

## MOTIVATIONS OF ROMANIAN STUDENTS TO STUDY ABROAD

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**Abstract:** *The paper studies the issue of international student mobility, especially diploma mobility (students taking their entire degree outside Romania). The first aim of the study was to evaluate the current situation of Romanian students' mobility, collecting data from several organizations that have researched the issue, NGOs, UNESCO, and OECD. Also, the study aimed at improving understanding of the motivations behind the international diploma mobility of Romanian students. In order to do this, we used self-reported data, based on questionnaires, from 50 high-school students from 12<sup>th</sup> grade, from Romania. The results indicated that the top destinations for Romanian students are: Italy, France, United Kingdom, Germany, but also Denmark and Netherlands. The factors that students consider when determining the country where they will study are: improved education conditions (laboratories, equipments, quality teachers, students' involvement in research, students' access to resources for their projects), employment opportunities after graduation, language and cultural considerations.*

**Keywords:** *Romanian students, international students, motivations, studying abroad*

### 1. Introduction

There are currently an estimated 3.0 million international students of all nationalities studying abroad worldwide (Findlay, King, 2010). According to the OECD this figure rose four times faster than the overall trend in international migration between 1998 and 2004 (OECD, 2008).

According to European Commission data, there are more than 4000 institutions of higher education in Europe, with over 19 million students and over 1.5 million employees in the system. Many of the European universities are found on the leading positions in the world rankings in terms of the quality of education and study conditions. In Romania, there are an increasing number of young people that choose to continue their studies abroad after finishing high school or undergraduate courses.

The benefits of following a program of study at a university abroad are numerous. The system of education, study programs that follow the market trends, new technologies, international study environment, an international career which may be initiated since the time of studies and development opportunities in an environment that corresponds to the student's skills and interests are only a part of them.

International or mobile students are those who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study. Depending on country-specific immigration legislation, mobility arrangements, such as the free mobility of individuals within the EU, and data availability, international students may be defined as students who are not permanent or usual residents of their country of study or alternatively as students who obtained their prior education in a different country, including another EU country (OECD, 2013).

## 2. The study

This study is focused on the issue of international student mobility, especially diploma mobility (students taking their entire degree outside Romania). We have two objectives, set out in the form of two research questions, as follows:

- *What is the current situation of Romanian students' mobility?*
- *What are the motivations behind the international diploma mobility of Romanian students?*

In order to answer the first question, we analyzed statistic data from several organizations that have studied the issue of international student mobility: *Educativa* Group and *Integral Education Programs* Company (Romanian organizations that offer counseling services for admission in foreign universities), UNESCO, OECD, and Institute for International Education.

Currently, in Romania there isn't an institution that would centralize the number of Romanian students who study at universities in other countries, and NGOs working in the educational area report different figures. Thus, the exact number of Romanian students who study abroad is a matter of debate: the Ministry of Education does not have such statistics and between UNESCO and the *Integral Education Programs* Company data, there is a big difference, the latter claiming that the real figure is closer to 50.000, while UNESCO reports a figure closer to 26.000 (in 2010). Moreover, statistics show that the number of international foreign students from Romania was approximately 10.500 in 2009, and the National Institute of Statistics mentions a number of nearly 14.000, in the same year.

Foreign universities have attracted approximately 30000 alumni, who currently are registered in different degree programs. According to *Integral Education Programs*, a company of educational consultancy, universities of United Kingdom occupy the first place in top universities abroad chosen by Romanian students. The second place is occupied by the Netherlands universities, followed by those in Denmark and Sweden, according to data made available by the same consulting company. According to these data, in the last years, the number of Romanians candidates for universities of Netherlands has increased by up to 50%, while interest in Denmark has doubled. The fact that young people are targeting universities from Netherlands is due to lower taxes and because of very good programs in English (10 of Dutch universities are standing on the leading places in the Top 200 universities, according to The Times Magazine), according to the source cited.

Latest UNESCO official data on the number of Romanian students abroad and their destinations are from 2010, when there were reported 25.299 Romanian students learning in foreign universities. According to UNESCO statistics, the dynamic of Romanian degree students' mobility in the Top 10 international destinations looked like this: Italy (4174 students), France (3856 students), Germany (3232 students), United Kingdom (3165 students), Hungary (2307 students), Spain (1807 students), Austria (1336 students), Denmark (332 students), Netherlands (194 students), Norway (168 students).

According to *Educativa* Group, the top destinations for Romanian students are France, Germany, but also Italy and Spain giving the fact that Romanian community has grown in this countries in the last years. Also, these are countries where tuition fees have decreased significantly for students from EU countries. Annually, 5000 Romanian people leave to study abroad, according to official estimates of the Ministry of Education, and some of them take advantage of the tuition fee facilities. Significant grows are reported for countries like Netherlands and Denmark because of their valuable educational systems and reduced costs for education. Moreover, there is a tendency of the Romanian students to apply for government loans to continue their studies, as in the case of the British Government, which grants a loan covering the full tuition fee. An explanation for the large number of Romanian students who learn in Hungary (over 2300) is that many of them have dual citizenship, Romanian and Hungarian, and prefer to study in the native country.

To answer the second question of the study, we used self-reported data, based on a questionnaire. The instrument was administrated to 50 high-school students from 12<sup>th</sup> grade, from Romania.

First, we asked students about the destination they would choose to continue their studies. The obtained results reproduce those of UNESCO reports, the top destinations being UK (22%), Denmark (18%), Italy (15%), France (12%), Germany (10%), Spain (10%), Netherlands (9%), and other countries (4%). One explanation for choosing the UK, for instance, may be the fact that in this country there are so-called "sandwich" programs which lasts 4 years instead of 3 and incorporates one year of paid work experience as part of the program. In Netherlands, students begin to take increasingly into account the universities of Applied Sciences where different internship programs offer employment opportunities after the completion of the program. In Denmark, the government integrally supports the tuition fee.

We were interested in finding out the main determinants of students' decision to study abroad. The main factors mentioned were:

- improved conditions for education (laboratories, equipments, multimedia; attractive courses, the quality of teachers, internships in different companies, students' involvement in research projects, the access of students to resources for their own projects)
- employment opportunities after the graduation
- language and cultural considerations (integration in an intercultural environment, foreign language proficiency, opportunity to learn about other countries culture)
- academic tradition of the university
- simple entry requirements

In a lower proportion, the students mentioned:

- geographic proximity
- similarity of education systems
- travel opportunities
- better living conditions

Another important issue addressed by the research is the relationship between international student mobility and intentions to return to Romania. 37 per cent of students in the survey claimed that they have no intention of returning to the native country once they have finished their studies. The motives were related to the desire of permanent emigration, or they claimed that they were seeking to access an international career. A big part of the students, however, plan to return (39%), although many of them want to work abroad before coming back to Romania (24%).

Studying abroad is not an easy thing, so we asked the students about the difficulties they think they might have. The main obstacles that student mentioned were:

- Not having enough financial means for living abroad (29%)
- Getting a local job while studying (18%)
- Difficulties related to leaving the family and friends (15%)
- Not confident enough with the language (13%)
- Different study standards (9%)
- The image of Romanian people in Europe (8%)
- Concerns about the costs of health service (6%)
- Bureaucracy (2%)

### **3. Conclusions**

According UNESCO reports, in the last years, there has been an increasing in the number of Romanian students that are choosing to continue their studies in an international institution. This

paper showed that the main destinations desired for Romanian students are UK, Denmark, Italy and France. The reason for choosing these countries is related to their student mobility politics.

The discussion has been moving around the motivations of Romanian students about studying abroad. The dominant reasons given by students for going abroad were related to attending a world class institution which offers optimum conditions for learning. The students in the research are interested in attending international universities that are offering quality teachers, access to various resources that enhance academic and professional achievements. A significant idea that emerges from this study is that the global hierarchy of universities will become even more important over the next years and therefore that the desire to attend a world class university will become even stronger in the future (Findlay, King, 2010).

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