

MIGRATION IN MACEDONIA: BRAIN DRAIN EFFECT - STILL A MAJOR PROBLEM

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Migration as phenomenon and subsequently the brain drain or human capital outflow affects the demographic and socio-economic structure of the country. This issue affects the developing countries the most. As a small migrant receiving and sending country located in Southeast Europe, still challenged by the reforms the transition process brings, Republic of Macedonia is facing one immense challenge – its young highly qualified individuals continue to leave the country in larger numbers. Due to the fact that since 2002 official census of the population in the country has not been conducted, the real number of the migrants stays unknown. According the State Statis-

tical Office, the number of people leaving the country is continuously growing. According to the statistical regions people who migrated out of the country, are mostly from the Southwest region.¹ Top three preferred destinations for migration among Macedonians are Australia, Germany and USA. The number of emigrated people from 1990 till the present day is 200.000 people. Most of them decided to leave in order to avoid the severe economic crisis, because since the beginning of the transition, poverty rates and unemployment rates have increased dramatically.

1 State Statistical office of the Republic of Macedonia, Statistical review: Population and Social Statistics, Migration 2011, (Skopje, June 2012), p.106

But this trend of leaving Macedonia continues today. What are the reasons for such trend? In 2011 the unemployment rate among young people aged 15 to 24 years was 53.7%. Significant youth unemployment rate, no further perspective for their development, uncertain future are the main reasons that lead to migration among young people. According to the Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011 of the World Bank, emigration rate of tertiary-educated population in 2000 was 29.1%.² Furthermore, due to the fact that since 2002 official census of the population is not conducted, there is no data on how many of the highly educated individuals left the country. According to a survey in 2003 the number of young, educated, and highly skilled persons who left the country in 2002 is nearly 15,000 people.³

We live in a time when everyone must think for themselves and invest in their future. Indeed, under the socio-economic conditions in Macedonia and the well

2 The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, Migration and remittances Factbook 2011, Second edition, p.167

3 Janeska, V. (2003): Migration of Highly Educated and Skilled Persons from the Republic of Macedonia. University 'Ss. Cyril and Methodius', Institut of Economics – Skopje.

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known "employment opportunities", i.e. lack of jobs, nepotism in public administration regardless their professionalism etc., a large number of people decides to leave. Before the visa liberalization in order to travel to other European countries, Macedonian citizens needed visas. After the granting of the visa liberalization in 2009, they are able to travel only with passport in 25 European countries, excluding Great Britain and Ireland, which are not part of the Schengen zone, but not to work. Visa liberalization applies only for tourist travels no longer than 3 months. However many are abusing this privilege in order to find a job. It is well known that after Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the number of people in Macedonia who own Bulgarian passport has increased. Owning a Bulgarian passport facilitates the legal stay in EU countries and the opportunities to find work within the EU. Macedonian officials do not have accurate data about the exact number of people who own a Bulgarian passport. In particular, due to possessing a Bulgarian passport and sometimes through the help of relatives already living abroad, people find jobs outside Macedonia.

More often young people who have completed their education in a foreign country decide to continue their further education abroad. Students are looking for scholarships abroad as a master's or doctoral studies and after completing the degree, it is unknown of their intentions to come home. An army of young people faced with unemploy-

ment and hopelessness for finding a job in the country, decide to search for a better life outside of Macedonia. This is not surprising having in mind the lack of concrete measures undertaken by the state institutions for keeping the brains home.

The situation is concerning. Why? A massive brain drain from the country has been going on for more than 20 years. There is an outflow of young, educated, skilled cadres, in which the state invested educating them, which means that the fruits of these high degrees of education will be harvested by the highly developed countries and not in Macedonia.

Does no one from the relevant institutions is noticing this? This issue is so massive that it is not possible for the country to continue ignoring this problem. It seems that institutions benefit from this outflow, because if nothing else, the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of Macedonia has announced that the number of unemployed people is reduced. And where are these newly employed persons? For sure not in the new factories in Macedonia, as they do not exist.

Each day more and more people are leaving and we all are staying blind and ignoring this problem.

There is an anecdote that circulated in 2009 when visa liberalization started: Those who will be last, to not forget to put the lights out! Today, four years after this period, all indi-

cates that this anecdote is coming true.

What is the future of the country with such trend? No official measures and instruments are taken to prevent this phenomenon. In September 2012 the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia came out with the announcement that in cooperation with USAID prepared a strategy for prevention of brain drain. According to the announcements it is expected the project to start at the beginning of this year. Hopefully it will not be another document without implementation. We hope that this time it will bring some positive results. We hope that the priorities of the young people in Macedonia will finally be noticed.

In conclusion, state institutions must become aware about the long term effects that brain drain has on development of the economy and society. The census of total population in Republic of Macedonia must be carried out, so the number of people who migrated is known. This data would represent a good basis for further analyses. This issue needs future analyses and policymaking so recommendations for decreasing this trend could be adopted and implemented.

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