

What brings people back? Opportunities and obstacles of return migration in Central Europe

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Introduction

Outmigration from Central and Eastern Europe has become a significant issue in recent years given the unexpected pace and socio-economic consequences of the process. The migration from the semi-peripheral regions of the EU to the more prosperous core regions is not a new phenomenon but the robust enlargements of the European Union (in 2004 and 2007) and the removal of barriers from labour mobility made it easier than ever before to move and work in the more developed Western part of the Union. The highly liberalised migration regime and the substantial differences in life conditions and incomes triggered significant outward migration in the former state-socialist countries. The new, 'post-socialist brain drain' has had serious effects on the national and regional labour markets, the competitiveness of regions, and chances of development, local demographic processes, and many other fields of socio-economic life (Martin & Radu 2012). Under the pressure of these negative effects policy makers have to act quickly and effectively to change recent trends, halt the process of brain drain and make brain gain possible. A couple of re-migration initiatives have already been carried out in Europe and it is timely to analyse their experiences in order to improve the efficiency of future policies (Kovács et al. 2013).

The aim of this paper is to present the recent migration and re-migration trends in Central and Eastern Europe and to analyse the possibilities of policies aiming to re-attract, re-integrate, and re-employ emigrants. Our findings are based mainly on the results of research conducted within the Re-Turn project which has been funded by the Central Europe programme of the European Union (Lang 2013). In the first part of the paper European migration statistics are analysed in order to shed light on recent migration trends and to outline the background of re-migration policies. The second part of the study focuses on concrete policies, best practices and initiatives implemented in countries of Central Europe, aimed to tackle outmigration. The analysis is based on a systematic overview of interventions made on various spatial levels in Europe and the initiatives and pilot actions carried out within the Re-Turn project.

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(1) The relevance of return migration: migration patterns in Central Europe

In this chapter we briefly analyse the situation of emigration and return migration in Europe and more specifically in Central Europe. For the sake of analysis we examine data on emigration and remigration of European statistical databases and the existing literature. The main goal is to give an overview of the conflicts related to emigration and re-migration in the Europe wide context and to define regions that have been seriously affected by emigration.

During the last twenty-three years countries of post-socialist Central Europe have gone through enormous political, economic and social changes. First, the systemic changes and the re-establishment of democracy and market economy, later the EU accession brought about substantial changes as far as migration flows in the region were concerned. In this respect the liberalisation of borders and the free movement of people quickly re-drew the map of Europe's migration pattern. An astonishing phenomenon was the economically triggered migration of young and well educated people from the New Member States towards Western Europe's more competitive regions (Smoliner et al., 2013). However, it is also important to point out that some of the old member states of the European Union (EU15) did not remove labour market barriers to immigrants from the new member states right from the beginning (e.g. Germany, Austria), and barriers were often removed only gradually (e.g. see the differences between New Member States of 2004 and 2007). We should also bear in mind that due to various factors (e.g. language barriers, differences in welfare regimes, national pension systems) European citizens have generally a lower propensity to move from one country to another as compared to citizens of the United States, what is often seen as an obstacle of greater competitiveness (Kahanec & Zimmermann 2011).

Analysing the migration flows within Europe the growing body of literature highlights the relevance of core-periphery relations where ever growing masses of labour from the periphery are triggered towards high-income countries within Europe (Drbohlav et al. 2009, Martin & Radu 2011). Countries of origin of this type of labour migration may also be the non-post-socialist countries of the European Union (e.g. Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland), but the weight of post-socialist countries has been clearly and steadily increasing for the last decade. Even, some of the previous peripheries of EU (e.g. Ireland, Spain) have become destinations of immigrants from the new member states by now (Kahanec & Zimmermann 2011).

According to Castles and Miller (2009) contemporary global migration flows are accelerated, increasingly diversified and more and more politicised. These features fit to the context of Central European outbound migration as well. New forms of migration (e.g. circulation) appeared with growing number of migrants which caused sharp political debates in these countries. Increasing number of political parties put the issue of migration high onto their agenda but in many cases the debate remains purely political or academic without practical solutions.

The process of 'post-socialist brain drain' generates new challenges in the territorial development and social cohesion both the sending and receiving regions. The ratio of foreigners has dramatically increased in some of the core regions; however, regions affected by emigration faced serious demographic and socio-economic consequences as well. Migration, both extra-European and intra-European, has a significant impact on the demographic and labour force development of regions (Blanchflower et al, 2007, Samers 2010). Advanced regions normally benefit from migration, whereas poorer regions suffer from it. In addition, to its impact on the labour market, migration reduces ageing in affluent regions and increases it in poorer ones (ESPON 2010a). In this respect we can identify core regions and crisis regions of migration within Europe.

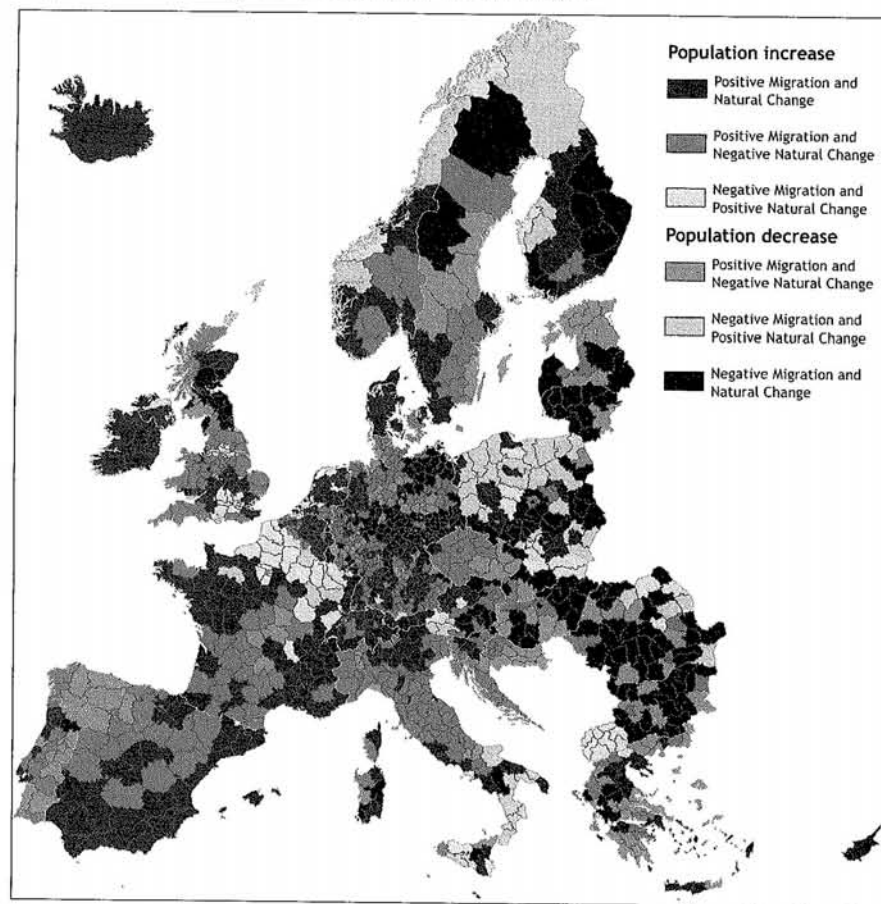


Fig. 1: Population Change by Main Components 2000–2007, NUTS3 level
Source: ESPON 2010b, p. 15

Figure 1 shows the dimensions of population change in European regions for the period of 2000–2007, where data on natural change and balance of migration are combined. Regions are classified in six groups according to their demographic profile and migration balance. One of the most striking dividing lines on the map is running between Eastern and Western Europe. Regions suffering from emigration are located mainly in the former state-socialist countries, including Eastern Germany. Taking into consideration the three East German regions it can be stated that the thirteen out of fifteen EU regions suffering most intensely from out-migration are located in East Central Europe. In addition to post-socialist countries, the southern parts of Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy) and remote sparsely populated regions of Scandinavia are also suffering from emigration. Beside these extensive areas, smaller regions in the core of Europe (e.g. Central France, Northern England) are also hit hard by emigration. They can be commonly characterised as "internal peripheries". However, most of the EU15 regions clearly benefit from migration, except for some north-eastern regions in France, the northern part of Portugal, north-eastern Finland and some regions in the former East Germany (ESPON 2010a).

Differentiating between European regions, population change through migration could be explained by two different components: (1) internal migration between regions within the same country, and (2) international migration crossing national borders. Generally, both components should be taken into consideration when analysing the migration record of specific regions within Europe. As figure 2 shows, in about two thirds of EU regions the total migration balance was positive for the period of 2005–2010. The combination of positive internal and positive international migration could be recorded in most of the cases (42 %), which was followed by the combination of negative internal and positive international migration (19 %). Regions where both components were negative for the period (13 %) could mainly be found on the periphery and geographically mostly in the eastern part of Europe (ESPON 2010c).

Considering these dimensions, East German and Bulgarian regions suffered the greatest population decline caused by migration, whereas regions of Ireland and Southern Spain gained the greatest numbers of immigrants in relative terms between 2000 and 2007. Except for some of the capital cities' and regional centres' regions, the overwhelming majority of regions in the former state-socialist countries suffered from emigration. It also seems to be a common trend that population losses caused simultaneously by national and international migration tend to overlap in the eastern regions of these countries. Migration loss of regions in the EU15 is normally caused by internal migration only (e.g. northern Scandinavia, northern Scotland, eastern Germany, southern Italy and Greece). Negative balance of international migration plays a role only in Portugal and northern France.

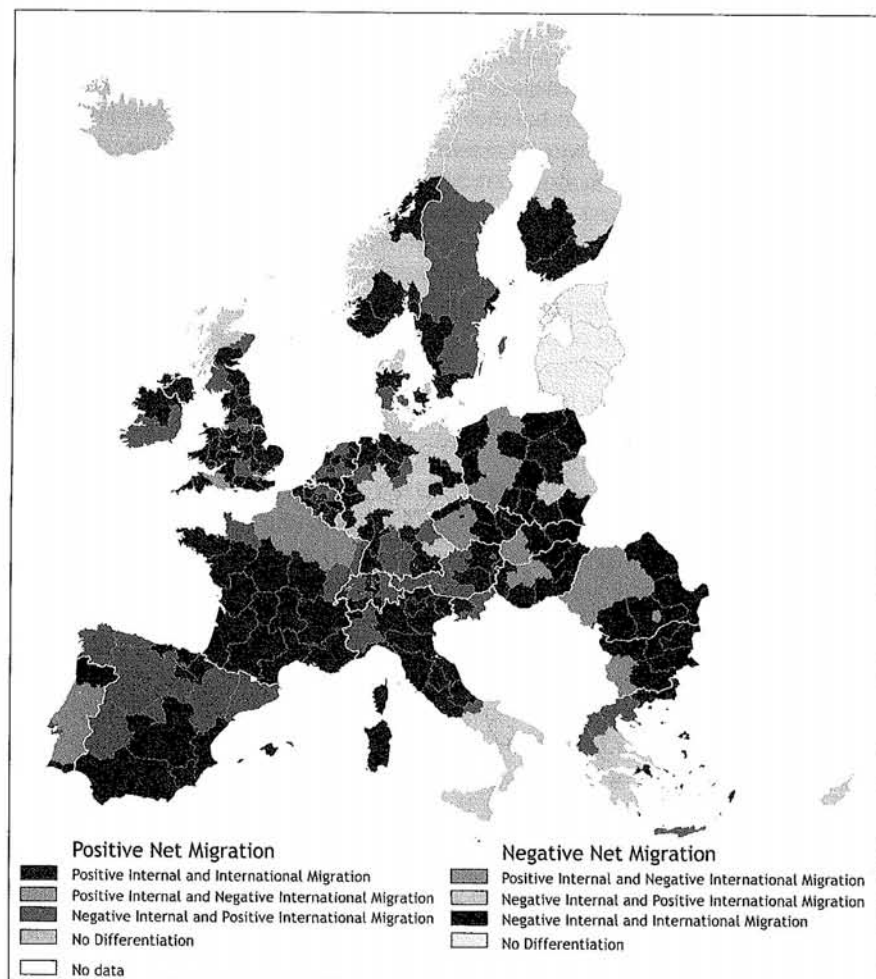


Fig. 2: Net Migration: Internal and international migration balance for 2005–2010, NUTS2 level
Source: ESPON 2010c, p. 3

According to estimations, the annual turnover of migration is around 2 million in the ESPON countries. Migration flows between European countries go mainly from East to West. This pattern becomes clear especially from Figure 3 where migration flows involving more than 5,000 people in the years of 2006 and 2007 are indicated. There were altogether 79 such relations within Europe in these two years. The greatest flows were recorded between Germany and Poland (223,000) and between Spain and Romania (102,000). Migration between Romania and Italy

(76,000) and between Spain/Poland and the UK (52,000) were also considerable. The map also indicates that migration flows favour mainly major European metropolitan regions, like London, Madrid and Paris, but other capital city regions also attract large number of international migrants (ESPON 2010d). However, it should be highlighted that significant migration flows from third countries also targets these core economic regions (Dumont & Lemaitre, 2008).

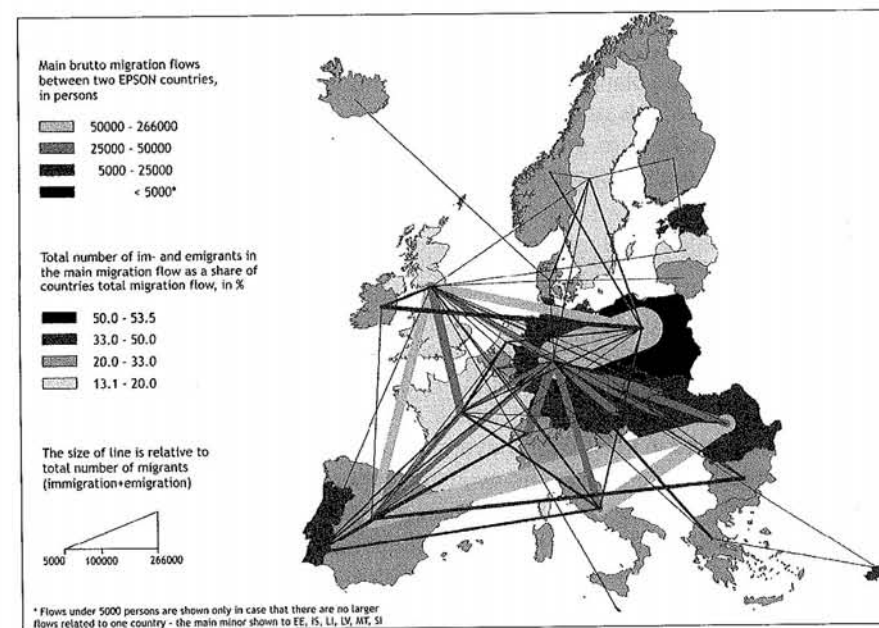


Fig.3: Main bilateral gross migration flows
Source: ESPON 2010b, p. 49

Considering internal migration flows involving more than 2,500 persons the advantageous position of major metropolis regions becomes even clearer. The most important connections were directed to the most important global cities of Europe including London, Paris or Madrid, and cities of the Ruhr agglomeration. Regional disparities in economic development and income level within countries appear also strikingly on the map, such as in Sweden, Germany or in other countries from less developed peripheries to the core region.

Summarising the processes both emigration and return migration are significant spatial processes in Europe. After 2004, labour migration has increased within the enlarged European Union where core regions of immigration and crisis regions of emigration could be defined. Core regions are mainly located in the more developed countries, with high GDP per capita values, and they enjoy

surplus both in internal and international migration. Crisis regions are located mostly in the eastern periphery and they have negative balances of both internal and international migration. Among them the eastern regions of post-socialist countries could be identified as the most crisis ridden regions in the context of European migration.

(2) Tools for return migration

In this chapter the focus of analysis is on different policies and best practices aiming to enhance re-migration. Therefore, incidence and importance of re-migration in European planning and implementation activities are to be assessed. A further objective of this study is to analyse initiatives, practical tools and related experiences of the Re-Turn project. Tools of Re-Turn project are examined with a special focus on their applicability and possible future utilisation.

(2.1) National policies

To begin with an overview of recent European policies designed to stimulate return migration and/or to stop (or slow down) outmigration is necessary. The role of policies targeting return migration has been growing in the world (UNDP, 2007). The reverse brain drain of skilled engineers and scientists has benefited e.g. China, Taiwan and India a lot (Sills, 2008). Following their example more and more countries make efforts to attract back their nationals residing abroad. The migration policies adopted in these countries aimed at stimulating the migrants to remit funds, to bring their skills back, and even allow them dual citizenship and rights. They may establish systems of information and cultural outreach to expatriate communities, and they may also support migrants to seek representation in institutional structures, and particularly in the parliament. They may even offer incentives to stimulate return (e.g. special access to definite social services, permission to earn premium interest rates), as well as reintegration assistance (SOPEMI, 2008).

Regarding their geographical scale, European, transnational, national and regional/local migration policies can be identified in Europe. We have found only very few transnational policies during our research, and only one (Marie Curie Programme) had a full European coverage. A large-scale initiative covering six European countries is the "Guidance and Counselling for Migrants and Returnees". The project involved partners from six European countries (Slovakia, UK, The Czech Republic, The Netherlands, Cyprus, and Greece) and it was carried out between 2009 and 2011. The main objective of the project was to disseminate experiences and to collect best practices about migrants and returnees. Beyond these initiatives bilateral agreements were also established between sending and receiving countries (e.g. between Austria and Ukraine) to help migrants to return.

From our desktop research it turned out that coordination and synergy between existing national brain gain strategies are also missing. Compared to the significance of labour outmigration, there are very few transnational initiatives.

On the national level migration, labour and youth policies often jointly deal with the retention and re-attraction of workforce. In most cases the focus of migration policy is on immigration, illegal migration and asylum seekers and the implementation of EU regulation. Interestingly, while the analysed strategies aim to attract skilled labour they pay much less attention to preserving or re-attracting their country's former and present human resources. Most policy documents put the emphasis on the possible economic and demographic advantages of return migration, and social reintegration is emphasised only in three of them. Regarding their duration, most of the policies are very young (i.e. implemented after 2000).

According to the applied methods (e.g. re-attraction, re-integration, re-employment, retention) national policies show great variations. Most documents apply more than one method. Generally, re-attraction plays an important role in most policies, but it is more emphasised in those re-migration policies that have clear economic objectives and in policies formulated in East Central European countries (e.g. Poland, Hungary). The latter try to heal the negative outcomes of previous migration losses resulting mainly from income disparities between East and West. The role of re-employment is important especially in labour market initiatives (e.g. Lendület in Hungary). The most common and significant measures made by home countries are briefly discussed below according to the type of intervention.

Return policies:

- Grants to re-attract skilled labour - especially for researchers. These initiatives target very few people (4–10 person/year). The grants are usually co-financed by the European Union. Some examples are: Rientrocervelli ("Brain buster") in Italy, Lendület (Momentum) in Hungary, Slovensko Calling in Slovakia.
- Information services for possible future re-migrants about jobs, legislation, business possibilities etc. Some of the sending countries (e.g. Poland) have created crisis-centres for facilitating information flow and helping re-employment. The "Have you got a PPlan to return?" initiative in Poland aims to provide information to make return as smooth as possible and help re-integration. However, after the breakout of the 2008 crisis in sending countries the massive return of migrants is not a preferred scenario because it would worsen the conditions of domestic labour market.
- Helping re-integration and re-employment of re-migrants by recognising skills earned abroad (e.g. Romania).
- Assisting the return of migrants who lost their jobs and became homeless while staying abroad (BARKA Foundation, helping Polish people to return to Poland).
- Strengthening identity of emigrants to motivate their return (Back2BG, Bulgaria).

Resourcing expatriates:

- Network-building among expatriates – frequently used in scientific (R&D) relations (e.g. OST Scientist Network – Austria, German Academic International Network – Germany).
- Lobbying with the participation of expatriates (e.g. pro-Polish lobbying) to promote the country abroad.
- Promoting national culture and language abroad and strengthening the ties between expatriates and those who remained at home (e.g. Wspólnota Polska [Polish Community] Association in the case of Poland under the patronage of the Polish Senate).
- Creating database to collect information about students and workers abroad (The State Agency for the Bulgarians Abroad).

Retention policies:

- Most of the policy documents emphasises the importance of national and regional economic situation: in this point of view outmigration and return migration are simply (economic) growth related issues. From this standpoint the priority is to boost economic growth and as a result, migration trends would change as well. This approach is often a feature of countries without significant outmigration.
- Retention policies often focus on easing the administrative burdens for starting new enterprises, organising trainings for future entrepreneurs. The target groups can be both (possible) re-migrants and workers not emigrated yet.

Although EU legislation does not allow regulations that can counterwork against the free movement of people principle, there is an example of restriction policy, too:

- In 2012 the Hungarian government introduced a new rule for future university students to slow down the outmigration of skilled labour. According to the law students have to work in Hungary in the next 20 years after their graduation for a time period that equals to their government-financed university education. If they emigrate they have to pay back the costs of their education.

The decision of returning (or staying put) is influenced not only by the policies of sending countries but by those of the destination countries, too. This type of migration policies became more important because of the recent crisis (Cerna 2010, Kuptsch 2012). The growing unemployment in receiving countries made governments eager to adopt protective measures regarding their labour market. Nevertheless, some countries (e.g. Sweden) continued their (more or less) open migration policies because of labour shortages (Awad 2009, IOM 2010). Some examples for this type of policy measures:

- „Pay-to-go” programmes to motivate return migration (e.g. Spain, Czech Republic). The country of destination offers money for potential re-migrants

to facilitate their move back to the home country. However, according to available data only very few people used this option.

- Campaigns in the source countries to make outmigration a less attractive option (e.g. Great Britain in Romania).
- Microcredit funds for returning migrants (e.g. FondoMicrocreditoBalceni in Italy, helping Romanian migrants to return – started in 2007) in co-operation between sending and host countries.

In relation to re-attraction policies it is worth mentioning that according to some surveys, most of the returnees distrust their government (e.g. in Poland, see Eurofund 2012).

On national level the fragmented institutional background of migration policies seems to be a problem. Usually there are no co-ordinating institutions with a comprehensive authority to manage all of the re-migration related tasks. Furthermore, national decision-making processes are not comprehensive and lack of funds is also a significant problem.

According to previous researches (Hilpert & Parkes 2011) the public opinion both in sending and receiving countries is afraid that the migration, which was planned as a temporary stage of the career of migrant, becomes permanent. This attitude can obstruct the necessary migration flows too, thus jeopardising competitiveness. Despite the information services offered for possible re-migrants, information flows seem to be weak elements of policies. The majority of possible re-migrants have not got any information about their possibilities. The quality of information flow affects policy responsiveness, too (Cerna 2010, Eurofund 2012).

According to our analysis, the feasibility and adaptability of these projects depend mainly on two factors: the level of decentralisation of the political system in the different countries; and the financial conditions (e.g. financial resources available in the region/community, available national and/or EU funding etc.).

(2.2) Best practices on local and regional level

Regional and local policies may be more efficient for mitigating the losses caused by emigration because their objectives are more ‘tailored’ for regional and local conditions than national policies. On these scales return and retention policies are the most widely spread. Among the analysed best practices the geographical focus of these initiatives are crisis-ridden regions suffering from intense out-migration, high levels of unemployment and structural problems in local economy. The analysed initiatives are different with regard the type of approach, the target groups and feasibility.

In terms of approaches two major groups can be identified. On the one hand, initiatives using concentrated approach focus only on migration-related and labour market issues, such as re-attracting people, preventing brain drain, supporting job seekers, providing information about the job market or business opportunities, etc.). On the other hand initiatives with integrated approach

connect migration issues with a wider range of social and economic processes, urban and regional development, education, information society, etc. During our research, initiatives with integrated approach were clearly in majority.

According to the target groups two approaches could be pointed out: the so called 'catch all' and 'differentiated' approach. The second approach focuses mostly on age or the level of education. Regarding age, the investigated initiatives focus mainly on young people. The successes of initiatives mainly depend on the available human and/or financial resources of the spatial approach. Based on their specific problems regions use different types of measures to intervene in migration processes. The most frequent types of interventions are: job creation, place marketing, scholarships and grants, financial aid for returnees, recruitment, and development of public relations. In terms of the feasibility and adaptability we can conclude that beside the necessary financial and human resources the level of decentralisation of the political system in the country also matters.

Summarizing our research findings, it can be stated that relatively few transnational and national initiatives have been launched until now which deal with remigration, moreover, concrete and comprehensive policies are very rare. In terms of their success, because of the short time of their operation it is hard to measure their impact, costs and efficiency. The idea of re-attraction and retention of human capital are the most widely used policies. We also found that a competent institutional background with decentralised decision-making is needed to develop promising initiatives. Furthermore, well-defined aims and target groups contribute to the success – without a real focus and results there is a risk that the programme becomes too general. Last, but not least the proper information flows between different actors are crucial in the efficiency of re-migration and retention policies.

(3) Analysis of Re-Turn initiatives

Several initiatives have been implemented in the course of Re-Turn project. The main objectives and analytical categories of the Re-Turn project are: re-attraction, re-integration, and re-employment. These three objectives can partially overlap in the initiatives. The possibilities of practical evaluation of these initiatives are limited, because of the short time span and the lack of related documents of monitoring.

In terms of retention it must be underlined that a direct retention strategy would contradict the idea of free movement principle within the European Union. Hence, retaining labour workforce should not be enhanced in an obligatory way. This is the reason why Re-Turn initiatives do not directly deal with retention.

(3.1) Re-attraction

As it was mentioned previously, the most frequently used objective of European policies supporting return migration is the increasing awareness of the attractiveness of the home country or region. Initiatives were carried out within the project

using the idea of resourcing policies: providing migrants the possibility to keep in touch with the home country.

In the framework of Re-Turn two such initiatives were experimented in order to re-attract migrants. One of them was the establishment and operation of a website. Emigrants living abroad could find relevant information on the website that might have influenced them in making decisions about return. Such web portal can broadcast about national and regional developments, successful return stories or it can provide job seeking platform, as well. In addition to the website, a mobile application and a Facebook profile were also developed within the project. The second initiative was a telephone hotline for emigrants and potential returnees who search information regarding return opportunities. During the project lifetime, calls from the homeland were planned to be free of charge and dials from abroad at discounted prices.

Both initiatives were designed to provide migrants relevant information without face-to-face meetings. During the implementation it turned out that information provided online (website) was more efficient and popular among migrants thinking about return than the hotline. Migrants living abroad (i.e. the primarily target group of the telephone hotline) were hardly involved in the hotline project, mainly because of technical obstacles, such as calls from abroad were not discounted, or free. The website was more popular and received more visitors also because migrants could read about different themes simultaneously, such as housing, taxation or child care, and they could also find information about successful return stories.

To sum up the results of Re-Turn re-attraction initiative, it should be underlined, that the maintenance of a website or other online networking systems might be an appropriate tool to draw the attention of emigrants to the advantages of the home country. In particular, the operation of such kind of initiatives is relatively cheap, and it is able to forward useful information for emigrants thinking of return.

(3.2) Re-integration

Social and economic re-integration of returnees was also one of the objectives of Re-Turn. Although, re-integration of migrants to the labour market was a separate objective due to its significance (called re-employment), yet social and economic reintegration is the prerequisite of re-employment.

It can be concluded that emigrants are often not aware of the changing socio-economic conditions or administrative regulations of their home country. Their connections with the homeland get gradually weaker over time. This finding was also confirmed by the regional workshops of Re-Turn organised for decision makers and intermediaries. For instance, migrants are often considered to be failed migrants or job-hoppers, despite the fact that employers generally do not have negative attitudes towards returnees. Networks between migrants abroad and returnees/non-migrants in the motherland are seen as facilitators for the reintegration after return.

One of the possible initiatives for the smooth re-integration of returnees is the One-Stop-Shop concept. It aims to provide so called tailor-made services, mainly through personal counselling. In the framework of Re-Turn project two types of re-integration (One-Stop-Shop) offices were opened. On the one hand, a welcome agency was set up in one of the pilot regions of the Re-Turn project that helped returnees with personal assistance by using a wide range of network. On the other hand, an integration office was also opened in order to provide trainings for returnees who wanted to establish their own firm.

Main activities of the One-Stop-Shop offices are the provision of information and contact details of regional employers, labour offices or housing agencies etc. Furthermore, they assure networking between employers and returnees in order to enhance re-integration to the labour market as fast and effective as possible. Participants had the chance for personal consultancy and assistance from special trainees who enabled their return and re-integration. The majority of returnees who do not want to start their own business can apply for HR development and job searching for the sake of being re-integrated to the labour market of the home country. In terms of the One-Stop-Shop concept the cooperation with the returning jobseekers can be further enhanced by website and online platforms in order to assist returnees in the re-integration and re-employment process. The re-integration policy should not only focus on social and economic, but also on other kinds of assistance. The complex information service is an important tool of re-integration, and it can be realised in the easiest way with the help of One-Stop-Shop.

(3.3) Re-employment

It is not enough to re-integrate the returnees in social terms, but their re-employment in labour market is also needed. The benefits of return migration are the greatest if the financial, human and social capital of returnees are utilised in a complex way, as it is implied in the scientific literature (Ferri & Rainero, 2010).

Assisting and enhancing re-employment and related economic activities among returnees is a difficult task again. As an online survey and statistical analysis of Re-Turn project revealed, returnees are generally less often employed and more often unemployed than stayers (Smoliner et al., 2013). Returning migrants surveyed by Re-Turn unanimously mentioned the lack of suitable job in the labour market of the home country or region as their most serious problem. Companies employing returnees have mostly positive experience. They consider returning migrants a valuable workforce, primarily due to better language skills and up-to-date technological knowledge. But companies do not have special policies regarding returnees in their HR development strategies. These facts also confirm the importance of re-employment.

Return migrants often start their own enterprises after return. Therefore, we consider the promotion of knowledge and practice of entrepreneurship among them an important part of re-employment. Entrepreneurship as a possible

solution should also be included in re-employment strategies that can be successfully applied for everyone and in all sectors of the economy.

Returnees have better chances to start their own business as opposed to stayers also because they enjoy advantages due to the knowledge and work experiences acquired abroad. Related Re-Turn initiatives could be separated into two groups. On the one hand, an entrepreneurship training programme was launched that supports returning migrants to become entrepreneurs and teach them how to start and operate sustainable and successful business. On the other hand, a special program was developed called 'entrepreneurship training and mentoring programme', that enables participants to find out, realise and operate their own businesses. During this programme, a network was established that involves mentors and companies with a wide range of profile, so returnees have the chance to find their own field of work and their mentors.

During the Re-Turn project, the implementation of these programmes was started with promotion, which was followed by trainings and preparation of business plans, and it was finished with the start-up of new businesses. The aim of trainings was to teach returnees how to attain entrepreneurship knowledge, and practice in order to yield profits from their foreign work experience, and support them with practical assistance. The initiatives also involved various intermediaries.

Initiatives that seek to promote entrepreneurship among returnees are important. Such initiative should focus on various aspects. First, assistance and counselling should be provided in terms of tax, insurance and employee conditions of returnees. Second, return migrants who want to become entrepreneurs should be supported by tenders, projects or allowances. Other possible help might be non-repayable credits, special economic zones with tax relief, support with technical equipments and the help of foreign investment agencies. In addition, job portal is a significant tool of re-employment. It should be operated as an independent website.

(3.4) General objectives

Beside the three main concepts what the project focused upon, a fourth category of initiatives could be separated that functions as a mixed group. It should be emphasized that during the implementation of these initiatives most of them may overlap. One of the most important initiatives related to the general objective of the project was the so called ambassador concept. The main objective of the concept is to promote a positive image about the region among emigrants and to offer so called tailored solutions for possible returnees. The ambassador's own migration experiences could be used in a pro-active way. In addition, the ambassador is responsible for establishing an effective network between migrants and intermediaries of the home country.

Based on the project experiences it can be concluded that migrants who participated in the initiatives were motivated mostly by potential benefits after

return (especially those who were unemployed) and receiving training in order to increase their skills and acquire new professions. In addition, opportunities of becoming self-employed and starting own businesses were also important motivations. The most frequently asked assistance was related to job seeking. In this case, the smooth communication with the local labour office proved to be very important. Last, but not least, the possibility for personal consultancy is also important for returnees where so called tailored solutions could be offered.

It should be highlighted that the smooth cooperation among different organizations are crucial for return initiatives. Hence, many disadvantages of start-ups, such as the lack of knowledge and relations and financial problems might be avoided and the exchange of experience could facilitate efficiency.

Generally, the longer the time of an emigrant spent abroad, the less the probability of return is (SOPeMI 2008). However, according to the results of Re-Turn initiatives, the majority of returning migrants actively plan their return. As the method of resourcing strategies, this is also supported by networks established between emigrants and return migrants/non-migrants. Return migrants are often not aware of their obligations (e.g. social insurance) and possibilities (e.g. job search). Therefore, adequate communication and PR strategies are needed, which may be considered as part of the re-attraction objective. Communication and PR strategies enhancing the image of the home region are needed.

Conclusions

As we have seen emigration is a serious problem for many peripheral regions especially in East Central European post-socialist countries. But the migration process is not a one-way and irreversible phenomenon. In this context the issue of re-migration gained relevance in the past years. Empirical studies show that the willingness of migrants to return their home country is relatively high. However, it is important to emphasize that social, economic, political and legal barriers can all equally hinder re-migration. Therefore, complex measures are needed to change the direction of recent migration flows and to enhance re-turn migrations. Re-migration initiatives cannot ignore the facts that Europe faces significant demographic challenges and many regions have to deal with the shortage of skilled workers. This situation foresees a growing competition for skilled labour – both on European and global scale. The role of European policies is also an important factor: on the European level policies will move towards granting free movement of people and a more unified labour market in the future. Beside the EU level the role of regional and local governments, and NGOs, can be also crucial in remigration initiatives. Because of the distrust towards national governments and politicians other actors and decision-making levels can be more effective than those of the national level.

First of all, it is important to emphasise that responses to the challenges of brain drain have to be place-based ones. This means that policy makers need to create

unique strategies of the regions according to their special conditions – there are no “one fits all” strategies.

As surveys and our policy analysis show, information-flows have a crucial role in return migration – from the planning of return to the reintegration of returnees. On the basis of scientific surveys focusing on the needs of return migrants, complex packages of information (e.g. on health care, education, housing market and the labour market) should be provided for the persons concerned. Therefore, further information exchange platforms should be developed and the existing ones should be strengthened. These platforms would present administrative duties related to return, job vacancies, business possibilities etc. Furthermore, assisting intermediaries can be also helpful to support return migration by developing telephone hotlines and welcome offices for the sake of encouraging returnees being entrepreneurs. The surveys conducted in Re-Turn pointed out complicated administrative procedures discouraging return migration. Therefore, all kinds of administration (i.e. in relation to social security, starting new businesses, etc.) should be simpler to facilitate return migration and to help re-integration. Stronger social ties between stayers and migrants increase the chance of return – therefore policy makers should build upon these ties and policies should facilitate, and strengthen them

In addition, re-integration of return migrants is an essential prerequisite of successful re-employment activities – without re-integration the return of employees can be temporary and they can leave their country again. Complex projects of re-integration involving different social and economic aspects can be recommended. As the part of these initiatives, national, regional and local governments should emphasise the importance of return migration in the public in order to reduce tensions which can develop because of grants and other incentives received by returnees. Therefore, it is important to present the economic, demographic and social benefits of return migration in the wider society.

Last but not least, it is crucial to provide strong, competitive and innovative economy in the home country and region. According to surveys, the most important factor of return migration is the economic situation of the home country – the role of return campaigns and policies are less significant. The role of SMEs is significant in competitiveness and job creation. Therefore, it is important to draw the attention of small and medium sized companies to the role of return migration and the possible benefits provided by returnees. This would help both re-employment and re-integration.

To sum up, it is not an easy task to tackle the negative consequences of brain drain but with complex measures policy makers can influence attitudes both towards migration and re-migration. Without proper interventions the future competitiveness of Central Europe is severely jeopardized. European Institutions, countries, local and regional authorities, companies, NGOs, labour unions and scientific centres all have to work in partnership to make Central Europe more attractive for local and emigrated labour. Migration should not be considered as

a problem but as a possibility: a possibility to gain experience, knowledge, new skills etc. Future policies should also acknowledge the role and enhance the conditions of circular migration; rather than seeing migration as a permanent decision it should be perceived as a stage of career.

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