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The impact and importance of return migration in East Central Europe

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Abstract

Return migrations might be a key factor for sending regions, especially in East Central Europe. The enlargement of the European Union affected a mass labour migration from post-socialist countries towards Western European regions. Among rules of the Union this East-West migration has become more than brain-drain, beside high-skilled migrants, lower skilled ones also leave their country of origin. In this paper I focused on common characteristics of migrants from East Central European countries. During my research I have used results of an online survey among migrants and made interviews with returned Hungarian migrants. Though sending countries makes efforts towards re-attracting migrants, without stable macro-factors their return might be uncertain. According to my results I would state though each country has its own profile, in some cases, especially Hungarian and Polish migrants have common characteristics in motivation of emigration and type of work abroad.

Keywords: *returning migrant, elite migrant, lower skilled migrant, Hungary, motivation, online survey*

Rezumat. Titlu în română

Cuvinte-cheie:

Introduction

In current social and economic conditions in a European and as though, in global context labour migration flows might be dealt with. In 2004, joining to the European Union brought new chances for post-socialist countries. EU15 had opened their labour markets up against migrants from new member states which have intensified East-West

migration within Europe. Expansion of migration flows permanently increased. It has also resulted the re-organization of emigration from these countries. Before the enlargement of the European Union, several countries had different target country profile, for instance on Poland's and Hungary's list the most preferred country was Germany and USA was at the top three. After 2004 it changed, other European countries started to become more important, especially United Kingdom receives the

largest group of migrants from the post-socialist countries.

Not only brain-drain is standing beyond this process. In the 1990s rather highly skilled labour migrants were involved in the process [1]. Among rules of the European Union free movement are allowed for member states so because of big difference in wages and living conditions mass of migrants left their country of home. It might cause both positive and negative effect on sending and receiving countries, too. In geographical context, the problem might be location of sending regions which is highly concentrated in East Central European countries. Thirteen out of the top fifteen sending European NUTS 2 regions are located in this part of the continent [2]. Emigration has high rate among young and well educated population. Figure 1 shows dataset of the Hungarian Health Insurance suggesting the value of emigrants who have inactivated their insurance by leaving Hungary. Since the enlargement in 2004, millions of people have moved from East to West which was also supported by the economic and financial crisis started in 2008. Though it raised the number of emigrants, in parallel it intensively affected the number of returning migrants [3]. Data of Labour Force Survey (LFS) showed increased migration flows back to the country of origin which also means they are all unemployed returning migrants [4]. Despite the survey is established among job seekers, they are not the total number of returners. It is a

relevant phenomenon, but how sending countries or region might be benefiting from it. In this paper I would focus on common characteristics of East Central European returning migrants and their impacts on local economic environment.

Return migration as a global phenomenon

Return migration has been investigated since the 1960s, though different scientific approaches have been existed. In general, as definition of an OECD study, "returning migrants are people returning to their country of citizenship after have been international migrants in another country abroad" [5]. Several theories identify it in micro and macro level, whether it is seemed as a negative or a positive phenomenon. Cassarino has summarized these theories in his study, and suggested that in spite of several, in sense of homogeneous approaches, return migration might be dealt with in several levels [6]. First, the individual of returnee are crucial, especially the motivation of returning. As Cerase divided returning migrants into four groups, a person regarded as member of a group explains main characteristics of his or her return [7]. Success of the return is also very important in order to utilize the newly acquired skills at home and have developing effect in the neighboring. A further key factor might be the newly built networks with foreign economic partners.

Year	Male and female						Total
	age						
	- 19 year	20 - 24 year	25 - 29 year	30 - 34 year	34 - 40 year	40 - year	
2004	64	384	645	259	95	119	1 566
2005	650	1 645	1 707	850	540	491	5 883
2006	124	780	1 224	613	203	289	3 233
2007	170	1 172	1 865	967	385	453	5 012
2008	241	1 531	2 392	1 477	689	896	7 226
2009	243	1 401	2 178	1 511	707	1 074	7 114
2010	238	1 675	2 690	1 664	917	1 213	8 397
2011	330	2 180	3 645	2 669	1 693	2 679	13 196
2012	139	1 019	1 983	1 486	1 054	1 709	7 390

Fig. 1: Hungarian emigrants in case of their age structure from 2004 to 2012 (OEP KÜLFI System, 2012)

Returnees gain with their work experience abroad, because of new skills earned while being on multi-cultural working conditions. They usually have higher language skills than stayers practicing

foreign language out of its homeland. Human and financial capital gains to be brought might have both individual and developer effects, such as an amount of money investigating into the local economy or the

latest technological know-how. As though, returners are also more flexible against problems and have widened horizons by experiencing different circumstances in another country. The later ones could be useful on the level of everyday life and jobs. Highlighting impacts of returning migrants several papers stated pros and cons of returning. Unfortunately, not only positive sides of returning exist. Especially people have lower skills in language studying, or those who are working for firms employing migrants from the same country, not acquire and improve their foreign language skills. They are motivated mainly in earning more money than others. Furthermore, returning back to the home country lack of relations might be harmful in job seeking. Those who are stayed in contact with previous employers have more chance to get a job after their return, though these migrants are usually highly skilled professionals, such as researchers, engineers or doctors. As survey represents unemployment rates are high among returnees, but reasons might be different. Today, because of the global crisis job seekers have less chance than they used to. Returning migrants might be used to higher salary and living conditions abroad so partly they could wait for well-paid jobs. However, as my results will present, more than 80% of returnees return to their home region. Living in backward region means less opportunities for having a job so returning to this region might yield the same. Not finally, on the one hand, success stories can generate more emigration, and on the other hand, "being once living and working abroad might lead to stay moving in the future"¹.

Method

During my research I analyzed an online questionnaire survey and made interviews with returned Hungarian migrants. The survey was promoted among migrants from eight Central European countries via media, institutions and online groups of migrants. On the survey each person who has had at least 6 month long period of time working experience abroad was allowed to take part. Promotion was started at the beginning of 2012 and lasted eight months long. During the research, a snow-ball technique was also used to promote the survey between social networks of the migrant. Moreover, I have made twenty-three interviews with returned Hungarian migrants who had worked

two to seven years abroad. The period of time abroad might be a key factor exploring return migration [8]. As King states this is an optimum absence for the sake of the migrant absorbs enough experience so returning back to the home country the newly retrained skills might be utilized [9]. I have divided my interviewees into two groups: so called elite migrants and lower skilled migrants. The previous group contains highly skilled people who were working at their profession abroad, such as researchers, doctors or ICT workers. The later one involves migrants who are lower educated, and even, people who are well educated, but had lower skilled jobs abroad.

East European experiences

According to results from the online survey, I would suggest Hungarians and Polish re-migrants are the most similar out of nations from the region. Although, in absolute numbers Poles and Romanians, even though Bulgarians are more similar to each other in sense of mass migration. They might be motivated in different ways. During the research we have targeted potential and returned migrants. The previous group contains people who left their country and now working abroad, they were regarded as potential returners. 71% of questioners were potential migrants. The survey is not representative.

More than 40% of questioners were come from East Central European countries (N=823). As others have stated, our research proved that main emigration motives were taken towards higher salary, career opportunities and better living conditions believed in target countries. According to the foreign salary I would conclude that especially Polish and Hungarian migrants work in lower skilled jobs abroad than their education level would suggest it. Similar to previous researchers, it might cause problems after their return because of the lack of the latest technologies and methods which would not gain advantage re-integrating to the labour market at home [10] [11]. Referring to attitude of emigrants, it might be an East Central European characteristic that nearly the half of migrants from this region stay in contact with home, not only communicating with their relatives or friends, even though, maintaining a household while being abroad. This phenomenon was discovered the strongest among Hungarian migrants, but it is not

public among Poles. Of course, dealing with profit oriented household keepers, some part of migrants have relation in this way to the house, but still the other part have a stable place to go after return. Post socialist countries have another common factor, exactly the satisfaction after return. Comparing target and sending East Central European countries to each other, re-migrants from sending ones felt in worse condition themselves at home country than they used to abroad. At the end of this list could be found Hungarians and Poles, again. It could be because of the different wage levels and the more prestigious consume they used to at host countries. Maybe, these results might also reflect the actual macro trends in some cases.

In case of educational level, according to the survey I would state that primarily educated migrants are negligible in phenomenon of return migration. High skilled migrants such as people with tertiary education or PhD are the most interested in current migration flows from the post-socialist countries. Additionally, more than half of people have been international migrant improved foreign language nearly perfect.

Focusing on return motivations, among East Central Europeans the family is the most important reason in taking decision to return. The second most important motivation is different between countries, but for Hungarians and Poles the second motivation in the list is left behind. Other well-fare services, such as educational offer, social services, social security or even the culture is more unimportant for migrants. According to Cassarino, gained social networks are also important in case of return migration [12]. During the online survey we discovered that Hungarians and Poles are less concerned in networking with foreigners than other East Central Europeans (for example Czechs and Slovenians are more interested in it). Building new relations with abroad would gain several advances for instance for entrepreneurs or in trading, and further, additional potential benefits could be used. In spite of individual decision, there are some options which might help to return.

Although, there are several existing European return initiatives quite a few migrants knew about them. Sending countries have already taken efforts to re-attract their emigrants to return, in national and regional level different programmes exist [13]. There are special target group programmes, such as the Lendület (Momentum) Programme in Hungary

re-attracting researchers. Further, initiatives with general target group could be also found, i.e. 'powroty.gov.pl' Programme which is an online portal providing suggestions and tools to return to Poland. Saphier and Simonovits had concluded that most of emigrants willing to return to their home country, but because of the lack of help they do not undertake it [14]. It might get up a question, so why mass of return migrants are experienced? The answer could be, probably because the radius of these projects might be less or another macro level situation is not enough to return to the home country. For the sake of better understanding, I used empirical research. In some cases it strengthened the previous statements, but it might bring different approach up, as well.

Empirical results from Hungary

During my research I have also used snow-balls to find returned Hungarian migrants to be interviewed. Although, most of them were willing to answer entirely, but sometimes the process of providing additional potential interviewee were problematic. Re-migrants seemed to be positive on the whole phenomenon. Whereas, According to my empirical research, in case of former plans, interviews suggests that each returned migrant had calculated with his or her return, they have expected to come back to their home country after a period of time being abroad. It might be concluded that Hungarians would not be permanent emigrants. After accomplishing their expected goals, most of them could return. In motivation of emigration, empirical research has highlighted the conclusions of the online survey. Both groups of re-migrants regard emigration as temporary period of time. Elite and lower skilled migrants calculate on something which be yields benefits in their life. A possible aim for young migrants could be to have enough money to build or buy a house returning to the country of origin or "to save sufficient amount of money"² in order to start their life.

In case of ways to emigrate, the two groups have different manners. Elite migrants usually go abroad via their employer or one of relationships their institute or employment has. Previously, their foreign employer made impression on migrant and vice versa. In spite of that, lower skilled migrants are more heterogeneous. They prefer to find individually jobs abroad or emigrate with oral assurance of work contract, but it is not in any case

definite. Though, in many cases there are abuses of potential jobs, significant part of migrants chose this way. They usually have job in catering, manufacturing and construction industry abroad. Job profiles also determine the newly acquired skills and experiences re-migrants could bring back to the home country. As literature claims, return migration does not attend to positive impacts alone, it might also have negative side [15]. Expect improving language skills, the later mentioned professionals offer less useful work experience that could gain advantage returning to labour market of the home country. Furthermore, lower skilled migrants do not actually possess language skills. It could cause isolation from the host society, without basic communication they are not able to have strong friendships with foreigners. Nevertheless, it does not mean they are absolutely disinterested in it. Usually, they get in contact with foreigners in their workplace. As I previously mentioned, migrants from post-socialist countries are especially interested in lower skilled jobs. Common interest could be developed easily, mainly because of the poorer language knowledge, so a shallow friendship might be improved in free-time activities. These kinds of friendships may help to integrate in a new society abroad. Generally, these relationships do not last so long and be less important after return. The fact that working abroad for a firm from the home country of emigrants motivates them less as working for a native firm from the host country. As one of my interviewees claimed, "it is a comfortable way, there is less stress to learn the language, because most of supervisors are Hungarians, too, while the salary is higher than at home"³. Regarding short term plans it is worth to working in such a place, as though, it is not necessary to have proper language skills. In East Central European context, migrants from this part of Europe might be concerned in this way. Nowadays, millions of Polish and Romanians [16] and thousands of other nationals from the region live abroad within the European Union. Most of these emigrants have lower skilled jobs as their education level or professionals would suggest [17]. If these emigrants are regarded as potential returnees in the future, their newly acquired skills and foreign work experiences will not spread as they were expected. Their foreign relationships, however, might be more important not only for themselves, even for their employer. Receiving profitable skills from abroad

and benefit from them after returning, there are difference in returning motivations among the two groups.

As online survey of Re-Turn project has highlighted, one of most impressive return motivations is the family within re-migrants of post-socialist countries. It might be because of sense of tending with retired parents, taking the old family house or property over, and even though, nuclear family could also make decision. I found examples for the later statement from both of groups, when breadwinner decided to return because of his/her child. This kind of exigency has bad feelings about returning, re-migrants are less satisfied with their actual position which might be affect a re-emigration.

Making decision to return to the homeland could be easier for elite re-migrants. Such as in process of applying for a job abroad, elite returnees have contacts with their previous employer at home. Usually, there is a continuous communication between migrant and employer or its institution, so as these emigrants were looking forward for career advancement, they are offered for a new job at their previous workplace. On the other side, lower skilled re-migrants return with less important and profitable work experiences or skills which might not provide them advantage re-entering to the labour market. However, their financial capital could be used for several investments within their neighborhood and set up a new business being entrepreneur, so indirect way they could be successful.

Summarizing the comparison of two groups of returnees, it might be concluded that in spite of big differences of host and sending countries, emigration motivates are taken to achieve a positive change. Foreign job determines utilization of work experience. Elite re-migrants could receive career advancement and return to their previous workplace, but lower skilled returnees are less motivated to come back.

Conclusion

In conclusion, emigration from East Central European countries is a current, massive and permanent phenomenon which has risen in recent years. It might threaten sending countries, because of lack of labour force which could be created by mass emigration. Mainly, young and highly

educated people emigrate having lower skilled jobs abroad. Global crisis have increased number of emigrants in recent years, but it also affected increase of returnees. While native population of host countries does not apply for a lower skilled job before the crisis, as a result of the recession, foreign workers were dismissed. Returning from abroad might have several advantages, but they are different for elite and lower skilled migrants.

Human capital could be highly improved during the period of time of working abroad. On the one hand, elite migrants usually improve their skills, pick new techniques up that might be useful during following job. On the other hand, lower skilled returning migrants have less chance to get advancement compared to their previous assignment. Even though, there are several initiatives supporting returning to the homeland, because of uncertainty of the home country and fear of being unemployed, few people decide to return. Except individual reasons, pull factors to stay abroad could be better living-conditions, higher consume behavior and the strength of new and different culture. Those who have been disappointed in their home country are less motivated in return if they are success abroad.

On the whole, emigration of many East Central Europeans could bring many possibilities for sending countries, because returning to their country of origin these people might be centre of development.

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3 Zsolt, butcher, male