

# The Priorities and Challenges of Diaspora Education Policies in Poland and Lithuania

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## Abstract

The changing character of diasporas and states' politics intersect with new challenges in the policy-making process. This study aims to investigate the priorities and hardships of the diaspora education policies in Poland and Lithuania. The study applies the three-dimensional approach (Lesińska, Popyk 2021) to study diaspora policy and draws on qualitative research with the diaspora state institution representatives in the two countries. This paper compares the role of diaspora education policy in a broader policy context, alongside presenting the challenges, namely "socio-demographic", "methodological", "political" and "financial", that state institutions face while ensuring education for the young members of diasporas. It contributes to the scholarship on diaspora policies studies by presenting how state institutions approach and govern the relationships with young diasporas through ensuring education and support social and cultural life of diaspora schools.

**Keywords:** diaspora, education policy, Poland, Lithuania, institutions

## Introduction

Diaspora education is the soft power of the diaspora policies of many countries (Østergaard-Nielsen 2016). It is fundamental not only for providing knowledge to the members of society living abroad but also for building and strengthening beliefs and values, as well as constructing identity and a sense of belonging to the state of origin (Kloc-Nowak 2018; Szul 2018; Pędrak 2017). In Poland and Lithuania, the

education of children and youth abroad has been among the priorities of the diaspora policies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania (MFA of Lithuania) 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland (MFA of Poland) 2015), although it has not always been sufficiently articulated (Popyk 2022).

Diaspora policy however was not effective enough to preserve relationships with the diaspora (Praszałowicz et al. 2012). The mass post-accession emigration from Poland and Lithuania resulted in the diversification of diaspora groups and the change in the diaspora's nature from "liquid" towards "solid", which required a change in diaspora policies (Popyk et al. 2023). This has been particularly important to keep the ties with the young compatriots (school-age children and youth), specifically, the second generation (children born abroad), for whom the language and culture of the country of origin are likely to become equally or less significant than the destination state's (Pędrak 2017; Moskal, Sime 2016; Vilkeny 2017).

While the diaspora education policies in Poland and Lithuania are often evaluated from the perspective of the diaspora members (Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska 2019) or diaspora organisations (see e.g., Nowosielski, Dzięglewski 2021), the purpose of this paper is to investigate the state institutions' perspective in realising the studied issues. Thus, this paper aims to study and compare the challenges the state institutions face in designing and implementing diaspora education policies in both countries. The paper seeks to answer the following main research questions:

Q1: What is the position of education within the diaspora policies in Poland and Lithuania?

Q2: What are the challenges Polish and Lithuanian state institutions face in designing and implementing the diaspora educational policies in Poland and Lithuania?

We find these two cases comparable due to several reasons. Both Lithuania and Poland joined the EU in May 2004. All new member states experienced outflows as a result of entering the Union. However, these two countries faced the one of the largest ones. According to Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS 2021) estimations, between 2004 and 2010 the number of Poles staying temporarily abroad (for more than 3 months) doubled and since then about 2–2.5 million people, which means 5–6% of the national population. The overwhelming majority of them emigrated to one of the EU countries. The Lithuanian case represents an even greater demographic lost in XXI century – according to the data of 2005–2014 from the Lithuanian State Data Agency, over 619 thousand citizens live abroad, and half a million of them reside in Europe. This number reaches 20% of the population. Consequently, Poland in the post-accession period has represented the country of the biggest net emigration in the EU, whereas Lithuania has had the largest net emigration per 1000 of its population. The numbers are important, but what is even more significant in the perspective of the subject of the article, is the reaction of the state authorities. In both countries they had to face a momentous challenge in terms of reorganizing the

previous diaspora policy and include the actions related directly to the new population staying abroad, including education.

To study the challenges of diaspora education policies in the two countries, we applied a qualitative study based on interviews conducted with representatives of the policymaking institutions (both legislative and executive branches) in Poland and Lithuania.

## Diaspora Policies in Poland and Lithuania

The Polish diaspora societies (White 2018) are not only large in size (about 18–20 million) but also diverse. The 2015–2020 governmental programme for the first time presented a division of the diaspora, pointing to the old diaspora groups, ethnic minorities, and recent emigrants (MFA of Poland 2015).

The Lithuanian diaspora is not as numerous as the Polish one, although the scale is more significant for the Lithuanian state. The estimated number of Lithuanians living abroad is 1.3 million, which comprises one-third of the national population (Europos Migracijos Tinklas 2021). It should be noted though, that the number of emigrants from Lithuania has rapidly grown since the 1990s, with more than 700,000 people having left the country (ibid).

The diaspora policies in Poland and Lithuania developed after 1989, after both states overcame the communist regime (Chałupczak et al. 2014; Ferguson et al. 2016; Fiń et al. 2013). Since then, the policies have undergone multiple transformations. A previous study (Popyk et al. 2023) demonstrated that the post-accession diaspora policies in Poland and Lithuania are largely shaped by mass emigration and the changing character of the diaspora from “liquid” towards “solid”, indicating the growth of permanent emigrants in the Western countries. The post-accession emigration wave, which partially transformed into permanent migration, required adjusting the measures to establish relationships between the state and the diaspora.

In Poland, the policy toward the diaspora is differentiated between 1990–2010 and 2011–2015, which marked a line between the “old” and “new” policies (Fiń et al. 2013). The first policy document *The Objectives and Priorities of the Government’s Policy on Polonia, Emigration and Poles Living Abroad* was adopted in 1991. A substantial change in the policy’s paradigm was noticed in 2011 in the programme aimed at establishing partnership relationships with the young diaspora in Western countries (MFA of Poland 2012). A recent change in the long-term plan was adopted in July 2015 in the *Government programme of cooperation with Polonia and the Polish Diaspora in 2015–2020*.

To compare, the diaspora policy in Lithuania has also developed recently. The major difference, though, is the consistency of the governmental programme, which was developed and first adopted in 2010. The diaspora policy programme entitled

*“Global Lithuania” Involvement of Lithuanian Emigrants in the Life of the State* came out in 2011. The programme has both long-term and short-term “Action Plans” for the realisation of the set tasks. The main direction of the state’s actions has been seen as seeking partnership and the active engagement of diaspora members to act and participate in the life of the state (Gudelis, Klimavičiūtė 2016).

The policy-making process requires the engagement of multiple state and non-state institutions, which due to various factors view the diaspora as needing embracing or a source of tapping resources (Gamlen et al. 2019). These institutions are important in building relationships with different diaspora groups. Nowak and Nowosielski (2019) claimed that the Polish diaspora policy has undergone substantial changes along with the leadership struggle between the Senate (the upper chamber of the Polish parliament) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) over the responsibilities for the diaspora policy (see also Stefańska 2017). The authors mentioned that these institutions have had divergent visions of running the diaspora policy and different financial resource allocations. Currently, a range of bodies (committees, departments, offices) as part of the main institutions (the Senate, or the upper chamber, the Sejm, the lower chamber, the Chancelleries of the President and Prime Minister, and the Ministries) are ascribed to maintain relationships with the diaspora (Lesińska, Wróbel 2020; Stefańska 2017). Education of the diaspora members has been the main concern of the Ministry of Education and Science, specifically the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad (ORPEG), in charge of ensuring teaching and learning tasks, and the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), in charge of scholarship and exchange programme coordination.

Apart from the state institutions, some non-governmental and quasi-governmental institutions are also engaged in diaspora policy implementation. The quasi-governmental bodies’ work has been a matter of political and academic discourse because of the controversial relationships and support with the state bodies (Nowak, Nowosielski 2019).

In Lithuania, the diaspora education policy is run by a number of state bodies responsible for the ascribed tasks in a given period, stated in the short-term Action Plans as part of the *Global Lithuania* programme. This includes not only the Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport but also 20 other institutions (Government of the Republic of Lithuania 2020). To evaluate the work and plan further policy directions and institutional cooperation, the MFA of Lithuania (2020) runs a survey on Lithuanians living abroad, which allows the diaspora to evaluate the current actions, programmes, and ensured rights.

## Diaspora Education Policies in Poland and Lithuania

Diaspora education is an element of the diaspora policy, created and run in terms of the broader policy measures, which shape its different aspects. However, the education policy, as well as the broader context of a policy formation, is not a static element of a state's politics, but rather a fluctuating and dynamic process affected by multiple factors. Among the main determinants of the policymaking process are the political and economic situation, social and political discourses and narratives, the migration policy of the state of origin, and the immigration and integration policies in both the states of origin and destination (Lesińska, 2019; Levitt, de la Dehesa 2003).

The education of young emigrants is also affected by the policies and regulations of their country of residence (Aikins, White 2011; Nowosielski, Dziągłowski 2021). These to a certain extent shape the process of diaspora education at state schools and diaspora schools (both week-long and weekend schools) through state or local regulations on national education. The diaspora schools are mostly seen as complementary education, which makes them invisible in the shadow of the mainstream education in the residence state (Burman, Miles 2020). Besides, the role of such an education centre is likely to be ambiguous due to parents' needs and expectations towards their children's present and future (Zielińska et al. 2014). As such, some studies (Slany et al. 2016) demonstrated that Polish emigrants' view learning the language of the state of residence as a priority over the language of origin. This is believed to lead to a smoother and faster adaptation to the new setting and to give children more opportunities both at school and further education/employment as valuable human capital (Moskal, Sime 2016).

The studies (Praszałowicz et al. 2012; Pędrak 2017; Vilkieny 2017) also indicated that emigrants have a rather positive perception of the language and culture of the country of origin and tend to efficiently develop bi/multilingualism while communicating in different languages at home, school, and other social places. Similarly, Montvilaite et al. (2015) showed that the majority of Lithuanian emigrants seek to nurture their native language and build identity more as emigrants than when they were in Lithuania. Moreover, an annual survey of Lithuanian emigrants (MFA of Lithuania 2020) revealed that Lithuanian parents abroad are keen on having more opportunities to develop the national language and preserve their culture and identity. Among the important issues enabling that view is a perception of insufficient access to diaspora schools and resources while living abroad.

Similarly, the Polish diaspora endeavours to preserve the national language and culture by establishing and running "Polonia" schools and centres (Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska 2019; Mafek 2019). Polish education can be accessed in one of 49 Polish schools abroad (organised and financed by the Polish government), which implement the Polish national curriculum, and in 1,143 Polonia schools (organised and mostly financed by the diaspora communities) offering non-formal education for more than 14,000 children worldwide (ORPEG 2022). To compare, there were 245 Lithuanian

educational centres (10 of which are formal schools that use the national curriculum) abroad, teaching 11,700 children around the world (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of Lithuania 2022).

The education at schools abroad covers not only language and subject learning but also various cultural and social events funded by different sources. A number of Polish and Lithuanian schools are co-organised and co-financed either by parents, the community, or church (Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska 2019; Małek 2019). In Lithuania, most of the non-formal educational centres are self-funded, while certain activities or events are financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MESS) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Lithuania. In 2020, the MESS allocated about EUR 3 million (69%) to various educational and cultural tasks set in the annual Action plan of the *Global Lithuania* programme (MFA of Lithuania 2021b). Additionally, the Lithuanian National Radio and Television and the Ministry of Culture spent, respectively, EUR 880 thousand and EUR 207 thousand on the Action plan tasks undertaken in 2020 (ibid).

For comparison, in Poland, educational and cultural activities are financed by several institutional bodies, mainly through a competition. The 2022 edition of the annual competition “Polonia and Poles Abroad” allocated about 10 million EUR, half of which were targeted for educational tasks (KPRM 2021). The Ministry of Education and Science set EUR 240 thousand for the competition “Polonia Family” in 2021, aimed at strengthening cooperation between schools, which organize education of the Polish language abroad, with schools in Poland. The MFA of Poland allocated more than 7 million EUR on supporting the renovation and modernisation of Polish organisations abroad. Another competition financed by the MFA was “Public Diplomacy 2022” granting 880 thousand EUR on tasks aimed to enhance the image of Poland, Polish culture abroad (MFA of Poland, 2021b).

Apart from the intuitional and financial challenges, diaspora educational centres also faced additional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown (Young, White 2022). Although the Polish weekend and complementary schools in the UK underwent changes in functioning and teaching/learning ICT-adjusted approaches and tools, they met with a lack of official governmental guidelines and recognition (ibid). The pandemic, though, accelerated the required changes in the approaches to providing education for diaspora children and youth. The current migration trends and scattering of emigrants have long been seen as ineffective and required adjustment by adopting digital tools (Szul 2018).

## Methods

This paper is based on the larger research project, entitled ‘Diaspora policy in the context of post-accession migration. Comparative analysis of Poland, Lithuania and Hungary’, aimed at investigating and comparing the diaspora policies in three coun-

tries—Poland, Lithuania and Hungary—funded by the National Centre of Science in Poland (OPUS 16 no 2018/31/B/HS5/00913).

The study of the diaspora education policy challenges in Poland and Lithuania is based on qualitative interviews with policymakers in both countries. The interviews with the policymaking institutions' representatives allow investigating the topic from the first-hand narratives on the process of creating and realising the policy. The study includes 12 interviews with representatives of various policymaking institutions, including the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Education, members of the committees of cooperation with the diaspora, and government centres in charge of education policy, in total  $n=14$  ( $n=10$  in Lithuania and  $n=4$  in Poland). The authors are aware of the unequal number of interviews in the selected countries. The process of recruiting respondents from the Polish policymaking institutions was impeded by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and the effects of millions of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine in 2022, which affected the functioning of many Polish institutions, particularly those responsible for education. However, the author has greater access to secondary data in Poland, which facilitates the inquiry of the researched issues and gives a broader view.

The study was approved by the relevant ethics committee and is in line with the requirements for qualitative interviewing with people. The interviews were anonymous on-site in 2022. Each interview started after the participants provided informed consent. They were recorded and lasted 60 minutes on average. The interviews were primarily focused on the diaspora education policies in Poland and Lithuania. They included sections on current policy measures and programmes, historical backgrounds, challenges of policymaking and realisation processes, and states' good practices.

The process of analysis was held under the interpretative paradigm (Miles, Huberman 1994). It included voice-to-text transcription and applying the codes created by the authors, which helped to identify themes and patterns (Clarke, Braun 2016). Four categories of policymaking challenges were a result of comparing the data from the two states.

## Findings

The analysis of the challenges in diaspora education policies in Poland and Lithuania indicated that education does play an important role in maintaining relations with different diaspora societies abroad. Moreover, education policy demonstrates how the state perceives the diaspora and seeks to establish relationships with it. As such, the Polish diaspora policy towards post-accession emigrants was claimed to be rather reactive (Chałupczak et al. 2014). The study's participants mentioned that education policy has also been post-factum in terms of meeting the diaspora's needs rather

than imposing state measures. Moreover, the authorities seek to adjust the educational tasks due to the needs and relevance of specific countries, regions, organisations, or individuals. The Polish interviewer described the education policy as follows:

*It seems to me that this [policy's aim] is more to meet the expectations of Poles living abroad, or the Polish diaspora, which expects support in bringing up children or grandchildren in Polish culture abroad (PL, 01).*

Similarly, the Lithuanian state endeavours to establish partnership with the communities abroad. The main aim of the education policy towards Lithuanians residing abroad was set to maintain collaboration with the diaspora societies by involving them in the dialogue on how to approach the potential problems in diaspora policy implementation.

*Every half year, Members of the Cabinet have meetings with members of diaspora organisations. Direct meetings, not with some other intermediate formats, but direct meetings. We are trying to involve diaspora organisations in activities which are here to help the diaspora to keep the language, culture and, of course, to keep business ties as well, which is very important as well. We attract diaspora members to be advisors to our ministers, like public advisors to our ministers (LT, 02).*

Besides, diaspora education includes more measures than education inside the state, while school is a place not just for learning but also primarily for cultivating culture and traditions. Education policy towards the diaspora does not only comprise the teaching/learning element but has a broader scope of state-diaspora interactions based on historical, cultural, and societal values and a sense of belonging. It is often linked to various communities' activities, including sport, music, art, leisure, etc., which enhance the socialization aspect of the education institutions abroad:

*Our schools are important for organising social life. Social cultural life with immigration is very close. They [the activities] are very connected. So, you cannot cut school from a club or a place of meeting. Usually, it's the same women coming with children, sometimes husbands coming and playing basketball or whatever. We're going to a picnic after the event that's very close. There are only a few clubs that have their [own] buildings. So, everything is there (LT, 01).*

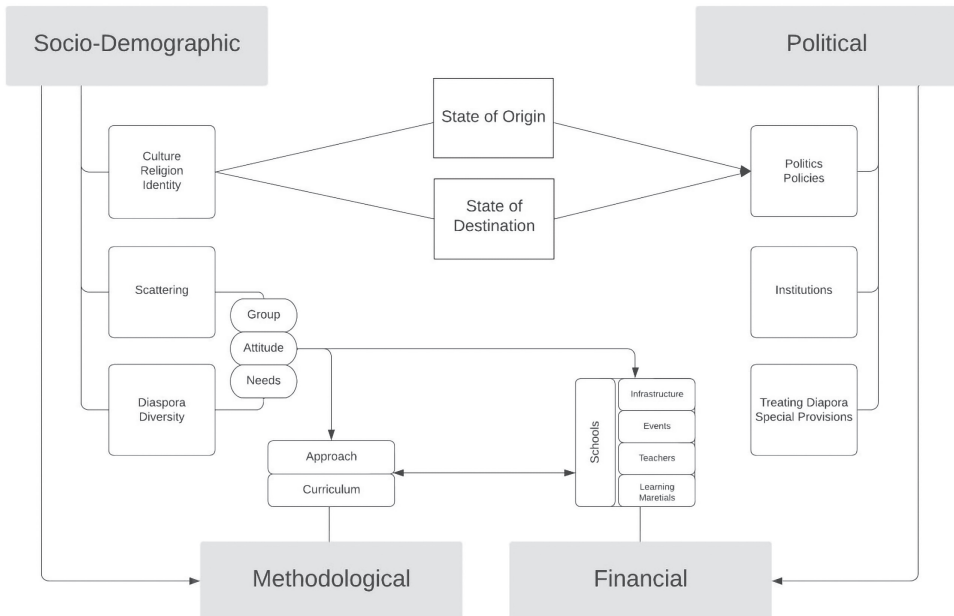
*It is not possible to separate school activities from non-school ones. While in Poland it can be done 100%, abroad it cannot be done at all. If the school has no external activities, no one will go to this school. Because it's on Saturday or Sunday. These are additional classes, therefore it must be attractive, it must be pleasant to spend time. If it is not, people will not go to this school because at this time they have a choice of extracurricular activities in their schools. So, the classes in Polish schools must be attractive enough to be competitive with the offer in local schools (PL, 02).*



The study also reveals that policymaking institutions in both states face various challenges that are partially consistent with the challenges the members of diaspora institutions and societies experience. Figure 1 presents four interdependent and interlinked groups of challenges that Polish and Lithuanian policymakers participating in the study experienced while implementing diaspora education policies.

Figure 1.

Challenges in diaspora education policymaking processes in Poland and Lithuania



Source: Own elaboration

The study allows us to point out four groups of the main challenges: *socio-demographic*, *political*, *financial*, and *methodological*. The *socio-demographic challenges* indicate not only the dispersed diaspora groups and members but also individual approaches towards the language, culture, and society of the country of origin. These diaspora policy challenges primary depend on the states of origin and destination politics and approaches, as well as interdependence with the financial issues of supporting education abroad. The nature and character of diasporas, though, stipulates the changes in methodology of providing the education to diaspora children.

Another group of challenges that both the diaspora institutions and policymaking institutions experience may be described as *political*. This group of challenges indicate the role of political, and historical, context of the diaspora education. It reveals that certain political elites are keen on promoting the chosen vision of relationships between the state and diaspora (or single diaspora groups, e.g., kin minorities). Besides,

the challenges of implementing diaspora education are grounded in the institutional structure and cooperation within and across the states.

The *financial challenges* illustrate disputes over budget allocation and distribution measures aimed to provide education for all children and youth living abroad. Financial issues greatly depend on the state's political orientation towards diaspora, as well as within a country's financing structure and regulations. The last are key in defining the equity of the financed institutions and programmes abroad.

The analysis results also point to the fourth group of challenges – *methodological*, which encompasses the approach towards ensuring the educational needs of the diaspora. The approach towards education by default depends on the origin state's education system and approach towards diaspora. The selected cases demonstrate that diaspora from the Eastern European state in the Western states determines changes in the educational approach seeking to implementing the Western education methods and tools.

## Socio-Demographic challenges

The *socio-demographic challenges* comprise a group of a broad number of issues concerning the societies of the state of origin, state of residence, and diaspora societies' peculiarities. First of all, the process of ensuring education policy by the policymaking institutions is determined by the demographic characteristics of the state of origin, the state's internal policy on enhancing the national and ethnic identity, and participation in the social, cultural, and political life of the state. In particular, the socio-demographic characteristics directly impact the vision and role of education in children's and families' lives. Hence, education is a mean for children to acquire knowledge and skills needed to be active members of certain communities and societies.

The main tasks of Polish and Lithuanian education policies are to preserve the links with the young diaspora by enhancing the ethnic identity through learning the language and their own history and traditions (*Global Lithuania 2011–2022; The Governmental Programme of Cooperation with Polonia and Poles Living Abroad 2015–2020*). Teaching, including language but particularly history and culture, can be shaped by the demographic characteristics of the state of residence, which is likely to impose its lifestyle, culture, or the value of the native language on the diaspora. As such, the diaspora institutions endeavour to pursue maintaining ties with the young generation, who are more prone to establish connections with the state of residence than older emigrants.

*Knowledge of a language is disappearing, culture is changing, or language is changing. The pressure from the home countries is usually to keep the education opportunities for children who are abroad—education in Polish or in the mother tongue in general and also through learning about the mother country (PL, 01).*

As the data show, the majority of Polish children abroad are willing to learn the Polish language and participate in community activities despite being affected by migration.

*It is not about where the child lives, whether the child attends such a school, another one, or whether his parents teach him. Well, every child is the same because he wants to learn about Poland or the Polish language (PL, 02).*

The challenge, however, that Polish policymaking institutions face is encouraging parents, particularly mothers, to speak with children in Polish at home, and to encourage language learning by showing the benefits of bilingualism and the importance of shaping children's identity. One of the policymakers mentioned that, despite many tools for learning Polish or doing activities in Polish available online, some parents do not encourage their children to speak Polish. However, if the language is spoken at home, even if it is not absolutely grammatically and linguistically correct, it will most likely be developed.

*I talked to a few schools that if teachers abroad meet a child who speaks a dialect, they do not teach the official Polish language, but accept the dialect. Because if a child speaks in Polish dialect, this proves that it's spoken at home. If a child speaks [in a] literary [tone] and weakly, the language is not spoken at home but taught. The speaking dialect will make this Polish language last for a long time (PL, 01).*

The Lithuanian policymaking representative also shared their concerns about speaking basic Lithuanian by the young generation as essential to preserving links with the state of origin. Moreover, it also supports intergenerational communication and smooths return migration.

*We have to keep some knowledge of the language and some knowledge about the country. Culture is the main purpose of those schools, so that's enough not to take the knowledge of literature or perfect knowledge of the language. I think [they will retain it] if they will learn. But to have some basis that they could speak with their grandparents is the main goal. And if they're coming back, it would be much easier to be integrated back (LT, 01).*

Apart from the linguistic issues, the socio-demographic challenges also cover the characteristics of the diaspora societies, which have changed throughout time and space. The Polish and Lithuanian diasporas differ not only in size and reason for migration but also in their relations with the state and their needs. This evokes the approaches to building relationships with Poles and Lithuanians living abroad.

*Polish politicians have adapted to the changes in the world, and the Polish diaspora is also changing. For once, these are natural, generational changes in the diaspora. The socio-political situation in the countries has also changed over this period ... there is indeed*

*a big difference between those who left Poland and those who were born in Poland now. The grandparents before the war or even earlier (PL, 01).*

The Lithuanian policymakers also state the evident changes in the educational approach in order to integrate children living abroad into the national and state life.

*It's [changes] mainly about the Lithuanian school. I think that we are more active here than before. [...] Now there are 223 Baltic centres in 45 Lithuanian communities (LT, 04).*

The diversity of the diasporas is also characterised by their dispersion abroad. While the older diaspora groups tended to reside in communities, current emigration trends demonstrate that Polish and Lithuanian emigrants are scattered across countries, regions and cities. As a result, this prevents diaspora educational centres from operating on the older models, as many emigrant children are physically not able to attend the schools. Consequently, it requires changes in the diaspora organisations and approaches towards education (see the methodological challenges below).

A former worker of a Lithuanian government institution responsible for cooperation with Lithuanians in different countries, including in the U.S., Norway, and Greece, pointed to the irrelevance of the current educational approach due to the dispersed diaspora, and that the diaspora school offers education for only 3% of children abroad.

*It's difficult to teach in such countries as the United Kingdom or the United States or Germany—very difficult to gather. People are scattered. I was working in five countries. For example, in Greece, it's impossible [to gather people]. They're working in many hotels on islands. It was even difficult to gather them to have an event. How could they come, by boat? They have no time. They have no money for such events. Or in Norway, there are 28 airports. They are dispersed in Norway. But for them, it's expensive to come to Oslo, so they have their local communities ... They [the Lithuanian government] are trying to create more schools. But you cannot open a school in every single place (LT, 01).*

The presented demographic hardships are interconnected and interdependent with the other groups of challenges of diaspora education policies in Poland and Lithuania (see Figure 1).

## Political challenges

The *political challenges* are another broad group of hardships the policymaking institutions in Poland and Lithuania face. They include the influence of state and foreign politics, as well as global and regional trends concerning emigration and treating the diaspora. One Polish representative stated:

*The geopolitical situation of Poland in terms of some countries is also a challenge. We treat the Polish language as an aim itself, independent of any international policies because it*

*is something that happens naturally, and we can learn it. So, the challenges are among the financial and organisational issues, as well as international and political ones (PL, 01).*

A Lithuanian diaspora institution representative, though, mentioned that the geographical position and impact of neighbouring states' policies became an advantage for the policymaking process, as the Baltic states' representatives would share and discuss policy measures to elaborate best practices.

*We continue to cooperate with the Estonians and Latvians, and we had online consultations with Estonia twice already, and we are planning to have our live meetings with the Baltic Diaspora politicians meeting to share our experience and to learn from each other (LT, 07).*

A set of important issues in a state's politics that appears in the Polish and Lithuanian diaspora policies is the cooperation and responsibilities of the institutions. In Poland, the institutions' struggle for leadership was determined not only by their status but also by the allocation of finances (see also Nowak, Nowosielski 2019). One of the Polish interviewees mentioned that diaspora policy changes with the political orientation of the ruling party. Moreover, the ruling government tends to change the responsible institutional body along with the financial allocation. An important issue, though, is how this body perceives the diaspora and what type of relationship it aims to establish.

*Ideas [towards diaspora policy] are adapted to the political situation, therefore, this is likely to change.... Each of the ministries treated the Polish communities abroad as a subject to some extent because it served them to pursue the specific policy (PL, 02).*

The Lithuanian institutions, on the other hand, engage in close cooperation between other state institutions and bodies, which are prescribed certain tasks. Moreover, the state's long-term strategy enables it to evaluate and enhance the existing policy directions, approaches, and measures.

*The Foreign Ministry coordinates all 14 institutions plus the Ministry of Education and other institutions. It helps to establish schools, pre-schools, weekend schools, and, of course, weekends (LT, 01).*

Another representative in Lithuania mentioned that the state institutions were successful in establishing cooperation between different ministries and other state bodies from the legislative and executive branches, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs Department.

The political challenges may depend on the politics and policies that the state of residence imposes on diaspora schools' functioning, but also on how the emigrants or ethnic groups are treated and viewed. For this reason, diaspora education should be congruent with the politics and policies of the state of diaspora residence/settlement,

which may impose its own rules and visions of historical events, and the role of religion, culture, or language. As a result, the Polish diaspora education programme and approach are state-adjusted, and not universal across different countries, but function as bilingual schools, or under bilateral agreements with Polish as a foreign language, either bilateral agreements or mutual support.

Some states, though, encourage emigrants to nurture their language and culture. As such, the Polish representative mentioned supporting ethnic education in Norway as a tool for enhancing children's sense of belonging and identity development:

*I also understand the policy of individual countries. Some treat our mother tongue a bit differently than we would like. [...] For us, it is not the goal that these children should become part of the community as soon as possible, melting into the local community. [Rather that] they would have a sense of connection with their home country. This is our interest in the sense of some kind of lobbying for certain activities as well (PL, 01).*

Along with the growing number of schools and enrolment of children, the Lithuanian government aims instead to unify the education of the diaspora with the national educational system. This is believed to be supportive of both the diaspora organisations to acquire funding and of the young diaspora to follow the national curriculum, which is supposed to be beneficial in case they return to Lithuania. The other aims of the Educational Agreement and new programme are to strengthen the learning of the Lithuanian language among the second and third generations living abroad, which is intended to maintain ties with the young diaspora.

*On the 1st of September last year [2021], the Educational Agreement was signed. The diaspora is in this agreement. Our Sunday/Saturday schools, it is in this agreement. It shows that already we [take into consideration] these weekend schools and the Lithuanian unified educational system. [...] So, I believe that funding these schools and prioritising the educational system abroad will bring more children to the schools (LT, 02).*

Therefore, the political challenges reveal not only the states' internal disputes on establishing ties with the diaspora and ensuring education but also structural and institutional disputes. The politics and policies of the state of residence can limit or shape the diaspora education process on their territory by adjusting to the local rules and regulations.

## **Financial challenges**

The *financial challenges* of the diaspora education policy are tightly connected and dependent on the political and demographic challenges. Both the Lithuanian and Polish policymaking institutions' representatives mentioned that financial shortages are among the main problems in carrying out the educational tasks related to the

diaspora. Nevertheless, the participants from both countries mentioned that more than half of the budget assigned to their respective diaspora programmes is aimed to cover education policy. This includes not only the teaching/learning process but also financing other cultural and sports events, as well as supporting the building and renovation of infrastructure, employing teachers, providing teacher workshops and distributing learning materials.

*And the biggest share of the Global Lithuania budget goes to the Ministry of Education and for the activities for children, supporting Lithuanian schools, organising different camps, and providing training and assistance for the teachers at those schools (LT, 07).*

*For sure, education has always [garnered] the greatest amount of the budget ... A great share is spent on schooling, but not only schools. First, it finances school infrastructure—rent, bills, stationery, and computers. Second, financing educational materials, such as books. Third, financing after-school activities, competitions, events, excursions, social events, and educational stays in Poland. Hence, schools cover half of the budget, but more money is invested in after-school activities to make the education offer attractive (PL, 02).*

Polish participants stated that there are disputes not only about the amount of financial resources dedicated to the diaspora but also between the governmental institutions on the budget's purpose and allocation. What's more, the difference stems from left-wing and right-wing party politics. The former aims to establish cooperation and strengthen economic relationships with the diaspora in the West, while the right-wing favours the national minorities in the East (Lesińska 2019). This determines the budget's distribution and programmatic operations related to the diasporas.

*When the MFA lost power, the money was taken to the Senate. Then it turned out that the Prime Minister's Office had more power, [so] the money was taken from the Senate to the Prime Minister's Office. And what is the Polish diaspora to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? An instrument in the implementation of the state's foreign policy (PL, 02).*

Besides this, the Polish representatives mentioned that the existing procedure of financing diaspora education is not effective as it favours large non-governmental institutions registered in Poland. Hence, smaller organisations are deprived of a chance to get sufficient financing for their activities. What's more, the larger NGOs are quasi-governmental organisations, established and supported by a representative of certain state institutions (see also Popyk 2022).

*There are three big foundations, which are states within the states themselves, and they impose the politics. I would prefer the policy to be guided by the state rather than NGOs ... I am for the state to shape the Polish diaspora policy, apart from the openly corrupt competition mechanisms ... If we talk about the important segments of the policy, I reckon they should be run by the state, not non-governmental institutions (PL, 03).*

Since 2019 though, the responsibilities for maintaining relationships with the Polish diaspora were moved from the Senate to the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, namely the Department for Cooperation with Poles and the Polish Community Abroad. Since then, the Department endeavours to regulate the cooperation between institutions and the financial issues of the diaspora policy.

In comparison, the Lithuanian diaspora education policy has not undergone such radical changes in terms of institutional responsibility and cooperation since 2011. Most of the Lithuanian non-formal education schools abroad and other diaspora organisations were not funded by the state, apart from certain event programmes. The Lithuanian participants mentioned that:

*We also have to offer them [diaspora organisations] financial assistance ... and Lithuanian schools as well. Now, they run on the willingness of volunteers in the diaspora organisations. Those teachers in the schools are not supported by the state, yet. And for them, it is difficult to rent premises and they're struggling each day (LT, 07).*

However, the Lithuanian government has recently changed its approach to financing diaspora education organisations, aiming to provide access and support to a larger number of diaspora members. This also required raising the budget assigned to realise the set tasks.

*We had a significant change at the end of last year [2021]. Our parliament approved the change of our education law, so the state will be able to give financial support for the basic needs of those schools. It will be implemented in 2023 (LT, 07).*

To include a greater number of Lithuanian and Polish youth among the diasporas, the states have increased the budget for diaspora education. Though a significant part of the policy measures and finances are dedicated to kin-minorities, the diaspora organisations in the West are gaining increasing attention as well.

## **Methodological challenges**

The last, but equally important group of challenges in the diaspora education policy that Polish and Lithuanian state institutions face are *methodological*. The name of this category of challenges derives from the concept of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer, Glick Schiller 2002), declaring that a state is a 'natural social and political form in the modern world' (Ibid.: 302). It shapes the already established vision of the world, centralizing the homogenous societies. The 'methodological challenges' point to the old, already established approaches towards immigration, diaspora and methods of developing relations through ensuring education for the diaspora members.

In relation to the changing diasporas, both in composition (diaspora heterogeneity and categorisation), spatial scattering, and diversification of needs and



attitudes, both states' participants stated that current diaspora policies, particularly education policies, require changes in approaches to correctly perceive diasporas, and establish and maintain relationships.

*Another thing is that diaspora groups, especially youth, are very different. So, it's very difficult to choose the tools and methods that you want to work with because there are students or some low-skilled workers. There are diaspora youth that have grown up and those who were born in that country. So, it's very hard to choose the method to reach them (LT, 03).*

The existing policies were also perceived to be conservative, which resulted in their poor acceptance. One of the former state institution representatives in Lithuania criticised the current authorities for not adapting the approach to diaspora policy measures.

*They are working with Lithuanians abroad in that old style, like our uncles ... In the very beginning, it [the policy] was copied from the pre-war emigration system. Some newspapers, some centres [institutions] were copied. [New diaspora] cannot work in the format like communities (LT, 01).*

A Polish participant noted that to preserve Polishness and a level of knowledge of Polish culture, there is a need to start perceiving the Polish diaspora not as part of the whole nation, but as Poles residing abroad. With more instrumental efforts, this aim can be achieved.

*The policy measures need more professionalisation. We can assume that the knowledge of Polish culture will come automatically. We need to shift from teaching Polish as a native language to Polish as a foreign language because it is the second language (PL, 03).*

The Lithuanian participants also stated that Lithuanian institutions are aware of the necessity to change the tools and methods to reach and teach the diaspora, to preserve national identity and language. For this, additional methodological tasks were set for the Ministry of Education.

The significance of the COVID-19 pandemic was also mentioned in terms of methodological changes in diaspora education. Both states' participants stated that the pandemic, on the one hand, impeded the work of existing diaspora institutions and hampered personal meetings and events. On the other hand, the pandemic forced the development of new methods to reach more children and youth. Online tools help to provide education at a distance with no need to go to a school, which is specifically convenient for children living far from the community centres.

*[The pandemic period] helped in this way and there were loads of additional strategies and programmes put in place so some of the students could do online sessions, which were not possible before. New programs or software were created for children to start doing that. So, we got more schools and more children joining the whole network, which*

*is very positive on this note ... The availability and attractiveness of learning Polish grew in the times of COVID. We are on a higher level now ... Now, parents do not take their children 300 kilometres to Denver to school, there are online schools (PL, 02).*

Besides this, a Lithuanian participant mentioned that the pandemic period also created new opportunities for state intuitions and bodies to meet and have tight cooperation on elaborating diaspora policy.

*I guess for all the institutions this pandemic situation was quite difficult because we had to change a lot of our activities to adjust to the new reality .... We are really satisfied that work did not stop but continued. We work even closer and more actively with the Ministry of Education Science and Sports. We have closer connections with the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, also the Youth Department—they are active members (LT, 07).*

Therefore, despite changes in the diaspora and the impact of COVID-19, both states' participants reveal that the institutions are aware of the necessity to adjust methods to run the diaspora education policy more effectively.

## Discussion and conclusions

Diaspora education constitutes a significant part of the diaspora policies in Poland and Lithuania (Q1). This study also shows that diaspora education includes a broader range of issues than simply teaching/learning activities addressed to children and youth living abroad. Moreover, education institutions abroad are rarely places solely for learning, but in most cases play a vital role as the diaspora's social and cultural life centres. This complies with a broader definition of diaspora education (see Popyk, 2022), which encompasses language, culture and history learning, building national/ethnic identity and ties with the home state in formal and informal environments. This extensive definition of education for the diaspora, on the one hand, makes the topic challenging to encapsulate and study. On the other hand, it points to the necessity to inquire about the mechanisms of the diaspora policy as a whole, in which education takes an important if not the most significant place.

The analysis presented four main groups of interdependent challenges that state institutions in Poland and Lithuania face in the diaspora education policies, namely *socio-demographic, political, financial, and methodological* (Q2). The socio-demographic hardships of the policies point to the importance to consider the different societies living abroad. The case of Poland illustrates that young Poles abroad are eager to learn Polish and maintain ties with Poland, while some parents need more support in enhancing the national identity and linguistic development of children by encouraging their learning Polish. These findings are in line with previous studies

(Kloc-Nowak 2018; Praszalowicz et al. 2012; Vilkienė 2017). To compare, the challenges for the Lithuanian policymaking institutions are the scattered diaspora and small number of educational centres and diaspora institutions. This has its roots in the financial challenges of both states. Lithuania has recently introduced a new approach to financing diaspora organisations through competitions. The mechanism of competition is not new in Poland, but the existing programmes have significant weaknesses. The institutional leadership struggle (Nowak, Nowosielski 2019) and apparent activity of quasi-governmental institutions supported by certain politicians or parties results in a distorted financial mechanism. The case of Lithuania illustrates the strength of institutional coherence and collaboration. Moreover, the consistency and stability of the diaspora programme in Lithuania also demonstrates the robustness of the institutions' cooperation. The rivalry between the state bodies in Poland though, has resulted in a lack of durable and systematic diaspora policy strategies.

Despite the internal political disagreement, Polish institutions endeavour to meet the needs of various diaspora societies and groups by offering multiple competitions and financial aid, direct support for learning, teacher training, infrastructure maintenance, events organisation, and state visits. The Lithuanian state however, intends to unify the approach and include the young diaspora in the national education system. This is a part of enhancing the return policy of the state (Popyk et al. 2023), aimed at preparing young students to have a smooth re-adaptation to Lithuanian society when they return.

The study also demonstrates that the changing demography of the diaspora societies require significant shifts in the approaches, methods, and tools of the education policies of both states, which supports the previous suggestion by Szul (2018). The COVID-19 pandemic was revealed to have both negative and positive impacts, particularly in developing new online tools for teaching children and involving them in new forms of activities. Besides, Russia's invasion in Ukraine has both intensified the scale of Polish and Lithuanian's concerns on the importance of approaching young diaspora in Ukraine, Russia or Belarus and ensuring an access to education.

The outcomes of this study also indicate that education policy cannot be studied separately from other aspects of diaspora policy. As such, studying the challenges of the education policies in Poland and Lithuania, we present the challenges the state institutions face in other areas as well, with the distinction of the hardships specific to the teaching process. Consequently, the findings can partially be conveyed to other aspects of such policies.

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