

Corruption Influences Migration of Skilled Workers



Countries that have higher levels of corruption struggle to attract and retain skilled workers report the authors of a new study published in EMBO reports.

Qualified workers are in demand in many countries around the world. They are internationally mobile and have the flexibility to take on new challenges. However, if the exodus of skilled workers exceeds the immigration rate of highly qualified individuals it may have a negative impact on the economic performance of a country.

The authors studied the migration of highly skilled workers across 123 countries from 1990 to 2000. Corruption in different countries was scored on a scale of zero to six using the corruption index from the International Country Risk Guide and compared with the migration patterns of workers aged over 25 years who had at least completed secondary education.

"A positive 'balance of brains' is a crucial factor for the success of any country," Mara Pasquamaria Squicciarini from the LICOS Centre for Institutions and Economic Performance at the University of Leuven remarked. "Our study confirms that the level of corruption in different countries directly impacts the availability of skilled workers and is an important decision factor for emigration and immigration by highly skilled professionals."

The economic status of each country was taken into consideration in the analysis. Under conditions where the gross domestic products per capita were the same, corrupt countries were still more likely to experience a loss of highly skilled workers. The results are therefore not solely attributable to the financial or other incentives that each country is able to provide to attract qualified individuals.

The authors also point out that investments in education in corrupt countries are futile if the impact of corruption on migration patterns cannot be tackled directly. "Investment in education in corrupt countries benefits other countries if people emigrate to more attractive employment markets," Andrea Ariu from the Catholic University of Louvain la Neuve commented. "Government policy must focus not only on building an educated workforce but also on fighting corruption to create a fair labour market for all concerned."

"The balance of brains: Corruption and migration", Andrea Ariu, Mara Pasquamaria Squicciarini
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