

BRAIN GAIN - RETURN MIGRATION STIMULATION PUBLIC POLICIES. AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH USING CORPORATE MANAGERIAL TOOLS STRATEGIES.

Adina Săniuță

e-mail: adina.saniuta@facultateademangement.ro

Magda Maria Jianu

e-mail: maria.jianu.21@drd.snspa.ro

ABSTRACT

Economies with an unstable political environment have difficulties retaining talents within the country. Romania, for example, has been experiencing an acceleration of the migration phenomenon for the past 30 years. While the Romanian economy is rapidly growing, according to all stats, talent migration is still an actual phenomenon. One of the reasons for the brain exodus, especially in the highly qualified labour segment, is the faulty management of public services: education, healthcare, and infrastructure is lagging behind Western Europe.

The article aims to highlight best practices from the private sector that can be implemented by the government and to develop a brain gain model to attract talent back into the country.

Keywords:

■ Brain gain ■ Return migration ■ Public policies ■ Innovation
■ Managerial tools

Introduction

The migration phenomenon is as old as humanity itself. Economic, environmental, social and political factors cause individuals to leave their native country in quest of higher standards of living in the destination country. These factors can be extended to economic and financial constraints, high unemployment rates, low public service quality, economic, financial and political instability, inadequate employment opportunities, national conflicts or wars, opportunities for a better future, proximity to family, natural disasters, weather conditions, and others. (Wallace, 2002; Carling, 2016). According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there were 281 million migrants worldwide. The estimated 281 million people living in a country other than their countries of birth in 2020 was 128 million more than in 1990 and over three times the estimated number in 1970. (IOM, 2022).

Romania is one of the countries that contribute significantly to the above stats starting with the fall of the communist regime. After this milestone in the history of Romania, migration emerged as a crucial socioeconomic phenomenon, with the majority of the diaspora concentrated in OECD countries. In addition, the OECD reported in 2019 that the Romanian diaspora is the fifth largest in the world.

Regardless of the fact that it is a significant phenomenon with both social and economic repercussions, Romania lacks a national strategy or comprehensive public policy designed to motivate citizens to return.

Based on exploratory research and literature review insights, the current paper aims to discover the migration phenomenon and motivations to return and develop a brain gain model that will test in future quantitative research.

The paper is structured into six sections, which emphasize the following topics: Migration phenomenon in Romania; Managerial strategies for retention and attraction of talents; Public policies for return migration stimulation example of European Countries; Methodology; Brain gain model - an innovative approach using corporate managerial strategies; Conclusions.

1. Migration phenomenon in Romania

Roughly 6 million Romanians have emigrated from within Romania's borders in the last 30 years, with the top destination countries for Romanian migrants being Germany, Italy, Spain, and United Kingdom. In the first 25 years, this phenomenon's positive economic and cultural consequences far

outweighed the negative social impact. In time, however, the share of remittances in the Gross Domestic Product decreased to 2% in 2020, and the economic impact of these inputs has significantly reduced. The negative consequences of the migration phenomenon have worsened. In the short term, migration pressures the labour market, causing the deficit to expand. In the long run, migration translates into a demographic decline that will continue to unbalance the labour market and lead to the collapse of the public pension system. Currently there is no national strategy in place to halt and reverse this tendency. Romania's economic condition has significantly improved, and some of the causes of migration have disappeared.

Thus the present study attempts to explore three dimensions connected to the phenomenon of migration. First, it aims to explain why the migration flow (that accelerated after joining the EU) persists; second, it seeks to understand the reasoning for which segments of Romanian populations living abroad would be eager to return to Romania; and third, it targets to serve as a mechanism of developing public policy concepts that would encourage Romanians to return home.

1.2. Talent migration

The European Union defines brain drain as a loss: “The loss suffered by a country as a result of the emigration of a (highly) qualified person” (European Commission, 2008). The phenomenon, characterized by the migration of highly skilled professionals in search of better living standards, better wages, better professional opportunities, and recognition, is not new. It became visible in healthcare (Mejia, 1981), where international migration first appeared in the 1940s when many European professionals emigrated to Great Britain and the USA.

All Eastern European countries are affected by it, and Romania is no exception. The intensity of the brain drain has increased after joining the EU and has transformed into an exodus of vast proportions that affects the standards of life of the citizens who are still living within the country's borders. For example, according to official statistics, the country has a deficit of 20.000 doctors (leaving 52% of the Romanian communities with no skilled medical help), a 50.000 IT specialists, 400.000 engineers and 4000 architects.

The loss severely affects the quality of life of the Romanian population: an insufficient number of doctors leads to poor health services, which leads to an increasing emigration that will stimulate further brain drain, thus spiralling down a phenomenon that needs a robust governmental intervention to be curbed, or that will eventually lead to a nation fail (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2012).

The cost of the brain drain phenomenon is not just an immediate loss, but an opportunity or economic cost, skilled individuals that create value add elsewhere while creating a cost for the country that has invested in educating and skilling them into the professionals that eventually leave it.

2. Managerial tools for retention and attraction of talents

Historically, companies are developing strategies to attract and retain talent. Nowadays, in a competitive business environment, it is more challenging to have talented and competent employees than material resources since skill is considered the most valuable asset to businesses (Kaewsang-on et al, 2021). Since the late 1990s, the highly-skilled workforce has become fundamental to a successful knowledge economy (Wang, Miao, 2019).

Goffee and Jones (2007) define talents as individuals with potential, knowledge, ideas, and cognitive skills. If these skills are put to work in the organization, they complement other resources. Therefore, talent is considered a key factor for companies to remain competitive and successful.

When it comes to talent strategies, companies consider two aspects: retention and attraction. Retention is defined as all practices, policies, and strategies developed to retain the best employees (talents). On the other hand, attraction refers to all of the above with the scope to attract the best employees in the company.

From a public policy perspective, both retention and attraction are worthy of consideration. The more the public sector invests in all that brings added value to the happiness of its citizens, the more the migration rate will be diminished. Those who left the country will return and invest their talent in the homeland's economy. In parallel, it has already become a cliché that it is cheaper to retain a customer than gain a new one. Both companies and state authorities should focus on retention.

One of the objectives of the paperwork is to develop a model of brain gain based on the talent attraction strategies used by the companies. In the following, relevant specific approaches used by theoreticians and researchers in the domain will be emphasized, to set a general framework for the studied topic and develop further research.

One of the tools companies are using is employer branding, and the tool we consider for the proposed model in section 5. The concept is based on the work of Ambler and Barrow (1996) and is helping to find the right talent and retain existing ones. Furthermore, keeping the current employee creates the premise for loyalty. But it is essential to be aware that employer branding is a valuable instrument for recruiting and retaining employees and not about developing the potential of the people working in a company.

Priya et al. (2021) list the benefits of employer branding:

1. Lower cost per hire;
2. Faster time to hire;
3. Lower Employee turnover;
4. Savings on salaries;
5. Helps to attract qualified candidates;
6. Improve company performance.

From the above-mentioned benefits, considering a governmental model for talent attraction, the most important are fifth and sixth.

Minchington (2006), Crous (2007), and Cheese et al (2007) consider that companies' leaders and human resources specialists value employer brand as a critical success factor for companies striving for competitive advantage in the talent war.

Cadorin, Klofsten, and Löfsten (2019) highlight in their study the importance of strengthening the relationships between business and government representatives at all levels to receive the necessary support for development, namely for talent development significantly - and extended limiting talent migration and developing policies for brain return.

An interesting parallel can be made between employer brand and country reputation (this comprises more than the awareness factor as stated below).

The paper "The impact of a country's reputation in the economic development of a nation" (Săniuță, 2020) presents the dimensions of the reputation and image of the country as closely related to the notion of the country brand. Simon Anholt (2011), who is considered one of the pioneers of the development of the country brand concept argues that a nation's reputation is built by exchanging material and immaterial values. According to S. Anholt, countries are building their reputation through an exchange of material and immaterial values through the following six communication channels:

- 1) Governance - public opinion on the competence of the government, its honesty, and the perception of the commitment to regional and global issues. An important aspect to consider is the quality of life, an indicator that the FutureBrand-Country-Index measures;
- 2) Population - the reputation of the country's citizens regarding competence, openness to foreigners, and friendly attitude. Alongside these factors are also prominent and respected figures from science, politics, sports, art, and media;
- 3) Culture and heritage - public perception of national heritage and culture;

- 4) Investment and immigration - the power to attract people to live, work, and study; the perception that people have regarding the quality of life and business environment;
- 5) Tourism - the level of interest in visiting the country;
- 6) Export - the public image of a country's products and services that also involves the creation of well-known brands that highlight the country of origin and position the nation in the minds of consumers (e.g., Made in Germany, Made in Sweden, etc.) (Săniuță, 2020).

As can be seen, when it comes to talent, attraction is not only the companies' job but also the state has an important role.

The construction of a solid country brand (not only promoting some tourist places) is a good start for attracting talent and for migration return, as it is about economic and social development.

3. Public policies for return migration stimulation example of European Countries

While building a national strategy in this respect, policymakers must have a few key elements in mind:

1. The demographic structure of the target groups - structural traits that can improve the results of their efforts, that if correctly identified, can generate a high impact (International Center for Migration Policy Development, 2019):
 - a. The demographic structure of the target groups - structural traits that can improve the results of their efforts that, if correctly identified, can generate a high impact (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2019);
 - b. Timeframe - the time spent abroad by the migrant: return occurs most frequently in the first two years of living abroad and is significantly after five years;
 - c. Lifecycle and age - the young and the senior age migrants tend to return more often;
 - d. Education - the return movement graph is U-shaped, with the unskilled and highly educated individuals accounting for the most significant part of it.
2. The success of the migration project - depending on the migration objective (professional, financial, or personal). Studies (Battistella 2018; Constant & Massey, 2002; Dumont & Spielvogel, 2008) show no clear decision-making criteria. It varies based on many individual

factors; both well-integrated and failed-to-integrate emigrants have been observed to re-migrate.

3. The evolution of the political, economic, and social conditions in the origin country, conditions that have determined the migration decision in the first place.

Most European countries have not approached Return Migration as a specific topic. At the same time, no other European Union member state has indeed experienced an exodus of the same magnitude and impact as Romania since 1990. Romania has lost approximately one-quarter of its population in the last 30 years to Western European countries - this is why Romania must focus on the return migration policies as part of a strategic area of interest and development and intensify efforts. Only a few European countries have built comprehensive strategies that should be carefully studied and used as best practices.

Spain

The Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security is the body that built and now owns the *Policy Plan de Retorno a Espana* and sees it as a solution to the labour shortage, a responsibility, and a Constitutional obligation. It was not designed in an office. Instead, it was based on thorough research based on workshops and focus groups with Spanish emigrants in Germany and UK, meant to understand what are the main drivers for the return decisions, what they see as inhibitors, and t needs to be changed in the originating country to stimulate a comeback; interviews with Spanish citizens that already returned, investigating what drove them to decide and what were the main obstacles in their reintegration efforts; and consultations with the business and political environment, to understand their needs. The result of the research is Spain's strategy to attract back (but not limited to) skilled professionals, a comprehensive collection of 50 measures:

1. Twenty-seven measures to support professional projects;
2. Fourteen measures to support the planning of the return and the reintegration efforts;
3. One measure to ensure psychological support;
4. One measure to support a positive and inclusive return environment;
5. One measure to facilitate access to the European Solidarity Corps;
6. Six measures to support collaborative institutional management of the plan.

The strategy attempts to have a holistic approach, to understand and address the various perspectives and needs of each actor involved; to facilitate the reintegration of return migrants, to understand their main challenges and offer concrete institutional, informational, social, and psychological support, one informative platform and a guide to help the individuals find their way back to and in the home country.

Poland

While Poland does not have a single consolidated political plan and strategy, as Spain does, the Polish Government has acknowledged the need to stimulate the return migration since 2006, and policymakers have launched several programs to address the matter. It represents a constant preoccupation and an evergreen topic on the political and public agenda (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2019).

A Return Programme has been released in 2007, managed by the Ministry of Labour, consisting of a set of six areas of engagement:

- 1) Fiscal measures, designed to avoid double taxation for citizens who have worked abroad and are returning home;
- 2) Educational support for the returnees;
- 3) Institutional transformation - training for public service workers;
- 4) Support services for the returning migrants - dedicated website, support in finding jobs;
- 5) *The Returner practical guide*;
- 6) Focus on brain gain in close collaboration with specific target highly skilled professional groups.

The Polish Migration Policy released in 2011 does not aim to stimulate the return migration but rather to create a positive environment for the individuals who decide to do so. The plan focuses on supporting the children of migrant families to integrate into the local school system.

The *Socio-economic* priorities of migration policy adopted in 2018 define the target categories that should be in focus and attracted back to the country (students and academics studying and working abroad) as well as a set of financial incentives for Polish entrepreneurs to return and establish businesses in Poland.

In parallel, a five-year plan, the *Programme of Cooperation with Poland and Poles abroad*, in the years 2015-2020 was designed to support the Government's efforts to entice people of Polish nationality to settle back in the country and it includes financial programs, grant schemes and incentives, educational and language learning support for children, support for entrepreneurs, initiatives aiming to attract students studying abroad and job matching facilitation.

While the Polish strategy is not consolidated and lacks the institutional perspective, it does send a strong signal that the Government is working towards bringing a part of the Diaspora back home. The economic situation has significantly improved. Poland is the first ex-communist country to be ranked as a Developed Market. The country expects an increasing trend of repatriation in the upcoming period.

Latvia

The long-term *National Development Plan of Latvia* for 2014–2020 is a country plan that briefly mentions the importance of restoring the country's workforce and demography, stimulating return migration is identified as a strategic objective. In 2013, the Ministry of Economy drafted Proposals for return migration support activities that argue on behalf of the positive contributions to the economic needs and growth of the repatriation of Latvian nationals that left in search of better jobs and salaries. The Latvian authorities identified the benefits of the re-emigration (labour, entrepreneurship) as having a more significant impact than the remittances, so their strategy focuses on encouraging return.

Return migration support action plan defines eight measures:

1. Supporting the migrants with information to reintegrate upon return;
2. Connecting companies and job seekers;
3. Obliging public authorities to promote job openings online ensures that Latvians living abroad have complete visibility on the available opportunities that are available in the country;
4. Brain gain - young, educated abroad, highly skilled professionals have a dedicated measure;
5. Economic partnerships with diaspora members are promoted;
6. Support for the diaspora civic bodies which focus on keeping open communication between the country and its members;
7. Supporting the families of those who decide to return to reintegrate into schools or find jobs;
8. It defines the status of the Repatriate and the financial benefits that come with it: financial assistance for travel expenses, language learning, and six months of support in case of unemployment.

Latvia's strategy to repatriate some of its citizens is complex, approaching the matter from all angles. It actively communicates the need to attract people back home; it drafted and implemented a tactical plan and has promoted the legislation to support their efforts, proclaiming the Repatriation law. The purpose of the law is to create an inclusive and positive environment for those who wish to return, promote the idea of return migration among the members of the Latvian diaspora and establish the role and functions of the national and local authorities that support the process.

Romania

According to all statistics and official data, Romania is the European country with the highest population living abroad. The official numbers vary from 5 million (OECD) to 10 million (The national strategy for Romanians everywhere 2017-2020). While the exact number is difficult to estimate, it is

widely accepted that the migration phenomenon has transformed into an exodus. Surprisingly, it is also a country with no national strategy or coherent political policies to stimulate re-emigration. The approach mentioned above, a document that acknowledges the breadth and the intensity of the movement, is focusing on offering help to the diaspora communities, showing support in protecting the national identity or language and traditions conservation, but makes no statement of an intent to influence or trigger a return movement actively.

Dispersed initiatives and plans are launched, but not in a consolidated strategy or vision.

Diaspora Startup, an EU and the local Government co-funded program, offers non-refundable financing to Romanian migrants that wish to return to the country and start a business.

The most visible efforts in this respect are carried out by private initiatives and associations.

Repatriot, the initiative led by the Romanian Business Leader Association (RBL), is a non-profit, non-political body of Romanian entrepreneurs that seeks to reconnect the diaspora and entrepreneurs in the country. For the last six years, RBL has been running annual summits and conferences across the globe, think tanks, and initiatives to attract the diaspora's capital, know-how, and resources into the country, in an effort to stimulate return and investment. The remarkable efforts of this NGO are somewhat compensation for the lack of interest of the policymakers and authorities.

ReThink Romania is a private initiative that has brought together successful entrepreneurs with the mission of creating trust and mobilizing the energy of Romanians to fulfil the country's potential in the next 30 years - a vision for the country. One of the strategic objectives and courses of action they identified is gaining back the skilled professionals that have chosen to live abroad. The project is still being drafted.

The Multidimensional Strategy for Attracting Young people to Romania (SMART) Diaspora is the result of an extensive research effort that involved hundreds of Romanian students studying abroad. It is a statement, a public proposal to the Romanian Government, and a strategy that places talented people as the centrepiece of the country's development roadmap. The plan's four primary objectives are: promoting Romania as a career fulfilment destination, facilitating the return and integration of the students back home, supporting the young, highly skilled professionals in accessing jobs in the public and private sector and consolidating the connections with diaspora and external partners. It is a holistic approach that addresses all aspects of re-emigration: motivation, financial motivation, diploma and studies validation, job matching, information, integration facilitation, role and responsibility assignment, and diaspora mapping. The Government can effortlessly adopt it as a strategy, as it is a robust, well-researched, and documented strategy to boost brain gain movement.

4. Methodology

The current article is part of a study pilot based on exploratory research, and this is the first step to discovering insights about the migration phenomenon and motivations to return.

To better understand the topic for this exploratory study, the authors used the semi-structured interview method applied to 11 subjects that live abroad.

4.1. Objectives

The research scope of the study is to identify the reasons Romanian talent left the country and, based on the managerial best practices and success stories of public policies developed in other countries, to propose a model suitable for Romania.

The following research objectives are considered by the authors that would facilitate the achievement of the declared scope:

O1: Identification of the reasons for the migration phenomenon among talents;

O2: Identification of the return intentions and the motivations behind;

O3: Understanding the variables to be included in the Brain Gain Model.

4.2. Methods

To better understand the migration and possible return of those migrating abroad, the authors organized a series of online semi-structured interviews.

For this paper, the authors interviewed 11 persons who left Romania. The interview is the most used format for data collection in qualitative research and the methodology is the semi-structured interview. In qualitative research, one of the most widely used data collection methods is semi-structured interviews (Bradford, Cullen, 2012). This type offered the possibility to cluster the answers and allowed the authors to explore subjective viewpoints (Flick, 2009) and gather the subject's experiences related to migration and return migration.

Given the situation (subjects living abroad), the interviews were conducted online through the ZOOM platform (which allows video conferencing). The duration of an interview was about 45 minutes, and each of the respondents had to answer 12 questions.

4.3. Limitations

The study's main limitation is that the qualitative research is not statistically representative. Thus, the present paper is only a preamble for comprehensive quantitative research and a first step in developing a model of public policies based on managerial strategies.

Another limitation of the study is that the target audience is not structured in specific ages, professions, or income clusters.

4.4. Results of the qualitative research

The research was carried out based on semi-structured interviews with high educated 11 subjects based in Western countries. The profile of each person the authors interviewed is summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Profiles of interviewed subjects

	Gender	Age	Country of residence	Occupation
Subject 1	Female	39	Northern Ireland	Manager, IT Industry
Subject 2	Male	28	Netherlands	Engineer, IT Industry
Subject 3	Female	52	England	Operations Specialist, IT Industry
Subject 4	Female	40	Germany	Sales, IT Industry
Subject 5	Female	35	Germany	Sales
Subject 6	Male	41	Denmark	Supply Chain Director, Automotive
Subject 7	Male	37	Austria	Buyer
Subject 8	Female	42	Canada	Detailer
Subject 9	Female	41	Spain	Advertising specialist
Subject 10	Male	40	Netherlands	Engineer
Subject 11	Female	33	France	Police office

Source: the authors, based on interview responses

An important finding resulting from the interview relates to why the subjects decided to leave the country. This category appears to be more about gaining new experiences, personal or professional development, or escaping Romania's political and economic situation, including poor public services and corruption. The unique financial context was of little importance, while the general social and political environment mattered. These individuals are not searching for better economic benefits but rather for a social climate that allows them to grow.

Their perception of the advantages of living in their host countries refers to the quality of life: the superior quality of public services (health and education; infrastructure), better job opportunities, or even the people's positive attitude. The authorities will have to construct their strategy around improving the overall quality of life, education, and the health system rather than offering financial stimulants, as money does not seem to be at the centre of the “brain” migrants’ interests anymore.

While in the public services area and overall quality of life, Romania cannot compete with Western civilization, it holds a winning card: it is still the home country for the families of those who chose to leave the country. All those interviewed indicated that they would consider returning home for their families if needed.

Being away from their families is one of the significant perceived disadvantages. So can be the host country's local weather, political or geographical features, and the difficulty of making friends or integrating, or the feeling of not belonging. While the advantages are rational, measurable indicators, the detriments seem to be of personal and emotional nature. It remains to be further studied, but one of our conclusions is that the most effective public policies in attracting talent back to the country will have to address sentiments instead of quantitative indexes.

A central talking point of the interview was around the reasons that would stimulate a reversed migration. The question "What would be the reasons for which you would return to Romania?" revealed that most of those who responded would return for their families in case of significant changes in mentalities, and changes in the political or social ambience.

One of the objectives of this interview round was to understand the current plans of the migrants concerning a comeback. All answers showed that the respondents have no mid-term intention to return to Romania. The immediate conclusion is that the return migration will not be triggered in the absence of an intentional approach and strategy.

A surprising question, however, revealed an interesting change of mind. When asked "Do you feel like you could contribute to an improvement in Romania's current state of economic, social, and political affairs? Would that constitute a reason to return?", the majority of the respondents, including those adamant about not returning to Romania, answered positively. The responses to this question expose a potential solution for policymakers looking to reverse migration. Further research will test the hypothesis that migrants would return if given a mission or a higher objective.

Other reasons that would trigger a return decision are linked back to the political context: corruption was in everyone's thoughts, and the respondents described a need for a profound country transformation (political, social, and cultural) that could determine the return.

The current research confirmed that the financial criteria are not critical or minor for brain gain movement. We conclude that the policymakers would have to focus on "story-telling", creating a vision for the country and assigning a mission to the "brains". These valuable citizens would return to contribute to a project rather than for money, and they would devote their efforts to the country's project rather than changing a job.

5. Brain gain model - an innovative approach using corporate managerial tools

Based on the current literature review, best practices, and the results of the qualitative research, the authors propose a model based on 16 attributes that are also used to measure the country's reputation (Reputation Institute, 1999, in Tisch 2017), in extension is what the employees of a company are looking for when they decide to stay or to have another experience, that is why the author considers the below model one effective also in brain return:

- Effective governance - a safe place, ethical country, responsible participation in the community, development of progressive economic and social policies, creation of a favourable business environment;
- Attractive environment - friendly and welcoming, beautiful country, attractive lifestyle and pleasant country;
- Developed economy - contributor to global culture, high-quality products, and services, well-known brands, well-educated and reliable workforce, capitalization of education, technologically advanced.

The authors will test the model using a quantitative approach in further and extended research.

Conclusions

In the last 30 years, Romania has lost roughly 200000 inhabitants per year, which is a massive number for a country not in war or another conflict. Those who left Romania, especially talents, among other reasons, claim Romania's political and economic situation, including poor public services and corruption. Based on the literature review and the conducted literature review, the proposed model considers variables such as safeness, progressive economic and social policies, attractive environment, performing education system, advanced technology, and a well-educated and reliable workforce.

The authors acknowledge the limitations of the study and aim to develop a series of research to test the model and also to extend the literature review and the analysis of best practice policies addressing return migration. We will have to take into consideration also the phenomenon of great resignation (that should be a concern not only for companies but for the state too, as it can have an impact on migration/return migration policies). Remote working is another aspect to consider. It could be a catalyst for return migration as you can spend more time in the homeland and reassess the possibility of returning home or attracting talent from other nationalities. They should also conduct, and it can be done in partnership with the business environment and the academic one, diaspora research, and set a

legislative framework to enable the possibility of taking exit interviews of those leaving the country for more than one year.

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