diminished sense of belonging. For many, the move was not only about seeking better economic prospects but also about finding a place where they could feel secure and plan for a stable future. This sense of security and the opportunity for a better life abroad often outweighed any lingering attachments to Latvia, contributing to the weakening of their national ties.

Other emigration periods show a lesser likelihood of reduced Latvian belonging. Conversely, emigrants from the 1990s and pre-crisis period (2004-2008), when economic conditions and disappointment were not the predominant reasons, are more likely to have an increased sense of belonging to Latvia in the past five years. Belonging to the host country has strengthened the most among those who emigrated between 2004-2008.

3.2.2. Demographic Factors and Education

Gender was statistically significant in only one model, with men showing an increased sense of belonging to Latvia. Education significantly impacts changes in belonging, with a higher level of education associated with stronger ties to both Latvia and the host country. Emigrants with a lower level

of education tend to have weaker integration in the host country and diminished belonging to Latvia. Age also plays a significant role, with younger respondents generally showing a decreased sense of belonging to Latvia, especially those aged 35-54. However, this age group also shows significant variability, with some experiencing increased belonging to Latvia. Younger people tend to adapt and integrate more quickly into the host country.

3.2.3. Ethnicity and Language

Ethnicity and the language spoken at home are significant factors in all models. Compared to other ethnicities (except Russians), Latvians are more likely to experience a reduced sense of belonging to Latvia and increased belonging to the host country. Non-Latvians tend to show increased belonging to Latvia. The language spoken at home is crucial for maintaining national ties, with families speaking Latvian being less likely to feel alienated compared to those speaking Russian. Citizenship of Latvia has no significant impact, except that acquiring host country citizenship reduces the likelihood of changing one's sense of belonging to Latvia.

3.2.4. Family, Social Networks, and Participation

Family structure significantly affects the intensity of belonging. Strong national ties are influenced by family members remaining in Latvia, close friends, and property ownership in Latvia, which increases the likelihood of a strong and even strengthened sense of belonging to Latvia. For example, one respondent highlights the importance of maintaining these connections: *My mom and I call each other almost every day. We communicate with my brother through the Internet, just like everyone else, through the web. We live 10 km outside [the city] and we have a rather poor internet connection. From the outset, we contacted Latvian friends somewhat more frequently. Now there are fewer and fewer of them left. When you go to Latvia, of course, you meet them. Visitors sometimes come over, but many have gone to other countries. I try to go home at least once a year. Sometimes I make it over twice.* (NMV-3702) Further in the interview, she also expresses the dual sense of belonging and identity that characterizes the feelings of many emigrants: *It seems to me that I have two homes. When you are here [in Sweden], and you talk about home, you talk about Latvia. When you go to Latvia, and you talk about home, about Sweden. I have a family here, but at the same time, everyone – my brother, grandmothers – all are there. Anyway, I am rich, and I have two homes.* (NMV-3702)

Having friends from Latvia in the host country also helps maintain a sense of Latvian belonging. However, family presence can have mixed effects, with some feeling increased belonging to Latvia and others to the host country. Living abroad with family or alone does not enhance belonging to the host country, while expanding social contacts and making new friends strengthens ties to the host country. Participation in diaspora organizations helps to maintain a sense of belonging to Latvia and reduces the likelihood of alienation as explained by one respondent: *I can only get that true sense of belonging in the Latvian community, together with other girls playing 'kokle' [Latvian national musical instrument, like a zither or lute] and in a choir. It's not something about the country, and it's not even about the land; it's something about my roots and where I am from. That is a part of my identity.* (NMV-4575)

3.2.5. Other Influences on Changes in Belonging

Material wealth significantly impacts changes in belonging to Latvia, with both wealthier and poorer groups experiencing reduced belonging. Employment is crucial for integration, with work, entrepreneurship, and parental leave predicting better integration into the host country. Higher satisfaction levels correlate with increased belonging to the host country and weakened ties to Latvia. Interestingly, transient migrants, who alternately live in Latvia and abroad, show change in belonging the least, maintaining strong ties to Latvia without strengthening their connection to the host country. Before drawing final conclusions, it is essential to examine the factors closely related to maintaining a sense of belonging to the country of origin and forming new ties in the host country.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis, based on both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys of emigrants, reveals that the sense of belonging varies in intensity and focus, forming distinct clusters that reflect different dimensions of belonging among various emigrant groups. Characterization of each cluster in this article demonstrates key factors that influence the maintenance or weakening of subjective attachment to Latvia and the formation of new identities in the host country.

Overall, the findings highlight the significant relationship between the analyzed factors and the formation and changes in the sense of belonging during emigration. The time factor plays a crucial role in the transformation of feelings of belonging during emigration. This includes both the length of time spent outside the homeland and the emigration wave, which is associated with the reasons for leaving and the emotional context in which the person left Latvia.

Family and social ties significantly influence the differentiation of belonging feelings, whether an individual lives alone or with family and friends abroad. Strong national belonging feelings are maintained and even strengthened over time, influenced by family members remaining in Latvia and extensive social contacts in Latvia. Material components, such as property ownership in Latvia, also strengthen the sense of belonging. Conversely, separation from loved ones, dissatisfaction with family life, work, and life overall are significant risk factors that hinder the formation of belonging feelings towards the new living place (characterized by weak attachment to the host country, neighborhood, and residents).

Ethnicity has a statistically significant impact across all models, but the language spoken in the family (in this case, Latvian) is even more crucial, especially in maintaining and strengthening national belonging feelings.

The transformation of belonging feelings is significantly influenced by the respondent's age. Younger people adapt and integrate into the host country more quickly but also tend to forget their origins faster. As the respondent's age decreases, attachment to the host country and its residents strengthens, while attachment to Latvia weakens.

Subjective factors affecting the diversity of belonging forms include satisfaction with various aspects of life and the level of trust in political institutions. Higher satisfaction levels indicate favorable socio-economic conditions and personal life stability, strengthening the sense of belonging to both the country of origin and the host country. The same applies to trust – higher trust levels (in this case, in the Latvian government) are associated with a stronger sense of belonging to Latvia, while participation in diaspora organizations helps maintain national identity feelings.

Very weak national belonging feelings (cluster 2) indicate a desire to distance from or confront the country of origin and everything happening there. Such feelings are more common among emigrants who left during the economic crisis and post-crisis period, possibly leaving the country with a sense of bitterness. Weak ties to the country of origin may be a free choice or objectively conditioned, as some emigrants lack close friends either in Latvia or among Latvian emigrants, but form friendships with locals. They have no property in Latvia. Emigrants who do not feel belonging to Latvia or whose sense of belonging to Latvia has diminished are more often people with a relatively low level of education and exceptionally low trust in the Latvian government. However, the data indicate that a diminished sense of belonging to the country of origin does not automatically strengthen feelings of belonging and development of a new identity in the host country.

Transnational identities, which combine a strong sense of belonging to both the host country and the country of origin, are based on openness to transnational relations. The survey data indicate that the formation and strengthening of such ambivalent feelings of belonging can be significantly predicted if living with family, a higher level of education, material well-being, and higher level of satisfaction in all areas of life.

Factors hindering the formation of transnational identities include all the economic reasons for emigration (inability to find work, financial difficulties, etc.), closely correlated with the emigration wave, as well as dissatisfaction with political developments in Latvia and a lack of trust in the Latvian

government. Higher satisfaction with life overall and higher levels of trust foster positive feelings of belonging to both the host and origin countries. Conversely, dissatisfaction with any aspect of life—work, family life, socio-economic conditions lead to alienation and lack of a sense of belonging.

The diversity in sense of belonging among emigrants suggests varying degrees of attachment to Latvia, which can influence social and cultural ties. For those who maintain strong ties to Latvia, there is potential for transnational networks that benefit both the country of origin and the host country. These networks can facilitate economic, social, and cultural exchanges, reinforcing a sense of global Latvian identity. However, the weakening of national belonging among some emigrants, particularly those who left due to economic hardship, indicates potential challenges for national unity and identity. It highlights the need for targeted policies to engage the diaspora, fostering connections through cultural programs, economic incentives, and political engagement. Strengthening these ties can enhance social cohesion, ensuring that those who have emigrated continue to contribute to and feel part of Latvian society.

In conclusion, understanding the nuanced feelings of belonging of emigrants is crucial for developing strategies to maintain and strengthen societal cohesion in Latvia. Addressing the factors that influence these feelings can help create a more inclusive and connected global Latvian community.

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APPENDIX A

Dimensions of Sense of Belonging: Distribution of Respondents into Clusters

Clusters	Number of cases	
	Non-weighted data	Weighted data
Cluster 1. Integrated in the host country, closely belong to Latvia	533	468
Cluster 2. Fully integrated in the host country, alienated from Latvia and Latvians	172	218
Cluster 3. Weakly integrated in the host country, moderately belong to Latvia	109	126
Cluster 4. Weakly integrated in the host country, closely belong to Latvia	92	113

Base: Respondents who participated in both waves of the survey in 2014 and 2019 (n=981). Return migrants, i.e., those respondents from the 2014 survey who have since returned and are now living in Latvia were excluded from the analysis.

APPENDIX B

Factors affecting individual changes in feelings of belonging between 2014-2019 (*bivariate logistic regression model*)

	Sense of belonging to Latvians has weakened		Sense of belonging to Latvia and Latvians has increased		Sense of belonging to the host country and its residents has increased	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Gender: male	0,078	1,081	1,635***	5,131	0,137	1,146
Age groups (ref. category 55+)						
15-24	3,875**	48,181	0,427	1,533	3,498**	33,065
25-34	1,813*	6,127	-0,149	0,861	2,585**	13,261
35-54	2,364**	10,633	0,146	1,157	1,564*	4,776
Level of education (ref. high)						
Low	2,856**	17,395	-6,018**	0,002	-2,191**	0,112
Average	-0,248	0,780	-0,229	0,796	-0,529	0,589
Wave of emigration (ref. category after 2011)						
Born abroad	2,032	7,629	-3,627*	0,027	-2,262*	0,104
Before 1991	1,074	2,928	0,207	1,230	-0,927	0,396
1991-1999	-0,917	0,400	-0,387	0,679	-0,908	0,403
2000-2003	-2,259**	0,104	-1,868**	0,154	0,865	2,375
2004-2008	-0,750	0,472	-0,421	0,656	-0,007	0,993
2009-2011	-1,100**	0,333	-0,403	0,669	-0,649	0,522

Ethnicity (ref. other)						
Latvian	2,031**	7,624	-0,853	0,426	-0,266	0,766
Russian	0,069	1,072	-2,358***	0,095	-1,306*	0,271
Language spoken at home (ref. category: Latvian)						
Russian	1,160*	3,188	0,520	1,682	0,604	1,830
Latvian and Russian	-1,542*	0,214	1,168	3,215	1,702**	5,484
Other, incl. host countries	0,593	1,810	1,487**	4,426	-0,654	0,520
Citizenship: Latvia	-0,444	0,642	-1,095	0,335	-0,285	0,752
Citizenship: host country	0,903*	2,468	0,520	1,682	0,181	1,199
Someone from R parents' family lives in Latvia	-1,060*	0,346	0,466*	1,594	0,394	1,484
Someone from R family (partner, child) lives in Latvia	-0,774	0,461	1,097**	2,995	1,806***	6,085
No relatives live in Latvia	0,322	1,380	0,556	1,744	-1,000	0,368
Friends live in Latvia	-0,958	0,384	0,434*	1,544	0,269	1,309
Has no friends in Latvia	-2,347*	0,096	1,178	3,248	1,386	3,999
Friends from Latvia live in host country	-1,074**	0,342	0,327	1,387	-0,551	0,577
Has friends who are locals	-0,473	0,623	-0,221	0,802	-0,311	0,733
Has friends who are immigrants	0,530	1,699	-0,998**	0,369	-0,156	0,856
Has property in Latvia	0,107	1,113	0,933***	2,542	-0,355	0,701
There is someone in host country who can help you if you get sick	-4,028***	0,018	0,341	1,406	3,381***	29,408
There is someone in the host country who can help if you need to borrow money	0,435	1,545	1,675**	5,338	-0,077	0,926
There is someone in your host country to talk to if you are sad	2,846**	17,220	0,655	1,925	0,485	1,625
Lives alternately both in Latvia and abroad	-2,732***	0,065	0,433	1,541	-1,371**	0,254

Occupation: employed	-1,225**	0,294	-1,591***	0,204	0,946*	2,574
Occupation: entrepreneur, self-employed	-0,328	0,721	-0,746	0,474	1,251**	3,494
Occupation: studying	0,725	2,066	-1,023	0,359	0,725	2,065
Occupation: on parental leave	-1,627**	0,197	-0,689	0,502	1,231**	3,426
Occupation: retired	-3,315**	0,036	-2,602**	0,074	1,911	6,761
Occupation: other	-0,221	0,802	0,684	1,981	3,319***	27,629
Is household able to make ends meet (ref. category: very easily)						
With great difficulty	3,278*	26,514	-18,634	0,000	-0,269	0,764
With difficulty	-1,258	0,284	-20,466	0,000	-1,744	0,175
With some difficulty	-1,660**	0,190	-0,695	0,499	-1,133*	0,322
Easily	0,031	1,032	-1,136*	0,321	-0,225	0,799
Very easily	0,928**	2,530	0,363*	1,437	-0,913**	0,401
Satisfaction with life	0,865*	2,375	-0,182	0,833	-0,262	0,769
Household: Lives with own family	0,664	1,942	-1,492	0,225	-3,587***	0,028
Household: Lives with parents' family	1,452*	4,273	-0,522	0,594	-0,541	0,582
Household: Lives with own family	-0,476	0,621	-2,185**	0,113	-1,462*	0,232
Household: Lives with other people	0,306	1,358	-2,079**	0,125	-2,523**	0,080
Participation in diaspora organizations	-2,290***	0,101			-1,332***	0,264
Constant	-0,033	0,968	0,895	2,446	-0,938	0,391

*** $p < 0,001$, ** $p < 0,01$, * $p < 0,05$