

Why do young people go abroad? A comparison between Ukrainian and Swedish students

A country needs its citizens. In order to flourish and prosper, it needs citizens that are engaged, working and investing in knowledge, production and service. At the same time, citizens need their country, in order to get a good life for themselves and their families. Every country has generational tensions since the old folks represent wisdom and tradition, while the young ones represent curiosity and the future.

The curiosity of the youth is an asset for the country since it can make them go abroad, get experience, knowledge and networks, that can be used when they come back and settle down in their country. Migration of young people represents an investment of great joy for the young ones and creates opportunities for creating a prosperous country. As long as the young ones come home, settle down and use the competence they have gained through their migration activity.

But what if they do not come back? Then the country has lost one of its strong individuals, since migration is probably made more by the strong individuals, and the country have lost the influence these strong individuals and their international experience could have on the country.

The question is, do young people want to go abroad, and do they want to come back? With this question, Iana Gupalova, a second year student at The Kharkiv University of Humanities "People's Ukrainian Academy" (PUA), made a survey, supervised by Sven-Olof Collin, professor of Corporate Governance and Accounting at Linnæus University (LNU), Sweden. This is our report of the survey.

The survey was made on students at the Ukrainian and the Swedish university in March 2011. In PUA, 64 students responded and in LNU 27 students responded. It is by no means a representative sample of young people from the two countries, but it can indicate the differences and similarities, and give some hints of the problem and the solutions.

Being asked what they wanted to choose for the next few years, 48% of the Swedes and 37,5% of the Ukrainians wanted to permanently stay in their country. To stay in their home country but have an opportunity to go abroad attracted 25% of the Ukrainians and 33,3% of the Swedes. The other way around, to stay abroad and to be able to have some work in their home country attracted only 3,7% of the Swedes, but 9,4% of the Ukrainians. Finally, to permanently live and work abroad attracted 18,8% of the Swedes but only 7,4% of the Ukrainians.

With a more advanced analytical technique (logistic regression) it is possible to differentiate students according to their gender, age, self-reported grade, home country and if they considered themselves to be patriots.

We found no strong difference in patriotism since 53% of the Ukrainians and 59% of the Swedes considered them to be patriots.

To stay in their home country were more preferred by men. To live in the home country but with opportunities to work abroad were preferred by patriots. To live outside, but with opportunities to work in their home country were more preferred by those with higher grades. To settle down in another country were less attractive for older students and for patriots.

We were not able to identify any strong country effect, but age, gender, success in studies are more explanatory for migration preferences. Patriotism and age reduce mobility, and success in studies and female gender increase mobility.

What is then attractive in mobility? The students were asked several questions regarding if they were looking for experience, fun, social protection, better future for their kids, etc. Through a factor analysis it was found the responses organised themselves in three factors, that was interpreted to represent security, personal development and fun. Ukrainian preferred the security factor, and the Swedes and the young ones preferred the fun factor. No significance was found for the developmental factor. Thus, Ukrainians goes abroad to get a more secure life, and Swedes goes for fun.

The student had to respond on questions if they thought they had a duty towards their country and if the country had a duty towards them. About 1/3 thought they had no duty, and the country had no duty, 1/3 thought both to have a duty, but interestingly enough, 1/3 thought they had no duty but the country had a duty to support the individual. This question were asked since there could be an expectation that in a country of Sweden, with its welfare state, where the state is much more supportive than in Ukraine, more students would take the support of the state for granted, i.e., having an unbalanced view of duties. But as it turned out, 1/3 of students in both countries have the unbalanced view of duties.

Finally, they were asked about three countries were they would like to settle down. For Ukrainians they preferred: USA (51%), Sweden (42%), France (33%), Ukraine (30%) and UK (17%). Swedes preferred: Sweden (34%), USA (19%), UK (12%), Italy (85) and Norway and Spain (5%). Thus, USA is a country many prefer, but highest score for Swedes is their home country, but only fourth on the list for Ukrainians.

These results are based on a very tiny sample. But it indicates that Ukrainians are slightly more prone to leave their country, probably because higher social security. Swedes leave for the sake of having fun. Females and those that see themselves as being high performers are more mobile. Patriots, men and older ones are less mobile. One conclusion to be made for a country and their politicians is that implanting a sense of patriotism reduces mobility. But if reducing mobility, then the country loose the opportunities that resources gained through mobility could create.

When looking at gender, it appears that females are more mobile, maybe because they feel two opportunities abroad, one is to get a marriage which could support them and their children, and another is to get a job that could support them. Men can only count on support through getting a job, thus having fewer opportunities abroad. On the other hand, men can experience that they only need to support themselves, but a women has always to count on supporting her children. Another explanation could be that females have small networks, with a few strong friends, but men have extensive networks, but local ones. Thus, the woman have more to gain from moving since she do not loose her network, but can gain support for her family, while men loose their entire network, and gain nothing.

If these interpretations have any truth, a country has to make efforts in getting their women back, which is made through offering security for her family. Investments in child support and good schools make her more secure, and investment in kindergarten gives her, with all her experience gained abroad, the opportunity to give service to her country.