



POLICY PAPER

Reintegration of highly skilled returnees to Montenegro: Challenges and Opportunities

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Existing legal and strategic framework for reintegration of highly skilled returnees¹

Migration policy is not a big issue only in the countries of the Western Balkans, but equally in the EU. Many highly skilled people from Western Balkan countries emigrate to EU countries or United States for different reasons: employment, further education, better life standards... Not only people from Western Balkan countries prefer working in the United States, but many European scientists and researchers. United States are still regarded as 'land of opportunities' even for highly educated Europeans. As for people from this part of the world, better practice in the field of social benefits in the United States and the EU countries and overall conditions of employment are still great motivators for their further migrations.

Speaking of Montenegro, this is a country which was faced with the great migration problem twenty years ago, when many of the highly skilled people left the country in order to find better life conditions in the Western European countries.¹ According to the UNESCO report *Science, Technology and Economic Development in South-Eastern Europe*, some countries in Western Balkan region, have lost almost 70% of its skilled professionals, due to external migration of highly qualified personnel. The report states that 79% of engineers, 81% of masters, and 75% of PhDs left Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1995. At the same time, Tirana University recorded a decrease in academic staff by 40%.² It is still unclear how many students in total study abroad or how many of them have stayed in the country of emigration. But the survey conducted by the King Baudouin Foundations showed that a very few Western Balkan students,

¹ Students' mobility in Western Balkan countries, Besic Milos, the King Baudouin Foundation, 2009
Up to the Institute of sociological research of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, there were more than 5% of the citizens of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia left the country between 1994 and 1999 2% of them are highly educated people

²See

<http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/bs/features/setimes/articles/2007/06/25/reportage-01>

only 26 of 2137, who study abroad want to come back to their home country.³ The economic and financial reasons which forced them to leave the country then, are still the most important cause of many young professionals to leave the Balkans. Many of them want to return, but their country of origin does not have policies to reintegrate them into the system and provide them with good life conditions. They have no guaranties, what so ever.

On the basis of the insight into literature which deals with migrations of Montenegrin population, we can conclude that this is a theme still waiting to be explored. Scientific works from this area which have been published up to now, certainly are pioneer works in research of Montenegrin population migration and they represent a solid foundation for future research.⁴

First of all, it is necessary to point out the considerable lack of statistics on migration which provide specific information on possibilities how to turn brain drain into brain gain. So far, an expert research concerning this topic has not been conducted in Montenegro. One of the first obstacles for any migration research is the fact that Montenegro was a part of the State Union with Serbia and no separate findings related to this issue exists.

After Montenegro renewed independence in May 2006, several laws that regulate the field of migration were brought.⁵ These legal frameworks have led to the development and popularization of the migration issue in Montenegro, but not to the actual implementation and monitoring over the laws. There was not a substantial practical experience in trying to establish a policy or at least a programme that would regulate and motivate highly skilled people to stay in the country.

The National Youth Action Plan of Montenegro, dealing with highly skilled individuals, was adopted by the Government in 2006. This Plan recognizes the

³ Students' mobility in Western Balkan countries, Basic Milos, the King Baudouin Foundation, 2009

⁴ Gluščević Vukajlo; Migration of the population of Montenegro in the nineteenth century, Cultural - educational community of Podgorica, 2000; Pejović Đorđije; The migration of Montenegrins in the XIX century, CID, Podgorica, 2003

⁵ Law on State Border Control, Law on Asylum, Law on Central Register of Citizens, Law on Register of Temporary and Permanent Residence, Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners, Law on Montenegrin Citizenship, Law on Personal ID Card, Law on Travel Documents, Law on Data Protection

unemployment problem as one of the main reasons of the brain drain process, but there is no activity mentioned to improve an integration process of highly skilled returnee to Montenegro. Through Strategy of Science and Research Activities 2008-2016, the Ministry of Education and Science provided research practice for PhD students at the best European universities.⁶ But upon their return, the Ministry did not provide any mechanism to reintegrate those people to the institutions of the Government or to find them an appropriate job. It seems that it is cheaper to pay professors from the region to teach at the faculties at the University of Montenegro then to employ highly qualified people, and thus to save the payment of the plane tickets, per diem etc... There are also activities related to financing scientific activities of Montenegrin people who are working abroad by connecting them to scientific institutions in the country of origin. Aiming to decrease the level of brain drain, the Ministry of Education has solved the housing problem of all PhD employed at the University of Montenegro by offering them housing facilities.⁷ The Ministry of Education and Sports of Montenegro is also in charge of launching Programmes funded by the European Commission: Central European Exchange Program for University Studies (CEEPUS), Erasmus Programme, and Tempus. They provide students' mobility in the EU countries. So far, there is no official document that would recognize this problem as one of the main reasons to increase brain gain process in Montenegro.

⁶ Strategy of Science and Research activities 2008 – 2016

⁷ There were 134 apartments that were given to the PhD. employees at the University of Montenegro. Data available at link <http://www.pobjeda.co.me/citanje.php?datum=2005-12-15&id=77689>

Key stakeholders and their activities on reintegration of highly skilled returnees

Governmental institutions of Montenegro

Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Media, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Interior Affairs and Public Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Human Resource Management Authority, Employment Office of Montenegro, Bureau for Scientific, Educational, Cultural and Technical Cooperation of Republic of Montenegro, Bureau for the Care of Refugees.

The Government of Montenegro adopted the Strategy for integrated migration management in Montenegro 2008 – 2013⁸ in 2008. One of the main aims of this Strategy was to provide conditions to reintegrate migrants to Montenegro. However, the Action Plan did not predict any activities for reintegration of highly skilled returnees. Probably one of the most important initiatives in this regard was started by Human Resource Management Authority in April 2010. This institution started gathering data on Montenegrin scientists working and living abroad, with specific aim of creating unique data base. This is first, but very important step in including these experts in local academic community. The Ministry of Science⁹ paid special attention to improving cooperation with Montenegrin researchers who are living and working abroad. Linking foreign scientists with our scientists engaged in research in developed countries, will

⁸ Strategy for integrated migration management in Montenegro 2008 – 2013, September 2008, Podgorica, The Government of Montenegro

⁹ During 2012, the Ministry will conduct an analytical study on the Montenegrin Diaspora, with focus on how best to capitalize on the Diaspora for international opportunities for Montenegrin scholars and students. They will also organize one conference to discuss the findings of the study on the Montenegrin Diaspora

greatly contribute to the development of science in Montenegro, is one of the conclusions at the Round table, organized by CEDEM within this project.¹⁰

International Organizations and the University of Montenegro

International Organization for Migration IOM, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR, Delegation of the European Union in the Republic of Montenegro, U.S. Embassy in Podgorica

Faculty of Architecture, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Economy, Faculty of Electrical Engineering, Faculty of Fine Arts, Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Political Science, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Law, Faculty for Teaching (in Albanian), Music Academy, University of Donja Gorica, Mediterranean University.

Institutions of high education are one of the key institutions in converting the brain drain into brain gain. There are not many active initiatives supported by either the University or the Government of Montenegro. The only initiatives in terms of brain gain are supported by international organizations, as WUS Austria, European Commission, and Embassy of United States in Podgorica. During this research, only Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics¹¹, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics and the “Rektorat”¹² accepted to help this project with their own material.

Civil Society Organizations

Youth Initiative for Human Rights – YIHR, Center for Development of Non-Governmental Organizations – CRNVO, YCC Juventas, The Monitoring Centre – CEMI, Association of Youth with Disabilities Of Montenegro – UMHCG, Montenegrin Women's

¹⁰ Round table “The development of highly skilled returnees' reintegration policy in Montenegro”, conducted in November 2011, in Podgorica, Montenegro

¹¹ This help was coordinated by Predrag Stanisic, Dean at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

¹² Rektorat is the highest academic official office of University of Montenegro.

Lobby, SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence, Libertask, The Roma Scholarship Foundation – FSR, Centre for Civic Education – CGO

Many of non-governmental organizations are the first employers for highly skilled returnees, because they cannot find appropriate jobs at the institutions of the Government of Montenegro.

Individuals

Mr. Dragan Batricevic, a journalist at Prosvjetni rad

Predrag Stanisic, Dean at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

Through the FP7 Programme, Mr. Dragan Batricevic, a journalist at Prosvjetni rad in Montenegro, has collected stories about 45 young researchers who left Montenegro in the last twenty years. He found some of them through their families and friends, but there are also some of them who contacted Mr. Batricevic. We can assume that highly skilled people who left the country and found appropriate jobs abroad are very interested in sharing their experience with young people in Montenegro, but they do not want to return to Montenegro. One cannot identify the reasons of professionals leaving their country and suggest a new policy in order to turn brain drain into brain gain.

Business sector

Even though the representatives of the business sector in Montenegro are very interested in brain gain to strengthen their human capacities, so far they have not been included in any project regarding this issue.

General impression is that key stakeholders recognize this issue as a key topic to solve the situation in terms of human resources in Montenegro. Stakeholders who are directly inflicted by the issue are not familiar with the European projects or any national

programmes related to reintegration of highly skilled returnees. Regarding the problem of unemployment (which remains the main problem of all of our returnees upon their return) each stakeholder considers nepotism to be the main obstacle in the recruitment process. In order to develop adequate policies, the state institutions, they all agree, need a comprehensive research that would potentially provide data on both brain drain and brain gain and the structure of it. So far, none of the institutions found itself as the one that will be in charge of conducting this kind of research.

Effects of existing policies and programmes - view of highly educated returnees

There is no novelty when stated that Montenegro has a lack of legislation when it comes to brain-gain issue. However, Montenegro is not the single case. No country in the region could be proud of the richness of the legislation in this area. Only document dealing with some of its aspects in Montenegro is the National Youth Action Plan of Montenegro, brought by the Government in 2006, as above mentioned. And again, although indicated the unemployment problem, this document does not give any recommendations for improvement of the current situation.

Since Montenegro expressed its aspirations to become a part of the European family, and the European Commission decided to create special fund for bringing non-EU students to various European school during the year of 2000, student exchange programmes became pretty present in Montenegrin educational system.

CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies) first launched in 1993 and later joined by Montenegro and other Balkan countries, is a multilateral mobility programme between Central European educational institutions,

with specific aim to strengthen bonds between Central European scholars, both in professional and personal sense.

The ERASMUS Programme is EU student exchange programme founded in 1987, which launches many different projects. This programme is highly recognized in the European scholar circles. However, not many Montenegrin students have heard of it. For example, CEDEM's research from 2009 has shown that 92.8 % students are not even informed on student exchange programmes. Only 1.9 % students at University of Montenegro have all the information on this programme.¹³ However, it looks like situation has improved lately.

Then, there is also another programme of the European Commission – TEMPUS, which supports the modernization of higher education and creates an area of co-operation in countries surrounding the EU through different regional projects.

And last but not the least, FORECAST undergraduate student exchange program, launched by U.S. Embassy to Montenegro in 2009, which provides scholarships for one academic year of undergraduate, non-degree study in the United States.

Even though these programmes create great opportunities for Montenegrin students, not many of them use them. Reasons are various and many: complicated procedures, not getting much help from University, fear that foreign diplomas would not be recognized and so on. Also, not even this area is spared from nepotism. It is not rarity to hear students complain that scholarships were awarded to friends and relatives of those working in public administration. But still, even if we neglect this fact, we are still faced with another issue. Students who have been awarded the scholarships for studying abroad do not express the desire to come back to Montenegro. With no strategy or action plan adopted to deal with this issue, there are no instruments which would help attract these students to return to native country. Even though the contract previously signed by the respective Ministry (Ministry of Education and Sports or Ministry of International Affairs and European Integration) and student contains clause that scholarship user is obliged to come back after the scholarship period has expired

¹³ Students' mobility in Western Balkan countries, Besic Milos, the King Baudouin Foundation, 2009

and to work in the Ministry. However, this clause is not respected in practice. Nevertheless, there are several programmes, only supported by international organizations, which are potentially going to increase the number of people returning to the Balkan countries.¹⁴

When it comes to the issue of employment, there are some initiatives trying to foster its treatment and to emphasize its importance.

One of those programmes was initiated by the Employment Office of Montenegro. The so-called simulation programme is designed to serve as preparation for employment. The aim of this programme is the opening of new vacancies through the support and development of entrepreneurship. Preparatory programmes refer to different fields in order to improve human resources' capacities (ICT, foreign languages, further qualification, re-qualification or specialization). The highest number of participants in these programmes, around 60%, comes from the younger unemployed population, especially in the programmes dedicated to the acquiring of computer skills and foreign languages, etc. However, no emphasis has been put on returnees, whether highly or not educated at all.

The next initiative – *The Brain Gain Program* – was started by WUS Austria offices in the region. The programme included inviting professors from former Yugoslavia and Austria to teach as guest lecturers at universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. Although fruitful initiative, which brought 33 experts to Montenegro, it did not have any concrete activities for attracting Montenegrin experts living and working abroad to come back and further develop their carriers here.

Through *Strategy of Science and Research Activities* the Ministry of Education and Science (current Ministry of Education and Sports) provided research practice for PhD students between 27 and 34 years old at one of the best European universities.¹⁵ There are also activities related to financing scientific activities of Montenegrin people

¹⁴ WUS Austria Brain Gain Program, UNESCO – Conference on launching the crosscutting Strategy of Science, technology and Innovation 2009 – 2015

¹⁵ Strategy of Science and Research activities 2008 – 2016

who are working abroad by connecting them to scientific institutions in the country of origin.

According to data on the mobility on research activities of universities and institutes in 2010, prepared by the Ministry of Science, showed a very low mobility of researchers at longer intervals (more than 3 months). By comparison, the European Union is 33% of mobile doctoral students during their doctoral studies. During 2010, the data in Montenegro shows:

- 86 visits of local researchers to foreign research institutions, from 1 week to 3 months;
- 16 visits of local researchers to foreign research institutions longer than 3 months;
- 21 young researchers stay - staff (master's or doctoral students) longer than 1 month;
- 45 visits of foreign researchers in institutions of Montenegro
- 9 representatives of the Montenegrin scientific Diaspora

The Ministry of Education and Sports, very aware of the brain drain problem, started solving this issue by offering housing facilities for all PhD employed at the University of Montenegro.¹⁶

This obvious lack of legislation leaves returnees with their hands tied. Chronic nepotism seems to be their biggest problem. Scholarships are often “reserved” for relatives and friends of those working in the State Administration. Still, even if they somehow manage to get some of the scholarships for studying abroad, Government does not have policy or strategy adopted which would be directed towards motivation of highly educated cadre to return to native country. Furthermore, Montenegro has bad policy when it comes to attracting foreigners to study here. With unreasonably high tuition fees, Montenegrin universities are unattractive to foreigners, who rather choose some of European universities with lower fees and longer history, as well.¹⁷ Also, since 2006, Montenegro has attracted many foreign companies to invest in the country. The

¹⁶ There were 134 apartments that were given to the PhD. employees at the University of Montenegro. Data available at link <http://www.pobjeda.co.me/citanje.php?datum=2005-12-15&id=77689>

¹⁷ For example, the approximate scholar fee in Montenegro is 1500 Euros per year compared to Italian fee which is only 300 Euros.

businessmen usually arrive with their families. All of them need to obtain legal documents as foreigners and need to recognize their diplomas. This recognition is necessary in order to either be employed either to continue studying. Many of these foreigners graduated from various private faculties in Russia and the former Soviet republics. Since the Office for International Cooperation within the Montenegrin Ministry of Education which recognizes diplomas is overloaded with requests, they often do it without checking their relevance first.¹⁸ This almost random recognition also contributes to an increased number of highly educated people in Montenegro.

Having in mind all problems stated above, CEDEM and partnering organizations envisaged and organized focus group within the project *'Advocating for the 'Brain Gain' policy aimed at reintegration of highly educated returnees in the countries of Western Balkans'*, each in their respective countries.

The session revealed nothing new. Mostly unsatisfied participants (highly educated returnees) talked about various problems they have had after being returned to Montenegro, some of which resolved, some of them still ongoing. Although no one could deny the changes and progress that Montenegro made in the years after regained its independence, it seems it actually "tricked" our participants to come back. Beside the fact that many have returned from family reasons and nostalgia, there is great number of them who strongly believed things have changed, and thus, had great expectations. The Questionnaire shows that many of our returnees who returned after 2006, they thought that situation in Montenegro is much better than it really was.¹⁹

Situation they found was far away from the politically and emotionally mature community which sees and recognizes the need for reintegration of highly educated

¹⁸ Questionnaire for highly qualified returnees, conducted in 2011.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

cadre coming from abroad. Nor the State Administration nor the business sector has embraced these people. On contrary, real problems were only to come.

Key challenges in the field

The first challenge returnees face with when return to Montenegro is the validation process. This process often lasts more than two months. Although the procedure may look simple, there have been cases with documents lost, processes delayed, and so on, and so on.

However, since the validation process finishes sooner or later, there comes possibly the greatest challenge in Montenegro regarding brain gain issue, and it is the employment. Those returnees who have, after being graduated, worked for more than a year abroad, are not allowed to take the state exam, what than implies impossibility to apply for jobs in public administration. In other words, they are not eligible, since they do not meet all requirements. Respondents employed in State Administration perceive their chance to work there as a privilege, because State Administration provided them with great support in further education. Returnees agree that ministries and other government institutions often award scholarships to their personnel or send them to several-month trainings abroad. However, since state does not have Strategy on Reintegration of Returnees adopted, it does not motivate those who have been awarded with scholarships to stay and work in government institutions. Therefore, these young people want to come back to country they have studied in or find the employment in civil sector organizations. Insufficiently developed managerial abilities of people in leadership positions in the Montenegrin State Administration, as well as those of entire society, is what makes returnees even more unsatisfied. When asked if they have managed to apply their knowledge and experience in Montenegro, except those respondents closely tied to their professions, others have answered negatively.

Lack of business opportunities in the country leaves the impression that it is better to go abroad and work there even if the job does not suit the one's profession. Financial reasons (which are connected with job recruitment process and the labour market supply) are the ones causing young people to leave the country in a pursuit for better opportunities. But also, these are the reasons preventing young students to study abroad and force them to stay in the country of origin, even though they wish otherwise. The Montenegrin government recognizes the importance of improving the educational systems and understands that it has to be a priority of the government. However, the last CEDEM's research on public opinion showed the public trust in this system has dropped for 8, 1%. According to this research, public trust in educational system was 66, 8% in 2010, compared to 59, 7% as it is now²⁰. What seems to be the cause of such drop was not specified. But it could be caused by shortcomings of the Bologna process (Montenegrin version of this process, to be précised!), which are more evident each day. The Bologna process accelerates studying, but it does not improve the quality of education. "Hyper production" of diplomas, whether at public or private universities, additionally overloads the already pretty small Montenegrin labour market. Even though there are positive effects of increased number of people with college degree, we still have the problem with small labour market, not capable to integrate all those seeking for job. With no compunction, we may conclude that we now have more highly educated population, but at the cost of quality.

Finally, the problem that pervades all of the above mentioned is the data lack. No institution is specialised to gather data on Montenegrin citizens studying and working abroad, nor there are other institutions to which the Government has delegated this assignment. With no people base specified, no strategy could be directed towards the ones in need. This is where special attention should be paid to. CEDEM and other partnering organization have recognized this problem, and thus created special Questionnaire which is to be placed on websites of all respective organizations working on the project *'Advocating for the 'Brain Gain' policy aimed at reintegration of highly*

²⁰ Research findings are available at http://www.cedem.me/fajlovi/attach_fajlovi/pdf/cedem_september2011-2011-10-4.pdf

educated returnees in the countries of Western Balkans'. This questionnaire, after being filled by returnees, will help in creating at least initial data base on Montenegrin citizens working and studying abroad, but as containing specifically designed questions, will provide most essential information for eventual creation of policy on reintegration of highly educated cadre from abroad.

Recommendations:

- The Human Resources Management Authority should enhance system for data collecting on highly skilled returnees and to construct a web presentation containing all of their biographies.
- The Government should adopt the Strategy on reintegration of highly skilled returnees.
- The Ministry of Education and Sports, responsible for awarding scholarships, should provide the infiltration of scholars to the system, once they return to Montenegro.
- The Employment Office should mediate within the process of recruiting the returnees, and cooperate with public institutions.
- The Employment Office should make a contract with private companies in order to provide working positions, or at least internships, for returnees.

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