



MASTER'S THESIS

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**"Return of Highly Skilled Migrants to the Western Balkans:
Potential and Possibilities"**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines what kind of policies are necessary to apply in the Western Balkan countries to attract highly educated individuals from Western Balkans to return and to be generators of stability and prosperity in their home countries. To provide practical policy guidelines for creating sustainable return policies for the Western Balkan, this thesis relies on interview data of individuals who have returned to origin countries upon receiving higher education degrees abroad and those who stayed abroad. The focus of the thesis is to examine the obstacles they faced upon return, their motivations, incentives that can be considered in creating the return policies. Furthermore, this thesis provides a unique perspective to return migration of highly educated individuals, since interviewed individuals are at the beginning of their career and so their perspective and perceptions are very different than most of the literature discusses. The empirical data is based on a qualitative research design that consists of interviews of three generation of POSIG students that returned to their home countries or stayed abroad after graduation. This thesis shows how the institutional context in the home country has a huge impact to what extent returnees will contribute to the country of origin. Furthermore, it shows how overall institutional context in the country has an impact in reversing the brain drain phenomena and in attracting highly skilled individuals to return.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is interested in how the return of highly educated migrants from the Western Balkans, young individuals, or individuals in the middle of their working lives, and their potential return migration to the region. For Western Balkan countries the emigration of people, especially highly educated, is a crucial concern, because it significantly affects the economic, social, and political development of the region. It is estimated that “between 2012 and 2018, on average, annually, 155 thousand people left the region for an OECD country; in 2018 alone, that number stood at 175 thousand people,” (Omic and Handeland, 2021, p.9). While the majority of emigrants are skilled or low-skilled with non-tertiary education – such as secondary or vocational education and training (Leitner, 2021), an increasing amount of those leaving are highly skilled and educated. Moreover, the concern about those leaving to study and thus become highly skilled and educated is also underresearched.

This vast majority of emigrants from Western Balkans are concentrated in Germany (49%), Italy (12.1%), Slovenia (9.4%), Austria (7.4%) and in the United States (4.8%), due to the higher income economies and better living standard. In 2018, the European Union accounted for 90 % of total emigration outflow (Omic and Handeland, 2021).

This mass emigration from Western Balkan has reached alarming proportions, and has resulted in the emergence of brain drain, economic stagnation, and demographic decline in the region. Brain drain as a term was invented from British Royal Society and served as an explanation of the emigration of scientists and technologists from the United Kingdom to the United States and Canada in the 1950s and 1960s (Cervantes and Guellec, 2002). ‘Brain’ refers to “highly skilled persons – intellectuals (including students), scientist and technicians, but also people without a university degree who are doing jobs that require highly developed skills, such as businesspeople, entrepreneurs, specialist, workers, artists, athletes, etc. (Pavlov and Zeneli 2013, p.6).” One of the definitions is that brain drain is phenomena described as a permanent outflow of nation’s most highly skilled individuals, which represent the vital driving force of any country (Pavlov and Zeneli 2013). European Union define brain drain “as a region’s loss of individuals with high skills and/or competencies (workers/students) due to permanent emigration.” However, these individuals are not only highly educated people but also people who possess important skills that

are necessary for the normal function of society, such as craft people, technical workers etc. (Omic and Handeland, 2021, p.9). Brain drain or intellectual migration is not a new phenomenon, because highly educated people have had desire to go to another country to find improved living conditions and expanded opportunities for a long time (Oruc and Santic, 2019).

In considering how to attract highly educated migrants from Western Balkans to return to their home countries, it is of great importance to see what factors influence them to leave the region. There are many factors that cause mass emigration from Western Balkan, and that force people to decide to leave the countries of origins and move in another place. If we compare quality of life in the EU and in the region, it is evident that there is a big difference. Furthermore, a lot of young people who finish high schools or university in the region, they are not educationally prepared for the job market, and that consequently lead to a very high youth unemployment rates. According to the World Bank¹, youth unemployment rate ranges around 17% in Serbia and Montenegro to 54,9% in Kosovo (Beharić et al., 2021).

In Western Balkan countries, young people are faced with unfair competition, and finding employment usually happens through political and/or familial ties. „Those who get a job typically earn less than they would in the EU, while working conditions and workers’ rights are often non-existent or violated” (Beharić et al., 2021, p.14). Those who leave the region and move to EU countries, usually work jobs that are unpopular among those who are staying in the country of origin, and most importantly they do not consider returning (Beharić et al., 2021).

Moreover, the factors such as the recent regression of democracy, rule of law and freedoms, push people to consider moving abroad. The European Training Foundation report (ETF, 2021) indicates the mistrust in public institutions and seeking the better living conditions influences much of the outflow. However, aspirations for better employment and higher salaries continue to be the main push factors for emigrating (ETF, 2021).

Among Albanian youth (43%) and Montenegrins (26%), the strongest driver for emigration is fueled by economic uncertainty. “Educational reasons come in second, but with a huge gap

¹ World Bank Group & The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Western Balkans Labor Market Trends 2019, 2019, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/351461552915471917/pdf/135370-Western-Balkans-Labor-Market-Trends-2019.pdf>

compared to economic motives. Other motives appear to be largely insignificant” (Lavrič, 2021, p.27).

According to the Mićanović, Jovičević, Berishaj and Raspopović (2022) study that examines the reasons for the outflow of young people from Montenegro, the main reasons for youth emigration are grouped in the following areas: „socio-political reality in the country, societal resistance to (positive) change, access to the labor market and (poor) work ethic offers and quality of educational programs, low living standard, a desire to discover the world” (Mićanović et al., 2022, p.11).

In recent years, educational mobility is one of the important factors for migration from Western Balkan countries. “In the 2013-18 period, the number of international students increased by 150%, from 13 600 tertiary students in 2013 to 34 500 in 2018”. Western European countries, Turkey and United States are the main destination for students from Western Balkan region. In 2019, for international students from the region, except Kosovo, Turkey was one of the five most popular destination, while the United States was top- five country for all Western Balkan countries’ students except Serbia. “Austria and Germany also appear as top destination countries, especially among students from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia” (OECD, 2022, p.32).

For the region, struggling with a weak educational system, institutions, and skill gaps, student exchange is of utmost importance, since it has the potential to build professional networks and to strengthen human capital through the transfer of knowledge, ideas, and skills. Likewise, for students who have opportunity to study abroad and return home, the time away can enhance prospects for their employment possibilities in the country of origin, and knowledge and skills gained abroad increase chances for success within their home country (OECD, 2022).

Student mobility programs, such as Erasmus+, the Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies and the European Regional Master’s Programmes have contributed to increased number of students from the region in EU countries. Furthermore, student mobility was additionally increased when universities in Western Balkan signed bilateral and multilateral agreements. “Between 2015 and 2020, the number of students, researchers and university staff from the WB6 benefitting from Erasmus+ exceeded 48 000” (OECD, 2022, p.33).

Still, the 2020 Public Opinion Balkan Barometer Survey explicated that potential mobility in the region is divided. „Albanians and Kosovars both aspire and plan to take real action to leave their country, to a much greater extent than citizens of Serbia or Montenegro” (ETF, 2021, p. 36). Even if the majority of highly skilled people from Western Balkan have a desire to move abroad, only 7% of them are making concrete steps for emigrating. There is a difference between people who just think to resettle (individuals with intentions to emigrate) and pragmatists (individuals who are taking actions to emigrate) (ETF, 2021).

Survey data demonstrates that young people are the ones that in the future will continue to move abroad. “In Albania, every second person with the ‘intention’ to leave is in the age group 18–34. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo this applies to a much larger share of young age cohorts”. When it comes to potential by educational level, people who take concrete actions to leave the region include better education than those with desire to resettle (ETF, 2021, p.36).

Unemployment is a strong factor for emigration, but also people who are employed showed an increase potential for moving abroad. In Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, people who are taking action to resettle are mostly unemployed, while in North Macedonia and Montenegro both those with desire to emigrate and those who are making concrete steps toward moving are predominantly employed. “The main message here is that while ‘intentions’ to leave might be widespread among the employed, ‘actions’ to leave engage more of the unemployed (except in Montenegro and North Macedonia where the share of employed taking actions for leaving predominate)” (ETF, 2021, p. 36).

Brain drain is usually considered as a negative phenomenon since it can weaken the growth potential of developing countries and the well-being of those left behind. However, brain drain can be at some point beneficial for developing countries. There are some positive effects that come from return migration, circular migration, remittances, externalities from the presence of emigrants abroad, and from involvement of high-skilled migrants in professional networks. Transfer of technology, knowledge, skills, and innovations significantly can have a positive effect on formation of human capital in the country of origin. Furthermore, for the development and growth of developing countries, especially for middle income, the limited highly skilled migration can be very useful. This of course is often considered in terms of optimal rates and perspectives that account for some governmental policies aimed at mitigating highly skilled emigration,

Unfortunately, that is not the case for a vast majority of poor and small developing countries (Docquier, 2014, p.5).

Remittances, as a positive effect of emigration, is very significant benefit of the emigration flow. These transfers importantly affects Western Balkan economies as well as are of great benefit to the recipients, because that improve the quality of their life. In the Western Balkan countries remittances are influencing the growth of GDP in much more in comparison to other European countries. If, in addition to remittances, we consider other types of foreign inflows (foreign pensions, other personal transfers, or the taxes), that contribution is higher. Amount of money that emigrants transmit to the country of origin are higher than direct foreign investments, and it is usually spent on food, clothing and cosmetics. These transfers are considered to contribute to the national economy, but cannot be seen as a generator of future development. In order to be generator of growth and development in the country, the foreign investments should have to be very high. (Jevtović, 2021).

When it comes to the negative effects of brain drain, the central argument is that “social returns to human capital are likely to exceed its private returns given the many externalities, both technological and sociological” (Docquier, 2014, p.5). Another negative effect is when highly skilled people emigrate in large numbers, it produces shortages of workforce in key activities, and that affects a country’s ability to adopt new technologies and deal with crises. Moreover, the brain drain have influence on the enlargement of the technological gap between developed and developing countries. The reason for that lies in the fact that the concentration of human capital in the developed countries have impact on the technological progress (Docquier, 2014).

When highly skilled emigrants resettle, they do not pay taxes in the country of origin, and additionally, since education is totally or partly fund by the government, people who emigrate they do not pay back their debt to society. “With the emigration of young, educated people, those investments become losses, or they become investments in the destination countries, who gain educated individuals without spending any money” (Jevtović, 2021, p.39).

In Western Balkan countries the cost of education of a person, starting from elementary school to the end of college that last on average 5 years, finishing in 2018 is around 18,000 EUR in Albania and 34,000 EUR in Serbia. As results showed, a secondary education, that includes 8 or 9 years of primary education cost around 21,000 EUR in Serbia and 9,000 EUR in Albania. Furthermore, the

cost of educating individuals for Ph.D. degrees is around 45,000 EUR in Western Balkan countries (Jevtović, 2021).

The results revealed that in the Western Balkan countries, the loss of money earmarked for education of the individuals who left the region varies from 972 to 1,229 million EUR in a single year. “If viewed by country, in Serbia these costs range from 309 million to almost 400 million EUR, which are approximately around 4% of the budget for 2020. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, they range from 317 to 388 million EUR. In Montenegro, the education costs of emigrating people are between 28 and 31 million EUR” (Jevtović, 2021, p.43). If we take into account the OECD data, which showed that approximately 155,000 people from Western Balkan emigrated annually, according to this, the educational costs of this number of emigrants are 2.3-2.9 billion EUR. However, this number does not only cover permanent emigrants, but also people who temporarily went abroad to work, study, or who are sent by the companies they work for temporary assignments abroad.

Considering all the negative consequences of the outflow of highly educated people mentioned above, in the Western Balkans, the first systematic return policies emerged in 2010, which aim at strengthening the communication with diaspora and its engagement (Krasteva et.al.,2018). Related to that, in the last ten years the Western Balkan countries, has adopted strategic documents and established new institutions and measures for diaspora involvement. „With slight differences, these policies in all six countries target the financial potential of the diaspora and tend to facilitate the transition from remittances to investment” (Icoski, 2022, p.9). Something what is problematic here is the fact that specific brain gain and brain circulation policies remained sporadic and youth are not observed as a specific policy category, therefore their return and circulation is treated with the same measures as other migrants (Icoski, 2022).

Since there is a lack of empirical studies that examine the return migration of highly skilled individuals from Western Balkan countries and their potential contribution to the countries of origin, this master's thesis contributes empirically to policy knowledge for the creation of sustainable return policies in the Western Balkans, which can be of the huge importance for reversing the brain drain and for attracting the highly educated people to return and to be generators of stability and prosperity in their home countries. Furthermore, this thesis provides a unique

perspective into unexplored aspect of return migration of highly educated individuals who are at the beginning of their careers and do not have as much as social or financial capital.

The empirical data is based on a qualitative research design that consists of interviews of three generation of POSIG students that returned to their home countries or stayed abroad after graduation. The focus of the thesis is to examine the obstacles they faced upon return, their motivations, incentives, and what kinds of policies might help others also return. By taking a sample of individuals who all left for the same kind of education, it becomes more viable to explore between those who returned and those who did not return. It also provides insight into why some returned, despite the lack of policies, in effect examining both the usual lack of return migration as well as ‘deviant’ cases of individuals who returned despite the challenges faced in the region, as evidenced above.

The reminder of the thesis is organized as follows. The following section provides a literature review that consists of the theoretical insights and the conceptual approach to return migration. The second part of the literature review discusses the reasons for return as well as the readjustment problems that migrants face upon return. Furthermore, the third section provides an overview of the empirical literature that investigates the process of return migration. The fourth section provides the existing responses to return migration in the Western Balkans. The fifth section elaborates on the research design and methods which give information about the conducted interviews, methodology behind this, as well as the short info of the PoSIG program and its development. The fourth section is followed by empirical data derived from interviews of the three generations of PoSIG students. The conclusion summarize the earlier contents, note limitations, and provide policy recommendations.

SECTION 2: RETURN MIGRATION

This chapter reviews theoretical literature on the process of return migration and includes descriptions of the following approaches to return migration: neoclassical, structural, transnational and approach towards social network theory. It provides the insights into resource mobilization and the returnee's preparedness, since the tendency of return migrants to contribute to the development of the country of origin depends on their preparation of return as well as the resources that they mobilize during the migration experience abroad.

One of definitions of return migration is that it is "situation where the migrants return to their country of origin, by their own will, after a significant period of time abroad" (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007, p. 238). "The return of migrants with its human capital implications is one of the most commonly cited benefits of migration for the sending country, along with remittance and labor market effects" (Ammassari and Black, 2001, p.17). However, this is not the only capital transfer that is connected to the return migration. Migrants upon return can transfer the financial and social capital, they are maintaining the professional networks abroad, which are useful for their engagement upon return.

Regarding return migration and its impact on economic development of sending country, two strands of debate are traditionally emphasized. The first debate places a focus on financial capital that migrants collected during time they were abroad, and thus, potential investment (such as starting a business). The second debate considers returnees as innovators and "bearers of newly acquired skills and of innovative and entrepreneurial attitudes," which can have an impact on the country of origin as an innovative force (King, 1986, p.18). This kind of debate focuses on migrants' knowledge and their expertise, skills and qualifications (Klagge et al., 2007).

Highly skilled return migrants are the group of immigrants that distinguish from others because of their highly competences acquired abroad. Because of their experiences and knowledge, they can easily integrate in the regional economies and thus contribute to the regional development (Klagge et al., 2007). There are several approaches to return migration which I elaborate on in the following sections.

2.1 Neoclassical Economics and the New Economics of Labour Migration

The main foundation of the neoclassical approach to international migration is the concept of wage differences between destination country and sending country, and additionally the migrant's assumption for higher earnings in the receiving country. According to this approach, return migration is the product of failed migration when migrants did not achieve the desired goal. "...in a neoclassical stance, return migration exclusively involves labor migrants who miscalculated the costs of migration and who did not reap the benefits of higher earnings. Return occurs because of their failed experiences abroad or because their human capital was not rewarded as expected" (Cassarino, 2004, p.255).

Further, the New Economics of Labor migration (NELM) approach argues that return migration is a normal outcome of a „calculated strategy”, which means that migrants return to the countries of origin after successful experience abroad and reached goals. “Remittances are part and parcel of a strategy aimed at diversifying the resources of the household with a view to better compensating for the risks, linked to the absence of an efficient insurance market in home countries. They also constitute one explanatory factor in the return decision, together with the attachment to the home country” (Cassarino, 2004, p.255-256). Advocates of the NELM approach are tenacious in separation from the neoclassic claims of failed returnee. The length of staying abroad for returnees is proportional to the needs of the household and accumulated money. When those needs are satisfied, return migration starts.

The neoclassic approach helped me gain a better insight into return migration, as there are many cases where return is linked to a failed experience abroad. Factors causing return may be because the migrant has not been able to find a decent job and the costs are greater than the income. This theory partly contributes to the debate on return migration. Where I see the shortcoming of this theory is the fact that it is based solely on the failed experience as the only aspect that lead to return. It does not take into account and consideration of other aspects that may be linked to return migration. Furthermore, it considered only the migrants who are employed, but what are with other diaspora members?

When it comes to the NELM approach, it provides the significant insights into return migration that are in contrast to neoclassical approach. Namely, this approach contributes to the debate migration in the way that grounds its observations on the positive aspects that lead to the occurrence of return migration. Migrants stay abroad as long as they need to achieve their goals,

or to put in other words, as long as they collect a sufficient amount of money. After they achieve their goals abroad, then the return migration begins. I see the shortcoming of this approach because it is one-sided, and observe only positive aspects that lead to return migration. If this approach were connected with the neoclassical approach, we would have a more complete picture.

2.2 Structural approach

When it comes to the structural approach, return migration is viewed not only from the migrants' individual experience abroad, but it takes into consideration overall institutional context in the home country. According to the length of time the migrants spend abroad and the degree of their assimilation in the country of origin, Cerase (1974) identifies four different causes (categories) of return migration.

The first category called "**the return of failure**" describes migrants who haven't succeed to overcome traumatic shock and to assimilate to the country of origin upon their return. "These "failures" represent only a minority and re-adapted quite easily to their home context because they return quickly before their integration in the host society starts" (Ammassari and Black 2001, p.22).

The second category called the „**return of conservatism**” describe the migrants who went abroad with specific goal and accumulate a significant amount of money. These migrants are usually longer abroad, and during their time abroad they transfer money to the home country or save money to reach their plan upon return. "This means that the values of the home society continue to prevail as a reference for measuring success and achievement" (Ammassari and Black 2001, p.22).

The third category called the **return of motivation** includes migrants who stay long time abroad and who accepted the value system of the host country, and then they return to the country of origin. These people are willing to transfer the gained knowledge and skills and thus have positive implication on home country.

The last category is the **return of retirement** and includes migrant who completed their working life and who decided to come back to home country to retire (Ammassari and Black,

2001). Cerase's (1974) typology of returnees shows that to come to conclusion whether return experience is a success or a failure, the context in the country is a precondition for that claim.

The structural approach emphasizes the impact that returnees can or cannot achieve in the country of origin after coming back. This approach also focusses on the consequences that return migration may induce in the country of origin, with regard to two variables: time and space (Hachi, Morozan, & Popa, 2021). Time refers to the length of being abroad and the change that occur before and after resettlement, regarding the status of individuals who return and the origin of their society. When it comes to the space, structuralists state that the area of settlement, whether it is rural or rural, dictate the return process of returnees and modify their expectations. The central point to the return process of returnees are professional progress and social chances in the societies (Hachi et al., 2021). According to King (1986), the length of the migrant's period of migration is significant because once they return to the country of origin, they have opportunity to make a transfer of gained knowledge, skills to the home country and thus ensure the progress. If the migrants were abroad for a short period of time, that means that they did not have time to gain a lot of experience, so the question is to what extent they can contribute to the modernization back home. On the other hand, if the migrants were abroad very long, they can be alienated from the country of origin, since they were distanced for a long period of time, therefore their contribution can be small back home. King (1986) emphasized that somewhere in between it can be found the optimum length of period spent abroad that can be beneficial.

This approach helped me the most to understand return migration, because it takes into account not only the individual experience of migrants, but also the entire institutional context of the state. In this way this approach enriched the debate on return migration. Furthermore, it also highlights the importance of financial and economic resources that can be transferred upon return as well as it considered the process of reintegration of returnees. However, this approach, together with the NELM approach observe only the migrants with financial and social capital, and it omit to consider other profiles of migrants, that maybe do not have as much as capital. Also, it does not give the insights into how migrants adapt to the context of country of origin and also does not provide information of psycho-social processes that they go through.

2.3 Transnationalism and Return Migration

Transnational activities are developed by “regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders” (Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999, p. 219). This approach emphasizes the influence of this connection on forming the identities of migrants. According to transnationalism scholars, when migrants return to the home country, it does not mean that the migration cycle is over; actually, the migration story continues. Transnationalists argue that people who return to the country of origin, they prepare their reassimilation, through visiting home country periodically. They retain strong connection with the country of origin and from time to time transfer the money to their households.

The conceptual framework of transnationalism is established on two fields of research: **transnational identities** and **transnational mobility**. Transnational identities are composed of expatriates’ origin identities and the one that they obtain in the destination country. The combinations of these two identities develop **dual identities**. Scholars of transnationalism emphasize the process of adaptation upon return, which however does not mean rejection of identity that is formed abroad. After returning to the home countries, returnees are challenged with reintegration, at social and professional level. As it is mentioned above, the connection that migrants have with their household, which in part include periodically visiting the home country, constitutes transnational mobility that enable their return to be easier and prepared.

However, Carling and Erdel (2014) argue that transnational practices and ties to homeland continue to persist among first generation, but these ties are rare to maintain among subsequent generations. The reason for this is the language barrier and as the findings of the survey revealed, the young generations do not have intention to return to live in the country of their ancestors. Return visits to home country presents transnational practice that can lead to possible return migration. However, this kind of visits can create a feeling of distinction from the community back home, and that feeling of not belonging can weaken desire for potential return. There are some cases in which periodically visiting the country of origin is preparation for permanent return. Returning to the home country can be a gradual process and transnationalism in that case can help in transition from living abroad to living permanently in the country of origin. Furthermore, return visits can be an alternative for permanent return migration. It can be achieved through long annual visits that maintain social ties or through sustained transnational lifestyle (Carling & Erdel, 2014).

Carling and Pettersen's analysis of return migration intentions shows that people who are strongly transnational and weakly integrated have higher chances of planning to return to country of origin, while the individuals who are weakly transnational and strongly integrated abroad are less likely to plan to return. There are also people with middle level of return migration intentions, that are those who are integrated and as well as transnational (Carling and Erdel, 2014).

Bree, Davids and Haas (2010) article showed how transnational practices have positive influence on creating a sense of post return belonging of Moroccan- Dutch migrants who returned to Morocco. It is revealed that transnational practices can have a positive effect on orientation and involvement in the home and as well on receiving country. That means that transnational practices can be a positive push factor in integration in the country of origin and can strengthened the returnees' feelings of belonging. People who returned to Morocco due to socio- economic advancement, they prepared their return. They do that through maintaining translational practices that has a positive role in strengthening the feeling of local and transnational belonging. „Those who returned for socioeconomic advancement and retirement, who were both locally integrated and transnationally oriented, experience the highest sense of belonging and are most personally satisfied with their return “ (Bree et al. 2010, p. 506).

Transnationalism research also refers to the different initiatives with specific goals that are institutionalized and collectively coordinated. That is the fruit of interaction with governments of the country of origin. According to the Cassarino (2004), there are many examples in which governments showed the impact on strengthening (politically and economically) their migrant communities abroad. Further, transnationalism does not refer only to the connection that migrants maintain with their home country, “but also to the multifarious ways in which migrants feel linked to one another by their common ethnic origins and in-group solidarity” (Cassarino, 2004, p. 263).

When it comes to the interaction between home country and transnational migrant group abroad, the advocates of transnationalism argue that further research is necessary to understand to what extent are the influence of those interaction on these entities. As regard with return migration, transnationalism emphasis connection between people who return and their migrant groups abroad. Coming back from abroad take place when migrants are financially and knowledgeable ready and also when conditions in the country of origin are viewed as appropriate enough (Cassarino, 2004).

Cessarino (2004) argues that migrants who return to home countries are confronted with community pressure and feel marginalized, but they are at the same time determinate to find their place in society as aware of their significant specificities. Furthermore, transnational approach to return migration encompasses the migrant's initiatives and programs in the country of origin and mutual obligations that comes from the common ethnicity (diaspora) and relationship (family etc).

Horst (2007) in his article compared the experience of returnees from Jamaica that migrated to United States and England to examine the transnational social fields. Scholars of transnationalism argue that migrants create transnational social fields or spaces that connect their place of origin to destination areas. The migrants who returned from United States and England, even though they have the same identity of "returning residents," there is a difference between these two. The Jamaican migrants who returned from England to Jamaica upon return they demonstrated the commitment to their society. They did that through connection with resident returning organizations (Horst, 2007).

Something what is characteristically for English returnees is their engagement in transnational activities, but they are focus on their life in Jamaica. "What became clear was that English returnees attempt to achieve a sense of return by severing their ties to England in a more permanent fashion than returnees travelling between the United States and Jamaica". Contrary to them, Jamaican migrants who return from United States to the countries of origin, they continue to continue to frequently travel between the United States and Jamaica. These two different forms of return show the importance of understanding the relationship between transnational social fields and return migration (Horst, 2007, p.77).

Furthermore, many scholars view transnational migration as an outcome of the late capitalism, in which large, industrialized countries are dependent of cheap labor while, on the other side, non-developed countries are dependent of the money that migrants send home. Others connect the durability of transnational social fields to „high points of globalisation“. The economies in many countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Croatia, El Salvador et ac. mostly depend on the remittances that exceed private and official capital inflows (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007).

Transnationalism gave a very significant perspective to return migration that is different from approaches mentioned earlier. Namely, this approach emphasis, contrary to other approaches, that even if migrants come back to the country of origin, it does not mean that migration circle is over,

because they can still maintain the connection with the former country of residence. This approach enriched the debate on return migration because it highlights the formation of transnational dual identities and transnational mobility. Through translational mobility, as contrast to structuralisms' claims, migrants prepare their return. Something what I see as a shortcoming of this approach is the fact that many activities that are observed as a product of transnationalism, are not new and existed even before the transnationalism. Contemporary migration, mobility, communication of different cultural groups is similar to what was in the previous centuries.

2.4 Social Network Theory and Return Migration

Social network theory is a theory of international migration that views “networks” as mean for connecting migrants, former migrants, non-migrants in the countries of origin and destination countries through the chain of friendship and shared community. These networks make the international movement easier because it lowers the cost and risks of movement. That led to the higher number of migrations, which in turn strengthen and extend the network. After certain family members migrate others follow. Sometimes they return and the knowledge they acquired is then spread, so it makes it easy for future family members to migrate (Massey et al., 1993).

Social network theory views return migrants as having a strong connection with the countries they settled in before returning. But these connections are not the result of their commonality of attributes. Rather, their social networks reflect an experience of migration that may provide and have influence on further initiatives at home. Social structures enlarge the accessibility of different resources and knowledge, and on that way make the productive initiatives of returnees (Cassarino, 2004).

However, social network advocates view this network membership of huge importance, since these networks are selectively organized and for the membership in this network is needed a voluntary act of the members with the agreement of others actors that will guarantee movement of resources as well as the efficacy and maintenance of cross-border linkages. (Church et al. 2002) “...the formation and maintenance of networks require long-standing interpersonal relationships, as well as the regular exchange of mutually valuable items between actors. This pattern of exchange is maintained thanks to the circularity inherent in these networks” (Cassarino, 2004, p.266).

Cachia and Maya-Jariego (2018) reveal the importance of support networks in international migration. The authors examine the four communities of highly skilled migrants in Spain and showed that migrants who spend a large period abroad and who are waiting for permanent residency, they have a social support from local ties. While highly educated migrants who plan to return to the home country receive support from transnational ties in the home country. On the other side recurrently, mobile individuals use the support from transnational networks with a bigger geographical dispersion.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the other resources that are also significant for the success of returnees' initiatives and projects after their return. The accessibility of the resources also lay in the social capital from which returnees benefit before their coming back in the country of origin. Social capital, which "inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors" are the resources that comes from returnees' families (Coleman, 1988, p.110).

These resources have a potential to shape the performance of returnees and are the one from which they can benefit. „It is reasonable to think that social capital and the potential involvement of return migrants in cross-border social networks may be viewed as resources that complement and shape one another” (Cassarino, 2004, p.266).

According to social network theory, returnees, no matter whether they are highly skilled or not, must be observed as social actors, who may find a way to return to the country of origin, and take part in the cross – border networks. These social networks in which return migrants take part, constitute systems of social relations. Furthermore, social network theory developed two levels of study. In the first study, returnees are viewed as social actors who are engaged in different networks. By researching the practice of membership in these networks, and the type on organization, that lead to understanding to the behaviors of actors, since organization have an influence. Second, these network structures in which social actors are involved have different opportunities and orientations. Actors are viewed as individuals who export their interest (Cassarino 2004).

According to the Cassarino (2004), this definition stress the demand to observe the content of network chain that encourage the network structure where returnees belong. Returnees are viewed as actors who are giving the subjective meaning to their actions in the network, where they belong. Furthermore, network relationship can be establish on the principle of „complementarity” which

can take place when social actors, who are different with regard to entrance to the resources, attributes, individual characteristics, decide to be in a cooperation that will be valuable for both parties.

The social network theory enriched the debate on return migration in the way because it emphasizes the importance of social networks that migrants maintain with the former country of residence. The membership in these social structures enables the accessibility and transfer of different resources which can have a positive influence for the country of origin when migrants returned. However, this theory provides a pretty one-sided look at return migration and does not consider the other aspects, such as, for example, the institutional context in the country that affects the application of certain knowledge, the process of reintegration of returnees etc.

2.3 Resource Mobilisation and the Returnee's Preparedness

Cassarino (2004) argues that the tendency of return migrants to contribute to the development of the country of origin depends on their preparation for return. This preparation needs resources, time, and willingness. According to the author, there are different levels of return preparation regarding resource mobilization and preparedness.

Resource mobilization refers to „tangible (i.e. financial capital) and intangible (i.e. contacts, relationships, skills, acquaintances) resources that have been mobilized during the migration experience abroad” (Cassarino, 2004, p.271). Resource mobilization also encompasses social capital, or to put in other words, resources that migrants possessed before going abroad.

It is shown that migrants' preparedness is not related only to the experience in the foreign country, but also on their perception that the overall context in the home country has changed. It is emphasized that a migrant's preparedness is triggered by conditions in the country of origin and in the host country. It is argued that the degree of preparedness to return is connected to their impact on the development of their country of origin.

There are three levels of preparedness which have an impact on how the acquired resources of migrants will be mobilized. These range between no to high level levels of preparedness and speak also to the level of success return migration may lead to. For example, those with no level of preparedness

will not have the kinds of networks or access to organizational infrastructure upon their return, whereas those with high level of preparedness may utilize resources and programs available to them and thus maximize their return potential (Cassarino 2004).

2.4 Return motives and readjustment problems

To what extent the return migration will have **impact** on the socio – economic change in the country of origin mostly depends on the motives for coming back and the obstacles they face upon return. The motives for return are different, starting from economic, social, family and political reasons (King, 2000).

When it comes to the factors that have influence on returnee's decision to return in the home country, advocates of transnational approach, emphasis that return migration is a direct outcome of migrants' belonging to an ethnic community. Furthermore, migrants' self-identification as well as the perception of the 'homeland' are taken to influence their return decision (Cassarino, 2004). Studies on motives for return migration indicated that return is triggered by multiple, interrelated factors.

Empirical evidence indicates that family-related and social motives for return are the most important factors. „Strong family ties, the wish to rejoin family and friends, homesickness, problems of adjustment in the host country, racial harassment, and the aim to enjoy an improved social status back home are significant reasons for return” (Ammassari and Black, 2001, p. 23). Migrant's stage in life cycle brings different motives for return, since the age drive another needs and preferences. Migrants may express desire to raise their children, to get married or to take care of parents in the country of origin (Ammassari and Black, 2001).

Some migration scholars that research the linkage between integration, assimilation, and return, argue that return take place when migrants did not manage to integrate in the host country. It is stated that "returns may indeed indicate failure to become integrated and assimilated into the host country, but they may not do so. For some migrants they may be 'new' decisions, arrived at on a basis of changed personal and societal circumstances" (Ammassari and Black, 2001, p.23).

Gmelch (1980) has distinguished two perspectives on the approach to the question of the difficulties that migrants face upon. On the one hand, the actual economic and social situation of

returnees can be examined, looking at employment and housing, participation in associations etc. On the other hand, migrants' perceptions can be measured on the level of "satisfaction" or "dissatisfaction" regarding their expectations after returning to the country of origin. Furthermore, readjustment problems that migrants face upon return are seen as an indicator that can drive social change (Ammassari and Black, 2001).

Cerase (1974) argue that the higher is the conflict of re-adaptation because of the different value that return migrants possess, the higher is likelihood that they will evoke the social development and change. Oppositely, the greater are the traditional orientation of returnees, the lower are chances that they will provoke the social development.

King (2000) highlights the two opposite processes that migrants go through upon return. „On the one hand migrants are relieved to be back home in a familiar context. On the other hand, they are often quite disappointed after return and easily irritated with how things are done at home. Also, the relationship between returnees and non-migrants is generally ambiguous” (Ammassari and Black, 2001, p.24).

SECTION 3: Empirical Research on Return Migration to Date

Empirical research on return migration is very important, because it provides the data related to the volume, characteristics, age, or skills composition of emigrants as well as the correlation between certain trends, which is crucial for comprehensive policy process. The following empirical research on return migration provides the empirical data derived from interviews and case studies and researched the Turkish migrants from France, Germany the Netherlands, students and researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, scientists from China, expatriate researchers from developing countries, role of the higher education institution in the return migration process and migrants from European to post conflict countries.

Kunuroglu, Yagmur, Van de Vijver and Kroon (2017) in their study researched returned migration motivations of Turkish migrants from France, Germany the Netherlands. The authors used semi structured interviews conducted with 48 returnees. The results showed that the aspiration to return to Turkey lies in experienced discrimination in Western Europe and as the most important the feel

of belonging to the country of origin. The study revealed the significance of the socio – political context in Western Europe when it comes to the return decision. The returnees reported that the major reasons to return to the country of origin are related to the immigrated context where they fail to feel belonged and connected to the host members. The return to the Turkey was an action taken to help the returnees to prevent their children from being negatively stereotyped and to avoid letting them experience non equal social status in the country. Furthermore, while being in the host country, they had social and economic links to the home country, that are maintained through summer visits or buying properties back home (Kunurglu, Yagmur, Van de Vijver & Kroon, 2017).

Regarding post- return experiences, the study showed that the main issues after return are connected to perceived discrimination in Turkey, cultural differentiation with mainstream Turks and children related problems after coming back. Additionally, acculturative stress together with negative emotions is revealed as experience that follows post return process of Turkish migrants.

Adaptation to the different conditions in the home country are indicated to be very exhausting, especially for those returnees who decided to come back to ensure their children the feel of belonging that was missed in the host country. Further, the returnees state that adaptation problems comes because they adjusted to different culture in the west that is consist of characteristics that are different from those in Turkey. Therefore, it is present a distance with mainstream Turks in the return context. Additionally, the returnees who had attempt to establish a new business or to employ in the company, they did not manage to sustain it due to the different values and norms in the work context (Kunurglu et al., 2017).

Božić (2015) conducted 148 interviews with students and researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) who finished postgraduate studies in international universities, to identify obstacles and the opportunities for the return of expert staff after they required academic qualifications at foreign universities as well as the recognition of this important human capital by the labor market and society in general.

The analyzed data shows that in BiH there is scarcity of database, expert analyses in the competent ministries related to the number of highly skilled people who returned, their qualifications, acquired knowledge and competences. Furthermore, there are no information about their employment status and involvement in the labor market. “This clearly indicates that the issue of the return of educated staff and the recognition of their potential as a significant human and

intellectual capital does not rank highly on the list of priorities of the entity ministries. It further indicates insufficient recognition of the significance of brain gain within the context of social development” (Božić, 2015, p.46). The interviewees state that education system and the labor market are not efficient in applying and evaluating new interdisciplinary knowledge, which is very common in the institutions of higher education abroad (Božić, 2015).

According to the author, the interdisciplinary study programmes have influence on development of extensive variety of competencies, but since the weak approach to the domestic labor market, that lead to the no efferent recognition to this domain. Further, something what encourage this situation is the fact that employers are not well introduced about the level of education when it come to the foreign qualifications (Božić, 2015).

The results showed that most of the interviewed returnees are working in the public sector, while low percentage of them are engaged in the non - governmental sector. „An analysis of the data with an emphasis on professional development, opportunities for career advancement and recognition of the acquired qualifications has established that advanced knowledge and skills cannot be fully applied in the scattered and inefficient labor market in BiH” (Božić, 2015, p.46).

The returnees who are working in the public sector face with limitations when they try to implement new methods in the working environment. The interviewees indicate that they are not satisfied because of the low chances for professional development and opportunities to advance (Božić, 2015).

When it comes to the contribution that returnees can make in the country of origin, based on their knowledge acquired in the educational institutions abroad, the interviewees state that they usually do so through professional involvement. “This involves the application of new approaches to their work as well as through the exchange of knowledge and information with colleagues with whom they studied abroad” (Božić, 2015, p.46-47). With regard to the importance of networking in the process of transferring acquired knowledge, the returnees assert that they use the professional networks in which they were engaged abroad, in the development of the sector where they are involved (Božić, 2015).

Wagner, Leydesdorff and Bornmann (2014) in their study showed how return scientist from China made a positive contribution to the research in their countries of origin. The authors research data

on journal information from Web of Science between 2000 and 2012 and reveal that China and the United States have the top research collaboration in science. In 2000s, it is recorded the increase of coauthored papers between researchers from China and US. One of the reasons for the increased number of co-authored papers is because Chinese scientists who studied in the USA upon return to the country of origin are more likely to publish papers with their colleges from USA. In that way they are maintaining the connection with USA institution and USA researchers.

Sun (2017) in his dissertation examine to what extent expatriate researchers have impact on the development of countries of origin through international research collaboration. The author, used that WOS data that gave the number of publications done by the co - authors from the United States and other countries. „For example, in 2012, the value of co-authored publications between the United States and other countries ranges from 0 to 16,654, and China has the largest number of co-authored academic papers with the United States.” It is found that expatriate researchers bring significant contribution to the research collaboration between the host country and the country of origin (Sun, 2017, p.66).

Nonetheless, regarding the contribution that expatriate researcher can bring to the country of origin, two things should have to be taken into account, because not all countries can use the potential of talent mobility. First, every country has its own characteristics that distinguish one from another, and results from this study are taken from a general pattern for most of the countries. “Whether expatriate researchers have a significant impact on the research of a particular origin country depends on which country it is and how various aspects of the country co-determine its research activities“ (Sun, 2017, p.114).

Some poor countries has expatriate researchers in the United States, but the lower are chances that brain circulation will occur, because of the existing poor education and research conditions in the country.“ For example, Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Eritrea, Liberia, and Congo-Zaire have dozens to hundreds of expatriates who work as researchers in the United States, but there are no collaborative publications between these countries and the United States as suggested by the WOS data” (Sun, 2017, p.114).

Second, the findings showed that domestic researchers bring a larger contribution to the research collaboration than expatriate researchers. “...domestic researchers in a given country can also work with American researchers who are not from the given country, or they are simply more

motivated than expatriate researchers to initiate collaboration between countries” (Sun, 2017, p.114).

Further, in this analysis the group of the returning scientists are not divided from the group of domestic researchers. According to the author “returning scientists are an active part of the domestic research labor force and function more effectively in the international research collaboration than if they stay in the United States” (Sun, 2017, p.115).

To summarize, brain circulation will occur when there is established connection between expatriate researchers and their country of origin. The results showed that countries with poor economies and education are not able to exploit the potential of expatriate researchers. Moreover, there are greater chances that brain circulation in the form of research collaboration will occur between United States and the countries with similar academic capacity and development status. “Therefore, developing countries need to make intentional efforts to advance their education and research capacity before they can significantly benefit from international student mobility and research collaboration” (Sun, 2017, p. 23).

Wang, Tang, and Li (2014) researched return migration of academics, and the role of the higher education institution (HEI) in the return migration process. The study researched the HEI recruitment process through a large case study in a research university in China. The results showed that for successful recruitment of talents abroad of the huge importance is how university is presented in the international platform of the global higher education markets. Universities that are not highly ranked have to find another way how to attract overseas talents, sometimes that is achieved through economic benefits (Wang, et al., 2014).

The results that arise from the quantitative analyses showed that the candidate with a doctoral degree from an prestige university have lower chances to be on the shortlist or to get a job offer, than the candidate with degree from non-prestige university. According to the authors, „only those with special interests, voluntary or involuntary, in returning to China looked into this job market and submitted applications. Furthermore, the results suggests that the candidate with independent teaching experience had less chances to get a job offer or to be shortlisted in comparison with applicant who had not independently taught. The reason for this is because research, not teaching, was more valuable in recruiting faculty members abroad. The candidates who are shortlisted and whom are offered job are not maybe the best researchers if it is looked from the perspective of

number of publication. However, they are selected due to the highest potential for future development (Wang, et al., 2014).

When it comes to the economic incentives, most of the interviews reported that amount of salary plays an important role in view of job offers. For the HSU the amount of the salary serve as a strategy to attract overseas talents since the mentioned university is not rank on the top. Furthermore, one of the important factors that attract the returnees was the proactive recruiting strategies from its leadership. (Wang, et al., 2014).The study reveal the importance of networking in attracting people back home. The relation that candidates have with former returnees help them to recognize the university in good ways. Additionally, for the HEI such connections showed that overall institutional environment can play significant role in attracting people to return to home countries. “How the current returnees felt about their experiences and what information they imparted to the future job candidates and even the entire professional communities were critical for successful recruitments in the long run” (Wang, et al., 2014, p.15).

Using the comparative research in six countries world-wide and an in-depth study in Afghanistan, the study of Houte and Davids (2014) explores the conditions under which migrants from European to post conflict countries are able to have influence on development and peace – building in the home countries. According to the authors, only voluntary returnees are the ones who have potential for being an agent of change, due to the ties they maintain with the former country of residence. Their identification and feel of belonging that extends from their home country till European country of residence, ensure them and their dependents security from generalized violence and feel of safeness in the Western country of residence. The strong connection they have with the West and high profiles as returnees construct a risk for them because of existing criminality and anti - Western violence in the country of origin (Houte & Davids, 2014).

Contrary to them, involuntary returnees who returned to home country because of not having legal chance to stay abroad, according to the authors, they were not in the position to have influence regarding peacebuilding and development in the Afghan society. “Being weakly embedded in Afghanistan and involuntarily immobile, involuntary returnees felt exposed to generalized violence, as they did not have enough means to protect themselves and their dependents” (Houte & Davids, 2014, p.55). Moreover, involuntary returnees because of their lower position in the society, they were not target of violence upon return. “Having lived but never really participated

in the former host country, they did not pick up many skills or ideas and rather leaned to the conservative and traditional side as a strategy to negotiate belonging to the Afghan society” (Houte & Davids, 2014, p.56).

Two conclusions raise from above mentioned results. First, the role of human dimension of returnees, that includes participation in the home country, is the most important contribution. “Voluntary returnees’ creativity, resilience and innovativeness, along with their entrepreneurial mentality and their intellectual skills, are important input by these returnees” (Houte & Davids, 2014, p.56). However, the authors argue that these aspects are relative as well as and it is very difficult to make any changes in the society that is distrustful to returnees and any kind of foreign influence. Second, but it is argued the continued transnational mobility that is based on returnees contribution will provide desired changes. Transnational mobility become a strong point and tool for overcoming national limitations and making change (Houte & Davids, 2014).

Furthermore, the study of Williams and Balaz (2006) focused on returned migrants in order to contribute to understanding the cycle of skilled labor migration and further focused on the contribution that highly skilled returnees can bring upon return. The article focuses on three groups of returned skilled migrants from the United Kingdom to Slovakia, who has different economic behaviors: „ professional and managerial workers (broadly defined to include intra- and extra-company transfers); students (potential skilled workers); and aupairs as skilled workers occupying unskilled jobs abroad” (Williams & Balaz, 2006, p.441)

The aim of the study is to explore the individual economic benefits from different types of migrants and to provide more insights into acquired knowledge and valorizations of human capital. According to the authors, it is necessary to have a look at the specific interpersonal skills and the role of social recognition, since the formal education and training does not give a better understanding of the value of working or studying abroad. (Williams & Balaz, 2006).

The result from the case study are derived from the survey as well as from semi-structured interviews with returnees, who spent at least three mounts abroad. The results showed that some migrants upon return recognized gains regarding their profession, status, salary, and capacity to set up firms, despite the fact that they were for a short period of time abroad. Professionals and managers state that they achieved economic benefits, which is reflected in the fact that several of them acquired business skills necessary to supply the transition economy.

When it comes to the skills acquisition, the results reveal that all groups in the study obtain some technical skills, but that was not that widespread as language skills. Regarding the competences and the social recognition, using Alexander, Schallert and Chou (1991) terminology, the returnees gain conditional knowledge that is in contrast with declarative and procedural knowledge, “or in Evans’ (2002) terms, they ‘know how’ and ‘know who’ rather than ‘know that.’” This produce the self-confidence and greater independence. On one hand, the returnees spent a period of time abroad and they faced with different challenges that resulted in formation of self-awareness.

Finally, the results indicate that even if there were some cases that showed little financial capital accumulation or limited formal professional skills, generally returnee’s quality of life, regarding their careers, changed notably, even though they spent a short period of time in the UK. “The reasons lie in the social skills, the self-esteem and the other forms of more informal human capital acquired. Even skilled migrants, working in unskilled jobs abroad, should be seen as playing active roles in shaping their personal ‘learning careers’” (Williams & Balaz, 2006, p.464).

To summarize the empirical literature, the Kunurglu et al., (2017) study that examine the return migration motivations of Turkish migrants from France, Germany and Netherlandsm showed the significance of the socio - political context in Western Europe when it comes to the return decision. The aspiration to return to Turkey lies in experienced discrimination in Western Europe and as the most important the feel of belonging to the country of origin, as well as the major reasons to return to the country of origin are related to the immigrated context where they fail to feel belonged and connected to the host members. Furthermore, the main issues after return are connected to perceived discrimination in Turkey, cultural differentiation with mainstream Turks. The returnees state that adaptation problems comes because they adjusted to different culture in the west that is consist of characteristics that are different from those in Turkey.

Božić’s (2015) study reveal that education system and the labor market in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not efficient in applying and evaluating new interdisciplinary knowledge, which is very common in the institutions of higher education abroad. The returnees who are working in the public sector face with limitations when they try to implement new methods in the working environment. The interviewees indicate that they are not satisfied because of the low chances for professional development and opportunities to advance. When it comes to the contribution that returnees can make in the country of origin, based on their knowledge acquired in the educational

institutions abroad, the results showed that returnees usually do so through professional involvement.

In the study of Wagner, Leydesdorff and Bormann (2014), it is revealed the positive contribution of the return scientist from China to the research in their countries of origin. It is recorded the increase of coauthored papers between researchers from China and US. One of the reasons for the increased number of co-authored papers is because Chinese scientists who studied in the USA upon return to the country of origin are more likely to publish papers with their colleges from USA.

The study of Sun (2017) showed that brain circulation will occur when there is established connection between expatriate researchers and their country of origin. The results showed that countries with poor economies and education are not able to exploit the potential of expatriate researchers. Moreover, there are greater chances that brain circulation in the form of research collaboration will occur between United States and the countries with similar academic capacity and development status. This indicates that developing countries need to make efforts in improving the education as well as the research capacity in order to exploit benefits that can come from research collaboration and international mobility.

The Houtte and Davids (2014) study that explores the conditions under which migrants from European to post conflict countries are able to have influence on development and peace - building in the home countries, showed that only voluntary returnees are the ones who have potential for being an agents of change, due to the ties they maintain with the former country of residence. Their identification and feel of belonging that extends from their home country till European country of residence, ensure them and their dependents security from generalized violence and feel of safeness in the Western country of residence. The strong connection they have with the West and high profiles as returnees construct a risk for them because of existing criminality and anti - Western violence in the country of origin.

The study of Williams and Balaz (2006) that examine the returned migrants in order to contribute to understanding the cycle of skilled labor migration and further focused on the contribution that highly skilled returnees can bring upon return, showed that even if there were some cases that showed little financial capital accumulation or limited formal professional skills, generally returnee's quality of life, regarding their careers, changed notably, even though they spent a short

period of time in the UK. The reasons for that lie in the fact that returnees acquired some more informal human capital (social skills, self-esteem etc.), so even if highly skilled individuals who work abroad in some lower position, they can be „seen as playing active roles in shaping their personal learning careers (Williams & Balaz, 2006, p.464).

In the study of Wang, Tang, and Li (2014) it is showed that for successful recruitment of talents abroad of the huge importance is how university is presented in the international platform of the global higher education markets. When it comes to the economic incentives, the results revealed that amount of salary plays an important role in view of job offers. Furthermore, one of the important factors that attract the returnees was the proactive recruiting strategies from its leadership. Most of the candidates consider the attitude from leaders as an important component of professional work environment after coming back. Moreover, it is showed that universities that are not highly ranked have to find another way how to attract overseas talents, sometimes that is achieved through economic benefits.

SECTION 4: EXISTING RESPONSES TO RETURN MIGRATION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

The countries in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo), as the time passes, are losing its population. Most of these migrants who left the region are young highly educated individuals, who made decision to leave their countries of origin because they are not satisfied with the democratic and economic conditions at home. In the future, it is estimated that the region will lose around one million youth, and in that way call into question the overall stability of the region. In the Western Balkans the outflow of young people is very sensitive topic, and it is often affected by the political situation in each country (Iconski, 2022).

The liberal EU migration policies are maybe the most significant pull factor. As a consequence of the proceeding membership accession processes, for Western Balkan people, the EU is the most popular destination. “Between 2014 and 2019, the number of first residence permits for WB6 citizens issued in the EU increased from 577,514 to 974,499” (Iconski, 2022, p.5). One of the

strong push factors was visa liberalization (except for Kosovo). This opened new possibilities for traveling, education, and maintaining social networks.

Some EU member countries, for example Germany launched regulations in order to provide a welcoming environment for Western Balkan immigrants. Germany created the Western Balkans Regulation and a Skilled Immigration Act with the goal to facilitate the employment of highly educated people from Western Balkan (Mara, 2021).

That regulations Germany has increased medical brain drain from the region and do not contain the clause for the return of the workers after temporary residence in Germany (Oruč, 2021). In many other fields such as healthcare, tourism and construction there are bilateral agreement that foster the emigration of highly educated individuals (Henkel, 2019).

In the Western Balkans, the first systematic return policies emerged in 2010, which aim at strengthening the communication with diaspora and its engagement (Krasteva et.al.,2018). Related to that, in the last ten years the Western Balkan countries, has adopted strategic documents and established new institutions and measures for diaspora involvement. „With slight differences, these policies in all six countries target the financial potential of the diaspora and tend to facilitate the transition from remittances to investment” (Icoski, 2022, p.9).

Since 2005, Albania started working on reversing the brain drain phenomena, when the return of highly skilled migrants has been recognized as a an important policy in the Strategy for Migration to achieve an effective engagement of the Albanian Diaspora created in the development processes (European Movement in Albania, 2010).

In 2005 the Government of Albania officially opened the Brain Gain Programme, a joint initiative with UNDP. The UNDP that accept the request of Albanian Government, worked on the preparation of a Brain Drain program that is constructed on the experiences of different countries. This program was created with the goal of integrating highly educated Albanians in the public administration and overall development of the country. The program is created for the period of 2006- 2010 and encompasses two purposes:

The first purpose of the program is encourage the returnees to contribute the overall development of the country of origin. The second purpose is to establish the legal framework for integration of the returnees in the public administration. In the program was not included the formation of the

Diaspora network, but some kind of activities connected to the Diaspora are covered in the brain gain action plan (European Movement in Albania, 2010).

The existing policies has some limitations in efficiency: this program covers only public sector, while the cooperation with the private sector and its potential is not used enough. Additionally, the returnees who are employed in the public administration through the Brain Gain program, usually they are not placed in the right positions, whether they are working on lower position or on position that requires a lot of experience). Moreover, this program has not proven successful in empowering research institutions and universities, since these institutions have a huge potential to be a successful pull factor (European Movement in Albania, 2010).

In a more recent document, the National Diaspora Strategy 2021 – 2025, contained the brain gain measures that are reflected in ensuring the possibility of return of highly educated people from diaspora by providing them with employment opportunities back home. Another brain gain measure that is written is promoting the voluntary return of highly educated migrants through short-term positions for consultation, teaching or training purposes.

When it comes to Serbia, in the broader development strategies are included the brain gain measures. In the Migration Management Strategy (2009) the brain gain measures included: developing the projects for temporary return of highly educated workforce that has left Serbia and the measures to use their knowledge and skills at a distance, but also for their permanent return and active participation in the labour market.

In the Strategy to Preserve and Strengthen the Relationship between the Homeland and the Diaspora, as well as The Homeland of the Serbs in the Region (2011) is written that it is necessary to better utilize the potential of diaspora in terms of: strengthening scientific, technological, cultural, educational, sports and other development of the country - use of knowledge and remote skill of a highly educated workforce that is left the Republic of Serbia. One such mechanism is the programs of circulation of experts, which enable professionals, professors and scientists to spend some time abroad in leading companies and universities.

In the Strategy of Scientific and Technological development of Republic of Serbia 2010 – 2015, the concrete brain gain measure is to make "better use" of the diaspora, first by identifying its

members and their resources (database creation), and then by developing various forms of cooperation and return programmes.

In the National Strategy for the Economic Development of the Republic of Serbia from 2006-2012, it is written the brain gain measure to support mobility, inclusion in the single European educational space and investment in an efficient scientific research structure. In the National Sustainable Development Strategy 2007-2017, there is measure to develop programs for the most talented young scientists in the country, to promote the mobility of researchers at home and abroad, establish links with the academic diaspora, as well as the development of an adequate policy of return and employment. In the Regional Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the period of 2007 to 2012 there is a brain gain measure to attract professionals and financial resources of the diaspora for the country's economic development, but also for the creation of conditions for the professional engagement of returnees. The most recent and important document is the Economic Migration Strategy 2021–2027 to support return and circular migration. The goal of this strategy is to create a better economic and social environment that will slow down the departure of the working-age population, strengthen ties with the diaspora, encourage return and circular migration, but also attract foreign citizens of various educational profiles.

In Montenegro the first document where brain gain measures are included is the Strategy for Cooperation with the Diaspora for the period 2011-2014. The brain gain measures mentioned in this document are: mapping of scientific and professional diaspora, developing cooperation with them through scientific- research institutions and programs and the transfer of knowledge to launch small and medium-sized business in the areas of cutting- edge technologies and encouragement of student mobility. The recent document is the National Youth Strategy for the period of 2017-2021. The vision of this Strategy is a state of Montenegro where young people are independent, involved in decision-making, i.e implementation of public policies and have opportunities for work and financial independence.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Strategy for the development of Science for the period 2010-2015 is first adopted public policy that directly recognizes the existing problem of brain drain, and importance of activities in this field. The concrete brain gain measures mentioned in this document are: creating legal and other requirements for the unobstructed transfer of knowledge and technologies and the inclusion of foreign scientists and BiH scientists from abroad in the country's

scientific projects and to ensure that BiH institutions grant scientific advisor status to scientists from the diaspora.

Furthermore, in the Strategy for scientific research and Research and Development activities in the Federation for the period 2012-2022, there is a brain gain measure: including the diaspora in researching projects and mentoring young scientists and researchers. In the Strategy for the scientific research and Technological Development of the Republic of Srpska for the period 2011-2016 diaspora is important in terms of achieving objectives related to scientific – research cooperation and mobility. In the Development Strategy of BiH for the period 2010 – 2020, it is written that the resources of the BiH scientific diaspora will be used in the development of human resource competences through return programmes, the circulation and networking of scientists and professionals. In the Policy on cooperation with diaspora (2015), one of the objectives are creating conditions for a greater contribution of diaspora to the development of BiH, through:

- promoting diaspora and development of resources of diaspora
- mobilizing investment and financial resources of diaspora
- mobilize human potentials, knowledge and skills of emigrants

When it comes to Kosovo, the Kosovo Development Strategy 2016-2021 contained concrete mechanisms for engagement of highly educated individuals from diaspora in the public and private institutions in Kosovo. The aim was transfer of the knowledge and skills and in that way strengthening the human capacities of Kosovo.

In North Macedonia, in the Resolution on Migration Policy for the 2009 – 2014, there are brain gain measures for mapping and creating a scientific and professional diaspora database, support for temporary emigration and circulation of the workforce to facilitate their return, including virtual return programmes, reduction of brain drain and its negative effects and encouragement of brain gain. An important document created in 2012 is the National Strategy for networking, cooperation and reducing the outflow of highly educated people and professional staff 2013–2020, which is the first official document that directly regulates "brain drain" migration.

The integral part of the majority of mentioned documents are policy measures with the purpose to attract diaspora investments through creations of financial instrument for its support. (Despić,

2021). Something what is problematic here is the fact that specific brain gain and brain circulation policies remained sporadic and youth are not observed as a specific policy category, therefore their return and circulation is treated with the same measures as other migrants (Icoski, 2022). Iconski argue that the policies are drafted very ambitions and it seem that exceed the capacity of each country. The policies are drafted more as declarative rather than deliberative and realistic documents. They can be seen as wish lists and policy agendas that are overly ambitious considering the capacity of the six states. “This can be also seen in their proliferation, with in the last decade each country adopting several laws, strategies, and resolutions on the diaspora and migration. In some cases, the policies are not backed up with appropriate financial resources, as in Albania and North Macedonia” (Iconski, 2022, p.10).

Furthermore, one of the biggest barriers which calls into question the quality of return and circulation policies are the data scarcity on migration. “The WB6 lack reliable, accessible, and systematic data in terms of the volume, characteristics, age, or skills composition of emigrants, which is a precondition for a comprehensive policy process”. To some extent, this barrier is also present in the EU countries, which do not have the complete data. Hence, this shared challenge, distorts the real image of brain drain from Western Balkans (Iconski, 2022, p.11).

Additionally, the Western Balkan national statistical offices do not have a huge role in providing the accurate data on brain drain and diaspora. The reason for that is because these institutional bodies use the outdated statistics and only captures official emigration, which is not in correlation with the data provided by international organizations.

More importantly, in the Western Balkan countries, something what is of huge importance and what is missing is the qualitative research on youth and brain drain. This research would provide the new perception on the youth needs. The governments only rely on the data and analyses that are created by different organizations, when they work on adopting the migration policies. Just as importantly, Western Balkan countries are not united in process of reversing the youth brain drain. The effort to approach this issue are focused only on the state level, and still there is no a clear path towards working on reducing the outflow of highly educated people. „There is no formal strategy or cooperation framework treating it as a question of the highest importance for the region” (Iconski, 2022, 12).

SECTION 5: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This master's thesis contributes to providing a unique perspective into unexplored aspect of return migration of highly educated individuals, who are at the beginning of their career and do not have much social or financial capital, yet have to make decisions about whether or not to return to their countries of origin. Therefore, their perceptions and perspectives about return are different and rather unexplored in the literature. Furthermore, since there is a lack of empirical studies that examine the return migration of highly skilled individuals from Western Balkan countries, the thesis provides policy advice on the creation of sustainable return policies for the Western Balkans (and beyond) which could, if implemented, not only foster more return migration of highly skilled individuals, but also encourage countries in the Western Balkans to reorient their perspectives towards being more open to accommodating those wanting to return.

To provide practical policy guidelines for creating sustainable return policies for the Western Balkan, this thesis interviews individuals who have returned to origin countries upon receiving higher education degrees abroad and the individuals who stayed abroad. The focus of the thesis is to examine the obstacles they faced upon return, motivations, incentives, and what kinds of policies might help others also return.

The empirical data is based on a qualitative research design that consists of interviews of three generations of POSIG students. The PoSIG students are highly educated individuals who returned to their countries of origin or stayed abroad upon finishing their master's degree. The individuals who returned have experience how their home countries mobilize the potential of highly educated returnees. Their experience is valuable since it gives information of the reasons for return, obstacles they faced. On the other side, the experiences of individuals who stayed abroad are important because it gives insights into what Western Balkan countries should pay attention to attract others to return.

The “Joint Master’s Programme in Political Science – Integration and Governance” (PoSIG) is an integrated program that is established on international standards and provides teaching of political science in the line with level 7 of the European Qualification Framework. These courses offer the knowledge of a theory and methodology of Political Science that on the high-level teaching

capacities. During the second year, the courses are offered at the universities in the Western Balkan partner countries. After finishing master program, students are specialized in issues connected to the modernization as well as integration of EU neighboring countries.

The study in this thesis was conducted within a period of four months, starting from September 2022 until January 2023. With the help of the PoSIG program coordinator, I contacted three generations of PoSIG students. I sent out a total of 30 emails and tried to find them on social media (Instagram, Facebook) to schedule the interviews. I received 17 positive responses. For my research, I did interviews via Zoom platform. In the process of carrying out these interviews, I tried to encourage the respondents to talk more about their experiences, and I elaborated the questions to make sure that they give clear answers. I did not always follow the structure of the questions, because sometimes the participants answered some of the questions without me asking them.

I conducted in depth interviews, because this kind of data collection enabled me to accumulate a large amount of information about the behavior and the perception of respondents. According to Marshall and Rossman, in depth interviews give the interviewees the freedom to express themselves and potentially open new topics that the researcher maybe did not have in mind. At the same time, this method helps the researcher to identify, what topics are the most important to the interviewees (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.80). Related to that, when I did interviews with the participants and when I saw that there was space for me to add some additional questions that were not in the questionnaire, more precisely in my list of thirteen main questions, I asked the interviewees those questions in addition to find out the deeper meaning of the answers. As this research is exploratory, this method was most amenable. The interview guide was the list of nineteen questions. I asked them for the reasons for returning in order to better comprehend their perspective toward return and to potentially confirm the existing approaches of return migration or to bring some new perspective towards it. I asked them what obstacles they faced upon return. This question is very important because it reveals the crucial problems on which the countries should pay attention. I asked can they apply the knowledge acquired abroad in the home country, in order to find out if the Western Balkan countries utilize the potential of returnees. One of the questions was if they find it easier to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad, and what kind of policies should the state adopt in order to encourage highly educated

people to return to their home country etc. Further, I asked the individuals who stayed abroad for the reason for return in order to find out what prevent them from return. I asked them if they contribute in some way from the diaspora to home country, through the transfer of knowledge, money, skills. Also, I asked them what measures should the state implement so that highly educated people from the diaspora can contribute to the development and progress of your country of origin.

Below is a table that shows the division of countries, gender, and whether the interviewees returned or stayed abroad upon graduating from the PoSIG program. In total, there were 17 interviews conducted. Ten of interviewed individuals returned to the country of origin upon receiving their master’s degree, while seven stayed abroad.

Bosnia and Herzegovina	5 individuals	3 men and 2 woman	4 returned, 1 stayed abroad
Montenegro	1 individual	women	stayed abroad
Serbia	1 individual	men	Stayed abroad
Kosovo	5 individuals	3 men and 2 women	3 returned 2 stayed abroad
Albania	4 individuals	all women	2 returned 2 stayed abroad
North Macedonia	1 individual	women	returned

SECTION 6: EMPIRICAL DATA

6.1 ALBANIA

Albanian migrant K.K, who stayed in Austria upon receiving master degree, argue that the most important measures on attracting the highly educated migrants to return to home countries have to do with material conditions and the quality of life.

“Corruption is very discouraging for highly educated people to return. Knowing that the state is practically robbing you and you’re not getting anything back can be very discouraging. Cooperation projects with diaspora are needed in many fields, from education to businesses. But, they have to be projects that have an evident impact in the society, in institutional capacities, in community life. Not just conferences or gatherings where people talk and nothing is achieved in practice”.

She told me that advantages and disadvantages of living abroad depend on where you live and for what reason.

“For me, the advantage was that I got a job offer that allowed me not only to make some money, but also to grow in my career. Other advantages range from the material, like healthcare/insurance, workers’ rights, public transport, etc. to the cultural aspects like getting to know a different culture, learning/practicing a new language. But getting more opportunities to advance in your studies and career is probably the biggest advantage for those people who are career-oriented. You can also benefit from unemployment schemes if at some point you are left without a job”.

Regarding disadvantages, she stated that people sometimes face racism and discrimination.

“Third nationalities do not have the same exact rights and often resources that locals or EU citizens and some other nationalities do. Furthermore, being away from family, not having a support system can be tough as well. However, once you graduate and find a job it gets much better, you can live a comfortable life and become truly independent.”

She told me that she knows some friends and studying abroad has actually been a turning point for staying abroad.

“Some of them are happier to be working an ordinary job and get a decent pay than going back to their home countries to work in their profession and get ridiculous salaries so that they can barely get by”.

Furthermore, she explained me that she has an opportunity to contribute to country of origin through the transfer of knowledge, and mainly in the area of civil society.

When asked does Albania recognizes the importance and uses the potential of highly educated people, she answered that Albania do not use the full potential because highly educated people coming from abroad, in order to put their skills to use, need a lot more resources than a country like Albania can provide.

“Let’s say a professor comes back to work at a public university but cannot conduct any research because the university lacks the funding to do so. Also, the university has no or limited access to scientific journals, has no or limited labs to conduct experiments, etc. These are some examples of how someone who returns and is skilled in teaching and advancing knowledge to this level, does not find the space and resources in Albania.”

K. S from **Albania**, who returned to home country after studies, argue that highly educated people would be attracted to return home if the country offered them a good job with high salaries and good working conditions.

She told me that she returned to Albania, because she wants to live where her family is and because in the city where she was studying were little opportunities for foreigners, especially for those in political science profession. Additional reason for returning was because she had a work offer back home.

She stated that advantages of returning are because she can live close to family and friends and because highly educated people can upon return contribute to the development of country of origin. While, she stated, the disadvantages of returning are low salary compared with those in EU.

This is connected to the structural approach to return migration, according to which, return can be seen as an act of motivation. Individuals decided to return in order to transfer the gained knowledge and skills, which is contrary to the neoclassic approach, where return occurs as a consequence of fail experience abroad.

When asked do the highly educated young people find it easier to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad, she answered me that it is not the same for all.

“The employer, in my case governmental institutions, values with more points ones that has finished the studies abroad. But still, the employment it is not merit based”

She told me that Albania does not use the potential of highly educated people who returned and that nepotism is still huge problem that prevents the progress of the state.

This confirms the structural approach, according to which, returnees can be seen as an agents of change in their home countries, but it takes into consideration the overall institutional context in the country, that played a big role to what extend the returnees will contribute back home.

When asked if she can apply the knowledge acquired abroad upon return, she answered me that she has opportunity to transfer the knowledge gained abroad.

„I graduated in Integration and Governance and I am working in the EU Unit of Ministry of Education. I am also working as an assistant lecturer, sharing with other young people the knowledge that I gained abroad and also contributing in the chapters of Albanian accession to EU”

D.I from **Albania**, who decided to stay in Austria after studies, argue that better job opportunities would be good incentives for these individuals to return.

She told me that she decided to stay abroad for several reasons.

The opportunities I would get abroad would be more than the ones I would get from my home country. I would be able to get jobs in my field based on merit alone and not connections. The pay I would get for these jobs would be much more than what I would get home. The pay is of course related to the expenses in Austria as well but if I were in Albania, the pay would not be enough for life in Albania, whereas the pay is sufficient here in Austria. If in the future I would run into health issues, I would have an easier time finding proper and affordable treatment here. If in the future I decided to have children, Austria would offer to assist me financially as well as offer them a better education than what they would get back home”.

She stated that that one of the big disadvantage of staying abroad is language barrier.

“You would need a perfect understanding of the language to continue with bureaucratic steps, an average understanding would not be enough. Another disadvantage is the bureaucracy of it all. It takes a long time to get what you want because of the length of every process that must be approved from different channels.”

She told me that she has a desire to somehow contribute to the country of origin from diaspora, but she has not had any chances to do so and stated that she has not been asked to do so in return.

When asked do highly educated people from the Western Balkans work abroad in their profession or not, she answered me that based on her experience, about 20% of these individuals work in their fields.

“Language is a big factor so if individuals are not able to find jobs in English within their field, their chances of finding another job in the field are non-existent. The amount of jobs that require just English are very few, so the rest tend to settle in jobs outside of their field.”

Furthermore, she explained me that if highly educated people decide to return home, they face with nepotism.

“Jobs in the Western Balkans tend to be mostly given out based on connections rather than merit. That does not mean that highly educated people cannot get jobs, they are more likely to do so with a higher degree. It just means that having the proper connections just solidifies your possibilities on getting a job.”

S.S from **Albania** returned to the country of origin, because she saw the opportunity for professional development back home.

“The main advantage of returning is related to the professional development because in your home country you have more possibilities, but on the other hand in the Western Balkan countries we face many challenges such as corruption, informality, unemployment that affect the young people who are here and those who return”

She told me that highly educated people upon return do not easy find a job, and according to her, this happens due to the lack of organization of a proper job market.

“When I returned in home country, I encountered difficulty in finding a job because of the corruption and nepotism that exists here”.

From the experience of S.S it is seen how big barrier upon return can be the institutional context that is not welcoming for the highly educated individuals. The nepotism, as a negative trend is recognized from all Albanian respondents.

She argue that Western Balkans countries do not use the potential of highly educated people who have returned from abroad.

“The countries need to invest more in this aspect because they are an asset for these countries. I think that the state should implement special programs for these young people who returned, to provide them support in terms of employment and investments that they can make. Also, regarding the contribution from diaspora, the state need to provide economic support and other facilities for the opening of new businesses and the investment they can make”.

6.2 SERBIA

Serbian migrant M.R, who decided to stay abroad after receiving higher education degree, because he estimated that it is more profitable for him to stay abroad then to return to home country.

“There are better job opportunities abroad, better salary as well as better health and social system. In my case, the advantage of staying in Austria is that I can pay for the apartment and food from my salary and have some left over for less important things. I certainly couldn't afford that in Belgrade at this age.”

He explained me that it has become a trend that students who studied abroad stay in the country where they were educated.

“I have a lot of friends all over Europe and everyone who stayed did it after they came to study. Maybe the reasons for staying abroad are the same as mine”

M.R told me that he is contributing to the country of origin by sending the remittances, but when it comes to the transfer of the knowledge he did not have that opportunity.

This is connected to the transnational approach, according to which, migrants who are abroad can retain connections with the country of origin and from time to time transfer the money to their households.

Furthermore, he explained me that highly educated people from Western Balkan usually does not work abroad in the profession they were educated in.

“The people from my profession (political science) who remained mostly do not work in their profession, but they are certainly in higher positions in private companies. I don't know anyone who stayed to work as a cashier, a waiter, or something like that. People who have completed social sciences generally adjust according to the required labor market in Austria. Some went into project management, some into IT, and I also know people who got a job in the economy. On the other hand, engineers, physiotherapists, doctors and architects all work in their profession of course”.

When asked what kind of policies should the state adopt in order to attract highly educated individuals to return, he told me that it is difficult to expect that people from the government "pull the sleeve" of someone to return, but if someone decides to do so, the state (in this case, Serbia) has provided programs that are at a satisfactory level.

6.3 MONTENEGRO

T.B from **Montenegro**, after completing the master program decided to stay in Austria because of a better standard of living, greater opportunities for affirmation, less corruption and nepotism and thus better chances for career/private business development. She told me that besides above mentioned reasons, the advantages of staying abroad are because rule of law ensures the punishment of all forms of corruption and nepotism.

„As an individual who possesses certain qualities, you can express yourself, regardless of party affiliation. There is a well-developed health and social system. The state provides various types of finance helping young families to solve the housing issue that is certainly a big plus”.

The respondents from Albania and Serbia who stayed abroad expressed the same reasons for staying, usually the reasons are related to the better quality of life abroad.

According to T.B, the disadvantage of staying abroad is the problem of acceptance of foreigners by the locals. *“You will never feel at home in a foreign country”.*

T.B argue that studying abroad can be a turning point of staying abroad.

“It is a great opportunity for students to go abroad and to get to know another culture, lifestyle, and then make a comparison with home country and then to decide whether it is better to stay or return”.

T.B told me that highly educated people from Western Balkan countries who are educated abroad mostly work in the profession for which they are educated. But if they were not educated abroad - there is often a problem with the recognition of diplomas/nostrification, so completing additional courses is necessary.

When asked whether it is easier for highly educated people to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad, she explained me that in Montenegro without a good “connection” it is very difficult to get a job in the profession your were educated in.

As in the case of Albania, nepotism is also characteristically for Montenegro, and presents a discouraging factor for those who may consider to return.

She explained me that Montenegro does not recognize the importance of highly educated people and does not use their potential.

“Montenegro should work intensively to prevent a "brain drain" from its country. The situation must be fundamentally changed in order to ensure a good life for young people in their home country and equal opportunities for all. Then they wouldn't have to think about "how to get them back". Also, it is important to give them the chance to come to the positions of policymakers”.

This again confirms the argument of the advocates of structural approach that of the institutional context depends to what extent the returnees will contribute to the development of the country, but also that it depends on the institutional context whether the migrants will return.

6.4 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

E.M from Bosnia and Herzegovina, after completing the master program in Austria decided to come back to home country, because she received opportunity to work in the field of interest, and also because of family and friends.

The same as returnees from Albania, the reason for return are positively related.

“Advantages of returning are definitely being close to friends and family, in environment that is well known and familiar. However, disadvantages are far bigger than advantages and include lack of adequate employment opportunities, bad political situation and generally low satisfaction with living conditions”.

She told me that regardless of the fact that she completed her studies abroad, it does not lead to easier employment upon her return.

“I had pure luck to find job after returning home, but almost all of my friends that completed high education abroad still faced enormous problems in job seeking, due to bad political situation and corruption in business sector”.

She explained that the biggest obstacles she faced upon return is finding adequate job opportunity.

When asked does her country of origin recognize the importance and use the potential of highly educated people who have returned from abroad, she told me that corruption and nepotism in business sector are still on high level and as such remain big obstacle in recognizing the importance of abroad high education.

As the returnees from Albania and Montenegro, the institutional context in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not favorable for highly educated people. It seems that state does not recognize highly educated returnees as a group of people with special potential.

E.M told me that in her current job she has the opportunity to transfer the knowledge acquired abroad and in that way she contributes to her country of origin.

She argue that Bosnia and Herzegovina should have to provide highly educated people upon return job opportunities, adequate to their field of study and salaries that correspond with degree obtained.

E.K from **Bosnia and Herzegovina** decided to return home after finishing PoSIG program.

„While studying abroad, I explored all my possibilities to get involved within my field of study (Political Science), especially because my master’s programme entailed an internship requirement. My primary focus was to work on the topics that interest me the most and conduct research. Thus, I applied for internships both abroad and back home within this area. I got an internship approved in my home country and was offered a job afterwards, what kept me back home for some time”.

She told me that the largest advantage of returning is the investment of personal knowledge into home country and its labor market.

“There are plenty of opportunities to expand your knowledge of local issues and apply the skills learned abroad to impact these issues. Also, the advantage is the feeling of contributing to the country you live in and ability to impact its internal processes.”

Furthermore, she explained me that the main disadvantages of returning would include a time-consuming search for a job, less appreciation for personal knowledge and skills (networking over qualifications; corrupted selection) and low income.

When asked do the highly educated young people find it easier to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad, she told me that she does not think that highly educated young people are having it any easier than those who have studied locally.

“Young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are facing many obstacles towards actual employment, whereas within some industries (such as IT), foreign competitors are able to provide more than the local ones. For a political science field, it is a bit difficult to find a desired job, especially if you are not a political party member and want to try out your luck within a non-governmental or international organizations’ sector.”

When it come to the obstacles she faced upon return, she explained me that when she returned in Bosnia and Herzegovina, she was first faced by the COVID-19 health crisis.

“This situation exposed all the flaws of our system and made everything more difficult. I struggled with getting a consistent job position and either being not paid or underpaid for the work I was doing. My search for a job also took a lot of time and effort, and I had to reach out to employers myself by sending out emails and inquiring whether they would need a person to volunteer at least. I wanted to gain more experience to be able to apply for more serious roles”.

She told me that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not provide the environment that will keep the highly educated people in. However, according to E.K, there are some people and organizations that know how to appreciate what is being given to them, but they just need to be more vocal about it.

In answer to the question what kind of policies should the state adopt in order to attract highly educated people from abroad to return to their home state, she told me that a state should have a clear path of progress and fulfill necessary steps that will lead through it.

“These steps could include work and cooperation (on all local levels, as well as regional and international one depending on the issue) on suppression of malign foreign influence, prevention of nationalism and extremism, sanctioning of divisive rhetoric (especially among its politicians), providing sufficient financial means and working conditions to its people, consistently working on and resolving crucial issues of its citizens (such as health care and education), investing in education, infrastructure and economic development”

She explained that political situation and living conditions in the country keeps sending people away.

“Diaspora is mostly involved through investments, be that donations or just travelling to countries of origins. What is always interesting, however, are exchange programs, so that both sides can see how the other one is doing. With this, locals and diaspora are able to work together and build a network on common interest of making one’s country a better place to live in. Moreover, investments and exchange of practices in digitalization and education are another way to accelerate certain processes and make the country ready to respond to the current challenges”

E.Z from **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, returned to home country after master program.

“One of the main reasons for my return was the fact that I missed my friends and family. On the other side, I wanted to implement knowledge I gained abroad in my country. To check is it possible to move the country from stagnation and to see are western templates for society acceptable in my country.”

The reason is related to the classification of advocates of structural approach, according to which, return migration can occur because migrant has desire to implement the knowledge acquired abroad to the country of origin.

He told me that the advantage of returning is being closer to family and friends, while the main disadvantages of returning are poor job offers and chances, bad political system, corruption and the fact that complete political and economic situation is on the low level.

When asked do the highly educated young people find it easier to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad, he told me that he does not think so.

“The most important part here is to be active in politics and to know ‘right’ people”.

Regarding the obstacles he faced upon return, he told me that the main obstacle is finding job for which he is educated.

Furthermore, he explained me that Bosnia and Herzegovina do not recognize and use that potential of highly educated people. He stated that those young people who returned, they are not getting chance at all and the country do not have any strategy to implement and use their knowledge and experience.

In answer to the question can he apply the knowledge acquired abroad in home country, he answered that he did not have that opportunity, since there are difference between systems and education. He stated that highly corrupted system does not allow you to get into it without being in politics.

Further, he told me that the state should implement measures to approach the highly educated people in a better way – more digitalization, e – services and much more chances for educated people to implement their knowledge. Additionally, according to him, the state should use new technologies and adapt everything to educated people in order to make their contribution easy and successful.

M.Č from **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, after receiving the master degree, he returned to the home country, but due to some private reasons, he left job and went again to Austria.

He told me that living abroad have as much good and bad sides.

“Social and financial security is the aspect that is probably the most important to me when it comes to living abroad, however, on the other hand, it is not always easy to be so distanced from your family and friends. Language also presents the great barrier to most of the people, but that is the challenge that all the people accept when they move abroad.”

He told me that, since he just moved abroad, so he did not have a chance to help or invest back in the home country.

“However, I know a lot of people who invest in their home countries, and there are also a diaspora invest fairs where those people gather and discuss about the next steps”.

M.Č told me that people from Western Balkan who are economists, IT engineers, mechanic engineers, civil engineering engineers and labor force from similar niches are almost always employed in their niche abroad, while other people whose curriculum differs in their home-country university in comparison to universities abroad have much more problems to find the job.

Furthermore, he told me that right now he is focused on career development abroad and does not have any intentions to engage in any kind of actions related to development or transfer of knowledge back in home country.

When asked does Bosnia and Herzegovina uses the potential of highly educated people, who decided to return after studying abroad, he answered that most of those people are not given a chance to make significant changes in society, because of which they have to struggle once again to pave their road towards success back home.

“I believe that comprehensive approach regarding social security, financial security and physical security should be implemented in order to encourage young people to stay in their home-countries or to return. Most of the people leave their home-countries and become emigrants due to financial issues they face in their home-countries. Diaspora invest project is the small step forward implemented by most of the countries. However, I believe that the taxes for diaspora investors should be lower, subsidies should be implemented and the complete procedure of company registration should be easier as it is currently”.

S.T from **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, decided to come back to home country after completing studies abroad, because he felt homesick and wanted to start carrier back home.

He told me the advantages of returning are the strong feeling of fulfilment, because of succeeding abroad and taking on new challenges back home such as a viable job and starting to build a life.

Disadvantages of returning, according to him, are sudden realization of the lack of opportunities available home compared to abroad.

The main obstacle he faced upon return is a limited viable job opportunities (viable meaning jobs at companies/organizations that offer decent wage and benefits, job fulfilment, professional development)

He told me the state should create projects/organizations which are development oriented (in the fields of agriculture, transport, medicine, civil and mechanical engineering, etc.) with clearly defined objectives, budgets and timelines, in order to attract highly educated people to return.

“These organizations would provide specialists to return home and implement their knowledge directly. Additionally, it should go without saying that these individuals should be fairly compensated for their work and expertise. Furthermore, there is a need for creating investment opportunities and incentives for diaspora to open up businesses in their home countries”.

6.5 KOSOVO

E.S from **Kosovo** decided to come back to the country of origin after completing master program, because in the time of Covid-19 it was very hard for him to find a decent job.

This reason is connected to the arguments of neoclassic approach, according to which, return migration occurs when migrants did not adapt to the context of receiving country.

He told me that the only advantage of returning is the respect that you have from certain people and because you are close to family and friends.

Further, he stated that highly educated people after returning from abroad do not find it easier to find employment, because of nepotism.

Nepotism is the trend that is recognized in experiences of individuals from Albania, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“Regardless of the knowledge you acquired abroad, you need to have a good connection in order to find a good job, related to your field of study”

He told me that Kosovo does not use the potential of highly educated people who have returned from abroad and that he did not have opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired abroad in Kosovo.

Furthermore, he argue that state should provide the highly educated people better job opportunities.

“There is no need for specific programs, the country just need to be more open and to choose people who deserve and love their job position for which they are applying”.

D. K. from **Kosovo**, after a period spent abroad, he decided to come back to Kosovo.

“The advantages and disadvantages of returning depends on your point of view and goals. Since I have never thought of staying there I just had in my mind that my mission there is completed”.

He told me that highly educated people find it easier to find employment upon return.

“In the state, people are generally employed through connections, but many companies still appreciate young educated people, and offer them a job”.

He told me that finding a job was the main obstacle he faced upon return.

“Besides that, there are some things that you need to re-fits when you come back. Some kind of prejudice and mentality can make pressure on you, but you need to know where you are”.

He told me that he did not have opportunity to apply the acquired abroad in Kosovo, because, as he stated, some things need to be adapted to the state context.

“I can just say that state needs to directly offer a suitable job for highly educated people who returned. It is very important to involve them in education system, so they can change the way how other learn things in school and at the university firstly, and second trying to involve them in decision making process so they can contribute in public policies”.

N. I from **Kosovo**, after completing the master program decided to return home.

“One of the reasons that I decided to study abroad was to return to my country with the knowledge gained from my experience abroad. I am the founder and CEO of a kindergarten in Kosovo and for me, it was very important to gain a wider perspective on learning methodology and specializing in the field that I have graduated from”.

She told me that advantages of returning are being close to family and friends, and also huge opportunities, as Kosovo is a developing country. Furthermore, she stated that one of the main disadvantages of returning relates to difficulties to access the labor market.

“Highly educated young people upon return enjoy a kind of privilege when applying, but I cannot say that it is easier for them to find a suitable job compared to how the state can benefit from them. There is a gap between highly educated people and state mechanisms to exploit these people in the public or private sectors. Regardless of the aim that these people have to contribute to their country, for them, it is easier to be exposed to the foreign market, especially after COVID-19, by working remotely from home.”

When asked can she apply the knowledge acquired abroad in her home country, she answered that due to the transition the state is going through, it is hard to implement knowledge.

“However, more than the knowledge that I have gained during studies, what I can practice more often is the experience and confidence that I have gained from living independently, meeting new people, and experiencing different cultures, ideologies, behaviors, traditions, and choices. This has helped me develop a new way of thinking about solving problems that have affected my daily decision-making, which is slowly having an impact on my community”

She told me that the state should work on providing career opportunities, better income, support for highly educated individuals, creation of specialized services to search for talented, new path for job-creating entrepreneurs, creating innovative and creative spaces and return policies for highly skilled etc.

E. R from **Kosovo**, after completing the master program decided to stay abroad because she liked the idea of being challenged.

“Staying abroad is always related with having to live far from your family, living in a place where you don't speak the local language very well and the labour market is not very friendly at first. The advantages are that you make a lot of connections through your friends, meet new people, more possibilities to travel”

She told me that studying abroad is a turning point for staying abroad.

“There are much more opportunities here that sound more interesting to us. After getting used abroad, we always look for more exciting things and going back home is usually not that exciting anymore, except for visiting your family.”

When asked if it is easier for highly educated people to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad, she answered that it is much easier.

“Having the abroad experience makes your CV look better. Also, being more experienced with living and studying abroad makes a person more skillful in finding the right job”.

She told me that educated people from abroad work in very good positions in Kosovo. However, they are not compensated well financially in comparison to their experience.

According to her, the state should introduce policies to support the youth in their first years of working in the home country.

“Maybe cutting taxes, or reducing them, higher wages for the people with more academic background, especially the ones who studied abroad. A guaranteed paid internship or job for the first year after coming back from studies.”

Regarding the contribution from diaspora, she told me that a lot can be done by cooperating in the Higher Education level.

“Connections, programs can be created between universities in Kosovo and European ones through students and academics. Individuals who work in international companies abroad can be a good link to promote Kosovo and its potential for investments. But the link of cooperation between these actors is weak, therefore there should be initiatives to strengthen these connections”

A.T from **Kosovo**, after finishing studies decided to stay abroad, because he wanted to take advantage as much as possible of the educational opportunities in Austria, which exceed those in home country.

He told me that prominent education, social and economic welfare, meritocracy, cultural exchange, and networking are some of the advantages of living abroad whereas distance to family, language barriers, inability to create networks in your home country are some of the disadvantages.

He argue the studying abroad in most of the cases resulted in staying abroad, rather than returning.

“Many students that start studying abroad either prolong their studies further or decide to permanently reside abroad”.

He told me that he is trying to contribute to the country of origin from diaspora.

“Sooner or later, I aspire to return to my home country and provide my modest acquired knowledge and skills to my home country that would hopefully lead to the inflow of money. Even now, I spend a certain amount of money when I am in vacations in Kosovo”.

When asked, if it is easier for highly educated people to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad, he answered that it should be easier.

“However, after spending several years abroad, they lose contact with the labor market and their network starts to diminish. Also, not always they have a successful spell abroad as to find employment in their home country; for example, they don’t finish their studies or don’t take advantage of the opportunities offered abroad to gain new skills”

According to him, the state in order to encourage highly educated people to return need to provide greater opportunities to accommodate them into the labor market by creating mechanisms where they would surely know that they won’t be left out after taking the risk of returning to the home country.

“The state should record through embassies and other state entities how many Kosovar students study abroad and in what fields, and to create spaces in the labor market according to it. They can encourage public-private partnerships to help private companies recruit highly educated people into their departments where they lack human resources. The state can also help them financially through scholarships and grants for a transitional period after they return to their home countries to make them feel secure about their decision”.

6.6 NORTH MACEDONIA

J.T from **North Macedonia**, returned to home country after finishing master program, because of not having the opportunities to further advance herself academically or professionally abroad, while at home she had the perception that she could put knowledge into good use and easily enter the job market.

She told me that master’s degree obtained abroad opened her more opportunities for employment upon return.

“However, I do not think that the size of the salary is largely affected by the fact that I have an M.A degree. Due to the lack of experience in project management, and overall lack of being part of the job market, I was initially not offered a salary higher than colleagues who are less educated”.

When asked about obstacles she faced upon return, she answered me that she had to apply to multiple open calls for research and internships and after a few months she was able to be seriously considered for vacancies in organizations.

She told me that she have noticed that the most people who studied abroad and returned, are undertaking good job positions, but mostly in the NGO/IGO sector or the private market, not in the public sector.

“Their value is not immediately recognized, the students which have returned have to make themselves familiar to the job sector that they are interested in, and start with low-paying jobs just like the rest of the people which are entering the job market. I think that the main difference between people which have studied abroad and the ones which haven't is the speed of exceling in one's career. While both groups start out more or less with the same conditions, the ones which have studies abroad get more opportunities and more frequent pay raise, in a shorter amount of time”

She told me that even though her field of study does not have much practical value, she can apply knowledge in home country by working as a researcher in the Youth Educational Forum (youth NGO), with a focus on research and development of youth and educational policies.

She stated that the state should implement programs which will stimulate the return of highly educated people.

“Those programs should revolve exclusively around high-paying job opportunities within the civil, private and public sector. The biggest and maybe only incentive to return is proper employment opportunities. When it comes to the contribution that can come from diaspora, if there are successful business owners, academics and activists, they should direct their focus on capacity-building projects of their home country, and transfer their knowledge, such as opening a branch there, being a visiting professor in the public university”.

Based on the interviewees' responses, we can see that individuals from Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, who decided to stay abroad after completing studies, made such decision because of better quality of life and expanded opportunities abroad. The individuals from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia who returned home after studies made such decision because they received job offer and because of desire to be closer to family and friends.

Taking into consideration experiences of PoSIG students, the structural approach has the best explanatory value in understanding return migration of highly skilled young people in the Western Balkans, since the advocates of structural approach highlights that the returnees' success or failure is connected to the institutional context in the country. The experiences of the individuals showed how institutional context in the home country have a huge impact to what extent the returnees will contribute the country of origin. What is similar for all Western Balkan countries is a negative trend that people usually get the job through connections or through party affiliation. Good connection and knowing the "right" people are the ways how people are getting job .This trend have a negative impact in attracting the highly educated people to return to home countries and to be generators of change. Something what is characteristically for all countries in the region is low job opportunities for highly educated individuals who decided to return. Besides low job opportunities, the main obstacles that are similar for all countries in the region are bad political situation, less income and corruption, as noted by multiple interviews. When it comes to the implementation of knowledge acquired abroad, most of the individuals from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and NorthMacedonia had opportunity to transfer the knowledge, while individuals from Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo did not have that opportunity.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The previous sections have provided relevant information based on interview data from highly educated individuals from across the Western Balkans, all graduates of a political science MA program, who have decided to either return to the region or to stay abroad, for a multitude of reasons. As noted, many of them noted that the reason for return is related to job offer they received back home. Others cite personal decision the main reason for return, such as being closer to family and desire to implement acquired knowledge in the country of origin.

This master's thesis contributes to the understanding of the needs of returnees, their readjustment problems, obstacles they face, motivations and incentives. Most of the literature discusses that return migration is the product of failed migration when migrants did not achieve the desired goal, or that return migration occurs after successful experience abroad and reached goals. This thesis provides a unique perspective to return migration. Namely, the highly educated individuals from Western Balkans, who are interviewed, are at the beginning of their careers so their perspective about return are very different than above mentioned approaches discusses. They do not have as much as financial and social capital upon return. In creating sustainable return policies of the huge importance is to have variety of perspectives from different types of returnees.

Considering the lack of sustainable policy responses to return migration of highly skilled individuals who leave the countries of the WB for graduate programs, whether in terms of youth policy or beyond, the following **regional** policy recommendations based on the interview data and research conducted for this thesis may provide a starting point for governments in the WB to begin implementing.

- **Committing to the problem of brain drain on a political and institutional level:** Establishing an institution or office that will have a mandate to address the emigration of highly educated people, as well as establishing the institution to address the obstacles of returnees face upon return (Mićanović et al., 2022).

- **Creation of centralized database of highly educated emigrants and those at risk of emigration** - a lot of highly educated people are abroad, and the Western Balkan countries are not aware of their existence. So, there is a need for long term and systematic mapping of highly educated people abroad in order to work on mobilizing their potential. Specific attention should be given to the people who are studying abroad, because most of them will return to the country of origin with knowledge and experience. It is essential to provide the welcoming environment for them and to work on digitalizing services and to reduce the administrative barriers such as time-consuming diploma recognition. There is a need for the development of the professions that go along with global trends (Mićanović et al., 2022).
- **Providing proper employment opportunities and better income** - as empirical findings showed this is maybe the biggest and the only incentive to return.
- **Creating a return campaign.** The Western Balkan countries should conduct a campaign with the goal of highlighting the successful stories of individuals who return to the country of origin to work on the development of home country. The stories of successful returnees may serve as an inspiration for other highly educated people to come back (Mićanović et al., 2022).
- **Returnee support service** - A good example of support service exists in Serbia. The “Point of Return” organization in Serbia is providing help to Serbian migrants who have intention to return in Serbia and assist scientific and academic exchange and projects while encouraging the network between Serbia and diaspora.
- **Establishing the infrastructure and conditions for remote work** – Western Balkan countries should on attracting the highly educated individuals by offering them the possibility to work for foreign companies while at the same time being the residents of their home countries. There is a need for the development of the professions that go along with global trends (Mićanović et al., 2022).
- **Investments and exchange of practices in digitalization and education** – investment in the higher education can foster the positive returns and enable the transfer of the knowledge.

One of the limitations of the study is the fact that I cannot guarantee honesty of participants. Furthermore, flexibility of interview may reduce the reliability. It would be very significant for the future to have research that will cover more interviews with highly educated individuals from different professions and with more professional experience.

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Interview guide:

Questions for people who return:

1. Why did you decide to return to your home country after completing your studies abroad?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of returning?
3. Do you think that highly educated young people find it easier to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad?
4. What obstacles do you face when returning to your home country?
5. Do you think that the countries in the Western Balkans recognize the importance and use the potential of highly educated people who have returned from abroad?
6. Can you apply the knowledge acquired abroad in your home country?
7. What kind of policies should the state adopt in order to attract highly educated people from abroad to return to their home state?
8. What kind of policies should the state adopt so that highly educated people from the diaspora can contribute to the development and progress of the home state from abroad?

Questions for people who stayed abroad:

1. Why did you decide to stay abroad?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living abroad?
3. Do you think that going to study abroad is a turning point for staying abroad?
4. Do you contribute in some way from the diaspora to your home country, through the transfer of knowledge, money, skills?
5. Do you have any difficulties when engaging in labor market abroad?
6. Do highly educated people from the Western Balkans work abroad in their profession or not?

7. Do you think that it is easier for highly educated people to find employment in their home country after returning from abroad?
8. Do you have a desire to return to your home country and thus contribute to the development of your home country through the transfer of knowledge and skills?
9. Do you think that your country of origin recognizes the importance and uses the potential of highly educated people, who decided to return after studying and gained experience?
10. What kind of policies should the state adopt in order to encourage highly educated people to return to their home country?
11. What kind of policies should the state adopt so that highly educated people from the diaspora can contribute to the development and progress of your country of origin?