

HOW MANY BELARUSIANS INTEND TO MOVE ABROAD PERMANENTLY

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What explains significant discrepancies in the data of different polls on emigration intentions of Belarusians.

Which figure is true: 40%, 15% or 6%?

Three absolutely different versions of emigration intentions among Belarusians circulate in the Belarusian research papers and mass media. *First*, regular polls carried out by the Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) assess the number of Belarusians who intend to move abroad for permanent residence at **33-45%**. According to the [September 2013 poll of the IISEPS](#), allegedly 39.8% of Belarusians are eager to leave Belarus permanently to live abroad. *Second*, a number of polls conducted between 2006 and 2012 by the Centre of Sociological and Political Research of the Belarusian State University, the [Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies \(BISS\) in partnership with SATIO](#), as well as by the [Mahiloŭ Institute of Regional Socio-Political Studies](#) measured the share of prevalence of emigration intentions among Belarusians at **12-15%**. *Third*, some studies of migration intentions of Belarusians (e.g., research held under the auspices of the Sociology Institute of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus) produce an even smaller figure of emigration intentions, i.e. **about 6%**.

Which data are real in the end? And how these huge discrepancies can be accounted for?

It shall be stressed that this article deals with the migration intentions to move permanently abroad only. Temporary labour or study migration is not reviewed here.

Types of emigration intentions: passive and active

Migration intentions could be defined as a disposition of a certain person to move to another area in order to satisfy his or her life's interests, which cannot be, in this persons' opinion, realized at the current place of residence. The rate of emigration intentions usually predetermines the size of the actual emigration flows.

Some may have concrete and definite plans to migrate, while others may only express the possibility of migration without undertaking any certain steps for this matter. Therefore migration studies usually distinguish between two types of emigration intentions, conventionally named here *passive* (i.e. only declarative intention to emigrate is expressed) and *active* (i.e. emigration intention is backed by specific actions, such as learning a foreign language, consulting on emigration issues, or hunting for a job on a foreign labour market). It is the active form of emigration intentions which is a better indicator to predict the actual size of emigration of the population. Viačaslaŭ Źakievič, the author of the 2009 PhD thesis on migration intentions of the Belarusian population,

applied similar differentiation between the two types of migration intentions in the methodology of his research.¹

In the Žakievič's study, migration intentions of the Belarus' population were established in the case of the affirmative answer to the question: "*Have you recently thought of moving abroad: 1) to work temporarily, 2) to study, 3) for permanent residence?*". The researcher concluded that in 2006 **13.5%** of the Belarusian population intended to leave Belarus for permanent residence abroad. At the same time, about half of these respondents undertook any certain actions for this matter (i.e. they had an active form of migration intentions).

Depending on the wording and clarifying questions, a survey can measure either the overall prevalence of migration intentions (both passive and active forms), or its active/passive form only. It explains the difference in results of a number of polls, which calculated emigration intentions at **12-15% and 6%**. The former indicates the overall emigration intentions to move abroad permanently; the latter is the share of the population undertaking certain actions for this matter. It is worth stressing that these figures show the rates of the active and passive forms of emigration intentions **of the Belarusian population in whole**. The rates vary depending on a category of the population, i.e. age, place of residence (countryside/towns/cities), educational attainment, etc.

Emigration intentions among Belarusians are close to the Ukrainian rate. According to the [2011 research project](#), emigration intentions of Ukrainians was estimated at 17%, while their active form ("I have clear plans concerning emigration") was measured to be as high as 5.4%.

At the same time, the issue of the much higher figure of the IISEPS polls (up to 40%) needs to be explained.

Highly hypothetical evaluation: why not 40%

A regular question in the IISEPS polls is as follows: "*Would you like moving to a different country for permanent residence if you had such an opportunity?*" The subjunctive mood of the question predetermines hypothetical answers of the respondents. As a result, this questions measures not the migration intentions of the Belarusians *per se* but, as the IISEPS experts themselves justly noticed in the interpretation of the results of their [recent poll](#), it is "*mostly the respondents' evaluation of their situation in Belarus*". Therefore the IISEPS figure cannot be regarded as a number of Belarusians with intention to move permanently and should be interpreted with caution.

Consensus over the issue, who wishes to emigrate most

There is a consensus among researchers as for the categories of the population expressing their intention to leave Belarus more often than others: the rate of emigration intentions among the younger people residing in cities is higher, compared to the other population categories.

Besides, as the BISS research demonstrates, adherents of the pro-European geopolitical course express their wish to move to another country for permanent residence **three**

¹ Zhakevich V. 2009. Migration intentions of the population of the Republic of Belarus: sociological analysis, PhD thesis, Minsk [in Russian].

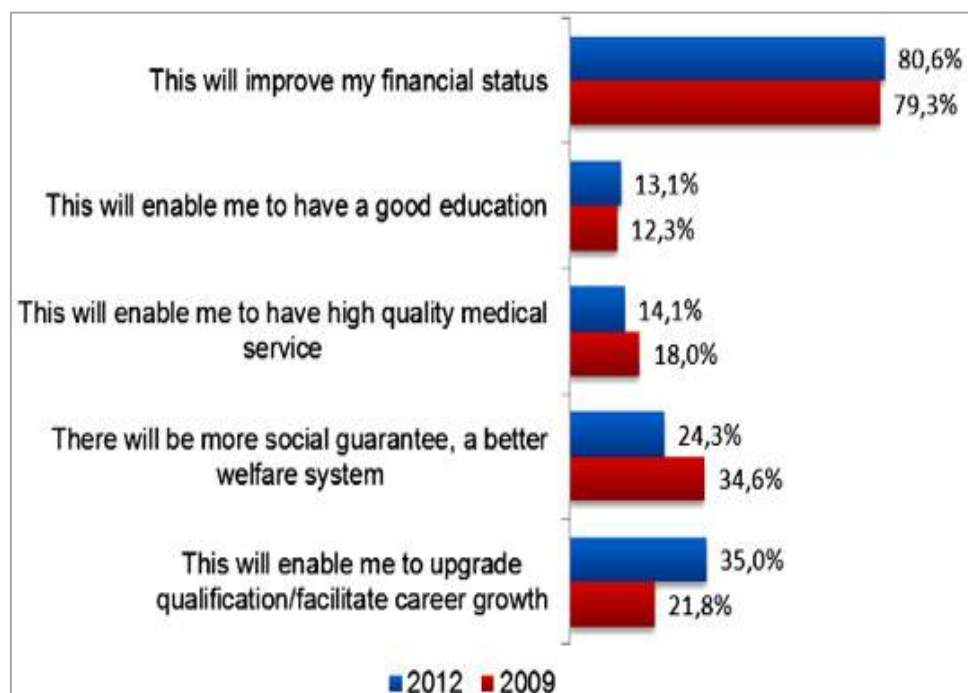
times more often than those who do not wish to leave Belarus with whatever objective.²

It is notable that among the Belarusians who intend to move to another country there is a large share of people with education in economics and with a high social status (i.e., businessmen at top managerial positions, government employees). **Arguably, this indicates that the advanced parts of the Belarusian society have a low degree of confidence in the future economic situation in the country.** High prevalence of emigration intentions among the citizens with a high level of education and rich practical experience is critically dangerous for the future of Belarus, as people of these categories of population have a highly valuable human capital useful for the future country's modernisation.

Why Belarusians intend to emigrate, and what restrains them

According to the BISS research, the main motivations to leave Belarus a for permanent residence abroad is to improve financial situation (80.6%), to get an advanced training and career development (35%), and to better social guarantees (24.3%).³

Main motivations for leaving Belarus permanently, 2009 and 2012. Question: 'If you would like to leave the country, what would be your reasons?'



About a half of the potential migrants, who are prompted to emigrate in order to improve their financial situation, are ready to change their mind and stay Belarus if their average monthly income was around 10 million roubles (slightly more than USD 1,000 as of late 2013). The other half of the respondents would not stay in the home country even if they had a salary of around 1,000 US dollars.

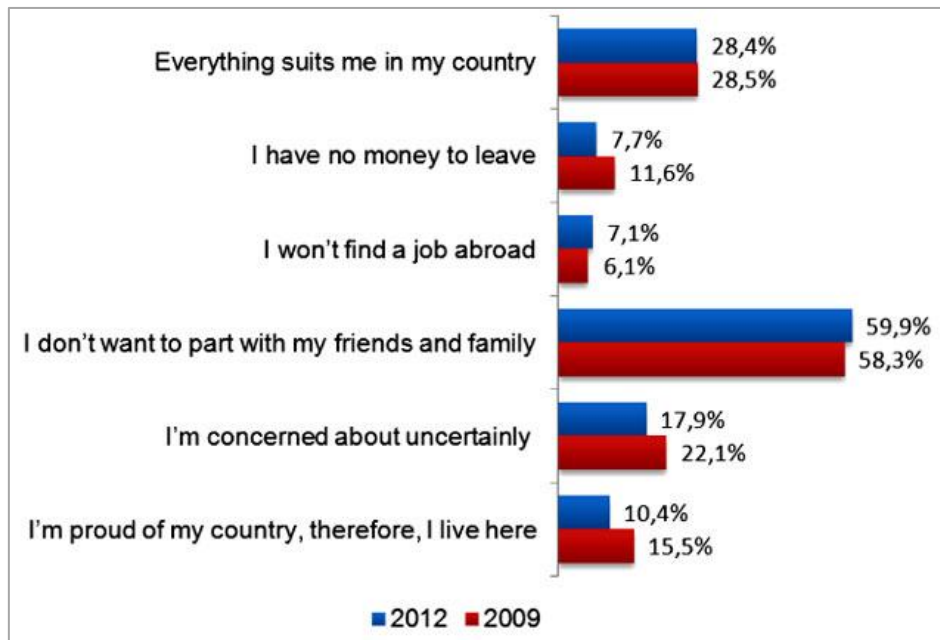
The main reasons for holding Belarusians in the country of origin are unwillingness to part with friends and family (59.9%) and uncertainty arising from emigration (17.9%).

² See: Alena Artsiomenka, Andrei Yeliseyev, Alexei Pikulik, 'Human capital: 'To leave impossible to stay', *BISS Research Paper*, 06/2013EN, 14 March 2013. Available at

http://belinstitute.eu/sites/biss.newmediahost.info/files/attached-files/BISS_SA06_2013en_0.pdf

³ Ibid.

Main reasons behind unwillingness to leave Belarus, 2009 and 2012. Question: "If you are unwilling to emigrate, what are your reasons?"



Interestingly, the share of the Belarusians referring to the pride in their country when accounting for their unwillingness to emigration abroad fell quite significantly – to 10.4% in 2012 from 15.5% in 2009.