THE ROLE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS DEFICIT

Eteri D. Rubinskaya

Rostov State University of Economics (RSUE), Rostov-on-Don, Russia

The growing demands of many countries in highly qualified specialists and their lack on the national labor markets push countries to use various opportunities from ongoing globalization in the education sector. Countries and their education sectors thus engage into a competitive fight for the brightest foreign graduates, gradually transforming national migration policies and adapting national migration legislation. In this article we are carrying out a comparative analysis of the migration policies applied across the world with the aim to attract foreign students onto national labor markets. We are also considering the toolkit used for migration regulation along with the major contradictions observed.

Keywords: foreign students, highly qualified specialists, migration policy, labor market, instruments of migration regulation

Topicality of the research topic

Deficit of educated specialists at the national labor markets has been caused, first and foremost, by the unfavorable demographic trends (low birth rate and population aging) in developed countries. These trends have predetermined the increasing demand for foreign highly qualified specialists, thus putting forward the issues of migration regulation optimization and widening of the migration channels for both current and future/potential migration flows.

Eteri Rubinskaya

is a candidate of economical sciences (since 2004); PhD – candidate and associate professor in Rostov State University of Economics, Rostov-on-Don, Russia.

She is a visiting expert on international and interregional migration, foreign migrants socialization and education for Rostov Regional Administration.

As an outstanding researcher, she has been the recipient of a Fulbright Visiting Scholar grant at Boston College (the USA).

Her science interests are focused around international labor market, transnational movement of labor force.

She published more than 40 articles in Russian federal and international journals, 6 training manuals for students, 2 monographs; participated in 35 International scientific – practical conferences and workshops.

Email: eteri-rubinskaya@mail.ru

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN SOLVING

International students as a social group serve as one of the most welcomed migration flows for countries since they are able to cause favorable economic, geopolitical and sociodemographic effects. The number of international students in the world is growing all the time. In the last 20 years their number has increased almost threefold — from 2 mln students back in 1998 up to 5.6 mln students in 2018, thus demonstrating a stable long-term growing trend (OECD, 2020). The flow of international students is enlarging not only due to gradual internationalization of the education sector, but also due to such factors as knowledge of the language spoken in a host country, historic ties between the countries, bilateral and multilateral contracts and agreements, political will of public authorities and finally, migration policy in a certain country.

As compared to economic migrants, international students have a key advantage — their future qualifications would be fully acknowledged in a host country once they finish their studies. Thus, they are automatically considered as potential qualified labor force for the local labor market. Understanding fully all positive consequences from the inflow of foreign students for studies and further engagement on the local labor market, developed countries are trying to use all opportunities provided by globalization so that to enter the competitive fight for the best and the brightest school graduates.

Literature review

Various facets of education migration have been already intensely discussed by the academia, and this has found its manifestation in both theoretical and applied publications all over the world (Altbach, 1989; de Wit, 2012; Ryazantsev & Pismennaya, 2015; Aidrus, 2010; Arefiev et al., 2005).

Some of the research studies have been also carried out by well-known international organizations, including UNESCO, OECD, and Eurostat. However, despite a truly large information basis formed about education migration overall, especially concerning the scale and the direction of international students' inflow, there are still research gaps in what concerns factology and analytics of the role of education migration as the key resource of the world market of highly qualified labor sources.

The US scientist Robert G. Myers in his landmark work "Education and Emigration" (Myers, 1972) written back in the 1970s was considering education abroad as temporary migration which, under certain circumstances, may turn into permanent migration.

This idea of the author was supported by the statistical data: in 1967 alone 7913 scientists, engineers and doctors moved to the USA, among them, 3772 (or 48%) were people who actually were educated in the US. R. Myers has also analyzed various factors that contribute to this shift in status — from temporary student migration to a permanent emigration.

According to A. Wilkinson et al. (2010), in the period from 1997 to 2006 21% of all international students in New Zealand also changed their status of a temporary migrant into a permanent emigrant. On average, this shift took about four years since the date of getting a tourist visa. In Australia, around 24% of all international students, finishing their studies in 2002, got the status of a permanent resident. And the highest rate of switching from a student visa to a residence permit is observed in Canada — 42% (Finn, 2010).

In Europe, a large-scale research into the factors influencing the migration intentions of foreign students (Master and doctorate level) to stay was organized by SVR (The Expert

Council on integration and migration) in coordination with MPG (Migration Policy Group) (The staying intention of international students in five EU countries, 2014). The study covered five EU Member Countries — France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK — and took 14 months overall.

The final report presents the results of surveying over 6200 foreign students studying in 25 universities of the countries in question. These results show that almost two thirds of all the respondents were interested in staying in the country of education after graduation. Employment opportunities and the interest in getting international experience were named as the major reasons for such intentions, thus confirming the idea that professional experience is an increasingly frequent motivation for studying abroad. The authors of this research have made a reasonable conclusion about the influence of a country's migration policy on the decision of foreign students to stay in a country after graduation with career-oriented intentions.

Instruments of countries' migration policies in relation to foreign students

Nowadays countries are transforming their migration policies and adapting their migration legislation with the aim to increase the inflow of international students. For this, they are applying various instruments which have already proved to be efficient (see Tab. 1).

Table 1 - Directions in the policy of foreign students' attraction

(Source: International mobility of researchers, 2019)

Directions	Instruments	Examples by countries
Financing research projects and initiatives	Internships and exchange programs for students; grant funding for various research initiatives	USA (Fulbright), Finland, Germany (DAAD), Erasmus+ in the EU
Official acknowledgement of qualifications and degrees	Bilateral and multilateral agreements on mutual acknowledgement of diplomas and degrees from other countries	EU (Bologna process); CIS countries; Australia and New Zealand
Social and cultural support	Support provided in case of relocation; informational support; relocating spouses and children; special grants for spouses	Austria (Dual Career Grant), Belgium (mobility centres), USA, EU
Visa and immigration support	Simplified procedures of getting a student visa; acknowledgement of foreign qualification level; permits to work while still studying; simplified procedure of getting a citizenship or a long-term residence permit; flexible scheme of job search after graduation which allow to stay in a country for a duration of a job search	Belgium, Canada, Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland, USA, Russian Federation (partially)

Noteworthy here, developed countries are trying to keep only those foreign students that would be really required at the labor market. These are primarily medical graduates and the so-called STEM specialists. Employers, experiencing a lack in certain categories of qualified specialists, are also in power to influence the migration policy in part of simplified visa procedures for specific categories of employees.

For example, Canada gives all foreign students a chance to stay in the country for three more years after graduation with the job search purposes. In New Zealand graduates are

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN SOLVING

getting a one-year work permit which can be later extended for another year, provided the graduate can demonstrate a direct connection between the obtained degree and further employment.

In Australia foreign students can apply for permanent residence after graduation. In Singapore foreign students have the right to apply for the so-called Post-study Scholarship which allows to subsidize studies and stay in the country for three more years and change student's temporary status into a permanent one (de Wit, 2012).

Authorities in the UK have developed two types of visa tiers specifically for university graduates — Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneur and Tier 1 Post-study work.

Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneur has been introduced for those who would like to stay in the country to develop own business ideas. A student applying for this type of visa is expected to be selected and approved by a university or by the Department of Trade and Investments as an individual with an original and convincing enough idea for future business development.

Tier 1 Post-study work allows university graduates to stay in the country on legal grounds while they are looking for a job straight after graduation. Once the studies are done, a student has the right to go home and then return to the UK with the employment purposes during the period of up to 12 months.

In Germany foreign graduates get up to one year to find a job as per the obtained qualification. This time period should be dedicated strictly to relevant job search, thus, graduates are allowed to work other jobs only on a part-time basis (the hourly limit is the same as for the students — 90 full days per year). Those graduates that have found a job relevant to the received education may then change their legal status in Germany.

In France foreign students that got their Master's or higher degrees in French universities may stay in the country with the job search purposes for a period up to six months. They are also allowed to work during this time period, however, on the same conditions as with working students — no more than 964 hours a year.

In the Netherlands foreign graduates of the local universities also get some preferences: they can stay in the country for a 12-month transition period looking for a job. Once this year is over, they either have to have a work visa, or return home (The staying intention of international students in five EU countries, 2014).

Special attention should be dedicated to the US practices since this country is using a very different set of instruments. For many years by now, the USA has been a major direction of education migration, receiving around 18% of all international students worldwide. Among them, 26% have been studying on various PhD programs.

After graduation, foreign students as F-1 visa recipients are eligible to apply for the so-called OPT — Optional Practical Training. The major goal of this OPT is acquiring practical skills in the study field. International Offices and/or Career Planning Centers at universities are playing an important role in such work.

They are consulting international students about such opportunities long before graduation and even provide step-by-step instructions on how to apply. An international student may apply for OPT up to 90 days before graduation. One of the OPT prerequisites is to demonstrate a direct correlation between the field of studies and the field of future work. In other words, OPT provides international students in the US with a completely legal way to work in the country for the next 12 months after graduation.

Moreover, if the field of studies falls into STEM categories, this period is extended to 17 months and can be prolonged later for another 17 months (thus, a foreign graduate gets almost full three years in total). Once OPT is over, another type of a work visa might be an option — the H-1B. However, this visa type covers only highly qualified specialists in the selected professional categories. Also, full support of the employer must be verified. On the other hand, holders of the H-1B visa then get certain preferences while applying for a green card.

Noteworthy, all the countries above have a certain legal mechanism which allows recent graduates to find a job once the student visa expires and thus move to the category of working migrants, provided all the requirements are met.

On the other hand, if a foreign graduate fails to find a qualified job during the pre-established period, returning home will become mandatory. Job search is especially encouraged for the foreign graduates of Master's and doctorate programs since such graduates have the highest qualification level.

They also tend to have a more globalized outlook and thus are able to live and work under high diverse sociocultural conditions. Over 50% of all PhD degree holders in the USA (in Mathematics, Computer Science, Engineering and Economics) were born outside the country. Same applies to the academic staff members: over a half of STEM educators are foreigners (Higher education and international student mobility in the global knowledge economy, 2011).

To date, the policy of foreign students' attraction and retention has already become one of the key instruments used at the international labor market fighting for the most qualified human resources (Rubinskaya & Savchenkova, 2015).

In this competitive fight, the winners will be those countries that are able to offer the best conditions. And under “best conditions” here we mean not only life quality and wages but also the most stable immigration status (having a residence permit, for example).

On the one hand, developed countries are now offering vast opportunities to the most talented foreign graduates. On the other, the same foreign graduates feel the lack of job guarantees back at home.

Consequently, being unable to apply their knowledge and experience at home, foreign graduates are not encouraged to return home, and this trend, obviously, has the most negative socioeconomic outcomes for the donor countries. Thus, the issue of (non-)returning students has become a truly acute one for many developing countries nowadays.

Nearly all developed countries (at least those with the most impressive economic development rates in the recent decades) are trying to return the students that have left to get some education and international experience abroad (Rubinskaya, 2011).

This policy has been especially successful in a range of South-Eastern Asian countries, including Korea, Taiwan, China, India and some others. On the one hand, this has been predetermined by significant macroeconomic transformations in these countries. And on the other, all these countries have really dedicated some time and efforts to implementation of their student repatriation programs.

Therefore, we can conclude that national economic growth is capable of transforming “brain drain” into “brain circulation” across the countries.

THE ROLE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN SOLVING

Concluding remarks

Best practices of developed countries confirm that having foreign graduates in a country might be an efficient way to provide this country with the most qualified specialists.

On the one hand, some of the countries are using the instruments that have proved their efficiency by now: a flexible mechanism for changing the migration status; the legal right to work during studies; simplified procedures for obtaining citizenship; having a transition period for a job search after graduation. On the other hand, there is also a rather harsh and mandatory requirement — if a foreign graduate fails to find a relevant job during the predetermined period, they must return to their home country.

Analysis of the current immigration practices aimed at the attraction of talented foreign students to the local labor markets allows us to conclude that the competitive fight between the countries for young foreign and qualified specialists is getting more and more intense. Contemporary knowledge economy is increasingly demanding human capital of the highest quality. This, in turn, means that the interest of local labor markets in foreign university graduates will be spreading not only across developed but also developing nations.

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<i>Paper submitted</i>	<i>08 May 2021</i>
<i>Paper accepted for publishing</i>	<i>24 June 2021</i>
<i>Paper published online</i>	<i>31 July 2021</i>