

THE INFLUENCE OF LONG-TERM EMIGRATION ON THE HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the impact of long-term emigration on the development of human capital.

Design/methodology/approach: The study used a quantitative approach, where the method for obtaining data was a survey. A quantitative study conducted on a sample of 160 Polish men and women.

Findings: A study showed a significant impact of emigration on the enrichment of the emigrants' human capital, which is expressed by an increase in the level of hard and soft competences, as well as an increase in the level of formal education. Almost all the respondents showed an increase in the level of competences (by 20% on average), with the greatest improvement in knowledge and skills in the area of foreign language skills (increase by 38%), knowledge of specialised computer programmes (increase by 36%) and increase in competences related to effective communication (increase by 22%). Furthermore, 41% of the respondents upgraded their education during their long-term stay abroad through formal education.

Research limitations/implications: The main research limitation relates to the size of the obtained sample and the fact that the sample is not representative, therefore the conclusions cannot be generalised to the entire population of Polish emigrants.

Practical implications: Working abroad in an international environment significantly contributes to the rapid and substantial development of both specialized and social competencies. This underscores the validity of not only hiring expatriates but also investing in development programs associated with temporary stays abroad.

Social implications: Emigration contributes to the development of social competences related to, among others: effective communication and building relationships, which is beneficial from the perspective of interpersonal relationships, not only professional ones.

Originality/value: The paper presents the increase in competences that occurred due long-term emigration and the groups of competences that improve to the greatest and least extent.

Keywords: migration, international migration, emigration, long-term migration, human capital development.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The international migration has specific effects, both positive and negative, which are most often analysed in the literature from the perspective of the inflow and outflow of population. The main effects of migration at the macroeconomic level include those related to changes in the demographic structure, the abundance and potential of the labour market, as well as those in terms of socio-cultural changes (Organiściak-Krzykowska, 2023). The positive effects of migration in the individual dimension include higher living standards, acquisition of new professional and language skills, life stabilisation and better prospects for professional development. On the other hand, in the socio-economic dimension, these benefits include the acquisition of new competences and life experiences or a reduction in the level of unemployment (Sakson, 2023). Thus, international migration contributes to the development of human capital both from an individual perspective and from the perspective of the economy as a whole. Thus, the aim of this article is to assess the impact of long-term emigration on human capital development, thus demonstrating the positive relationship between long-term international migration and human capital enrichment. This issue is relevant both in the microeconomic dimension, i.e. from the individual point of view of individuals - migrants who increase their knowledge and skills capital, as well as their current and future employers who benefit and will benefit from the competences developed by migrants through their employment, but also in the macroeconomic dimension, i.e. whole economies in terms of the human potential available to nations.

2. Emigration as a type of investment in human capital

Investment in human capital is understood as the set of activities which, by allocating resources in people, affect future monetary and physical income (Becker, 1975). In other words, investment results in the accumulation of human capital, increasing the pool of knowledge and skills embodied in people, which occurs as a result of specific activities. The most important forms of investment in human capital include (Łukasiewicz, 2009):

- investment in health care, which influences people's vitality as well as life expectancy,
- formal education at all levels of compulsory education,
- higher education for adults,
- on-the-job training,
- population migration,
- research.

One form of investment in human capital is migration, understood as a temporary or permanent change of residence of individuals or entire population groups (Fehler, Cebul, Podgórzńska, 2017). Treating the migration as a form of investment stems from the fact that migrants are influenced by the numerous attracting factors that immigrant countries are characterised by. These are related to opportunities to get to know a new culture, learn a foreign language or acquire knowledge and skills in a foreign market (Wickramasinghe, Wimalaratana, 2016). These motives coincide with neoclassical microeconomics, which emphasizes the role of individual actors in the market game who strive to make rational decisions that maximize their profits and minimize their costs, which in the context of migration means treating them as individual investments in possessed human capital resources. From this perspective, migration is an opportunity to acquire new skills, in spite of being economically unprofitable, nevertheless being an important element of personal development (Isański, 2015).

Emigration, as a rule, involves gaining professional experience in the economies of developed countries, enabling migrants to benefit from skills they would not acquire in their home market (Stark, Fan, 2007). But the positive impact of migration related to skills development will only occur for the sending country if the majority of migrants return to their country of origin after some time with valuable experience (Sakson, 2023). On the other hand, third countries, to which the migrant will move at a later stage, after only a few years abroad, can also benefit. This issue fits into the concept of "brain circulation", i.e. a situation in which a migrant treats going abroad as an opportunity to gain experience that he or she can then use with other employers in the next country of destination. Currently, this type of migration is gaining importance among the educated population of the global North, where a migrant, usually from a developing country, richer in knowledge and skills acquired in a highly developed country, returns to the country of origin or emigrates to the next country (Chen et al., 2022). It is estimated that return migrants may account for about 25% of international migration flows globally (Azose, Raftery, 2019). Research on a sample of Polish men and women shows that 21% of them plan to return from long-term emigration to their home country and 12% of them intend to move to a third country (Wesołowska, 2019), indicating an intensification of population flows between countries and thus a larger pool of beneficiaries of human capital investment in the form of migration. Moreover, support for employee movement between countries is one of the measures promoted by the European Union as part of its educational policy, which aims to realise the concept of lifelong learning on the one hand and to stimulate EU economic growth on the other (Drobny, 2017).

3. Methodology of own research

The study used a quantitative approach, where the method for obtaining data was a survey. A survey questionnaire, which was distributed electronically, was used to obtain data related to the broad impact of emigration on human capital enrichment and development. Among the questions included in the survey were those concerning the level of competences before and as a result of a long-term stay abroad (5-point Likert scale), the level of formal education before emigration and the current one after at least one year abroad, the work experience and qualifications acquired, as well as the development methods used by the emigrants abroad. This is complemented by statistical data characterising the respondents, such as age, gender, country of destination or number of years spent abroad. The data was acquired before the coronavirus pandemic, so the conclusions relate to economic conditions not limited by pandemic restrictions. The on-line survey questionnaire was made available to groups of Poles abroad, mainly in the European Union, but also outside the EU, including the United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland and the United States. As a result, it was possible to obtain 160 responses from respondents meeting the criteria related to the type of stay abroad, the characteristics of which can be found in Table 1.

Table 1.

Characteristics of respondents (N = 160)

Criterion	Characteristics	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
Sex			
	Woman	126	79% ¹
	Men	31	21%
Age			
	18–25 years old	9	6%
	26–30 years old	49	31%
	31–35 years old	41	26%
	36–40 years old	23	14%
	> 40 years old	38	24%

¹ The reasons for the higher proportion of women among the surveyed persons are primarily to be found in the slightly higher share of women in long-term emigration than men (CSO, 2013, 2023a), which, according to data from the 2021 National Census, amounted to 51.6% of women compared to 48.4% of men (CSO, 2023b); a doubled frequency of women going abroad for education there - according to 2011 National Census data, this was 86.4 thousand of women compared to 38.6 thousand of men (CSO, 2013); and a doubled percentage of migrant women with tertiary education - according to 2021 National Census data, this was 209.9 thousand of women compared to 107.4 thousand of men (CSO, 2023b), which is related to the theme of human capital development research; the occurrence of the phenomenon of feminisation of migration, i.e. the increasing participation of women in international migration processes, but also a change in the nature of the mobility undertaken by them, which is now increasingly associated with women's active participation in the labour market and their autonomous entry into employment, and less driven by family matters (Castles, Miller, 2011; Pawlus, 2017; Schmoll, Beauchemin, 2017; Bartnik, 2019); women's greater willingness to participate in surveys (Moore, Tarnai, 2002; Smith, 2008).

Cont. table 1.

Number of years abroad			
	1–3 years old	40	25%
	3–5 years old	29	18%
	> 5 years old	91	57%

Source: own elaboration.

Based on an analysis of the available literature on the subject, the following research hypothesis was formulated: "Long-term emigration contributes significantly to the development of migrants' human capital". In order to verify the research hypothesis, the following research questions were posed:

1. What level of hard and soft competences did the emigrants have before their long-term stay abroad?
2. What level of hard and soft competences did the emigrants possess in connection with their long-term stay abroad?
3. Which competences have been developed the most by the emigrants?
4. Which competences have been developed the least by the emigrants?
5. How did the emigrants improve their formal competences while abroad?
6. What percentage of emigrants upgraded their formal education as a result of their long-term stay abroad?
7. What kind of formal certification of their competences, other than education-related, do the emigrants have?

On the one hand, the research questions indicate the areas of human capital development, i.e. the increase in competences and formal education, and on the other hand they operationalise the hypothesis and allow for its testing.

The main research limitation relates to the size of the obtained sample, which, in view of the scale of the phenomenon of emigration of Polish women and men, could have been larger, as well as the characteristics of the examined population, in which women predominate, which makes inference on the entire population not justified. The sample is not representative, therefore the conclusions cannot be generalised to the entire population of Polish emigrants, and the conclusions refer only to the examined sample. Another important limitation of the study is the specificity of the data obtained regarding the assessment of the level of competences among migrants before their emigration and after their long-term stay, which is subjective data.

4. Long-term emigration and human capital development - research results

The research carried out indicates an increase in the average level of all the competences studied, i.e. specialist knowledge connected with the profession or profession, foreign language skills, general computer literacy (Office package, e-mail, Internet), knowledge of specialist

computer programmes (e.g. accounting, graphics, logistics, business), competence connected with effective communication (interpersonal communication, persuasion, providing feedback), competence in interpersonal relations (conflict resolution, building long-term relationships), competences related to cooperation with people (coordinating tasks, motivating others), competences related to decision-making and action planning (analytical thinking, working under pressure, setting priorities) and competences related to efficiency and resourcefulness (goal orientation, overcoming difficulties, self-development orientation). The largest increase was observed in relation to knowledge of a foreign language (38%), knowledge of specialised computer programmes (36%) and competences associated with effective communication (22%). On the other hand, competences connected with efficiency and resourcefulness (10%), general computer skills (11%) and competences connected with interpersonal relations (12%) showed the smallest increase. Furthermore, the average level of all competences of emigrants before leaving the country was 3.42, and as a result of long-term emigration it rose to 4.05, i.e. by 20%. In addition, the analysis of the individual data shows that 94% of the surveyed emigrants developed their competences in at least two areas.

Table 2.

Average level of competence before and as a result of long-term emigration

	Average level of competence before going abroad	Average level of competence as a result of emigration	Nominal difference	Percentage difference
Specialised knowledge relating to the profession learned or performed	3,35	3,89	0,54	16%
Knowledge of a foreign language	3,13	4,3	1,18	38%
General computer skills	3,91	4,33	0,42	11%
Knowledge of specific computer programs	2,29	3,11	0,82	36%
Competence related to effective communication skills	3,33	4,05	0,73	22%
Competence related to interpersonal relations	3,67	4,12	0,45	12%
Competence related to cooperation with people	3,63	4,17	0,54	15%
Competence related to decision-making and action planning	3,66	4,25	0,59	16%

Source: own elaboration.

Another studied area concerning the development of human capital among emigrants was the methods of improving their competences, which included both formal education at secondary and higher education level, but also participation in other forms of education, which ended with obtaining a confirmation (certificate or attestation) of their competences.

In relation to the first option, out of the total surveyed population 41% of respondents (66 persons) upgraded their formal education by obtaining a higher education degree or by completing a second bachelor's degree during their stay abroad. Upgrading their formal education, e.g. from vocational to secondary level, from secondary to higher education level,

from higher education of the first degree to higher education of the second degree, as well as from higher education of the second degree to higher education of the third degree (doctorate), was indicated by 41% of the respondents in the study group (27 people). On the other hand, 59% of the respondents (39 persons) who upgraded their education did so by completing their studies abroad at the level they had before the decision to emigrate, e.g. having a master's degree, they completed another course of study abroad at an identical level to the one they had before, but in a different professional area. Detailed characteristics of this population can be found in Table 3.

Table 3.

Type of formal education as a result of long-term emigration abroad

Formal education level	Number of people	Percentage of respondents
no increase in formal education	94	59%
increase in formal education	66	41%
including:		
a second course of study at the same level	39	59%
increase in educational level	27	41%
including:		
up to secondary education level	6	22%
up to higher education of the first degree	8	30%
up to higher education of the second degree	10	37%
up to higher education of the third degree	3	11%

Source: own elaboration.

As regards the second possibility, i.e. using other methods of improving formal competences than completing education or university studies at a given level, 65% of respondents (103 persons) indicated taking courses or training courses ending with formal confirmation of their competences, such as knowledge of foreign languages (59%), specialisation in a given professional area (41%), having licences to perform a given profession (26%) or having computer skills (15%). What is more, 54% of the respondents had other types of confirmation of their competences not falling within the scope listed above. The detailed characteristics of this population can be found in cont. Table 4.

Table 4.

Type of formal attestation of competence other than a secondary or higher education diploma

Type of formal attestation	Number of people	Percentage of respondents
certificate confirming knowledge of foreign languages	61	59%
certificate/attestation confirming specialisation in a given field	42	41%
professional entitlement	27	26%
certificate confirming computer skills	15	15%
other certificates or attestations	56	54%

Source: own elaboration.

The above results indicate, on the one hand, an increase in the level of hard and soft competences among migrants and, on the other hand, their efforts in the area of formal education in the form of secondary and higher education, as well as taking additional courses and trainings to broaden their knowledge and skills.

5. Discussion

Research confirms that long-term migration contributes to the increase of migrants' human capital, and also provides an opportunity for formal educational upgrading. Such conclusions are indicated by R. Palalić et al. (2021) based on an analysis of the effects of student emigration from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as U. Pauli and R. Osowska (2018), where more than 82% of the Polish migrants they studied developed their knowledge and skills as a result of their stay abroad. As K. Andrejuk (2024) points out, the upgrading of formal education by migrants during their stay abroad and obtaining a diploma from a foreign school/university affects their situation in the labour market, so that they acquire more attractive positions, which puts them in a better position than strictly labour migrants, and also increases their chances of running their own business successfully. Moreover, the very fact of studying outside the country of origin gives the advantage of higher adaptation skills to a culturally diversified environment.

Also A. Jastrzębska (2015) indicates the benefits related to the development of competences among re-emigrants with the differentiating factor of this collective being the period of stay abroad. Those with longer periods of emigration showed higher levels of acquired cultural² and social³ capital. Furthermore, in the context of the sending country, the gaining of new experience in foreign markets by long-term emigrants, the development of language competences or the acquisition of contacts is sometimes referred to as the "return of innovation". It results both in them developing their private knowledge and skills capital, but also in them becoming attractive candidates in the home labour market (Sakson, 2023). An example of this use of developed competences is provided by migrants who set up their own business after returning to their home country. Almost 52% of the entrepreneurs who returned from emigration indicate that the knowledge they gained abroad was crucial or very important in setting up and running their own business (Pauli, Osowska, 2018). This confirms the positive impact of emigration on the growth of knowledge among expatriates and its subsequent use when taking the invention of running their own business.

² Cultural capital is associated with professional and personal development.

³ Social capital refers to social competencies such as building new networks of connections and contacts acquired by going beyond one's existing environment.

Research and the model proposed by S. Contreras (2013) show that migration induces investment in human capital development in the broadest sense. However, this takes place in a different way than simply through competence gains in the migrants themselves. This observation is particularly true in poorer countries, where the monetary transfers transferred from migrants to their households are partly channelled into the education of the household members, so that they and the sending country also benefit from emigration. This relationship, on the other hand, does not exist for rich countries. The impact of emigration is also observed in the area of improved health among migrants and their families due to greater awareness and the ability to transfer additional income not only to current consumption, but also to investments in nutrition, health and self-development (Yang, 2009). These examples refer to the macroeconomic dimension of the positive impact of emigration on the potential of the nation in the sending country, where, thanks to the income received, living conditions, health and education levels in the sending country improve.

6. Summary

Despite the presence of disagreements and discussions in the literature regarding the value of emigrants' professional experience for their home country upon their return, it is important to note that competence development occurred in connection with emigration, as it was the main decision triggering subsequent employment and education behaviour. The study confirmed statements in the literature on the positive impact of long-term emigration on the development of human capital, which manifests itself in both the individual and socio-economic dimensions. Almost all of the migrants surveyed (94%) are characterised by an increase in various types of competence, professional and social competence, where the average level of competence increase is 20%. On the other hand, 41% of those surveyed have also increased their formal education by completing the level of education they had before going abroad or higher. Furthermore, 65% of the people surveyed also received another form of education, most often in the form of training and courses, which also ended with the acquisition of formal certification of the competences acquired. Furthermore, 65% of those surveyed received another form of education, most often in the form of training and courses, which also resulted in formal certification of the acquired competences. The research results presented in this article indicate the important role that long-term emigration plays in the development of human capital.

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