

National



POLICYBRIEF



PROMISE POLICY BRIEF: SLOVAKIA (2 OF 2)

Case study title: Returning young migrants

October 2018

INTRODUCTION

PROMISE explored the ways young people with a history of stigmatisation or conflict participate in society.

The situation in Slovakia is characterized by a high number of young people studying or working abroad. For that reason, we have understood migration as a process that has several stages: a return to the country of migrant's origin is one of them. Therefore, our attention during the research focused on the return of young Slovak migrants and we have analysed the tendencies of returning young migrants to become bearers of change and development in their home country.

The topic of return migration is under researched in Slovakia and there is a particular lack of qualitative research in this area. Our findings are based on 27 individual in-depth conversations that focused on 'individual's migration stories'. The interviews were conducted by means of a semi-structured interview and supported by a series of ethnographic observations at a cultural centre in a small town in north Slovakia. The cultural centre was founded by young people upon returning home. In our research we observed how young returning migrants modify life in their immediate circles, in the community and in society. We have discovered that the process of returning migration contains an element of active communication with the environment, an element of certain negotiation and modification which does not have to have an immediate goal to change the social or cultural situation in the community. Despite a variety of reasons behind the homecomer's decision, we have identified that the young migrants' readiness to return and the process of planning for a return are factors enhancing chances of young returnees to modify life in primary groups, in communities and in society. But an extended stay abroad as well as a return to a city other than the place of the returnees' origin caused a loss of social capital. Therefore, young returning migrants have identified the lack of opportunities, where they could share their experiences and improve a situation in Slovakia, as a problem.

The policy recommendations are directed towards youth organisations, NGOs, and local authorities as well as politicians at a national level. Based on the core findings in our research, the main aim of the policy recommendations is twofold. The first aim is to strengthen a networking process among young returnees and, by means of this, to give them the opportunity to transfer innovative ideas into the Slovak society. Secondly, we aim to raise awareness, among official representatives in their community and across wider society, about the role young returnees could, and would, like to play in their communities, and the skills and innovation they have to offer

KEY FINDINGS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Recommendation: Support public organisations and NGOs working with young migrants before and after their return.

Young returning migrants are not an entirely homogenous group because of their different individual experiences of being abroad. Based on their activities after return, we have recognized two distinct groups: those who are active mainly in their primary groups and those whose activities change lives in their communities and across broader society. However, both groups of returning migrants would like to present experiences, skills and innovative ideas acquired abroad to a wider audience but an extended stay abroad as well as a return to a city other than the place of the returnees' origin have caused the loss of social capital. Therefore, young returning migrants have identified the scarcity of platforms and opportunities, where they could share their experiences and improve situations for others, as a problem. For that reason, young returning migrants feel unheard by official institutions, communities, and society. Taking into account this situation, we are recommending the following actions:

- A support for public organisations, youth organisations and NGOs focusing on the return of young migrants (e.g. LEAF).

Unfortunately, organisations and NGOs dealing directly with the return of young migrants are based mainly in the capital city, Bratislava and their main target is a selected group of skilled returnees from prestigious universities. So, the next recommended step is:

- Work out a platform of networking for young returnees in Slovakia's regions and thereby evolve the potential of young migrants to improve life in communities.

2) Recommendation: 'To tap into the unused potential' of young returning migrants for the country's social development.

The official state position relating to young migrants studying and working abroad is confusing and ambivalent. On the one hand, official representatives of the state are declaring support for the return of young migrants; on the other hand, any activity following the declaration of support is missing. In the interviews young people who have returned from abroad present themselves as active citizens full of innovative ideas who would like to modify life in their communities. Based on the results from the case study, however, young returnees have a feeling that experiences acquired abroad are not used adequately by decision makers in their communities and society as such. An existence of invisible barriers resulting from weakened social contacts due to their stay abroad is blocking returnees' activities and is leading to young returning migrants' disillusion, apathy, and consideration of repeated migration. For that reason, we are suggesting:

- To establish local councils of returnees that would be accessible on a voluntary basis for everyone who has worked or studied abroad and returned home. These councils could also serve as networking hubs for young returnees and could be generators of ideas and praxis from abroad.
- Reformulate the system of returning grants and the policy of return in cooperation with young migrants.

3) Recommendation: Multicultural education and civic responsibility

While an economic perspective is a dominant tool analysing the process of return migration in new EU member states, return migration is certainly a far more complex problem that unveils novel issues. Considering the respondent's narratives, an extended stay abroad changes attitudes to cultural diversity and leads to the acceptance of different lifestyles. Therefore, respondents' experiences with diverse lifestyles may reduce antipathy to other cultures in a society without previous experience with social and cultural diversity. To maintain this goal, we are suggesting the following activities:

- Support young returnees' public presentations of experiences with different cultures; allow discussions with young returning migrants at elementary schools and in senior houses.
- On a governmental level use already existing financial mechanism supporting the development of civic society to financially support NGOs, youth organisations and public organisations which will organise the discussions mentioned above.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Our findings are based on 27 individual in-depth conversations that focused on 'individual's migration stories'. The interviews were conducted by means of a semi-structured interview. Because the topic of return migration is not sufficiently anchored in Slovakia and there is a lack of qualitative research focusing on return migration, the researchers decided to carry out a series of ethnographic observations at a cultural centre in a small town in north Slovakia. The cultural centre was founded by young people upon returning home.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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FURTHER READING	http://www.promise.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Returning-young-migrants.pdf