

IN 2013 BELARUSIAN POPULATION GREW ONLY ON PAPER

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According to the [official data](#), in 2013 the Belarusian population grew by 4,2 thousand people. Alternative assessments, however, beg to differ. The latter show that in 2013 the population actually declined by more than 10 thousand people. Natural decrease accounted for more than 7 thousand, while negative net migration was likely as high as 5-7 thousand. The optimistic report by the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus comes as a result of a poor migration accounting applied in Belarus.

The National Statistical Committee believes in unattainable targets

The key figures of official statistics are as follows: in 2013 in Belarus 118,463 persons were born while 125,872 deaths were registered, **yielding a net natural loss of 7,409 people**. Regarding the international migration, official data shows that in 2013 the number of long-term immigrants (individuals arriving to Belarus for a period equal to or longer than 12 months) was as high as 19,435 persons, while the number of emigrants was only 7,792. Therefore official statistics gives net migration for 2012 at 11,643 persons, which exceed the size of the natural population decline by 4,234.. By this number the Belarusian population allegedly grew in 2012, for the first time since natural population decline started back to 1994.

National data on natality and mortality is collected by the registry offices and is largely considered reliable. However, accounting of the international migration has a notable shortfall which is worth mentioning. According to the Belarusian legislation, Belarusians who intend to move to a foreign country for a period longer than 12 months have to fill in a departure card provided by the Citizenship and Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Subsequently upon their arrival to a foreign country, migrants have to register at a Belarusian consulate. Since not all emigrants follow this procedure, many are not accounted by the Ministry of Interior.

The National Statistical Committee receives data from the Ministry of Interior regional office in order to process it. Despite the emigrants are undercounted, the final statistical reports are not accompanied by corresponding remarks. The National Demographic Security Program for 2011-2015 sets a target of a positive net migration of 60,000, and official reports praise its achievements, despite the net migration for Belarus is in fact negative.

Our previous paper, based on the analyses of population censuses and main receiving countries statistics, show that over the two decades of independence the net migration for Belarus has actually been negative. In other words, the number of emigrants from Belarus is larger than the number of immigrants moving to Belarus, which contradict the official statistics. Here this point is proven using 2012 year statistics as an example.

Net positive migration of 9 thousand? Or rather net negative migration of 6 thousand?

Either Belarusian or foreign statistical agencies have not yet published detailed migration data with disaggregation by countries for 2013. Therefore, we analyse the available 2012 data. Since migration trends persist, conclusions for the year of 2012 are relevant for 2013. According to the official data, in 2012 net migration stood at 9,328. Further we compare the official Belarusian statistics on the size of emigration flows from Belarus with the statistics of the major receiving countries, namely Russia, Ukraine, the USA, Canada, and the EU countries. Statistics provided by the receiving countries is considered to be more reliable since immigrants are easier accounted in their new place of residence.

Belarusian statistics shows that in 2012 5,493 persons left Belarus for **Russia**. However, according to the Russian statistics agency data, in 2012 16,564 long-term migrants from Belarus were registered. Therefore Belarusian authorities failed to account 11,071 Belarusians who left for Russia. Ukraine's statistics service gives the figure of 1,814 long-term migrants from Belarus, while only 703 emigrants to Ukraine were recorded in the Belarusian statistics in 2012. The difference therefore stood at 1,100 persons.

According to the official Belarusian data, in 2012 only 165 Belarusians moved to **the USA**. This is an apparent underestimation, since 1,104 Belarus nationals were awarded Green Cards in 2012. Furthermore, an unknown number of the Belarusian students who went to the USA as the Work & Travel program participants stayed overseas without informing the competent Belarusian authorities. Each year, about 1,000 Belarusians moving to the USA permanently are not included in the official Belarusian statistics. This assessment is supported by the 2009-2011 American Community Survey figures which show that the number of Belarusians who moved to the USA over the past decade is 10,000 larger than the number of Belarusian emigrants to the USA given by the Belarusian statistics.

Canada brings yet another example of unaccounted Belarusian emigrants moving overseas. Canada's censuses show that about 500 Belarusians move to Canada permanently per year. However, Belarusian statistics record only around 50 long-term migrants leaving for Canada annually. For instance, the Belarusian figure for 2012 was as low as 72 persons. Finally, the number of long-term migrants from Belarus to the European Union is well reflected in the Eurostat data on the number of the first residence permits valid for 12 months or longer issued to the nationals of Belarus.

The largest numbers of the unaccounted Belarusian emigrants by the Belarusian statistics are in the cases of the United Kingdom (the difference stands at 415 people), the Czech Republic (394), Italy (350), Poland (337), France (234), Sweden (257), Lithuania (240). The Eurostat numbers on long-term first residence permits exceed the official numbers by about 2,200.

Numbers of unaccounted Belarusian emigrants in the main receiving countries in 2012 are given in the table below.

Country	Unaccounted emigrants in 2012
Russia	11 thsd.
Ukraine	1.1 thsd.
USA	min. 1 thsd.
Canada	approx. 500
EU countries	min. 2.2 thsd.
Total	approx. 15.8 thsd.

On the one hand, for Russia the number of the unaccounted long-term migrants is somewhat overestimated. The thing is the new Russian rules count the persons registered for at least nine months, not one year as before, as long-term migrants. On the other hand, it is likely that the actual number of the unaccounted migrants in Poland exceeds the official Belarusian statistics, since an unknown number of the holders of the Polish long-term national visas permanently live in the country without being properly accounted in the statistics of both Belarus and Poland.

Taking into account these consideration and the official data of the major receiving countries, it follows that 2012 did not see a migration increase by 9,300, as alleged by the Belarusian statistics committees. Instead, **the estimated net migration was negative and stood at about 6,500 persons**. This figure is close to [the findings of the earlier study](#) which show that net migration for Belarus is in fact negative, based on the analysis of population censuses, natality and mortality figures. The study shows that in 1999/2010 net migration was on average **minus 7,000 persons** per year. Therefore, our conclusions corroborate the results of the study which employed the other sound method of verification of official migration statistics.

The estimates related to 2012 can be applied to the year of 2013 due to the persisting migration trends. This effectively demonstrates that the targets set in the National Demographic Security Program for 2011/15 are not met, and the alleged positive net migration is a result of distortion of migration statistics.

Devising effective policies instead of issuing rosy reports

From year to year the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus publishes demographic reports which claim that positive net migration partially compensates natural population decline in Belarus. These reports and corresponding discourse of state organs secure a somewhat soothing effect, making the public believe that migration processes ease the negative effects of population decline, while in reality they do not.

Instead of compiling rosy reports on allegedly achieved demographic targets thanks to inaccurate migration accounting, it is time to acknowledge the gravity of the actual demographic and migration trends in Belarus. Instead of feeding an official discourse about net positive migration that Belarus allegedly enjoys, it seems reasonable to involve state officials, academia and independent experts in a frank broad discussion about more effective public policies in the realms of migration and demographics.