

According to the World Bank, a brain drain from poorer to richer areas of the world has involved over one hundred thousand students over the last ten years, and thirty-seven thousand in Europe alone. Of course,

The brain drain: how to reverse the trend

TREND

by Rita Fatiguso

the most coveted destinations are the United States, Canada and Germany... The impoverishment suffered by developing countries has been alarming, but now...



Marius Tirui had the right idea. With his country just about to enter the EU, this thirty-year-old from Bucharest with an honours degree in economics and a strong interest in business told us, "I'm staying, because the real business is being done here". In effect, Marius is an unwitting survivor of the "inverse Robin Hood syndrome", which appears in acute form when talented people emigrate en masse from developing countries to richer nations that are replete with resources but are short on individuals with adequate professional skills. The result is the depletion of intangible assets that is known as a brain drain. Romania is a textbook case of brain draining; for example, the country has been all stripped of its engineers, who would be of vital importance

now that fifteen billion euros are about to arrive from Brussels. The least that can be done is to ask them to come back home, but the prospects are poor.

Getting back what was once theirs is the only option open to formerly poor countries on the road to development. But it's not that easy, nor is it automatic. Returning home (when it occurs) can be a long and painful experience, since the individual must be reintegrated into his former culture.

The type of migration called "brain draining" is made necessary by conditions in a given country at a given moment in history. Such migration has increased from 3% of the global population in the 20th century to 10% one hundred years later. According to UN estimates, the principal cause is the power of attraction exerted by countries that are more highly developed.

According to a 2006 survey by the World Bank, the brain drain was responsible for one hundred thousand students migrating from

_Brain back operations have begun. India has begun to encourage Indian engineers from California's Silicon Valley, obviously far more skilled than when they left, to come back home



ECA countries, which are located in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Thirty-seven thousand moved to Europe and some 7,800 Poles moved to Germany alone. Approximately twenty-one thousand left for the United States, including 2,100 Romanians and 2,400 Bulgarians. From 1990 to 2006, 42% of migrants within the ECA area headed for Eastern Europe – an area that has welcomed more than three million illegal immigrants and competes with Switzerland, Canada and the USA for the brightest people.

A tug of war is underway, particularly between East and West, and it cannot be delegated to private individuals. The attempt to persuade people the Chinese call “sea turtles” to return home – that is, people who have trained abroad and who have families and jobs abroad – is known in technical terms as brain back. Giving these people good reason to return is turning out to be a serious problem.

To this end, Romania is beginning to reach agreements with Spain and Italy, the destination countries of its immigrants, and is

also seeking to establish contacts with IT giants such as Microsoft and Nokia, who have flocked to the Carpathians in search of those European funds. The logic is easy to understand: come if you want, we’ll help you settle. In exchange, you’ll hire Romanians, especially if they’ve moved abroad.

Neighbouring Bulgaria will soon follow their example. Poland, a reluctant forerunner, has not only sounded the alarm several times, but has also made impassioned appeals to its emigrants, particularly in Great Britain, where it has plastered London with notices.

Alessandro Ramazza, the president of the employment agency having the greatest experience with the European job market, said that “In Rome, paid advertisements in Romanian are beginning to appear which

_A World Bank study shows that the brain drain took about 100,000 students from Eastern Europe and Asia to destinations such as the U.S. and Europe





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_Statistics show that one million Chinese left the country for higher studies from 1978 onwards, but that only about 275,000 have returned, although China has also begun to recall its resources

appeal to Romanian nationals to come home, especially if they work in the construction industry. These adverts promise salaries that are no longer below the poverty line, but amount to a thousand euros a month. Also, Poland has developed a fantastic programme, because head hunting is occurring in Eastern European countries as well. From Moldavia to the Ukraine, the race is on to attract people with specific skills. Romania is now trying to play the same card as Poland, but it's doing so here in Italy, the home of at least one million Romanians who have left since the end of the dictatorship".

Germany, which needs 3,500 technical experts, will have to use hard-sell tactics and offer good incentives.

China has also swung into action and is following India's example; the latter has recalled engineers home to Bangalore from California's Silicon Valley, who are naturally more talented now than when they left. According to the few official statistics available, one million Chinese have left the country to



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get an education since 1978, but only 275,000 have returned. Some 118,500 students left China in 2005, and estimates say the number will rise to 200,000 by 2010. Apparently, the lack of top scientists and researchers is the biggest obstacle to research in China. As a result, Beijing has entered the fray by offering incentives for returning home. But emigrants generally lack confidence in their country's potential for stable growth, despite the current boom. And they are also convinced that China is not a meritocracy. Even so, twenty thousand PhD graduates from abroad would be a real godsend right now.

Acting in more general terms, the small Latin American country of Ecuador is appealing to all its emigrants to return, since it has suffered a desertification of its best minds over the past few years. President Rafael Correa has called it the "Return Plan", which is about to get into full swing. Correa is trying to reach all Ecuadorians scattered around the world, who he wants back in a big way. In Spain, the authorities have already followed this example; the region of Murcia has drawn up a plan that offers benefits to people who return.

Apparently, at least three thousand people can consider participation. However, the website explaining the plan is replete with complaints, and some people are even asking for discounts on the purchase of consumer goods and a car. Naturally, not everyone has been a victim of the "inverse Robin Hood syndrome". In some

cases, the most talented people do not want to go back home. Researchers engaged in the European Mirem project, which seeks to implement strategies for promoting return to the Maghreb, are well aware of this.

Entrepreneurs, the most brilliant of all emigrants, don't feel like going home, according to a report published at the end of last year.

As a result, it's easy to understand why a good project like the Blue Card project has been criticised. Proposed by Franco Frattini, the Vice President of the European Commission, it offers a minimum wage to lure aspiring intellectuals to Europe. But the amount will have to be reconsidered, now that the emigration deck is being reshuffled, as reported by observers everywhere. "All of Europe is playing a new game of Risk," continued Alessandro Ramazza. "And in this game, we're unfortunately going to have to pay an adequate price for talent. The reshuffling is occurring on a continental scale," he adds, "and is perhaps on a par only with the great migrations between Northern and Southern Europe that occurred in the 1960s and 70s".

_Ecuador, a small South American country whose finest resources have steadily emigrated in recent years, is now encouraging Ecuadorians all over the world to return home

