Publications that may be relevant for the upcoming GEM report:


In this article I offer an empirical investigation and theorisation of student mobility from post-Soviet countries. Using secondary numeric data, I provide a snapshot of undergraduate student mobility differentials and examine whether particular characteristics of student home countries are associated with the proportion of their students studying abroad. The two variables of interest are the tertiary enrolments and the labour force participation of young people. The results show that countries with lower tertiary enrolments and lower labour force participation rates are more likely to have higher proportions of students studying abroad, when controlling for the population size and the GDP per capita. The regression model explains 77% of the variation in the outcome. The paper also examines the most popular destinations for students in order to show that their choices of destination countries seem to be somewhat limited and mainly revolve around countries within the region. I place the results in the context of scholarship on international student mobility and world-systems theory to discuss the implications for individual states and individual students.


This report has charted the flows of students from Russia, Eastern Europe (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine), Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) to the EU countries since the late 1990s to show that increasingly large numbers of students from this region pursue degree programmes at European universities. Germany, the UK, and Poland feature as the most attractive destinations for students from former Soviet countries. These are followed by France, the Czech Republic, and Italy. Finally, Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands also emerge as rather desirable European destinations. Potential pull and push factors that may explain some of the observed patterns of student mobility from the region were discussed based on the review of literature on internationalisation of HE and international student mobility. It emerged that the perceived quality and considerations of affordability of HE in different European destinations constitute major pull factors for students from Russia, Eastern Europe (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine), Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan). Quality and affordability are intertwined as many students who pursue degree programmes in Europe do this on their home government funding. Many of such funding schemes use widely recognised international rankings to limit the availability of funding to those students who gain access to the world’s best institutions. Furthermore, specific characteristics of these destination countries and their higher education systems, such as the size of the system, availability of funding, tuition fee structure, linguistic access, visa regulations, and post-study work opportunities appear to play a role in the students’ mobility choices. The relevance of some of these factors, however, might be overestimated. For example, judging from the macro data, post-study work opportunities may not be a matter of great concern for students from former Soviet countries.
One of the top two destinations – the UK – operates the strictest regulations regarding post-study work. Out of the nine destination countries overviewed, the Netherlands is currently the only country that explicitly encourages graduates to stay there and find employment. Yet it attracts the lowest numbers of students from the region. This is in line with our earlier finding emerging from the UK context that UK HEI recruitment/admissions officers do not view students from this region as potential labour migrants. The popularity of European HE does not seem to be overwhelming in the context where the former coloniser – the Russian Federation – remains to be by far the most attractive study destination for the absolute majority of these countries. The relative attractiveness of Russia over the EU countries could be due to the historical and linguistic links, considerations of affordability driven by low fees and availability of federal scholarships, as well as the regulations related to the recognition of secondary school qualifications issued by former Soviet countries.

Considering this evidence, a bigger question that we are unable to answer here relates to the wider implications of pursuing degree programmes in Europe for students from post-Soviet countries, the majority of which remain to be undemocratic. The analysis of data sets on student mobility (UNESCO, 2016) and democratic development of post-Soviet countries (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015) reveals that there is a very strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between the proportion of degree mobile students that are enrolled at European universities (as a % of all mobile students from each of these countries) and countries' democratic development index ($r = .87, p = .01$). In other words, post-Soviet countries which send higher numbers of degree mobile students to HEIs in EU countries tend to have achieved higher score on democratic development than those who have lower proportions of students pursuing degrees at European universities. Student mobility however can be an expression of democratic transformation as much as it can be an agent of such transformation. Thus, future research will need to examine this significant trend in greater detail.


This report examines degree-mobility from Russia, Eastern Europe (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine), Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) to the UK with regard to trends, rationales, and strategies for student recruitment employed by UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The findings are based on the analysis of OECD, UNESCO UIS, and EUROSTAT (OUE) survey data on international degree-mobility, HESA data on international student enrolment figures at UK HEIs, as well as the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with international officers/admissions officers at 14 UK HEIs that were sampled systematically using a maximum variation approach. Over the last two decades, UK HEIs have seen an almost twenty-fold increase in the number of degree-mobile students from Russia, Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia, with approximately 15,555 students from the region enrolled at UK HEIs during the most recently recorded academic year 2013-14. The UK is currently the most popular study destination for degree mobile students from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The UK is also among the eight most popular destinations for degree-mobile students from Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. UK HEIs recognise four rationales for student recruitment from former Soviet countries: economic, socio-cultural, academic, and political. An economic rationale emerged as the key rationale. All interviewees demonstrated a strong awareness of the marketisation of the UK HE sector and the revenue that international students generate in the context of the consistently decreasing funding from
the government and the business sector. There was a perception that there exists a diversity of views on international student recruitment within the government. The Department for Business, Innovation & Skills and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were regarded by most interviewees as interested in attracting increasing numbers of academically excellent students from all over the world with a view to strengthening the UK economy and building cultural, political, and diplomatic links with other countries. In the perceptions of the interviewed HE representatives, the Home Office tends to view international students as an immigration challenge that requires better control, as manifested in the existing UK visa regulations. All interviewees viewed visa regulations for international students as a serious impediment to student recruitment.

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