

## **BRAIN DRAIN EFFECTS: THE CASE OF BULGARIA**

**Abstract:** *Brain drain is a well-known phenomenon. Highly educated individuals and scientists travel the world in search of better opportunities and working conditions. Nowadays the brain drain phenomenon has a serious impact on the Bulgarian economy and labour market. This paper presents a brief analysis of the positive and negative effects from brain drain in the case of Bulgaria.*

Nowadays, scientists have reached consensus that the effects from skilled emigration is predominantly positive for the host economies. However, it is still difficult to identify the overall effect of the highly educated emigration for the sending country and to estimate whether it is negative or highly negative. The public cost of acquiring education in Bulgaria is considerably high due to the large share of the state subsidy in the education system. Thus, the emigration of young graduates and highly qualified specialists and scientists hinders the opportunity of the government to receive a return on human capital investment. In this sense, the topic is increasingly provoking public debates and the study of the positive and negative impacts of brain drain is of increasing scientific interest.

The positive impact of skilled emigration summarize in the following:

- Opening the Bulgarian science to the latest scientific achievements worldwide and integrating Bulgarian scientists into the world scientific community. Some empirical studies state that a significant part of the Bulgarian academic community believes that "brain drain" is the price that Bulgaria has to pay in the process of globalization and integration.
- The return migration of part of the skilled and highly qualified Bulgarians abroad would influence positively the future development of the country due to the professional, organizational and managerial experience gained abroad. Recent surveys of the emigration intentions of young people show that the majority of them are planning to stay abroad for a while, and then go back again in Bulgaria. They do not intend to settle permanently in the host countries.
- The growing share of students studying abroad could also be positively assessed as it is expected to increase the investment in human capital and, in the long run, contribute to the economic prosperity of the country. Here, however, attention should be drawn to the fact that so far a significant part of the students abroad do not return to Bulgaria, but on the contrary - they find work and professional realization in the host country. Students are often attracted not only by a better standard of living, but also by better communications, access to new technologies, and relations that seem increasingly important to young people.

The negative effects of skilled specialists leaving Bulgaria are:

- The issue of "sunken costs" and the lost opportunity for the country to further develop in some strategic and prosperous scientific areas. It would be interesting to quantify the public investment in education of the population, but unfortunately, such assessments and data do not exist for Bulgaria. However, the overall costs of science and education are lower than the ones made in the developed countries. At the same time, brain drain covers precisely those areas where the training of qualified professionals is the most expensive - medicine, biology, IT technology, etc.
- The phenomenon brain drain has a negative impact on institutional networks and, in particular, on their ability to further develop. In the early years after the fall of Communism, research and development institutes suffered from a shortage of qualified scientists, as nearly 60% of the total Bulgarian emigration flows consist of researchers. R & D institutes are specialized in research in the most challenging areas of technological innovation, and

with their disintegration, Bulgaria practically no more has the opportunity to develop these strategic areas. One other issue is also the lack of new young people interested in R&D area. Reasons for this are low wages, the lack of interest in research and the variable prestige of the profession. As a result, the "aging" of Bulgarian science has emerged as a major challenge for government policies.

Over the past decade, Bulgaria became an exporter of computer programmers and other IT specialists for the international Information and Communication Technology (ICT) market. In the long run, this trend will eventually have a negative impact on the future economic development of the strategic economic sectors and the introduction of new technologies in the industry.

Finally, when it comes to the effects of "brain drain" to the national economy, it should be borne in mind that his negative impacts intensify by another phenomenon in the country, namely "brain waste". An empirical study conducted by Prof. Evgenia Markova shows that of the 100 undocumented Bulgarians in Athens in 1996 6% had worked for the last time in Bulgaria as primary or elementary school teachers. In 1999, the figure now stands at 9% (Markova, 2001). In 2003 - 2004, 202 Bulgarians participated in a survey in Madrid. 7% of them turned out to be teachers. In both countries, however, former teachers, mostly women, are in the process of lowering their qualifications and working in the field of domestic services.

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