

# THE BRAIN DRAIN PHENOMENON IN ROMANIA: CHARACTERISTICS, IMPLICATON

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**Abstract:** *The highly qualified international migration in Romania represents a loss of the human capital, particularly in the critical areas such as education and health, and a threat to its economic development. In this article we provide a quantitative assessment of the size, characteristics and implications of skilled workers' migration from Romania. This paper is based on a new database of 1,514 Romanian immigrants from 52 countries of destination. Many theoretical and empirical studies addressed to the determinant factors and the migration of skilled labor effects, focus on topics such as investment in education and views of future migration, human capital loss and gain, the magnitude of brain drain, temporary and return migration of skilled workers remittances and their impact on the receiving country, the circulation of knowledge etc. Although the magnitude of the brain drain phenomenon has reached alarming dimensions in some developing countries, the intensity of the brain drain or skilled emigration rate, measured as a percentage of educated highly- remained in the country of origin appears to be stable, due to the better worldwide education level. This paper seeks to identify the characteristics of the Romanian migrants with higher education (as a brain drain measure) on migrants having only primary and secondary education.*

**Keywords:** *international migration, brain drain, human capital, education studies*

## ***Introduction***

The brain drain has been and remains an important topic of debate due to its effects on social and economic development and it is associated with the international migration from less developed to more developed countries. The brain drain goes beyond economics to affect social and political development of the origin countries.

The “brain drain” term means the international transfer of human capital, the migration of relatively high educated individuals from the developing countries to the developed countries. According to some authors' current international migration irony is that ... many of the legal migrants from poorer to wealthier regions are even those countries ....afford least to lose: the highly educated and qualified. Since most of these migrants leave permanently, this perverse brain drain not only represents a loss of valuable human resources, but could prove a significant constraint on future economic progress of nations....” (M. P. Torado, 1996, p. 111)

## 1. The characteristics of the *brain drain* phenomenon

In Romania, the highly skilled labor migration is influenced and affected by globalization and by the economy needs. According to some authors, "although we know more about highly skilled labor migration and its consequences on the country of destination, there are still quite a few issues to be investigated dynamically." (S. Sassen, 2000, p. 206)

Generally, the brain drain phenomenon is characterized by common migration paths and patterns: strategies for finding a job, reasons for emigrating, transnational relations, recognition of qualifications, the international nature of certain professions, the presence of a potential international labor market having the intention to pursue and develop career perspectives.

The reasons for migration are a combination of issues that lead people to evaluate their current environment and outlook. Those who went to study abroad as the main reason, say that "the factor to study abroad" was only an apparent cause, but the real cause was seeking better conditions and means to achieve higher living standards and satisfactory jobs. Other reasons would be the possibility to discover new countries, cultures and places and a more satisfying work environment. We notice their frustration against Romania, combined with expectations and illusions about Western countries.

Generally, excluding the forced migration of the asylum seekers, the migration project is changing, starting from the idea of a temporary experience and ending with the long life or permanent choice. The most people agree with the affirmation: "Now I cannot see myself living in Romania anymore.... My life is here..." (Mirela). In order to have a planned turning back home, it is necessary to fulfill specific economic and social conditions and the emotional foundation is not sufficient. These aspects are determined by the lack of confidence of the Romania's prospects and the future changes: "I see nothing good in Romania in future and I cannot change that alone". (Mirela)

Some specialists argue that "despite the attraction of higher economic opportunities, the migration is "expensive" in terms of both monetary and psychological terms ... Young skilled migrants are in a stage of their lives when they can move without the burden of many family responsibilities .... In this era of globalization and economic opportunism, many of the young people are willing and even eager to move into another country."(M. Iqbal, 2008, p. 76)

The presence of their relatives abroad exerts a limited influence and, in the case of skilled workers' migration, the employment opportunities are those that lead the potential migrants to decide. The initial migration chain seems not to be always continued by others in the same family, community or locality. The family network seems not to have a so marked influence and the migration trends are all metropolitan. (M. Castells, 1996, p. 98)

Some specialists work in Romania for foreign companies. Working in a foreign company can help create conditions to migrate, but can also be a mechanism for retention of human resources when working conditions

offered in Romania exceed local standards in this area. The activities that are carried outsourcing (delegating or outsourcing of services activities to specialized firms) for foreign companies refer to the relocation of some production segments to take advantage of cheaper and qualified local labor. Such a work is actually entitled brains without bodies, because the products of such brains working remotely reach via the internet directly to foreign business center which is a form of virtual labor mobility.

The strategies that are used to find a job abroad can be grouped in two ways: personal or professional networks or internet searches to gather information and to enroll in competitions. Few of highly skilled Romanians appeal to work placement agencies. The Internet is an important means of disseminating information about companies, positions and procedures at a global level. The process of finding a job is quite easy compared to the problems associated with obtaining a work permit.

Choosing a specific destination country is influenced by the life and work concerns. Some rules or employment policies can keep the migrants in a state of instability and disadvantage compared to their competitors in host countries. It affects the migrants' workforce, restricts it to a certain extent, the hiring firms being able to take advantage of it.

The structure of immigrants has made some changes from 1995 to 2008 by the education level. There were increases in this period of almost 12% of immigrants with high school studies, their weight reaching in 2008 about 44% of the total (see Table 1), and the share increasing of those with higher education (about a quarter of all immigrants registered in 2008), at the expense of those with primary and secondary education.

**Table I. The structure of immigrants by the education level**

Education level/Year	1995	2000	2005	2008
Higher education	18,98	22,49	20,36	14,98
Secondary education	29,79	34,39	43,93	46,27
Vocational and technical education	11,91	11,60	6,80	3,23
Primary education	27,88	23,21	21,57	16,43
Other situations	11,44	8,31	7,34	9,1

*Source: Based on data from the Demographic Yearbook of Romania, 2007 and 2008 and from the External and Final Migration, 2008, (INS)- Stoica, Ionel, 2011, p. 145*

Such situations are reflected in the income differences of the foreign workers and of the native ones. The brain drain definitions are different. The Britain Encyclopedia defines it as being “the leaving of the educated and professionalized people from a country, a sector or the economic field to another one, usually for a higher payment or for better living conditions.” Another explanation states that “the brain drain can occur if emigration of

people with a tertiary education in order to long-term or permanent residence abroad reaches significant levels and it is not compensated by feedback effects such as remittances, technology transfer, investment and trade. The general recognized drawback of the brain drain is to reduce economic growth by investing in an uncompensated education and the depletion of the human capital resources of the origin country.” (N. Glick –Schiller, L. Basch, Blanc, C. Szanton, 1992, p. 129)

This migration type occurs while the highly skilled labor force is employed in the home country on lower paid positions or lower skill levels, not ensuring the professional development and the personal fulfillment. The decision to migrate is not a choice but an opportunity to develop the educational and the cultural potential. Romania’s environment does not always succeed to encourage stimulating the individuals’ best performance. It is deprived of good and better paid jobs, typical for post-communist countries. In general, the brain drain is treated as a natural factor and spontaneously as a result of globalization.

## **2. Brain drain implications**

Even when the brain drain is understood as a loss for the origin country, the benefit provided by the good reputation of the Romanian scientists and skilled workers in most developed countries, by the fact that provide additional income for the Romanian families, by the Possibility of turning back home, with the added value given by the additional human capital acquired abroad.

Because the causes of brain drain are very deep and problematic, some means of economic development would be necessary: providing opportunities for improvement to motivate workers to remain in the country by implementing retention policies; attract investment and foreign capital in the country; attract those who have left the country by offering them incentives, higher salaries and a free market economy. Other measures that should be taken are: changing the government, particularly in the fight against corruption and the end of the political and economic reforms recommended by the European Union.

Beyond the fact that the Romanian substantial investment that the state makes with the education and training of these people cannot be recovered anymore, the state cannot count on their contribution to the overall development of the country. The phenomenon is even more worrying as youth employment in the country with outstanding performance remains a sensitive issue, as long as the national economy will provide attractive solutions.

A permanent solution which should be considered in reducing the intensity of this phenomenon lies in the reabsorption of the Romanian students who studied at universities in Romania. Such an approach should be conditioned by the development of a viable strategy that will convince those young people to return home and be useful in the Romanian society. Other solutions could include: tax incentives for those who employ young

Romanian who return, the application of credit schemes advantageous to purchase a house etc.

### **Conclusions**

The brain drain phenomenon has increasingly appeared over the past years. The brain drain phenomenon is defined as “an abnormal form of scientific exchange between countries, characterized by the existence of a unidirectional flow for most developed countries.”(India Government: Ministry of Human Resource Development, *Study of Concepts and Causes of Brain Drain-AUN REPORT*, 2010)

The brain drain has been growing more and more for online media, gaining much efficiency in the last 2-3 years, through the existence of more than 60,000 sources. This process under an unidirectional flow, from the undeveloped countries to more economically developed countries, acquires a negative moral connotation in relation to other forms of brain drain.

In this sense, the specialized literature examines various aspects of the phenomenon from different perspectives, highlighting at least three different discursive-explanatory versions: brain surplus, brain export and brain exchange. (A. M.Gaillard, 2010, p. 174)

Brain exchange can manifest as an exchange of experts, researchers and students from less developed countries and developed countries or between LDCs themselves, to their mutual advantage of knowledge, expertise and training. It remains to be seen in the context of new EU migration policy what the fate of this generation of potential “permanent migrant youth” will be.

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