

WES SYMPOSIUM
INTERNATIONAL LABOR AND ACADEMIC MOBILITY
Toronto, Canada, 21-22 October, 2004.

Comments by Eva Egron-Polak, IAU in response to paper by Karine Tremblay (OECD)
on
“Links between Academic Mobility and Immigration”.

Congratulations to the organizers (WES and CBIE) for holding this seminar and even more heartfelt thanks for their kind invitation for me to be here and comment on some of the issues surrounding student mobility and immigration policies.

I am particularly happy to be here for two reasons: it is always great to come back to Canada. Also because less than three weeks ago, I chaired a workshop just prior to a conference in the Hague, organized by the Dutch Presidency of the European Union under the title: “Brain Gain: the instruments.” The title is telling as is the coincidence with the topic of this meeting.

It is clear, the race for brains is on and it seems to me that we are only in the first or second heat for a long distance race that has many participants. My role here is to comment on the findings of the OECD as prepared by Ms. Karine Tremblay and of course I will do so by offering some views from the International Association of Universities which has about half its members in developing countries and members in every region of the globe, thus including institutions in predominantly host countries as well as sending countries. Thus we are very interested in this race and most particularly, given our mission of promoting international cooperation, solidarity, social responsibility and our commitment to ethical values, we are most keen to contribute in some small fashion to ensure that this race is run fairly and that even if in every race, there must be winners and losers, it is imperative that in this case every effort is made to see that the losers also benefit from participating in the race.

Ms. Tremblay’s paper provides excellent background and much needed empirical evidence for the issues we are discussing. I think we all know the extent to which the knowledge economy, or knowledge society rests on the availability of highly qualified and highly educated people. We also know that demographic trends (which Karine does not really mention but which also contribute to the shortages of skilled people and thus to the flows of people) are not evolving in identical ways around the world. Finally, we also have a good sense of where, both regionally and in terms of discipline or professional areas, there are shortages of skilled or highly qualified people.

The paper goes immediately to the heart of the issue of the link between academic or student mobility and immigration by explaining why international students provide such an efficient, convenient and tempting source for solving these shortages. Karine backs up this explanation of the link between international students and future immigrants with a very good overview of what we could call the Brain Gain instruments being developed by

most host / industrialized countries, namely the immigration policies and facilitators that enable those students who are desirable and who wish to stay in the host country, to do so. Easing of immigration restrictions, or indeed favoring international students with higher education qualifications in the immigration process to facilitate their stay in the host country as permanent or temporary residents is becoming common practice in most industrialized countries. Only the US does not appear to need such favorable mechanisms; yet the country still acts as the greatest magnet for highly qualified people. Some stagnation and even decline is showing, though, in the wake of Sept 11 and the tightened visa procedures.

All in all, the conclusion is clear - both student mobility per se and the extension of this mobility to immigration are of great economic as well as academic and scientific benefit to the host country.

The paper also includes a section analyzing the impact on the sending country of such student mobility and eventual migration. Again, it is relatively easy to conclude that for sending countries student mobility remains highly beneficial for a variety reasons, especially if the students return home, bringing with them the much needed and sometimes not available skills, but also having created networks and gained general insights into their host countries culture and ways of doing things. Also, even if they do not return home, the paper argues, by looking at India and China as examples, that their remittance payments and their foreign investments are sufficiently valuable to the countries' developments to compensate for the loss of the human capital.

My first comment concerns the need to get the whole picture. Our research and discussion must go much further and deeper and must involve a wide variety of both sending and hosting countries. I would like to point in several additional directions that we need to investigate.

More attention needs to be paid to the up-stream battle being waged in terms of the instruments to attract researchers and highly qualified people in addition to the recruitment of students. This is a more recent development and is exclusively targeted at scientists and researchers. As these efforts increase, and are added to aggressive student recruitment and immigration recruitment proper, they need to be assessed together and their combined impact measured.

The most visible but not the only example of this effort is recent European Union policy. In addition to creating opportunities through the Bologna Process and mobility programs as Erasmus Mundus, which may serve immigration objectives eventually, the stated EU goal (Lisbon and Barcelona Ministerials) to create the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world has been translated into a specific target of 700,000 additional researchers by 2010. It is clear and openly recognized that this target will not be achieved without some of these researchers coming from outside of the region. So 1.6 billion Euros has been set aside for this task and new instruments to bring more researchers to Europe are being launched and will be elaborated within the next Framework Programme for Research.

In addition, such a strategy is being replicated at the national level in many countries. In Holland an estimated 120,000 researchers are needed in the short run; in Ireland 8,000 researchers are needed - nearly double the number at present. All kinds of funding schemes are being designed to attract researchers from everywhere. In Canada too, as you all know, the Research Chairs programme was designed as a means to combat the outflow of academics and scientists and if possible to attract others to come to Canadian universities.

So, in the examination of the link between immigration and student mobility, these new instruments and their impact need to be added. It is clear that what some have called the 'pull factors' are becoming more sophisticated, more diverse, more competitive and far more targeted. The resources that they expend to attain the objectives are also unprecedented.

This is great for the highly skilled people who may wish to take up new opportunities. But it is rarely in the immediate interest of the sending countries to see large numbers of highly education people leave. Indeed, the IAU survey on internationalization of higher education found the brain drain cited as the number one or two risks in all regions except in Asia. Let me underline that when in Canada or Europe we see highly qualified workers leave, brain drain is in the headlines everyday and everything is done to combat it. It is curious therefore that we now often read and argue that the brain drain concept is outmoded and we do the best to demonstrate how beneficial it is for other countries when their scientists come to our countries. The concept of brain circulation became in part fashionable when it was needed to serve our purposes to "poach".

It seems to be that as a first step in public policy discussions of this nature, we must be clear about our goals and recognize that there is a conflict of goals between sending and host countries. In fact sending is a misnomer when people leave on their own and hosting is too passive a way to describe countries that proactively attract highly qualified immigrants.

So, an analysis of how the pull factors are evolving requires a parallel examination of the reality of these sending countries and look at the 'push factors' and carefully note the differences that exist among various nations.

Unfortunately the factors that push people to leave are often strongest in those countries that can least afford such losses, especially if they are permanent. Taking China and India as the two cases for analyzing the impact on sending countries may make sense in quantitative terms, but it seems to me that it may offer an over-optimistic view of the trends taking place.

Let me add a few more numbers:

According to International Organization of Migration data and information from the Migration for Development in Africa (cited in Mohamedbhai, G., 2004, unpublished), it is reported that between 1960-1975 the number of highly qualified professionals leaving

Africa averaged 2,000 per year; in the decade from 1975 - 1984, it rose to 4,000 per year and at present it is estimated at 20,000 per year and this number does not include students who may not return after completing their studies overseas. Who is leaving? Doctors, nurses, teachers and engineers.

The cost to these countries and the impact such an exodus has on the capacity for sustainable development must be considered and is extremely high. Few countries in Africa and even in other developing regions have, as do the two fast growing giants China and India, sufficiently strong and growing domestic knowledge-intensive industries to re-attract people or investment from expatriates or the diaspora. In addition, trends to relocate production of such industries outside of the industrialized world are also concentrated in only a few nations with China and India, as well as some of the East and Central European countries leading the way. Such relocation of industry can often exert the pull back for highly skilled people as Karen points out is the case in China and India; it is not taking place in the least developed nations.

It must be said that the outflow of highly educated people is not new and pre-dates this current and strong emphasis on pro-active measures to attract and compete for brains. The effect of these new measures and incentives could be devastating, especially if nothing is done about the 'push factors' namely if nothing is done about democratic and economic development in the sending countries.

What are these push factors? The OECD paper mentions a few of the reasons why people may leave home to study and especially why they may remain in their host country. Clearly most people leave to seek opportunities or access to what is not available at home. To obtain better education and training, better salary, better professional conditions, more security and safety for them and their families, better prospects for future etc.

While in fast developing nations like China and India these 'push factors' are rapidly changing and indeed many highly qualified people may be returning because of improved conditions and opportunities at home, it is in the least developing nations that they remain unchanged and risk being even more adversely effected by this concerted strengthening of the pull factors. Furthermore, such push factors are very complex and country specific and often have as much to do with the economics of the situation as with political and ethnic or racial issues.

We therefore need to expand the horizontal links in public policy to also include other areas, in particular development assistance policy, in this overall discussion. Such a concerted effort to bring highly qualified people into industrialized countries must be accompanied by a renewed effort and commitment to also build capacity for continued education and training in developing countries. Only then will people actually have a real choice whether to stay and start their professional life at home. Even more importantly, rather than undermine developing countries absorptive capacity for highly skilled people we need to collaborate to build it up. Thus the OECD countries' official development policy and programs need to evolve so that the push factors are weaker and

the decision to move is really one of choice rather than a necessity because of untenable conditions at home.

It seems to me though that the concept, conditions and impact of brain circulation or as the OECD paper indicates, the changing nature of mobility towards a circular flow of human capital, are yet far from well known. This concept needs far more empirical investigation before we can state that this phenomenon is growing and that it is beneficial. What is the extent of such circulation, what impact does it have on sending and receiving countries, what conditions are required for benefits to be real in terms of economic and social development of various participating countries and at what costs to whom? Are some of the questions that remain unanswered. While I very much like the term 'intellectual nomad' that was used by Damtew Teferra in an article he wrote for IAU (*IAU Newsletter*, Vol 10, no. 1-2, 2004) and agree with him in saying that in light of the unsuccessful attempts to stem the outflow of what he calls 'knowledge entrepreneurs', new ways, including using the full potential of ICTs to tap into these resources need to be found to make brain circulation work and benefit to all. I look forward to hearing him speak later today.

What seems absolutely central to me is that all policies that will increase the mobility of students and researchers with an explicit or implicit aim to have them stay in the host countries must be developed in dialogue with source countries, must explore a variety of alternatives to ensure that the movement of highly qualified people truly does benefit all.

Finally since the trends described in the OECD paper are likely to grow rather than diminish, the mobility of 'brains' - whether they stay abroad or return home - needs our attention in terms of the intercultural dimension their presence will have on their surroundings.

By the very fact that they are highly qualified people, they will tend to be both more influential and visible members of their communities. An article in the *International Herald Tribune* (July 26, 2004, pg. 7), reported on India's Westernized émigrés returning home in a brain gain situation. It reports how the influence of these participants in the reverse brain drain is amplified beyond their numbers by their high-level skills and education, new cultural perspective and in many cases ample wealth. The fact that this globalized elite is trying to refashion India, implicitly in America's image, is not universally welcome.

Thus, another aspect of public policy to keep in mind is the socio-cultural impact of the changing nature of mobility of highly educated people.

In conclusion:

We need more research and hard facts on the movements and trends looking at all aspects - student mobility, researchers movements, short term and longer term movements. We need to look at far more sending countries and analyze the impact of the exodus over time.

We need to ensure that our mobility policies are co-developed and that our goals and those of our partner countries are clear.

We need to coordinate policies, and particularly link aid policy, to immigration and other incentives to attract people, so as to compensate for negative impacts.

We need to recognize that brain gain will not just happen - we need proactive measures and all kinds of instruments to ensure that brains can circulate.

We need codes of good conduct, such as those being developed by the EU for the recruitment of researchers.