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Further Reading: Cawley, Mary (2022) Labour immigration and rural transformation: Lithuanian and Polish nationals in rural Ireland, Chapter 7, in Holly Barcus, Roy Jones and Serge Schmitz (eds), Rural Transformations: globalization and its implications for rural people, land and economies. London: Routledge, pp. 113-131. ISBN 978-0-367-62646-4, DOI: 10.4324/9781003110095-9.

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Labour immigration and demographic transformation: Lithuanian and Polish nationals in rural Ireland

International migration in search of employment is long-established, as Ireland's emigration record illustrates. Immigrants usually move initially to large cities where employment opportunities are greatest. Recruitment to specific types of rural employment is also well-established internationally. Additional research on the spatial distribution of immigrant labour at a national scale is recommended to gain a better understanding of the transformation that is taking place in rural populations. This research was conducted to document the Irish experience of international labour immigration from the late 1990s, arising from strong economic growth. The study focuses on Lithuanian and Polish immigrants (36,552 and 122,515, respectively, in 2016), the two largest groups of nationals from the former eight socialist economies, which joined the European Union on 1 May 2004, for whom small-area census population counts are available. They, with other new member state citizens, were granted immediate access to the Irish, Swedish and UK labour markets, to meet labour deficits. The study is based, primarily, on published and unpublished data from the Census of Population for the years 2006-2016, at a range of geographical scales. Change over time is documented through choropleth mapping, the Hoover Index (HI) of population concentration and deconcentration, the Index of Dissimilarity (ID), which compares the distribution of the immigrant groups with the Irish population, and cluster analysis.

Key Findings

Following the international evidence, Lithuanian and Polish migrants moved initially in their largest numbers to Dublin, other cities and large towns, although some movement to smaller settlements occurred. Because of their numerical superiority, Polish nationals are more widely distributed throughout the state than are Lithuanians. The latter are concentrated to a greater extent in the east and the north midland border counties. The HI values illustrate the concentration of both groups in particular urban and particular rural areas and dispersion to smaller places as the economy recovered from recession from 2012 on. The ID values reveal emerging ethnic diversity in rural Ireland. Cluster analysis corroborates an association with meat processing, mushroom production, retail activities and social and personal services, following summary Central Statistics Office (CSO) reports. Lithuanian and Polish nationals remain small minorities outside towns of 10,000 population and over, but they contribute to new social and cultural diversity.

Policy Implications

The reported analysis underlines the value of small-area CSO data in illustrating population diversification, associated with the increased movement of Lithuanian and Polish immigrants into the Irish countryside. Such movements are of social and cultural importance and establish new links between people and places in rural Ireland with Lithuania and Poland. Meeting the service needs of immigrant populations, as well as their employment needs, is also recognised as being of growing importance internationally. The results point to requirements in service delivery, including educational services, to meet linguistic and cultural diversity in rural as well as urban areas.