Czeranowska *et al.*
Comparative Migration Studies (2023) 11:28
https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-023-00350-3

Comparative Migration Studies

ORIGINAL ARTICLE Open Access

Between settlement, double return and re-emigration: motivations for future mobility of Polish and Lithuanian return migrants

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Abstract

Although research on return migration is growing, little is known about returnees' plans and attitudes regarding further migration. This article contributes to the filling of this knowledge gap by studying the likelihood of engaging in further mobility among Polish and Lithuanian returnees. Using a mixed method approach we explore under which circumstances return migrants intent to stay in their country of origin permanently and what factors would make them consider leaving again. Our quantitative sample (CAWI survey) consists of 740 responses from Poles and Lithuanians who returned to their home countries from the UK. We conducted a binary logistic regression analysis concerning plans to move abroad again. In the qualitative part of the analysis, based on in-depth interviews with 60 Polish or Lithuanian returnees, we have contextualised quantitative results by presenting four case studies representing different likelihoods of re-migrating. Our research shows that both return and post-return plans are always negotiated in the context of a variety of personal, family and professional considerations. Having a job, having children and strong attachment to the current place of living turned out to be the strongest negative predictors of the likelihood of further migration.

Keywords: Return migration, Double return, Multiple migration, Reintegration

Introduction

Return migration can be conceptualised as "the process of people returning to their country or place of origin after a significant period of time in another country or region" (King, 2000: 8). According to the latest census (2011) in Poland, more than 730 thousand Poles have returned to Poland after living abroad for a minimum of 1 year (Statistics Poland, 2013, p. 71, cited in Author B, 2019). Official statistics in Lithuania indicate that between 1990 and 2011, around 67,000 Lithuanians returned to Lithuania, although representative surveys of residents in Lithuania in 2008 and 2011 found that the number of returnees was more likely between 200,000 and 300,000 (Barcevičius & Žvalionytė, 2012). Although migration statistics in both of these countries are highly problematic,

these are significant numbers in the context of the overall population size.[1] For some migrants, returning may not be the end of their migration journey, despite the fact that migration research often treats return to the country of origin as the final event in the migration cycle (White, 2014; Anghel et al., 2019). Although research on return migration is growing, its main focus is on returnees' performance of the labour market, their impact on the development of sending communities and the role of state policies in the experience of return (Hagan & Wassink, 2020). Little is known about plans and intentions of returnees regarding their further international mobility. This article contributes to the filling of this knowledge gap by studying under which circumstances return migrants intent to stay in their country of origin permanently (or for longer periods of time) and what factors would make them consider leaving again.

The article draws on a large data set from three projects. Our general aim is to both quantitatively and qualitatively analyse factors contributing to the plans for further migration of the returnees, be it "double return" (White, 2014) or multiple migration (Salamońska & Czeranowska, 2021). We first answer the quantitative research question: "What are the predictors of further migration plans of the returnees?", and then based on case studies we address the qualitative question: "How do these predictors play out in returnees' biographies?". We believe that our article fills an important research gap, as there are almost no studies exploring the issue of factors facilitating or hindering further migration plans of returnees in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.

Based on the literature review presented below, the variables we selected for the regression analysis relate to migrants' motivations for return, their position on the labour market, their housing and family situation as well as their attachment to both their previous and current place of residence. In the thematic analysis of migrants' narratives, we focused on the same factors in order to illustrate their nuanced and sometimes contradictory roles in migrants' trajectories. Having seen that Polish and Lithuanian respondents were rather similar in their responses to the survey (see Appendix) we have decided not to focus on the comparison between the countries, but rather on identifying factors explaining further migration plans for both of these groups. We assume that the role that these factors play in post-return motivations for further mobility will be similar in case of both Polish and Lithuanian migrants, which would be in line with some previous research on CEE migrants (e.g. Markova & Black, 2007; Spencer et al., 2007; Zorko & Debnár, 2021).[2]

The article therefore begins with a discussion of existing studies concerning return migration, challenges with reintegration and subsequent moves. Next, we present our methods and data, followed by the results of the regression analysis and four case studies representing different declared likelihoods of post-return mobility. The article concludes with a summary and discussion of the results, analyzing factors impacting the likelihood of Polish and Lithuanian returnees to engage in double return or multiple migration.

[1] https://www.krs.lt/savivaldybe/naujienos/lietuvos-statistika-gyventoju-surasymas/.

[2] For studies stressing differences between CEE migrant experiences, including ethnic differences cf. Anghel and Foszto (2022), Garapich et al. (2018).

Theoretical framework: factors in return and post-return migration

Before we engage in detailed analysis of the factors that encourage returns and further migration of returnees, it is worth taking a moment to acknowledge the terminological challenges in describing these phenomena. Therefore, let us briefly discuss "return migration", "repeat migration", "multiple migration" and "circular migration", as well as "double return", as each of these terms implies a different interplay between multiple factors involved in the decision to re-depart.

"Circular migration" refers to recurrent back-and-forth movements by the same migrant between two or more countries, such as seasonal migration. "Multiple migration" involves people moving at least twice, each time to different host countries (Salamońska, 2017), and may involve a return to the country of origin followed by emigration to a new host country (Salamońska & Czeranowska, 2021). "Repeat migration" helps migrants maximise the opportunities (Constant & Zimmermann, 2013), often relying on the knowledge gained and social networks established during the first migration, i.e. resources that help migrants to minimise the costs of subsequent moves (Massey & Espinosa, 1997).

Finally, the concept of "double returns" was introduced by White (2013) to describe the phenomenon of Polish return migrants who, after returning from the UK, quickly become disillusioned and move back abroad. The term underlines the fact that for those migrants, returning to the UK (after an attempt to settle back in Poland) is also a return "home".

Motivations for return migration

In order to better understand what drives return migrants to re-depart their country of origin, it is necessary to revisit the topic of motivations for return migration in the first place. Our article intends to contribute further evidence on migrants' return motivations as explained by actual returnees, while at the same time attempting to reveal a link between motivations for return and motivations for re-return or further migration. We argue that in some cases motivations for return act as primary drivers for returnees to settle down and inhibitors preventing them from re-migrating.

The early analyses of return migration were driven by neoclassical approaches and focused primarily on economic factors, correspondingly perceiving return as a failure to realise the expected ratio of income abroad. Alternative economic arguments include, for example, higher returns in the country of origin from the human capital that migrants have acquired abroad and higher purchasing power after return (Dustmann & Weiss, 2007; Anacka & Wójcicka, 2018).

Various studies in subsequent years demonstrated, however, that the decision to return is more complicated. New Economics of Labour Migration (Stark, 1991), for example, highlights the fact that migrants' decision-making process takes into account their families' wellbeing and that in many cases migration is a strategy to diversify their households' income. Return may thus result from the achievement of previously assumed goals (Cassarino, 2004).

Acknowledging the importance of economic aspects, we lean towards structural approaches, taking into account spatial, temporal and social factors. In line with this approach, previous studies on Central and East European return migration suggest that it is not economic motivations, but family reasons (e.g. care obligations towards

elderly parents), the desire to live and raise children in a familiar cultural environment, and a general nostalgia for "home", that are the primary drivers of return to the region (Budginaitė & Mašidlauskaitė, 2015; Gherghina & Plopeanu, 2020; Pollard et al, 2008; Slany et al., 2018; Szymańska et al., 2012). Adding to that, in his framework of Resource Mobilisation and the Returnees's Preparedness Cassarino (2004) argues that return motivations have two components—the level of migrants' willingness to return and their preparedness in terms of having accumulated enough resources for the return and being able to use these successfully after return.

Some more recent studies have analysed the link between migrants' return intentions and their transnational practices. Carling and Pettersen's (2014) analysis of return migration intentions concludes that migrants who are strongly transnational and weakly integrated are most likely to have return plans. Conversely, strongly integrated migrants and those not keeping strong transnational ties are least likely to have return intentions (which may or may not lead to the actual return). Among transnational practices, return visits to the country of origin are especially important as they provide migrants with an opportunity to re-assess their belonging, prepare them for return, and help smooth the transition from living abroad to living in the country of origin (Carling & Erdal, 2014:3). However, in a similar line of argument, our study suggests that maintaining transnational connections after return can also be a factor that motivates returnees to re-migrate. Short return visits "home" are different from the intended long-term or "permanent" settling in one's country of origin after return, which can potentially lead to failed expectations and challenges related to reintegration. Those challenges can prove unexpected and perhaps too emotionally costly to overcome, which might motivate some people to return to their previous country of residence. Therefore, we will now turn our attention to reviewing the literature on the factors that influence the reintegration of returnees.

Reintegration of returnees

Reintegration is conceptualised as "the process through which a return migrant participates in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the country of origin" (Cassarino, 2008: 127, cited in Mackova & Karmacek, 2019: 2). The difficulties experienced by returnees have to do with expectations that they are coming "home", i.e. to a place they know; believing that their home has not changed much during their time abroad, they assume that their adjustment will be effortless. These assumptions may be particularly strong among those migrants who missed their country when abroad and were led to idealise it through nostalgia. Moreover, as indicated by studies such as Dzięglewski (2020: 146), people are not always well prepared for return and sometimes fail to take potential hurdles in consideration ahead of time. This is problematic, because "readiness" is a crucial factor in successful reintegration (Cassarino, 2004).

Among the difficulties mentioned by Polish and Lithuanian returnees, economic and work-related issues stand out in particular. Iglicka, who analysed returns to Poland during the global financial crisis, argues that difficulties in finding a job (especially a satisfactory job) traps many people in a "migration loop" that leads them to migrate again, either to the previous country of migration or a different country in Western Europe (Iglicka, 2010). Fihel and Anacka (2013) show that return migrants are less likely to find a job in Poland than their non-mobile counterparts. These problems may be partly explained by

the fact that many returnees have lower credentials in the eyes of employers due to the fact that they worked below their qualifications while abroad (Iglicka, 2010, Barcevicius, 2016; Zvalionyte, 2014) and by the limited transferability of human capital (Garapich, 2016; Grabowska & Garapich, 2016). Karolak (2020) describes complex structural conditions leading to "failed transitions" to the labour market in Poland upon return.

The problems that returnees experience upon return are not limited to difficulties in finding a job. The interviewees in Dzięglewski's study who had found employment mentioned numerous social and cultural issues, such as very formal relations between employers and employees, pressure to work overtime, low salaries and lack of stability and security (Dzięglewski, 2020). One of the recent studies of returnees to Poland and Lithuania demonstrates that feeling different from others and difficulties in (re)building one's social networks are among the most important factors hindering the attachment to the place of return (Trąbka et al., 2022). These reintegration challenges may lead migrants to consider leaving once more.

Although various studies show that returnees have the potential to leave again, the actual factors that cause this and the circumstances surrounding subsequent moves are still largely understudied. Using insights from quantitative and qualitative data, our study aims to contribute to this debate by analysing returnees' motivations for post-return mobility. Such understanding is needed because returnees bring with them economic and social capital that can contribute to social change in countries of origin, but is lost if they migrate again, especially if their second emigration is permanent.

Methods and data

This article is based on a comprehensive data set from three research projects (Study 1—S1; Study 2—S2; and Study 3—S3). In order to identify the predictors of further migration of the returnees, we use survey data collected as part of the S1. In order to explore how these predictors work in the context of returnees' biographies, we have analysed qualitative data from three projects, all of which were focused on returnees to Poland, Lithuania or both. By combining the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches, we are able to analyse those factors in the holistic way.

Quantitative measures and analysis

The quantitative sample is derived from the CAWI survey conducted as part of the (project "DAINA CEEYouth: The comparative study of young migrants from Poland and Lithuania in the context of Brexit"). This survey took place between May and August 2020. A total of 740 return migrants from the UK completed the questionnaire (525 Poles and 215 Lithuanians). Respondents were recruited through Facebook advertisements and posts in migrant and return migrant groups. Invitations to take part in the survey were also sent to migrant organisations. The survey was prepared in two language versions: Polish and Lithuanian.

The CAWI survey enabled us to recruit a sample of considerable size. However, given the lack of a sampling frame for return migrants in Poland or Lithuania, this sample cannot be treated as representative.

In order to analyse the relationship between intentions of re-migration and various individual characteristics, we employed a logistic regression model.[3] Our dependent variable was measured using the question A*re you planning to move abroad once more for longer than 12 months?*, recoded into binary categories (*Definitely no/More likely no than yes* = 0; M*ore likely yes than no*/*Definitely yes* = 1) with *Don't know* answer not included in the model.

For our independent variables, we included the variable *I missed CoO* [Country of Origin] as the reason for return, as well as two variables connected with comparisons between the labour market in the country of origin and the UK (*Better in the UK than in CoO* = 1; *About the same in the UK and in CoO/ Better in CoO than in the UK*/*Don't know* = 0).

We measured respondents' attachment to the place where they lived in the UK (*How attached did you feel to your city/town of residence in the UK before leaving?*) and to the place where they lived at the time of the interview (*How attached do you feel to your current city/town of residence in CoO?*) on the 1–10 scale where 1 means *Not attached at all* and 10 means *Very attached*. In addition, satisfaction with the present housing situation (*How satisfied are you with your living arrangement*) was measured on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 means *Not satisfied at all* and 10 means *Very satisfied*.

The model also included time spent abroad (in years), whether respondents had children, their labour market status (*Employees*/*Self-employed/Unemployed*/*Other*), age in years and gender (*M*/*F*). The information on respondents' property was recoded from the question on their housing situation (*I rent a room in an apartment/house* / I *rent an apartment/house* / *I stay at my relatives' apartment/house and I do not pay rent* = 0; *I own an apartment/house (with mortgage)*/ *I own an apartment/house (without mortgage)* = 1).

Qualitative data

In seeking to find richer data and answer our second research question (How the predictors of further migration identified in the survey play out in the returnees' biographies?), we use qualitative data. As already mentioned, the qualitative findings come from three projects, combining different forms of in-depth interviews: semi-structured (S2 and S3), synchronous and asynchronous, and longitudinal (S1). All the interviews covered issues around motivations for return, experiences of returnees and their future plans, which made them comparable and allowed us to build a more comprehensive dataset. Cases presented here were chosen as the richest examples that would best illustrate the nuances of the role that further migration predictors can play in the context of individual biographies. S1 comprised a larger sample of 77 migrants, 13 of whom were returnees; these returnees are included in our analysis. We also use data collected from 16 semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with return migrants to Lithuania conducted as part of the (S2) (blinded for review). The research participants from Lithuania are returnees from various countries including the United States of America (USA) and different European countries. Finally, the dataset is complemented by 31 in-depth interviews with Poles

[3] Independent variables were checked for collinearity using VIF. All the values are below 2.

who have lived in the UK and returned to one of the major Polish cities (Kraków, Warszawa, Wrocław) after the Brexit referendum (June 2016). These interviews were held under the auspices of the project S3 (blinded for review). In all the three projects interviews were conducted in participants' native languages, namely Polish and Lithuanian, audio-recorded and transcribed (Table 1).

In all three studies, the aim was to ensure a reasonable heterogeneity of the sample in terms of socio-economic characteristics such as gender, age, and profession. However, the primary focus was on migrants in their twenties and thirties, who, according to statistical data, constitute the largest category of returnees to Poland as well as Lithuania. The sample is also highly feminised, which in turn seems to be a common issue with online surveys generally, regardless of the topic (Smith, 2008). The sample is biased towards persons with tertiary education, which is a common trait in Polish and Lithuanian migration studies (e.g. Górny & Salamońska, 2022; Lietuvos Respublikos Užsienio Reikalų Ministerija, 2022). The interview materials were analysed using a thematic approach, focusing on the issues that turned out to be significant in the regression analysis: migrants' plans to return, their experiences upon return in various life domains (family situation, housing situation and employment), and their future plans. We also looked at their attitudes towards their former countries of residence and their transnational practices. The analysis was performed manually, using thematic grids based on the above mentioned themes. As a result, we discovered that our interviewees' responses represented a spectrum of likelihood of subsequent migration, ranging from very unlikely to very likely (see Fig. 1). We subsequently selected four interviewees to act as case studies who represented different points on this spectrum. The case studies were used to illustrate the findings from our quantitative analysis, through the discussion of how different factors and life trajectories can lead to different attitudes towards post-return mobility. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2002: 3), "case study (…) involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world. In this perspective, it means interpreting and trying to uncover the sense of phenomena that people attach to it". The four case studies (two for Polish and two for Lithuanian returnees) represent two groups: those who intend to stay permanently and those who are more likely to "double return" or become multiple migrants. In contrast to the more traditional methods of qualitative data analysis which focus on analysing all interviews thematically with the aim of developing a typology, the case study approach allows us to take into account biographical details of interviewees in a broader context of individual migration trajectories, shedding light on the complexity and ambivalences of returnees' experiences which cannot be highlighted by quantitative data findings alone.

Results: what makes return migrants re-migrate?

Descriptive statistics

Generally speaking, the two populations were very similar in terms of demographic characteristics, migratory experiences and life after return to their home countries (see the tables in the Appendix for the comparison between subsamples). The small differences stemmed from the fact that the Lithuanian subpopulation was slightly younger. They were therefore less likely to already have children or own property (Author A 2021). Still, despite a few differences, we

Table 1 Interviewees' demographics

	Sample and method	Gender	Age	Countries of migration	Country of origin (and return)
Study 1 - "DAINA CEEYouth: The comparative study of young migrants from Poland and Lithuania in the context of Brexit"	13 longitudinal IDIs (repeated between 2019 and 2021)	F-5 M-8	Mean = 32	UK	Lithuania (5) and Poland (8)
Study 2 - "Social remittances of (re)migrants for the welfare of society: challenges and experiences in comparative perspective"	16 IDIs	F-9 M-7	Mean = 39	USA, UK, Switzerland, Sweden, Poland, Estonia, Denmark, Germany, Monaco, Spain	Lithuania
Study 3 - "Return migrations to a big Polish cities in light of the Brexit and pandemic"	31 IDIs	F-18 M-13	Mean = 36	UK	Poland

Source: authors' own elaboration

found the two subpopulations to be very similar, which may have to do with parallels in the factors influencing both of these CEE countries. For this reason, in the next section we analyse data from Polish and Lithuanian survey participants together and focus on the comparison between migrants who are willing to migrate again and those who are not. Table 2 below shows the differences between those two groups.

Predictors of further migration

The results of the regression analysis showed that emotional reasons seem to be the most important predictors for returnees' plans (see Table 3 below). Migrants who returned because they missed their home country were less likely to plan to re-migrate than those who did not give this reason for return. The latter group (i.e. those who listed other reasons for returning) were 1.89 times more likely to plan to engage in further migration. Also, the level of attachment to the current place of residence was negatively correlated with the probability of further migratory plans. The intention to migrate again increased by 1.23 times for every unit reduction in attachment. Moreover, the level of attachment to the place where a person had lived in the UK was positively correlated (albeit on a lower level of significance) with the desire to re-migrate, with planning to leave increasing by 1.07 for every unit increase in attachment.

Employed individuals were twice less likely to plan to move to another country than those who were not employed (unemployed and inactive). Having children was also negatively correlated with the desire to re-migrate—people with children were less likely to want to re-migrate than those who did not have children, the odds for those without children being 2.14 times higher. For both variables concerning the labour market preference (ability to afford one's desired lifestyle and respect for employees), returnees who asserted that the financial aspect of the labour market was better in the UK were 1.74 times more likely to plan to re-migrate than those who did not agree with this statement. However, the variable on respect for the employees was not significant.

Similarly, property ownership did not emerge as a significant predictor of re-migration plans. Interestingly, Lithuanians were 1.79 times more likely to plan to re-migrate

Table 2 Descriptive statistics

	Not planning to leave (45.7%)[a]	Planning to leave (34.5%)	Total
Reason for return: missed CoO	52.7	29.0	42.5
Satisfaction with housing situation (mean, SD in parentheses)	7.5 (2.61)	6.1 (3.13)	6.9 (2.91)
Attachment to the former place of residence in the UK, 1–10 scale (mean, SD in parentheses)	6.1 (2.81)	7.0 (2.55)	6.6 (2.75)
Attachment to the place of residence in CoO, 1–10 scale (mean, SD in parentheses)	8.0 (2.40)	5.9 (2.91)	7.0 (2.77)
Comparison of labour markets: Better ability to afford preferred lifestyle in UK	56.5	75.3	64.6
Comparison of labour markets: Respect towards employees better in UK	47.9	71.0	57.8
Years abroad (mean, SD in parentheses)	8.0 (6.61)	7.0 (4.69)	7.6 (5.60)
Has children	63.3	43.1	54.6
Property	58.9	41.6	51.4
Labour market status			
Employed	60.1	47.8	54.8
Self-employed	6.5	11.0	8.4
Unemployed	12.7	22.7	17.0
Other	16.6	14.1	15.5
Age in years (mean, SD in parentheses)	36.4 (8.07)	35.4 (9.12)	36.0 (8.52)
Female	77.4	62.1	70.9
Country			
Poland	76.9	65.1	71.8
Lithuania	23.1	34.9	28.2

Source: CEEYouth CAWI, n = 740

[a] 19.9% Respondents had chosen the option: "I do not know/I cannot answer"

Table 3 Binominal logistic regression model: plans to move to another country (1 = yes, 0 = no)

Variables	B coefficient	Standard error	Odds
Reasons for return: missed LT/PL (ref: no)	− 0.695**	0.212	0.529
Has children (ref: no)	− 0.763***	0.235	0.466
Owns property in LT/PL (ref: no)	− 0.025	0.249	0.975
Satisfaction with housing situation after return	− 0.082	0.043	0.921
Attachment to former place of residence in UK	0.102**	0.042	1.107
Attachment to current place of residence in LT/PL	− 0.207***	0.042	0.813
Employed (ref: not employed)	− 0.695***	0.212	0.5499
Comparison of labour markets: Better ability to afford preferred lifestyle in UK (ref: no)	0.554*	0.244	1.740
Comparison of labour markets: Respect towards employees better in UK (ref: no)	0.419	0.233	1.1521
Years abroad	− 0.044*	0.022	0.957
Age	0.004	0.016	0.996
Country (ref: LT)	− 0.583**	0.246	0.558
Gender (ref: male)	− 0.674**	0.232	0.510
Constant	2.859***	0.707	17.444
Cox & Snell R Square	0.252		
Nagelkerke R Square	0.339		

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

Source: S1, CAWI, n = 740

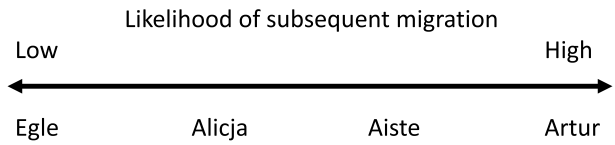

Fig. 1 Case studies

compared to Poles. Furthermore, women noted almost two times lower probability of planning to re-migrate compared to men.

Qualitative analysis

In order to explore how significant predictors of further migration from the above model work in the context of returnees' biographies, and to include participants' subjective perspectives into the discussion, we decided to choose four returnees representing different likelihoods of subsequent migration (Fig. 1). Each of these life stories demonstrates a different constellation of factors that play an important, albeit at times ambivalent, role in motivating returnees to leave their home country once again.

Egle, a permanent returnee*: I will only leave [again] over my dead body.*

Egle's story is that of a permanent return, at the core of which we see several of the above identified significant factors: her emotional attachment to her home country, her strive to bring up her children in the familiar linguistic and loving family environment in Lithuania, and her satisfaction with the job that she found after return.

Egle (S2) is a woman in her thirties who spent 7 years in the UK before returning to Lithuania with her husband and three children. She left Lithuania after completing her engineering university studies to live with her Lithuanian fiancée, who was already living in the UK at the time and held a stable job as a mobile engineer for a major TV and broadband company. Egle sums up her experience of migration as a temporary, well-planned life stage:

> *I left as a love emigrant. I met my husband in Lithuania and we decided to walk our life path together. There [in the UK] I gave birth to three children but we always thought that our children would go to school in Lithuania. When the time came [...] we packed our things and left, as planned.*

As a highly educated young person she had high expectations for a happy life in the UK which were crushed when she realised that she could not find a job within her qualifications. Her English turned out to not be good enough, and she did not belong socially, being viewed as an immigrant by the locals. She did low-skilled jobs for a while before giving birth to three children and becoming a stay-at-home mother. Egle led a lonely life in the UK, but she always kept close contact with her family and friends in Lithuania. These transnational ties intensified further when her children were born because she felt a need to build a close relationship between her children and their grandparents:

> *Before children we would go back twice a year, in the summer and for Christmas, but when the kids were born we would go back 3-4 times a year.*

All these considerations combined led Egle and her husband to the decision to return to their home country. The family sold their house in the UK and bought a

new one in Lithuania. After return she found a fulfilling job that allowed her to make use of her qualifications and in which she felt valued. She now receives much help with the children from her parents, which is a great source of joy for herself, her parents and the children in particular, and is confident that she will never emigrate again. When asked about the possibility of subsequent migration, she replied:

> *I will only leave [again] over my dead body. I feel good here. I can see that children are happy here, they speak Lithuanian. I never wanted my children to communicate in English with each other. I always said that I wanted emigration to be their own choice.*

Alicja, a family-oriented transnational returnee*: "If I was single I would probably not be here."*

Compared to Egle, Alicja's return is surrounded with much more ambiguity, as she struggles to reconcile her strive for stability for her family with her transnational identity. While Egle's return is a true return "home", Alicja's return is a combination of positive and negative experiences. We can see how predictors from the quantitative analysis (e.g. having children and preferring the labour market in the UK) contribute to these ambiguities. Alicja (S3) went to the UK in 2005, shortly after Poland's accession to the EU. She took a year off from university and intended to stay in the UK for a year to experience life in a foreign country and work on her English. However, after her boyfriend joined her, like many others, they extended their stay. They married in 2009 and had two children in the UK (aged 10 and 5 at the time of interview). Meanwhile, Alicja managed to finish her social work studies in Poland, flying there every two weeks, and eventually found a job as a social worker in the UK, in line with her qualifications. Her husband, on the contrary, *did not like his job* in the UK. Although they were satisfied with their transnational life and attached to the small town in the UK in which they lived, the idea of returning had always been at the back of their minds. Thus, they never bought a property in the UK, but instead started to extend Alicja's parents' old house in Poland.

> *When it was ready, we thought that it would be good to move in [laughter]. Or, not only that it would be good, but that this is the last call, for children. And you are always somehow drawn to Poland, despite everything. (...)*

As the quote above shows, Alicja's motivations for return primarily relate to her family: she wished to be closer to her parents and bring up her children in Poland. She also pointed out that her return had to do with the stage of life she had reached ("*we had our crazy times*"), namely the focus on family life. For the first several months after the return, she focused on organizing her family's lives and assisting her children in adapting to their new environment, leaving her no time to seek employment. After this initial period of settling in, she contacted a recruitment agency for which she used to work while in the UK and managed to get a part-time job in Luton, close to the airport.

> *I was flying for one night. Managers there were great! I flew to work early in the morning, I stayed overnight and I flew back at 8pm the next day. And on the third day I was working from home, paperwork can be done this way (...) it was the most ideal work on the planet.*

She further explained her reasons for engaging in this intense form of 'reverse transnationalism' (King & Christou, 2011):

> *...very good work conditions, [as a social worker] you are treated as a professional. This occupation is treated completely differently than in Poland.*

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic ended this transnational episode in Alicja's career. She then found a job at an NGO in Poland providing social services, but she still is considering commuting to the UK one or two days per week once the pandemic is over. Summing up her experience, she emphasised that she will always feel torn between Poland and the UK. Nevertheless, she is not considering migrating again, because her family needs stability.

***Aiste, a returnee "for the time being"**: "I'm a transnational kind of person."*

As with the above two case studies, Aiste's story once again highlights the gender aspect in the likelihood of further migration. However, unlike before, in this case children's future and mother's career opportunities are the key factors driving Aiste's future plans of re-migration. Aiste's (S2) case study serves as an example of a returnee who declares that she is likely to leave again in the future, although she does not plan to migrate in the forthcoming years. She is in her 20 s, left Lithuania at the age of 16, spent her formative years abroad, and returned (with her fiancé), having secured a job in Lithuania. Speaking about the context of her decision to return, Aiste explained that as a future mother looking for stability, she had some serious concerns about certain practical aspects of life in the US:

> *In the US in terms of friends I think I belonged. (...) In terms of culture and seeing myself in the future there, I wasn't sure (...) I had a colleague who had a baby while I was there and she came back after two months and she had to pump the milk while she was at work and in the meantime our manager told us that she cannot trust her any longer*

In Aiste's case, the return was motivated in part by an attractive job offer and the prospect of a better work-life balance, which was a compelling argument in view of her plans to have children. She openly admits that she never deliberately planned to return to Lithuania, and the choice to do so was simply the result of a combination of opportunities:

> *I think for me coming back to Lithuania was never a set plan. I kind of just came back because I got a job. Whereas the other people that I know (...) who came back, I think their long-term plan always was to come back to Lithuania at some point, just because they loved Lithuania so much.*

Although in her case it was not the pivotal motive to return, she admits that she has "*that emotional attachment [to Lithuania]; I just didn't know that I had it before I came back to Lithuania*". Therefore, her plan for the forthcoming years is to stay in Lithuania:

> *Right now I think, if I'm in a country that gives some of the best maternity policies in Europe [2 years of paid maternity leave], then, you know, why not take advantage of them and then maybe eventually, if I feel like I have outgrown my workplace or maybe my career opportunities in Lithuania then I'm not ruling it out.*

> *(...) I would probably want my children to see a somewhat different environment when they are growing up.*

Aiste feels that as a recent graduate, there is much she can learn in Lithuania, and that this experience will be valued abroad if she decides to re-migrate. She also expects that in a few years' time she will encounter a glass ceiling in her professional career in Lithuania and will therefore have to look for opportunities elsewhere.

> *I guess if we are talking about settling, then yes, for the time being, I am settling in Lithuania, for sure. But I'm a transnational kind of person, you know that is never set for sure.*

Artur, a multiple migrant with an episode of return*: "it is comfortable, good quality of life [in Poland], but boring".*

Similarly to Aiste, Artur is a young professional who emphasizes more attractive career but also personal development opportunities abroad. However, unlike all the above returnees discussed here, he explicitly declares his belonging to London and his return to Poland being just a temporary visit. The factors that emerged as significant predictors of staying in Poland (missing country of origin, having children, attachment to the current place of residence) were absent in his narrative.

After finishing high school, Artur (born 1996, S1) had to choose between following a professional athlete's career and going to university. He chose the latter and went to London to study finance at one of the top universities. While the first year was both psychologically and financially difficult, Artur started to feel more and more confident and "at home" in London in the years that followed. However, after graduation and one rather disappointing internship, he decided to return to Poland, principally because of his girlfriend, who was studying in Warsaw. The decision was made easier by an attractive job offer from a company in Warsaw. Asked about his feelings, he said:

> *I knew it was for good, but I did not overwhelm myself with this thought. I was thinking, "well, we will see what tomorrow brings, and the next week, for the moment I need to do this and that, I begin a new job in one week", so I had this short-term thinking and, above all, that it was cold [in Poland] and grey and that I needed to get used to it.*

However, the following winter, after the difficult pandemic year, Artur had grown disappointed with his life in Warsaw:

> *...it is comfortable, good quality of life, but boring. I have some friends here, but I still feel that my place is in London - I think that I would feel better there, I would develop faster and it would be more dynamic and exciting.*

Additionally, his job had proven to be extremely time-consuming and—due to the remote working practices forced by the pandemic—isolating. He mentioned that he planned to look for a job somewhere abroad. Indeed, when we spoke in June 2021 he was working online for a start-up in Germany, while living in Italy with his girlfriend, who was studying there on the Erasmus + exchange programme. After the holidays, he planned to move to Berlin.

Discussion

The aims of this paper were twofold: first, to identify in the course of regression analysis factors that lead some returnees in Poland and Lithuania to settle down permanently and others to re-depart their home country, second, to explore how these factors are experienced subjectively by actual returnees in the light of in-depth qualitative data. To a certain extent following the authors of the economic theories of migration (e.g. Cassarino, 2004; Stark, 1991), we recognize the crucial role of employment-related economic factors in migrants' plans for the future. First of all, our findings suggest that being unemployed makes people more likely to leave their country of origin. This is in line with Iglicka's (2010) and White's (2013) results highlighting the importance of economic integration of returnees as well as with Karolak's (2020) observations that the transition to the domestic labour market is not always easy. However, it is not only being active on the labour market that matters; other important employment-related factors are one's relationships with supervisors or co-workers and a salary that permits a comfortable lifestyle, which resonates with the discourses on "normal life" or "good life" among post-accession migrants in the UK (McGhee et al. 2012; Jarosz and Gugushvili 2020). The general perception among returnees is that professional relationships and salaries are better on the UK labour market. On the other hand, Aiste and Artur, mentioned career-related limitations of the labour markets in Central and Eastern Europe which resonates with other findings (Fihel & Anacka, 2013; Karolak, 2020).

Where job-related factors are significant push factors, emotional determinants such as nostalgia for home or attachment to the country of origin have a pulling effect. The regression analysis indicates that missing one's home country is not only a crucial motivation to return, as confirmed in numerous studies (e.g. Budginaitė & Mašidlauskaitė, 2015; Slany et al., 2018), but also constitutes one of the strongest factors discouraging subsequent re-emigration. Our qualitative data corroborates this finding. Egle was the most nostalgic among the four interviewees discussed, and the least likely to leave her homeland again; Aiste and Artur, on the other hand, made no mention of homesickness, and are both very likely to re-migrate. In short, for persons leading a transnational lifestyle who are well-integrated in their destination countries or representing "liquid migrants" (Engbersen & Snel, 2013), the return to their country of origin is just another episode in their trajectory.

It is noteworthy that in the survey, returnees in Poland and Lithuania were on average only slightly more attached to their place of residence than where they had lived in the UK, which may be the result of their gradual embedding in the UK (Ryan, 2018; Grzymała-Kazłowska & Ryan, 2022; Trąbka et al., 2022), while at the same time not losing bonds with their homelands, probably because of transnational practices (Carling & Petersen, 2014). Nevertheless, returnees' attachment to the place of residence in the country of origin was shown to be very important for their post-return migratory plans. The four narratives presented in this article shed some light on diverse aspects and roles of these ties. For instance, Egle emphasised that it was important for her that her children speak Lithuanian and live in Lithuania, and denied that she was attached to anything apart from their house in the UK. The other two women are to a certain extent attached to both their current and previous countries of residence: while they felt a sense of belonging while living in the UK or the US, and still missed some aspects of their lives

abroad, they had also established various bonds with their current localities. Artur, on the contrary, did not mention attachment to any place in Poland, left Poland as soon as the opportunity presented itself. His example illustrates the liquidity (Engbersen & Snel, 2013) of highly skilled transnational migrants (Beaverstock, 2018), who do not tend to form strong bonds with places.

Perhaps slightly counter-intuitively, in our analysis migrants' age turned out not to be a significant predictor of their plans to re-migrate. Looking at the qualitative data, however, we can assume that perhaps it is not the age as such, but rather the life-stage, which is pivotal in this context. While younger, unmarried and childless participants (e.g. Artur and Aiste) are less nostalgic about their countries of origin and more inclined towards further mobility, among older returnees with children emotional, family-related factors play a more important role, limiting their re-migration opportunities. The link between a person's specific life cycle stage and their mobility decisions was explored by researchers before (Eade et al., 2007; Krzaklewska, 2008; Sarnowska, 2016). Some argue that instead of focusing on single life stages of individuals, it is important to look at the family life cycle as the primary factor influencing mobility decisions (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002: 17). Since caregiving most often falls within the responsibilities of women in the families, it is not surprising that children- and family-related considerations in the context of mobility decisions are voiced most often by female study participants. While both Egle and Alicja made the decision to return and settle down in order to provide stability for their children, Aiste was explicit about her intention to leave again in a few years' time, once she would have taken advantage of the generous maternity leave in her country of origin, so that her children too might experience life in a diverse society. Therefore, in contrast to previous studies claiming that children are the main reason for return (Slany & Ślusarczyk 2018; Dzięglewski, 2020), our research suggests that the role of children in post-return migration plans is, in fact, ambivalent. For some returnees, children become a factor that roots their parents in their country of origin, where they can build close relationships with their grandparents; for others children are the reason to leave their country of origin again in order to offer their children more diverse and interesting lives.

Post-return intentions also seem to differ between returnees who maintain reverse transnational ties (Alicja, Artur, Aiste) and returnees who do not (Egle). Having strong transnational links with the country of migration allows returnees to consider re-migrating to that country; the social ties and professional connections they have there will make it easier to find work and re-integrate. Returnees like Egle, however, failed to develop strong links with the country of migration; after their return, they immersed themselves in their social lives in Poland/Lithuania, which they had maintained transnationally. The division between the groups is not entirely clear-cut, as a number migrants are especially strategic and manage to combine transnational lives with a settled lifestyle. For example, Alicja decided to settle in Poland but found a job in Luton which allows her to spend time in the UK on a regular basis. In this way, her reverse transnational connections are actually helping her to remain in Poland. This result suggests that the relationship between returnees' reverse transnationalism and reintegration may be similar to the link between migrants' transnationalism and integration in the destination country described by Carling and Petersen (2014). Our interviews suggest that while settled returnees may seek to live "grounded lives" (Bygnes & Erdal, 2016), which they missed

while abroad, those who used to lead a mobile, transnational lifestyle may be reluctant to leave it behind. The diverse strategies that migrants apply post-return also suggest that in reality, different types of migration (repeat, circular or double return) may overlap.

Conclusions

Our analysis revealed a number of factors that influence returnees' likelihood of re-migration from their country of origin. Many of these factors focus around post-return employment and career opportunities, but also relate to the quality of work and working relations, which returnees find disappointing in Poland and Lithuania. The life stage of returnees is another significant aspect which may increase the likelihood of repeat migration (for single returnees with no children), or decrease it (for returnees with a partner and children).Although some migrants return permanently as a result of migration fatigue (White, 2014), or because they missed their country of origin, others choose to live permanent transnational lives as an alternative to double return (Carling et al., 2021). For some, transnationalism is a burden that they are happy to relinquish after their return to their home country, especially if they escape the country of migration where they failed to build their sense of home (Dzieglewski 2020). For others, transnational relationships help to deal with the challenges of reintegration after return and may lead to repeat migration. Our research shows that migration and return decisions are always negotiated in the context of a variety of personal, family and professional considerations. Our qualitative data have helped us to demonstrate that the role of individual factors, grouped into a variety of constellations, in further mobility decisions can differ in different biographies. Although we were not able to analyse the variety, significance or level of representation of such sets of factors quantitatively in this study, our qualitative findings suggested that such combinations are very individual and therefore would be difficult to develop into typologies. This unique mix of factors in migration stories can only be appreciated when considered in the context of rich qualitative data which highlight ambiguities and contradictions which would otherwise remain hidden if quantitative results were reported on their own.

Despite all the rich findings, our study is not without limitations, mostly related to the sampling. Our survey data are not representative due to the lack of a sampling frame of migrants from or return migrants to Poland or Lithuania. Furthermore, we are aware that our final convenience sample for the online survey lacked balance in terms of gender, education and age. We attempted to address these imbalances through building a large and more robust qualitative dataset from three separate projects, and in this way ensuring a wider range of migrant characteristics, experiences and trajectories compared to if only one of the data sources was used.

Although we acknowledge the challenges of using mixed methods, especially when data come from different studies, we argue that this approach enabled us to gain a fuller picture of the complex and multidimensional social phenomenon of migration. Specifically, it helped us to illustrate and deepen quantitative results with the qualitative case studies, thereby building a more holistic view of the factors and their combinations contributing to returnees' further international mobility. Although we did not consider the significance of various combinations of factors quantitatively in this study, this could potentially be a fruitful direction for future research in this area.

Furthermore, we acknowledge our somewhat limited comparative dimension of this research, which could be expanded in the future through including contextual differences between Poland and Lithuania. Poland is a large economy in the region, while Lithuania is several times smaller by area as well as population size. We may therefore assume that economic and career prospects of returnees to these countries will differ. On the other hand, while there is no risk of rapid population decline in Poland, Lithuania seems headed for a troubled future: with the highest emigration rate relative to population size among the Central and East European countries, it has been described as a nation that is "coming apart" (Zvalionyte, 2012, 100). It is therefore not surprising that Lithuania is investing heavily in the development of innovative ways to attract returnees, especially highly-skilled ones (e.g. Gudelis & Klimaviciute, 2016); by contrast, this is not a priority for Polish policy makers. Despite these efforts of policy makers in Lithuania, our findings suggest that Lithuanians are still more likely to leave after the return than Poles, although our study does not allow us to fully explore this phenomenon. Our results do, however, suggest that countries like Lithuania should not only ensure that they have policies directed at attracting but also "retaining" returnees by assisting in their successful reintegration.

Appendix

See Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics: Polish subsample

	Does not plan to leave	Plans to leave	Total
Reason for return: missed CO	47.7	22.9	38.0
Satisfaction with housing situation (mean)	7.5	5.8	6.8
Attachment UK (mean)	6.4	7.5	6.9
Attachment CO (mean)	8.1	5.9	7.1
Comparison of labour markets: Better ability to afford preferred lifestyle in UK	60.8	79.5	68.1
Comparison of labour markets: Respect towards employees better in UK	50.0	72.3	58.7
Years abroad (mean)	7.8	6.8	7.6
Children	66.5	37.0	58.9
Property	61.2	45.2	54.9
Labour market status			
Employed	60.0	47.6	55.2
Other	16.2	17.5	16.7
Self-employed	6.9	9.0	7.7
Unemployed	12.7	24.7	17.4
Age (mean)	36.8	35.9	36.4
Female	78.5	63.9	72.8

Source: S1, CAWI, n = 525

Table 5 Descriptive statistics: Lithuanian subsample

	Does not plan to leave	Plans to leave	Total
Reason for return: missed CO	69.2	40.4	53.9
Satisfaction with housing situation (mean)	7.3	6.7	7.0
Attachment UK (mean)	5.2	6.2	5.7
Attachment CO (mean)	7.6	5.8	6.7
Comparison of labour markets: Better ability to afford preferred lifestyle in UK	41.0	68.5	55.7
Comparison of labour markets: Respect towards employees better in UK	42.3	67.4	55.7
Years abroad (mean)	8.5	7.2	7.8
Children	52.6	36.0	43.7
Property	51.3	34.8	42.5
Labour market status			
Employed	60.3	48.3	53.9
Other	17.9	7.9	12.6
Self-employed	5.1	14.6	10.2
Unemployed	12.8	19.1	16.2
Age (mean)	35.2	34.5	34.8
Female	74.0	58.5	66.0

Source: S1, CAWI, n = 215

Acknowledgements
Authors wish to express their gratitude to Professor Louise Ryan for her comments on the earlier version of this paper.

Author contributions
Literature review—all authors. Quantitative analysis—OC. Qualitative analysis—AT, VP. Discussion—all authors.

Funding
This article is based on the results of the research project "DAINA CEEYouth: The comparative study of young migrants from Poland and Lithuania in the context of Brexit", which was funded by a Grant (2017/27/L/HS6/03261) from the National Research Center/Narodowe Centrum Nauki. This article is based on the results of the research project "Social remittances of (re)migrants for the welfare of society: challenges and experiences in comparative perspective" (2020–2021), which was funded by a Grant (No. P-GEV-20–29) from the Research Council of Lithuania." This article is based on the results of the research project "Return migrations to a big Polish cities in light of the Brexit and pandemic" which was funded by a grant from the SWPS University Statutory Funds.

Availability of data and materials
Quantitative data will be available at a reasonable and justified scientific request.

Declarations

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Received: 19 November 2021 Accepted: 31 July 2023
Published: 11 September 2023

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