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Gábor LADOS, Szeged
 Zoltán KOVÁCS, Szeged
 Gábor HEGEDŰS, Szeged
 Lajos BOROS, Szeged

Challenges of brain drain and obstacles of return migration in Hungary: an empirical perspective

Zusammenfassung

Herausforderungen durch die Abwanderung qualifizierter Arbeitskräfte (*brain drain*) und Hindernisse für Rückkehrmigration nach Ungarn: eine empirische Perspektive

Dieser Aufsatz behandelt den Prozess der Abwanderung qualifizierter Arbeitskräfte (*brain drain*) in Ungarn und die Möglichkeiten von Rückkehrmigration. Nach dem EU-Beitritt bewirkte *brain drain* eine massenhafte Abwanderung von Fachkräften (besonders der gut ausgebildeten Schicht der Erwerbstätigen) in den Westen. Ziel des Beitrags ist es, die Haupteigenschaften von Abwanderung im Vergleich zu Rückmigration und den Motivationen von Migranten zu untersuchen. Der Aufsatz basiert auf verschiedenen methodologischen Ansätzen, darunter Literaturauswertung, Analyse statistischer Daten und Tiefeninterviews. Unseren Ergebnissen zufolge haben die wenigen Rückmigrationsinitiativen, die es gibt, bisher keinen starken Einfluss auf die Entscheidungen, zurückzukehren. Ungarn sind weniger zufrieden mit ihrer Rückkehr als andere Migranten aus den benachbarten postsozialistischen Ländern. Bezüglich von Hindernissen für die Rückkehr sind die schwachen Arbeitsmarktbedingungen das besorgniserregendste Problem. Sowohl hoch- als auch geringer qualifizierte Rückkehrer ziehen Vorteile aus der Auswanderung, doch ist erstere Gruppe nach der Rückkehr erfolgreicher als die geringer qualifizierte.

This paper deals with the process of brain drain in Hungary and the possibilities of return migration. After the EU accession brain drain generated a mass outmigration of skilled labour (especially the well-educated segment of the labourforce) to the West. Our primary aim is to investigate the main features of outmigration versus remigration and the motivations of migrants. The paper is based on different methodological approaches, including a literature review, analysis of statistical data and in-depth interviews. According to our results, the few existing

initiatives of remigration have no serious influence on decisions to return as yet. Hungarians are less satisfied with their return than other migrants from the neighbouring post-socialist countries. In terms of obstacles of return the weak labour market conditions in the home country is the most alarming problem. Both highly qualified and lower skilled returnees gain benefits from emigration, but the former group is more successful after return than the less skilled one.

1 Introduction

Human capital flight, more commonly referred to as ‘brain drain’ was coined by the Royal Society in a 1963 report to describe the mass emigration of British scientists to North-America following World War II (see CRUSH u. HUGHES 2009). Ever since there has been a growing body of literature focusing on the socio-economic aspects and consequences of brain drain in the world, the effects of globalisation on migration especially the international mobility of people with skills. With the imposition of Iron Curtain, migration from East Central Europe (ECE) to the West became, except under limited circumstances, effectively halted after 1950. The dismantling of Iron Curtain and opening of borders after the collapse of communism created entirely new situation in the migration pattern of Europe, where post-socialist countries became increasingly affected by brain drain (see GLORIUS 2013; KRISJANE et al. 2013).

It was first the former GDR where the mass migration of qualified labour, mostly to the western part of Germany took place. In the period of January 1989 to January 1992, roughly 870 thousand East Germans (5% of the population or 10% of the labour force) migrated to Western Germany (see BURDA 1993; KEMPER 2004). In the second half of the 1990s Eastern Germany was followed by other countries like Poland and the post-Yugoslav States, yet, brain drain in ECE remained relatively limited. However, after the 2004 EU accession (in the case of Romania and Bulgaria 2007) the migration of skilled labour from the new member states to the core countries of the EU speeded up considerably. The EU accession has lifted most of the previous administrative barriers of European labour movement and emigration of skilled workers from the former state-socialist countries gained momentum. The annual number of migrants from East to West gradually increased and reached its peak after the outbreak of global financial crisis in 2008 (see IGLICZKA et al. 2012). There are different estimations about the total number of ‘East European’ emigrants who moved to Western Europe after the EU accession, but most of the experts calculate, for instance, over two million for Poland and Romania, and 200 thousand for Hungary (see ROMAN u. VOICU 2010; IGLICZKA et al. 2012). These are substantial figures, especially if we take into consideration the size of these countries.

In addition to improving economic performance of the home country, one possibility to heal the negative outcomes of brain drain could be the stimulation of return migration. Many emigrants do eventually return to their country of origin, raising the possibility that the time spent away can be turned to the advantage of the home country (CRUSH u. HUGHES 2009, 345). This advantage can be garnered from the human, entrepreneurial, financial and social capital that migrants accumulated

abroad. Migrants may return with better education, new skills and technological knowledge, more financial resources, new ideas and international connections, thus they can be drivers of innovation and economic development in the home country. If countries of East Central Europe would like to counterbalance losses caused by brain drain they should pay more attention to the opportunities provided by return migration. Their starting position is not absolutely hopeless, as these countries experienced massive economic growth in the 2000s, resulting in improving job opportunities and fast convergence of income levels between home and host countries, especially for skilled labour (MARTIN u. RADU 2012, 111). Yet, as our research showed comprehensive re-migration policies in the post-socialist countries are still missing.

The main aim of this paper is to provide empirical insights about the state-of-the-art of return migration in Hungary and enrich the literature dealing with return migration in East Central Europe (see KLAGGE u. KLEIN-HITPAß 2007; MARTIN u. RADU 2012). After introducing the theoretical context we briefly discuss recent phenomena of emigration of people with skills and subsequent government responses in ECE. The empirical part of the paper is based upon data obtained in an online survey among migrants and in-depth interviews conducted with return migrants. The main research questions we would like to answer are:

- What are the main differences among countries of East Central Europe regarding the potentials of return migration, and the behaviour of returnees?
- What are the roles of macro- and micro-scale (personal) factors in the process of return?
- How do returnees assess their return to the home country? Can they make use of their foreign work experience after return?

2 Return migration from a theoretical perspective

A great variety of terms have been used in the literature to describe return migration: e.g. reflux migration, homeward migration, remigration, return flow, second-time migration, repatriation, and ‘retromigration’ (see GMELCH 1980). According to the definition of the United Nations Statistics Division (see UN 1998), returning migrants are “persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short term or long-term) in another country and who are intending to stay in their own country for at least a year.” This definition embraces four dimensions: i) country of origin, ii) place of residence abroad, iii) length of stay in the host country, and iv) length of stay in the home country after return (see OECD 2008).

The impact of return migration on the development of home country is often debated. Returnees may foster economic development in many different ways e.g. they contribute to the diffusion of innovations, the adaptation of foreign knowledge and working skills. Furthermore, they link their native countries to international networks and foreign investors (see SILLS 2008; FERRI u. RAINERO 2010). However, as some of the authors emphasise the impact of return migrants on the home region is not always beneficial. Failed return migrants do not necessarily

bring new skills; remittances may not generate economic upswing because most foreign earnings are spent on consumer goods rather than invested in land or other businesses. According to some commentators, the newly acquired wealth of returnees often heightens inequality and social tensions, resulting in growing resentment against returnees. The returnee is a living demonstration to young people in the society that it is possible to go abroad, see a part of the world, obtain a better paying job, save, and return to the homeland, reunite with family and friends and with enough capital to achieve a comfortable standard of living (see GMELCH 1980; OECD 2008).

Research on return migration and its main triggers gained impetus from the middle of the 1970s (see CASSARINO 2004; GLASER u. HABERS 1974; GMELCH 1980; VAN HOUTE u. DAVIDS 2008). Since then several theoretical approaches have been developed in the scientific discourse regarding the return phenomenon and its impact on the country of origin. Perhaps the two most influential and contrasting among them are the *neoclassical approach* and the *New Economics of Labour Migration* (NELM) (see CASSARINO 2004). Neoclassical economists argue that people move permanently to raise and maximise their wages in receiving countries. In this respect return migration should be interpreted as a failed migration which did not yield the expected benefits. In other words return migration involves mainly those migrants who miscalculated the costs of migration and who did not reap the benefits of higher earnings. Conversely, the New Economics of Labour Migration views return migration as the logical outcome of a “calculated strategy” (see CASSARINO 2004). Migrants go abroad for a limited period of time, until they succeed in earning sufficient amount of money and gaining new skills. From the point of view of migrant return is not a failure but the successful achievement of original goals. In this sense return migration is part of a well-prepared and calculated migration project.

Both the neoclassical and NELM approaches provide valuable insights regarding the reasons for which people go abroad and return home, however, both of them have several shortcomings as far as their analytical frameworks are concerned. Their main weakness is that they consider only economic (financial) factors when explaining motivations for return leaving aside other e.g. social, cultural, institutional, personal factors. There is virtually no reference to where migrants return, what kind of social, economic and political environment receives them at home, and what the main obstacles of return are. Moreover, these concepts provide little explanation of how newly acquired skills are used in the home country. The recognition that the success/failure paradigm cannot properly explain why migrants decide to return to their country of origin helped to evolve a third strand of theoretical approach to return migration, the structural approach.

According to the *structural approach*, return is not only determined by the individual experience of the migrant, but also by the socio-cultural and institutional factors of the home country. Advocates of the structural approach argue that decision to return seems to be very much influenced by the opportunities that migrants expect to find in their home country and by the opportunities offered in their host countries. It is also argued that returnees are often ill prepared for their return since it is difficult for them to gather proper information about the social,

economic and political changes that have, in the meantime, taken place in their countries of origin (see GMELCH 1980).

Revisiting the conceptual approaches of international migration theories CASSARINO (2004) highlights the importance of two factors that are important for return migration: resource mobilisation and preparedness. Resource mobilisation refers to tangible (i.e. financial capital) as well as intangible (i.e. skills, social contacts) resources that can be mobilised during and after return. Preparedness refers both to the willingness and readiness of migrants to return home. In general the higher the preparedness, the greater is the probability that a returnee is able to mobilise valuable resources, which will pay off in the country of origin.

As a fourth, conceptual approach the *Cultural Identity Model* (CIM) brings psychological and cultural perspectives into the explanation of return process (see SUSSMAN 2002 u. 2010). According to the model cultural identity and its transition substantially influence cultural adaptation and return experience. The model posits four types of post-adaptation identity: affirmative, subtractive, additive and global, each with a resulting return outcome (SUSSMAN 2002, 394). For those with an affirmative identity, the stay abroad affirms their home country identity, generally they have low adaptation to the host country and the return home is experienced positively. Both subtractive and additive identifiers tend to experience high adaptation to the host country and high repatriation distress upon return to the home country. The basic difference between the two groups is that while subtractive identifiers experience repatriation distress due to alienation or estrangement from their home country, additive identifiers feel the same because of embracing many aspects of the host culture (values, customs, etc.). Finally, global identifiers often have multiple international experiences, they belong to a global community, their adaptations to the host country are often instrumental and return to the home country is perceived by them as a neutral or positive experience.

Based on existing theories we formulate our research hypotheses in the following. We assume that even though micro-scale (i.e. personal) factors are important pre-requisites of return migration, however, in the case of East Central European migrants macro-scale (i.e. institutional, contextual) factors are even more important. Improvements in economic climate, growing wages and job security, political stability at home can generate higher levels of return. If the liquidity of the migrant's household in the home country is guaranteed, the expectations of the migrant and his/her family regarding job, income, housing etc. are satisfied then the return is organised and successfully completed. Adjoining the New Economics of Labour Migration approach we also think that a return to the home country is part of the migration strategy of the majority of migrants from the very beginning. Most of the migrants of ECE countries leave their home with the intentions to return at a certain point, thus, return migration is a 'calculated strategy'. Having said this we also think that due to geographical nearness, as well as the lower cultural, educational, social etc. barriers, circular migration among migrants from the new EU-member states has lot more importance than among guest workers coming from the main non-EU countries (e.g. Turkey, Maghreb).

3 The challenges of brain drain in Hungary

Hungary has been affected by several waves of brain drain throughout the 20th century. First the 1929–1932 world economic crisis, then the communist takeover in the late 1940s, later the 1956 anti-communist revolution caused mass exodus of highly skilled workers, mostly intellectuals (see HOCH et al. 1991). After the fall of Iron Curtain due to the liberalisation of economy and pervasive globalisation the process of brain drain clearly intensified (see CSANÁDY et al. 2008). The 2004 EU accession made a new impetus in the emigration of skilled labour (see SZEMÉLYI u. CSANÁDY 2011). While the Hungarian National Health Insurance Fund (OEP) recorded on average six to eight thousand emigrants annually before 2004, the figure broke through the ten thousand threshold after 2008, partly as an outcome of the global economic crisis (Figure 1).

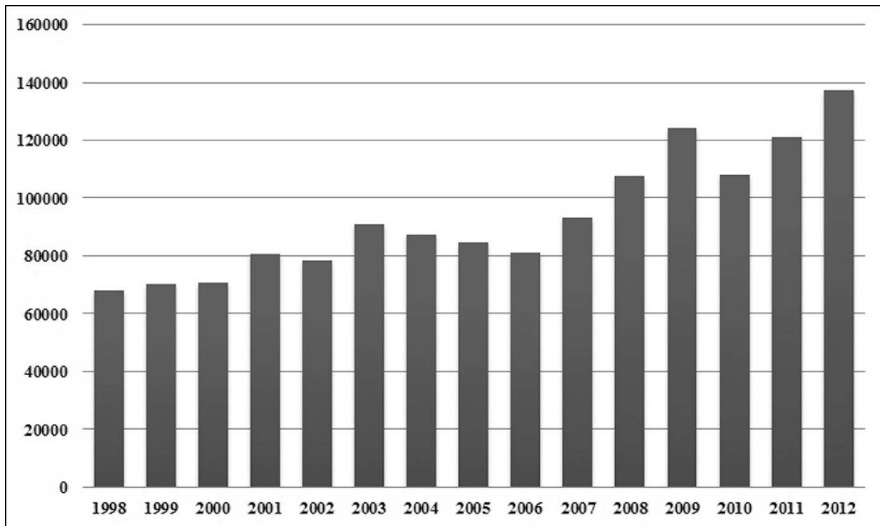


Fig. 1: Hungarian emigrants in the EU countries, 1998–2012. Source: EUROSTAT¹

There were also some changes regarding the major destinations of Hungarians after 2004. Before the EU accession Germany, Austria and the United States ranked the first three places among Hungarian migrants (see HÁRS et al. 2004). After 2004 due to the opening up of the labour market the United Kingdom replaced the USA as the third most popular destination for Hungarians. Germany and Austria, the traditional destinations of Hungarian labour are still keeping their leading position partly due to the large number of circular migrants (see ILLÉS u. KINCSES 2012). The majority of them are workers with vocational skills, or seasonal workers, whereas migrants heading towards the UK are generally younger, better educated people, with fair English knowledge, who are employed for lower wages compared to local labour with the same qualification.

¹ <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do> (05.10.2013)

In their study MARTIN and RADU (2012) identified returnees as those persons born in the home country, had spent at least six months working abroad over the previous decade and returned to their country. Taking this methodology and using data of the European Social Survey (ESS) that was designed to be representative for each country, by 2006–2007 already six to eight percent of the active population in the majority of ECE countries had spent at least six months working abroad (Table 1). Ratios for men are significantly higher everywhere than for women. According to ESS data Hungary is last among the investigated countries regarding the share of returnees in the active population.

Table 1: The rate of return migration in the active population (aged 24–65)

	Percentage of returnees overall	Percentage of returnees among men	Percentage of returnees among women
Estonia	910	1250	677
Poland	797	1179	430
Romania	765	1109	451
Latvia	743	1141	482
Slovakia	680	1019	317
Czech Republic	648	757	555
Bulgaria	620	710	533
Slovenia	430	610	350
Hungary	261	419	138

Source: MARTIN u. RADU 2012, 111.

Despite the serious consequences of recent emigration of skilled labour there is no comprehensive national policy or programme in Hungary to enhance the return migration of those residing in the West (see KOVÁCS et al. 2013). Among the first few successful attempts the Momentum Programme of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (“From Brain Drain to Brain Gain”) should be mentioned, which was launched in 2009 to re-attract and re-integrate young talented Hungarian researchers living abroad². Within the frameworks of the excellence programme scientists returning from abroad are supplied with research grants, which enable them to set up their own research team and attract home other young Hungarian researchers working abroad. Currently 79 Momentum teams are working at the network of research institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences or at universities.

In Hungarian national policies and programmes more emphasis is placed on the retention of skilled labour, especially where brain drain is most alarming like the health sector. To retain young trainee doctors the so-called Markusovszky programme was launched providing increased amount of scholarships to

² http://mta.hu/news_and_views/et-more-momentum-more-talented-scientists-more-funds-more-promising-research-127572/ (10.12.2013)

applicants³. Applicants are required to practise in Hungary for at least ten years after entering the programme. Retention of skilled employees working in the Hungarian public health sector was also aimed by the extra wage increase carried out in 2012⁴. Retention, as future strategy became also incorporated in Act CCIV of 2011 on higher education. According to the law, students studying with full or partial Hungarian state scholarship must establish and maintain employment, or pursue entrepreneurial activity under Hungarian jurisdiction and social insurance for a period double the length of their studies within twenty years after graduation⁵. The law has evolved fierce criticism among students, experts and political groups and it is permanently on the agenda in the Hungarian mass media. In addition to the law, the Hungarian government started a video campaign among young Hungarians (i.e. potential emigrants) on Facebook and YouTube with the title “Minden ideköt” (“We belong here”)⁶. The short video displays the attractiveness of Hungary as a homeland via subjective sentiments e.g. friendship, culture, landscape. Future impacts of these initiatives are difficult to assess but they surely cannot counterbalance the most important push factor of emigration (and the most serious obstacle of return migration) the poor economic performance of home country.

4 Methodological background

Our empirical research was conducted in the frame of a European project called Re-Turn that was designed to match the needs of regional labour markets with the capacities of people willing to return. Re-Turn aimed at identifying and implementing measures to capitalise on return migrants and thus enhance human capital and re-migrants’ entrepreneurial abilities in the participating regions. Altogether twelve partners from seven ECE countries representing regional and sub-regional public and not-for-profit bodies, research organisations and international organisations lobbying for migration issues have been involved in the Re-Turn project. As part of the project an online survey was conducted among both international migrants (those residing and working in the west) and returnees (those who returned) of the participating countries during 2012. The definition of return migrants was the following: “persons older than 15 years, who return to their country of birth after having been international migrants at least for six months in another country”. Thus, the definition of Re-Turn covers also four dimensions: i) country of origin, ii) place of residence abroad, iii) length of stay in the host country, and iv) age (older than 15 years, i.e. economically active age group)” (see SMOLINER et al. 2013). It means that economically inactive people or those who returned to the home country not entirely voluntarily were excluded.

Migrants and their networks were directly invited to take part in the survey via internet. In addition, NGOs supporting return migrants, chambers of commerce,

³ <http://humanos.org.uk/Images/Newsletters/Budapest%20Times%2047%2018%20Nov%202011.pdf> (10.12.2013)

⁴ <http://www.budapesttimes.hu/2012/11/08/last-warning-before-docs-get-tough-on-pay> (10.12.2013)

⁵ http://www.felvi.hu/pub_bin/dload/osztondijszerzodes/angol/Student_Grant_Contract_bachelor_EN_2012_aug30.pdf (10.12.2013)

⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLptO_hUQ3w (10.12.2013)

community services, recruiting enterprises and placement agencies and cultural institutions were approached to find a way to potential interviewees. People participating in the survey were also asked to forward information about the online survey to other people whom they know to be in the same situation (snowball method). The survey resulted in nearly 3,200 questionnaires; however, only 1913 were fully completed. This is not a representative sample, nonetheless, it can provide us information about the motivations of East Central European migrants living abroad and returnees who have already successfully repatriated.

To refine our knowledge about the return phenomenon face-to-face qualitative in-depth interviews were carried out with Hungarian return migrants in the autumn of 2012, and spring 2013. Altogether 39 returnees were interviewed who had worked between one and six years abroad and settled back to Hungary. The sample was designed purposive and targeted at understanding the motivations of both better educated and less skilled migrants. Thus, the group of respondents could be subdivided basically into two groups i.) highly skilled elite migrants (academics and highly educated intellectuals) who used to work in the service industry, and ii.) people with technical, vocational skills who were employed in the production. According to our predictions affirmative and global identifiers are overrepresented in the first group, whereas subtractive and additive identifiers dominate the second. In the subsequent part of the paper we briefly introduce our findings and discuss their relevance to existing knowledge.

5 Results of empirical research

5.1 Comparative analysis of transnational migrants' behaviour in East Central Europe

In general, the socio-demographic composition of the sample (n=1913) of our online survey is very similar to other previous researches as younger and better educated cohorts are overrepresented (see HÁRS 2003; IARA 2008; KLAGGE u. KLEIN-HITPAß 2007; MARTIN u. RADU 2012). The majority of respondents (52%) were below 35 and 59% of them held a university diploma (22% of them even a PhD degree). Males were slightly overrepresented (55%), just like parents with children (58%). Among returnees (n=726) the destination of return was in most cases (78%) the sending region (settlement), however, one fifth of them moved back to a new location, mostly to bigger (capital) cities. This implies that newly acquired skills often yield more benefits in larger agglomerations with more advanced economies where the level of income tend to be higher than in peripheral regions (see STARK 2004).

As a next step, we would like to focus on data of transnational migrants from the four ECE countries that were involved in Re-Turn: Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia, with special attention to the group of Hungarian migrants. Altogether 43% of the respondents (n=844) were citizens of these four countries. In each case the group of respondents could be divided into three groups i.) those who have already returned to their home country ('returnees'), ii.) those who are still residing and working in the West, but have clear strategy to return one day

(‘potential returnees’), and iii.) those who consider their return out of question (‘permanent migrants’) (Figure 2).

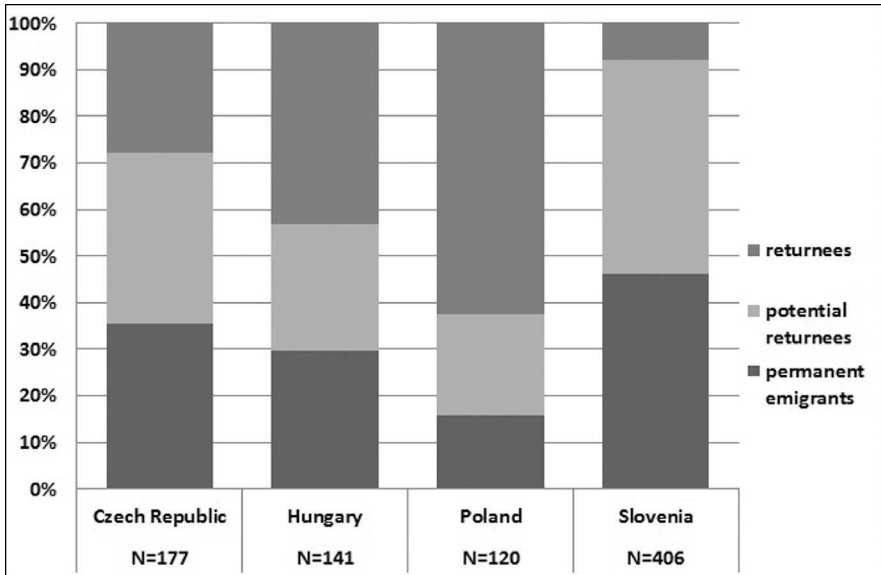


Figure 2: Types of migrants participating in the survey by countries

Source: Online survey of Re-Turn, 2012⁷

The survey showed that those who would never return to their home country (‘permanent emigrants’) are in minority in each case, though with distinct variations among the countries. The ratio of those who would never return is clearly the lowest among Polish migrants what can be the result of the traditionally strong home country identity, as well as bonding power of family and church. At the other end of the scale the inclination of migrants to return home is lowest in Slovenia, a small country with open economy and relatively skilled labour force who can easily find stable existence in the West European labour market. The figures for Hungary are much closer to the Polish case than to the Slovenian one, which implies certain similarities in the migration behaviour of transnational migrants of these two countries.

The planned duration of stay abroad can also orientate us about the level of attachment to the home country. It was again the group of Polish migrants where short-term (three to twelve months) stays were most often planned, whereas Hungarians tended to plan longer (one to five years) stays in the largest number which can be the outcome of recent economic hardship of the country and consequent disappointment of people (Figure 3). Data seem to justify our hypothesis that the majority of East Central Europeans leave their home with the intentions to return at certain stage; hence, return migration is their ‘calculated

⁷ http://limesurvey.ifl-leipzig.de/limesurvey/statistics_user.php?sid=64694 (01.01.2013)

strategy'. The share of those who planned longer than five years stay is marginal in each group.

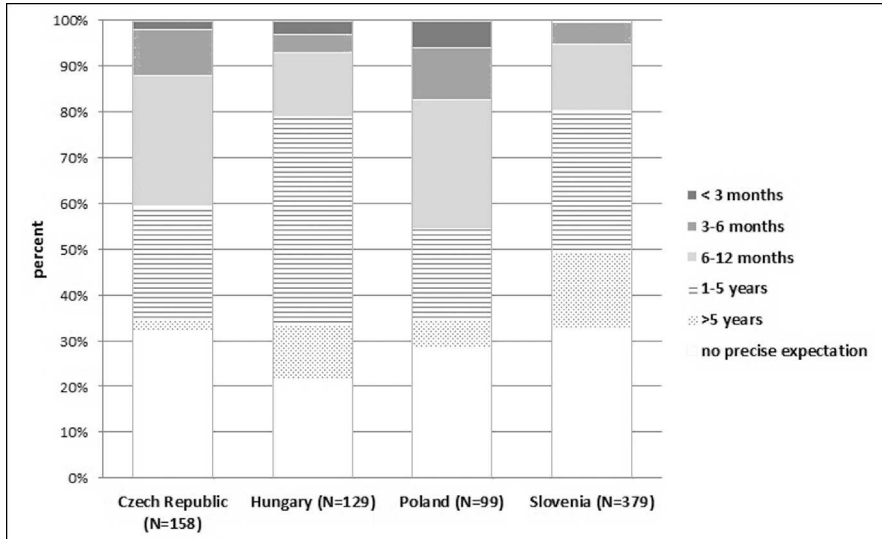


Figure 3: The planned duration of stay in the host countries

Source: Online survey of Re-Turn, 2012

The result of our survey support findings of earlier investigations (see KLAGGE u. KLEIN-HITPAß 2007), that the three main motivations of East Central European migrants moving to the West are the outlook to i.) improving income levels, ii.) better career opportunities, and iii.) higher standard of living in general (Figure 4). On the one hand, the aspirations to improve income level with the move were highest among Hungarians which is in accordance with the poor recent economic performance of the country (decrease of real income, growing unemployment etc.). On the other hand, improvements in career chances were the main reason of moving to the West among the Czechs and Slovenians, the two economically most advanced countries among the states under investigation.

With regards working conditions abroad it is typical mostly for Hungarian and Polish migrants that they are employed in jobs for which they are overqualified. This confirms the presence of brain waste phenomenon, often referred to in the literature regarding ECE countries (see SZEMÉLYI u. CSANÁDY 2011). The average income of Polish and Hungarian migrants is also lower compared to the Czechs and Slovenians. Greater income differences between the country of origin and destination, and lower job security at home can explain the weaker position of Hungarians and Poles in the foreign labour markets compared to the Czechs and Slovenians.

The majority of ECE migrants consider the stay in the West a temporary phenomenon and they systematically plan their return. There are different factors both at the macro- and micro-scale that can influence their decisions in connection

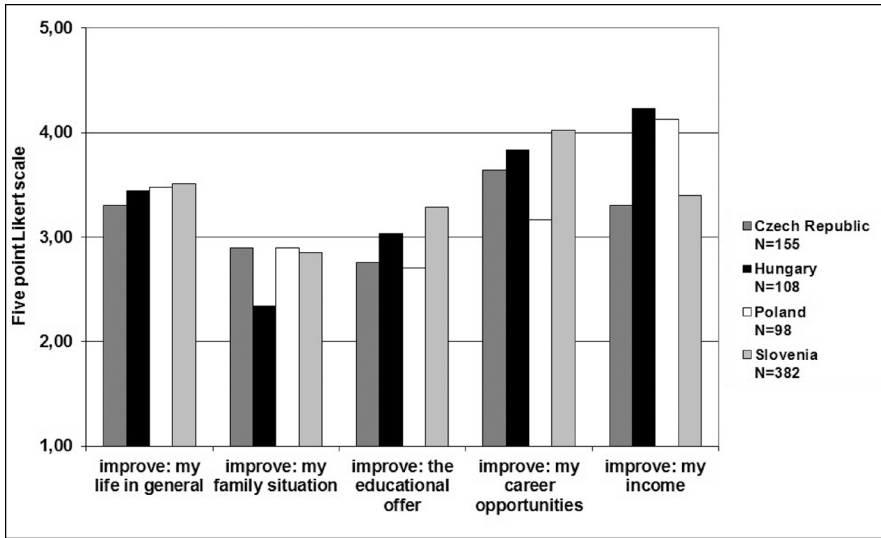


Figure 4: Motivations of emigrants from East Central European countries (mean values; 1=not relevant, 2=less relevant, 3=important, 4=very important, 5=most important)
Source: Online survey of Re-Turn, 2012

with return. Among them general life conditions in the home country as the broadest macro-scale factor was the most important among Czech and Slovenian migrants, countries with the highest per capita income in the sample (Figure 5). On the other hand, 'family relations' were lot more seriously taken into consideration by Polish and Hungarian migrants. In their case everyday living conditions did not have the same role as among Czechs and Slovenians. Thus, we can say that our earlier hypothesis about the greater possible role of macro-scale factors (e.g. economic growth, improving labour market conditions at home) fits mainly to the economically more developed part of the ECE countries. It is also remarkable that 'career opportunities' from the macro-scale was everywhere mentioned at the third or fourth place as an important motivation of return.

The temporary character of emigration among East Central Europeans was also supported by the fact that nearly 50% of emigrants maintained a property at home while living and working abroad, which to some extent implies the intention of return one day. Skills, financial and social capital accumulated abroad can be beneficial both for the returnee and his/her family, and the home country. However, regarding return migrants slight improvements in employment opportunities only among the Polish migrants could be pointed out.

5.2 Online survey among transnational migrants from Hungary

In this section we would like to focus on the intentions and behaviour of Hungarian transnational migrants (n=141), dividing them into two groups: returnees and migrants (still abroad). In both groups the length of stay is/was one to five years

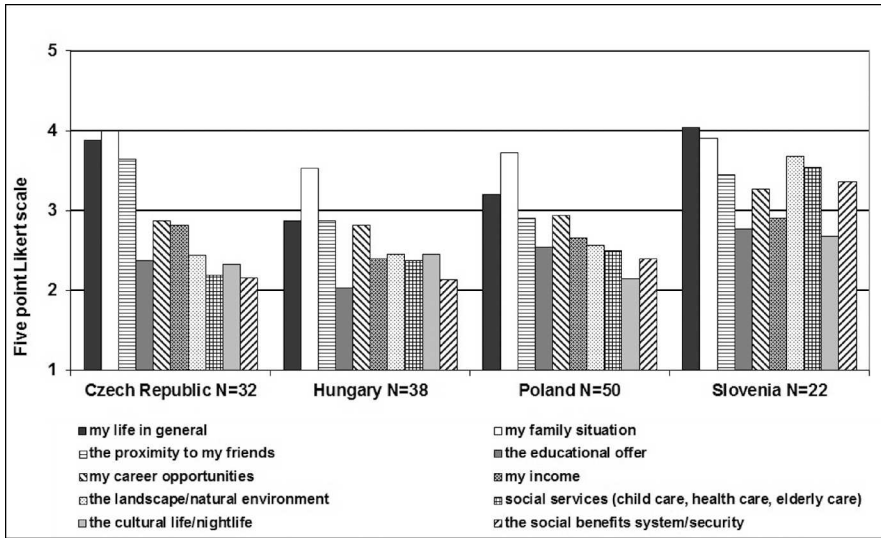


Figure 5: Triggering factors of return migration in East Central European countries (mean values; 1=not relevant, 2=less relevant, 3=important, 4=very important, 5=most important)
Source: Online survey of Re-Turn, 2012

abroad. Two thirds of respondents got a permanent job after arriving to the host country and their income nearly tripled compared to the previous situation in the home country (Figure 6). Their weak position on the labour market of the host country is reflected by the fact, that only 40% of them were employed in workplaces equivalent to their qualifications. This seriously questions their possibilities of collecting new skills and improving their job opportunities after return.

The majority of those who expressed their wish to return one day ('potential returnees') would also accept poorer working conditions (lower wages, lower position in the hierarchy etc.) after settling back, which confirms the 'calculated strategy' thesis. The stay abroad is often conceived as a temporary move, and after earning the expected amount of money migrants would return. It is also remarkable that even though the income level of returnees substantially decreased after return, nevertheless it was still 60% above the level they had before they left the home country. This can be the combined outcome of inflation and better positions after return.

The level of integration is quite different between the group of "returnees (and potential returnees)" and "permanent migrants". Those who returned (or will potentially return) maintained stronger personal connections with Hungarians (friends etc.) both at home and abroad. Their personal network was richer in individuals still living in the home country, which served as an attachment to the home country and a source of information.

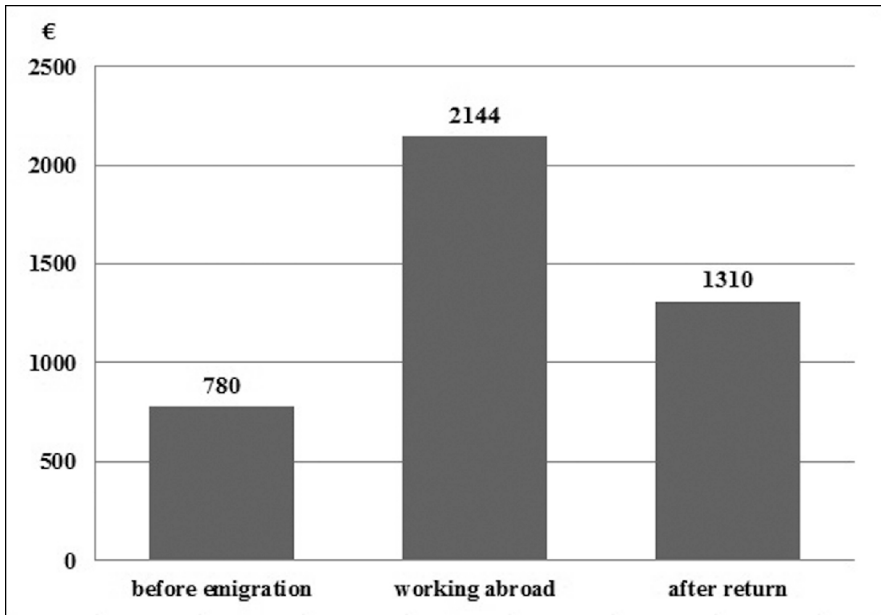


Figure 6: Average income level of Hungarian transnational migrants

Source: Online survey of Re-Turn, 2012

5.3 Interviews with return migrants in Hungary

The in-depth interviews revealed that both the groups of elite migrants and lower skilled returnees considered their stay abroad as a temporary phenomenon followed by positive changes in their lives. In the case of elite migrants the move to the West was systematically planned, and it was a relatively short period of time, which was important mainly for their professional career. While abroad they did not adapt to the host society completely, their cultural identity and emotional attachment to their home country remained strong (see HUGO 2009). Most of these returnees showed clear signs of ‘global identifiers’ as described by the CIM model, their repatriation was experienced in a positive or moderate way, depending on family status, yet, their cultural identity remained strong.

Members of the second sub-group (lower-skilled) tended to migrate mainly because of negative experiences and constraining factors at home e.g. loss of job, hardship with credit payment or problems in private life. The main motivation of their stay abroad was expected higher income levels for what they also accepted jobs below their qualifications.

A young researcher who worked five years in Germany noted: “In research, but especially in my institute it is expected from younger colleagues to go abroad, collect new ideas get to know new technologies, and after having returned to Hungary we can carry on our work with more success” (László, biologist). A typical representative of the second group stressed: “Together with my partner we wanted to save the costs of our family house. At home it was pretty hopeless and it

would have taken many years” (Erika, technical assistant). Another returnee explained the motivation of his emigration this way: “It is very simple. Here I could hardly sustain my family. It was very easy and comfortable to support my family from the distance ... the separation was nearly unbearable, but fortunately I could take them out after a while” (Zsolt, butcher).

The preparation for emigration and its conscious planning was highly determined by the level of language knowledge and earlier visits in the area of destination. Highly skilled workers usually speak the language of the receiving country and they established contacts previously as part of their professional life. Abroad they worked very often in multinational teams which serve as a global melting pot. Their position in a workplace depended solely on their skills and experiences.

As an opposite, lower-skilled migrants tend to leave Hungary without sufficient or any language knowledge, they do not plan their emigration systematically, very often they are employed by firms recruiting their employees exclusively from Hungary. The substantial wage differences and the continuous flow of migrants from the relatively poorer countries of ECE resulted in a mushrooming of workplaces where local people are nearly absent (see MARTIN u. RADU 2012). As our interviews revealed the lack of sufficient language knowledge limits the opportunities of lower skilled workers in the foreign labour market, very often they are subordinated to their compatriots speaking the local language and they hardly develop social relations with local people. If they make acquaintances abroad after return these connections are hardly maintained.

The interviewees confirming the results of the online survey expressed a good deal of discontent regarding their life conditions after settling back to Hungary. This can be related to the differences in wages and living standard at home and abroad, the worsening economic conditions and prospects in Hungary in the early 2010s, as well as the general working climate. Altogether these factors can easily result in circular migration, as discussed in the literature (see ILLÉS u. KINCSES 2012; MARTIN u. RADU 2012).

“The main difference between Hungary and ... lies in the management. Managers over there are interested in the opinion of their subordinates, they listen to them. It is easy to get accustomed to such open and trustworthy working climate, and after return the disappointment comes. ... Many decide to emigrate again because of this” (Zsolt, entrepreneur).

Those migrants who kept contact with their former employer could also more easily re-integrate to the Hungarian labour market after return. This fits mostly to the group of elite migrants, who normally returned to their earlier workplace, but to a higher position. On the contrary, lower skilled returnees did not maintain contacts with their previous workplace, and their reintegration to the labour market is also more difficult.

As the neoclassical economists’ approach suggests skills accumulated abroad are not necessarily beneficial for the returnee. This fits mostly to the group of people employed in the production, but there were also cases among intellectuals.

A teacher who taught English in Great-Britain for five years mentioned: “It was rather disadvantageous the five years I spent in Britain ... it was taken negatively

during the job interviews when I returned, because I had not been employed in the national education system” (Anna, teacher). New skills gathered abroad are not always beneficial for the returnee either. “When I returned my experiences gathered abroad did not mean any advantage during job search ... employers did not want to hear my experiences, they thought meat should be processed everywhere in the same way” (Zsolt, butcher).

Regarding the utilisation of work experiences and skills accumulated abroad interviewees had ambivalent opinions. Highly skilled intellectuals tended to express a positive view, thinking that their return was professionally a correct decision, whereas lower skilled returnees were either disappointed or just partially satisfied with their working conditions and professional advancement after return. However, general life experiences, wisdom, and skills in everyday life collected during the stay in a foreign country were considered unanimously positively. Respondents considered themselves lot more confident and down-to-earth after return and their problems’ solving skills improved a lot. All the interviewees would recommend young people to go abroad for a while to collect similar experiences as they did.

6 Conclusions

On the basis of this study it can be concluded that despite their similarities in socio-economic development and historical traditions there are palpable differences among East Central European countries not only in the factors of recent emigration of skilled labour but also in the potentials of their return. In the emigration process macro-scale factors seem to be dominant, people tend to migrate mainly for financial reasons (i.e. higher wages). This can result in brain waste as migrants of the post-socialist countries often take jobs in the West for what they are overqualified. As far as return is concerned, family relations seem to be the most relevant driving forces of repatriation in addition to the general macro-scale factors (economic prosperity, job opportunity etc.).

Our analysis showed that emigration and return migration are equally ‘calculated strategy’ in most of the cases; both of them are parts of migrants’ life strategy. The majority of migrants do not plan to settle down permanently in the host country, and although the duration of stay can vary greatly, migrants normally plan their return after a while. Hence, under the current circumstances the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) concept is more applicable for East Central European migrants than the neoclassical approach.

Regarding the classification of the Cultural Identity Model (CIM) it is difficult to fit our cases to the four general categories of the model. On the one hand, our highly skilled returnees fit only partially to the group of ‘global identifier’, as very few of them had multiple international experiences, and only some of them maintained a strong (‘affirmative’) home identity. On the other hand, our lower skilled returnees do not fit to the category of ‘subtractive identifiers’ either as many of them systematically tried to avoid alienation or estrangement from their home country. Regarding the CIM concept we found that the role of family (i.e. children) is not seriously taken into account as far as the decision making of migrants is concerned. Cultural identity, cultural adaptation is often interpreted and practiced

from the viewpoint of children, and this is increasingly relevant in relatively short-distance (continental) moves, as East Central European migrants demonstrate.

We can also conclude that the role of circular migration will probably increase in the future if wage differences between post-socialist East Central Europe and the Western core persist. This may result in frictions on national labour markets, especially in certain professions. Returnees provide good example for the new generations how to make use of geographical proximity of higher wages; therefore, the process of East-West migration will not slow down in the future. In the light of these, East Central European countries should elaborate comprehensive policies to enhance return migration, to make the re-integration of migrant workers and their family in the home country easier, and to prevent brain waste.

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