Skill Bill: Recognition of prior learning outcomes[1]

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As the international flow of labour force has become more important, the roles of different national diplomas and certifications are acknowledged. The number of employees coming from abroad increases in several countries, raising important questions regarding their employment. What do they know? How can they certify their knowledge? Can the international employees' knowledge be compared to the knowledge of domestic employees from the host countries? After forming the European Higher Education Area, the Member States' higher education diplomas represent a commonly accepted knowledge level. The different documents attached to the original diplomas include information on the skills, knowledge, abilities and independence of the degree holder. Employers can use these attachments and descriptions, but not all of them can understand the meaning of the information included in the official documents. We recommend using a special document called "Skill Bill", which should include the names of the different subjects, the skills/ knowledge developed and a brief description of the subjects.

Keywords: higher education, labour market, internationalisation, diploma, migration.

JEL codes: I23, J24, J61.

Introduction

The outflow of the workforce, the so-called emigration, creates a negative impact on the national economies of the countries of origin, but on the other hand, it has a positive economic impact on the destination countries. When the well-educated workforce decides to seek jobs abroad, their home country can lose the budgetary sources it invested in, such as the education of emigrant workers. Therefore, the emigration of the workforce is not the desired outcome for many countries (Grubel–Scott 1966). Destination countries prefer to employ

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a highly educated workforce to enhance their innovation potential. This has a long-term positive impact on the economic development of the regions opened for innovation. Nowadays, regions' development should lead to the production of higher added-value services and products (Kocziszky et al. 2017). In order to reach this outcome, employers need a highly-educated workforce.

Historically, people used to be mobile and were open to seeking new and better opportunities abroad if allowed (Castles et al. 2014). In several cases, major cultural differences could be detected between the country of origin and the destination country of the emigrants (Máté et al. 2018; Szondi 2018).

Neoclassical theories of macroeconomics usually base their migration theories on the economic imbalance of the world. It means that the main motivator of the workforce flow is to join those markets that are rich in capital but suffer from a lack of employees. These economic circumstances usually cause an increase in wages, so the potentially reachable higher salary motivates the workforce to migrate from the home country to the destination country (Hicks 1963). The microeconomic theory of migration investigates emigration as a kind of investment. This investment will return in the future as better living conditions for the emigrant in the destination country, but first, the emigrants have to invest in their mobility (DaVanzo 1981). Those who are open to emigrating from a country usually analyse their economic possibilities, including their costs, investments, and future incomes. They make their decisions based on these calculations.

When someone decides to migrate from one country to another and starts working there, he or she has to face many challenges. Some of these challenges are social (immigrant workers have to fit in the society of the destination country), some are economic (the costs and benefits of migration), and some are related to education.

We stated two aims before writing this article. First, we would like to give a brief literature overview on the investigated topic. Second, based on literature review findings, we will write recommendations related to the research topic.

Methodology

In order to be able to examine in detail the topic regarding the recognition of emigrants' prior learning outcomes, it is important to systematically gather and review existing related knowledge. It is important to emphasise that the topic we are examining is current and relevant to most countries. In addition, it is important to mention that it reveals different experiences from country to country, so we also

tried to explore differentiated authorial opinions in the literature. To prepare the article, we used the synthesis of the related scientific literature (Harris 1998) and the analysis of statistical data from open access statistical databases as research methods (Kothari 2004).

Based on the three potential goals of social science research (Babbie 2014), we would like to discover and describe the actual situation and explain our opinion.

We started our analysis by summarising the available literature listed by special scientific web pages like Science Direct, Google Scholar or Econbiz.de. We only used highly-ranked sources, and the statistical data was downloaded from a reliable source, the ILOSTAT.

The most important data related to the topic were collected, structured and compared. The findings thus provide an opportunity to get acquainted with the topic's literature background and compare the existing approaches.

Recognition of knowledge and its importance for workforce migration

The recognition of international knowledge seems easy, yet it puts a lot of responsibility on the individual workforce, on the employer and on the national authorities responsible for the recognition of knowledge (Quintino et al. 2017). Strict regulations on professions will close the labour market to the international workforce by creating informational asymmetry in special areas of knowledge (Akerlof 1970).

Nowadays, higher education has become not only international but also "European" within the European Union (hereinafter: EU). Although national higher education systems still have their national characteristics, they have also become international. European citizens have the right to choose where to study within the EU freely. They only have to fulfil the criteria that the citizens of the country hosting the educational institution also have to meet. After graduation, European students can get a degree that is accepted in all EU Member States (Bartha 2019). That makes the situation unequivocal in the case of European citizens. They can move freely within the EU before or after completing their tertiary degrees, and they should not face any discrimination. Because they studied in the EU, all Member States and companies and organisations operating in the Member States can easily detect and analyse their knowledge. The mutual recognition of professional qualifications is also well functioning within the EU (Adamo–Binder 2018) – this means that the workforce flow needed to develop

the industry in the EU Member States is effective. However, the situation is not as simple for professional workers coming from a state that is not a Member of the EU: how is it possible to find out what the workers with different qualifications know?

Completing a double degree or joint degree programme can help the specialists who earned a diploma to find a job abroad. This is one of the most important reasons why the different higher education institutions have started to develop joint or double degree collaborations (Csapó et al. 2017). When developing international education programmes, universities always have to pay attention to international students' motivational factors for learning abroad (Böcskei et al. 2019; Fenyves et al. 2019). Universities also have to pay attention to the education of talented students regardless of their nationality: their teaching programmes can also be enriched with special knowledge (Liskuné Vathy–Nagy 2019), like the development of presentation skills, academic writing skills, scientific communication skills.

The effects of labour migration on the hosting countries has been the focus of international scientific investigations. Usually, the flow of workforce into more developed countries causes economic prosperity for the hosting country, and it can cause an increase in wages earned by the local workforce (Oláh et al. 2017).

Several factors influence the flow of workforce. Scientists compared labour mobility trends in the United States of America (hereinafter: USA) and the EU and concluded that language barriers, cultural differences, the effects of the different political contexts and the diversified welfare and social systems led to a much smaller labour force migration in the EU than in the USA (Arpaia et al. 2016).

Third-country citizens entering the EU and especially its labour market have several disadvantages. They usually have inadequate work experience and often a low level of proficiency in the local language. The level of this disadvantage can depend on the language of the host country – for example, this is a much smaller problem in the United Kingdom (hereinafter: UK) or in Ireland than in Finland or Hungary. The lack of social and professional relations and references can also hinder third-country citizens to work within the EU. Third-country national employees working legally in the EU can also face problems receiving recognition of their education and skills acquired in the country of origin (Muller et al. 2017). This tendency can cause the exclusion of migrant workers from the host country's labour market. In these cases, third-country national workers may

start working at a company owned or managed by someone from their home country who came to the destination country and knows what the new employee knows and can communicate with the immigrant. At first glance, we could think that this tendency is useful for the labour market because a new workforce enters the market and is employed, and the new employees can thus contribute to the host country's economy. Nevertheless, on the other hand, this tendency can cause the formation of parallel economies in the same country with no real economic connections. This affects the successful integration of third-country national employees (Dajnoki–Kőmíves 2016).

Based on 2011 census data, Gödri (2017) summarised the situation of immigrants living in Hungary. From the viewpoint of the labour market, most immigrants are overeducated, and they are suffering from various forms of negative discrimination (for example, they are mainly employed on fixed-term contracts).

Kiss (2019) summarised the data available about immigration into the European OECD Member States and found that the average level of education varies in the case of different groups of immigrants. In 2008, in the case of immigrants motivated by family issues – mostly women following their husbands to the immigration destination countries – the share of lower educational attainment is nearly 50%, while immigrants with high educational attainment represent only about 20%. In the case of refugees in 2014, the share of poorly educated immigrants is nearly the same, but immigrants with a high level of education almost reach the 30% level. In the case of immigrants that were employed in 2014, the share of those with a high education level was nearly 50%. Kiss (2019) also underlined that we could not look at "immigrants" as one entity. The motivation behind immigration can be related to the average level of education.

In several cases, companies that are willing to employ an international workforce implement special procedures to help foreign employees get involved in the production and organisation of the company that employs them. These procedures are not obligatory by law, and they are developed upon the decision of the company's management. One of the most popular tools to involve the international workforce is to assign a "supervisor" employee for the newly hired foreign employee (Bédard–Massana 2018).

Companies realise the labour market value of the highly skilled workforce. This value is evaluated more from an economic point of view, not only by the

company itself but also by the independent organisations rating the company's operations. Companies try to keep the employed personnel and move them between their different operating locations (Vomberg et al. 2015). We can evaluate this kind of employee movement made by employers as an atypical way of labour migration because the employer has in-depth knowledge of the employees, so they employ them in a cross-border way. From the viewpoint of statistical bureaus, this sort of movement is only a kind of labour force migration between different countries.

In many cases, foreign direct capital inflow also causes an inflow of the workforce. That means the owners of the investor company send a few highly skilled employees to the place of investment in order to manage the newly established company and to transfer the knowledge already available at the founding company (Golob Šušteršič–Zajc Kejžar 2019).

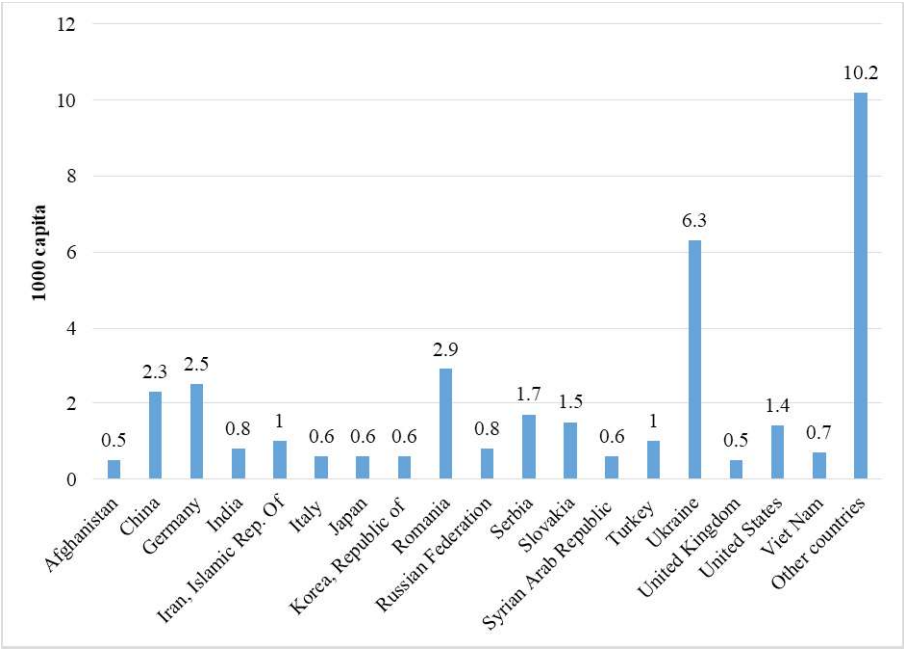
The Treaty on the functioning of the European Union states several important principles about the relationship the EU should maintain with its neighbouring countries. Article 8(1) of the Treaty sets forth the following provision: "The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation". Researchers working in extra-EU states often interpret this statement as the EU's willingness to start a kind of cooperation with its neighbouring countries that may lead to an outcome based on which the borders of the EU's labour market should be opened to the labour force coming from the neighbouring third-countries (Vinokurov–Preboev 2016). The EU itself seems to be open to starting the processes aimed to strengthen the cooperation with the neighbouring countries (European Commission 2015).

Workforce inflow and knowledge recognition in Hungary and Romania

When we talk about migration trends in Central and Eastern Europe or Southern Europe, we often refer to the migration of workforce from these countries to developed – mostly Western European – countries. This trend increased after the change of political systems in Central and Eastern Europe from 1989 to 1991. After those political and legal changes, many people decided to move to Western Europe in order to start a new career there; this seems to be a steady trend in several countries located in this region (Atoyan et al. 2016). Countries

that cannot retain their citizens are less able to become attractive for third-country citizens. Emigration can cause a continuous decrease of the available – and skilled – workforce in these countries (Fleischer 2017). Out-migration is still the main trend in Hungary, although, in 2015, in-migration put great pressure on the country (Pierog–Szabados 2016; Dajnoki et al. 2017). In several cases, foreigners can appear on Central and Eastern European labour markets as employees or job seekers, as well. In recent years, we have seen migration pressure build up in several situations (Özgür–Deníz 2014).

Figure 1 illustrates the inflow of working-age non-citizens in Hungary in 2019, by country of citizenship; there are more than 35,000 in total (ILOSTAT 2019).



Source: ILOSTAT 2019

Figure 1: The inflow of working-age non-citizens into Hungary in 2019, by country of citizenship (in thousands)

As Figure 1 shows, the most important source of international workforce in Hungary in 2019 was Ukraine: 6,300 people arrived to Hungary from that country.

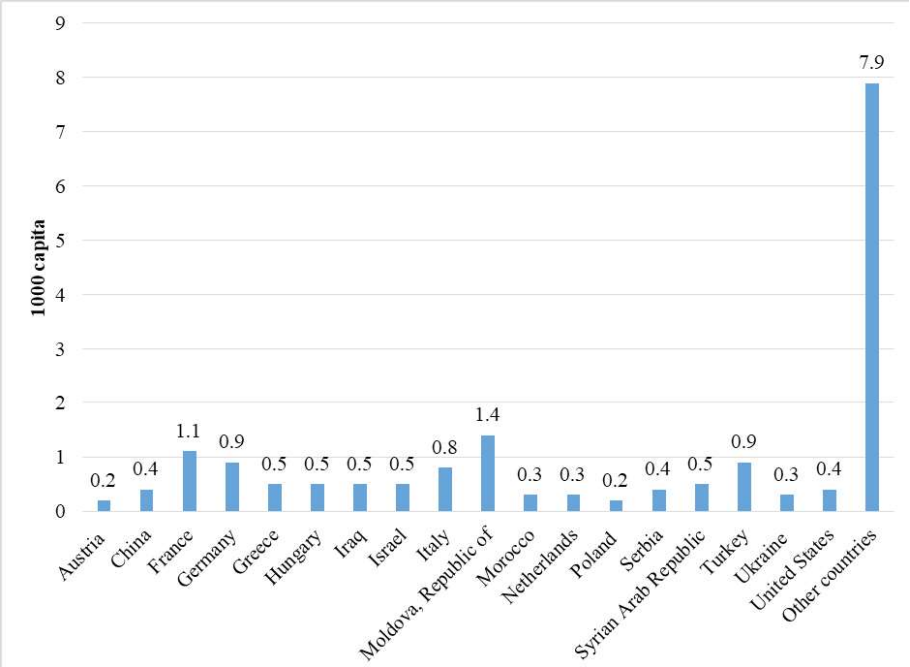
The second-largest number of people arrived from Romania (2,900), 2,500 persons arrived from Germany, 1,400 from the USA, 600-600 from the Republic of Korea and Japan, and the other 500 from the UK. The presence of German, American, Korean, Japanese, and British workforce in the country is strongly related to the foreign direct investment of their countries (Németh–Kőmíves 2020) and their very strong participation in the Hungarian market. The presence of 1,700 Serbians and 1,500 Slovakian citizens underlines the importance of transnational economic relations in the region. The presence of 2,300 Chinese nationals, 800 Indians and 700 Vietnamese citizens also reflects the solid economic connections between their home countries and Hungary. The "other countries" group represents nearly one-third of the total non-citizen population, with a total number of 10,200, which shows that Hungary can be considered a good destination country for people from several countries. The total labour force inflow to Hungary amounted to 36,500 citizens in 2019.

Many of the non-citizens coming from Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia and Serbia are members of the Hungarian minority groups who are willing to work in Hungary. They speak Hungarian and share the Hungarian cultural heritage, which means that they will not face any language barriers.

About 500 citizens of Afghanistan and 600 citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic arrived in 2019 to live and work in Hungary. In their case, the war in their home country can be a special push factor for migration (Oláh et al. 2017).

Figure 2 illustrates the inflow of working-age non-citizens into Romania, by country of citizenship. The chart shows that nearly 18,000 non-citizens arrived in Romania in 2019 (ILOSTAT 2019).

Non-citizens living in Romania are a very colourful group. A number of 7,900 people from the total of 17,900 came from "other countries", which shows that the international workforce arrived in Romania from several countries. The largest group of people came from the Republic of Moldova. These 1,400 people also represent a particular group within the investigated sample because many of them can speak Romanian, so they do not have any language problems during their employment in Romania. There are also many people from France (1,100), Germany (900), Italy (800), Turkey (900) and the USA (400). The neighbouring countries also represent an important group: we can find Hungarian (500), Ukrainian (300), and Serbian (400) people in Romania. Also, 500 Iraqi and 500 Syrian people arrived in Romania in 2019.



Source: ILOSTAT 2019

Figure 2: The inflow of working-age non-citizens into Romania in 2019, by country of citizenship (in thousands)

For the labour market integration of non-citizens, it is essential to know their prior education and convert their diplomas into degrees issued by European educational institutions. Furthermore, in war-torn countries – like Syria or Afghanistan – there might be a challenge to certify the degrees obtained.

In an ideal case, if an employer is seeking a specialist who can fulfil the job criteria, the future employer can check the applicant's original documents and base the decision on the certificates issued by the different authorities or educational institutions. But these circumstances will not cover all the situations related to job seeking or hiring potential employees. The countries' legal systems are continuously changing because they constantly have to react to the everyday issues related to society and the economy. In the case of educational reforms, the official documents and diplomas issued by the different states, authorities, educational institutions, etc. will also be changed.

Official documents written in local languages are not understood abroad. An official translation can help solve this problem; the foreign job applicant can get official certificates regarding his or her knowledge – but we still do not know what kind of knowledge the certification covers.

Upon graduation, students usually get certificates with a list of the subjects they studied and the results obtained for each subject. In these official certificates, the institutions have to include a description of the subjects learnt, the skills and knowledge developed, and a brief list of aspects related to professional independence. These documents rarely follow the year-by-year content development for different subjects. The other problem with these documents is that the terminology used is not understandable to everyone. The specialists working in the human resource departments of big companies can understand the terms of the special description included in these documents. However, the managers of smaller companies often cannot interpret them. The managers who are also the owners of the companies and have knowledge in the company's main field of activity play a crucial role in family enterprises (Tobak et al. 2018) or in agricultural companies (Harangi-Rákos et al. 2013). The way job seekers can communicate their strengths and weaknesses mainly depends on their personalities and individual possibilities (Nagy et al. 2018) – some of them can become more successful in self-marketing while others are less successful.

We recommend that educational institutions prepare a special document called "Skill Bill", which should include not only the names of the different subjects and the skills/knowledge developed but also a brief description of the subjects and which should be re-edited on a yearly basis as the academic/teaching staff develops the content of the different subjects. Thus, the future employers will know, for example, whether the completion of a subject called "Mathematics 3" means knowledge in derivation or knowledge in multiplication, etc. This way, the "Skill Bill" can help job seekers to find employment not only in their home countries but also abroad.

Conclusions

The literature review showed that Central and Eastern European countries are the ones that usually suffer from emigration. The well-educated workforce migrates from these countries, which causes brain drain for the CEE countries and brain gain for the destination countries.

We analysed the labour inflow in Hungary and Romania, two countries where emigration is higher than immigration. In many cases, immigration into these countries is connected to investments made by international companies (for example, Germany, France, the USA, Italy, the UK, India, China, Israel, etc.). However, immigrant people might also come from less developed countries or countries suffering from war or post-war crisis situations like Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria.

The employment of international workforce can face several challenges. One of these critical challenges is the lack of information about job seekers' skills or knowledge. We recommend using a "Skill Bill" document, which contains the applicant's knowledge and skills, combined with the exact content of the different subjects. This way, the companies can identify suitable job applicants more efficiently.

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