Re-Turn

Regions benefitting from returning migrants

Business Survey Report:

The Companies' View on Return Migrants and Foreign Work Experience

Thilo Lang (IfL)

Robert Nadler (IfL)

Stefan Haunstein (IfL)

Stefanie Smoliner (ZSI)

This project is implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme co-financed by the ERDF.

CENTRAL EUROPE COOPERATING FOR SUCCESS.

EUROPEAN UNION EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

Re-Turn

Re-Turn is an acronym of the European project 'Regions benefitting from returning migrants'.

This document was prepared by the consortium of the Re-Turn project. For more information, please visit www.re-migrants.eu.

The project is funded by the ERDF in the frame of the CENTRAL EUROPE programme (contract no 1568CC19BC5FA1D9720AB3BD3220ACA9).

Series editor and project coordination:
Dr. Thilo Lang
Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography
Schongauerstraße 9
04328 Leipzig
T_Lang@ifl-leipzig.de
Tel.: +49 341 600 55-159

Copyright © Re-Turn Consortium, represented by Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography (IfL), 2012.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced in any form, by print or photo print, microfilm or any other means, without written permission from the publisher.

Content

0. Executive Summary 5
1. Introduction 8
2. Literature review and hypotheses 10
3. Methodology 15
3.1. Sampling, case study regions and interview situation 16
3.2. Profile of businesses interviewed 20
4. Global analysis 25
4.1. Companies' view on challenges and opportunities of the companies and the region today and in future 25
4.1.1 Regional challenges as seen by the businesses 26
4.1.2 Regional opportunities as seen by the businesses 28
4.2. Strategies to secure the availability of highly-qualified personnel 29
4.2.1. Formal strategies in the region 29
4.2.2. Strategies of the companies in the region 31
4.3. Experiences with staff returning from abroad 36
4.3.1. Experience with remigrants as labour force 36
4.3.2. Commonalities and differences: Reasons to employ return migrants ... 37
4.3.3. Companies' support for remigrants 39
4.3.4. Difficulties of returning migrants from the perspective of the companies 40
4.4. Attitudes towards staff with foreign work experiences 41
4.4.1. General attitudes towards staff with foreign work experience 41
4.4.2. Judgement of the return process 44
4.5. Currently applied recruitment strategies 44
5. Case study regions 47
5.1. Usti Region (CZ) 47
5.2. Görlitz Region (DE) 47
5.3. Harz Region (DE) 48
5.4. Mid-Pannon Region (HU) 49

5.5. Piedmont Region (IT) 49
5.6. Lodz Region (PL) 50
5.7. Swietokrzyskie Region (PL) 51
5.8. Podravska Region (SI) 51
6. Conclusions 54
6.1. Remigrants as labour potential: Reflecting the hypotheses 54
6.2. Outlook: Consequences for the design of return initiatives 56
7. Literature 59
Annex 1: Questionnaire guideline Multipliers 61
Annex 2: Questionnaire guideline Businesses 64

0. Executive Summary

About 2.2 Mio Eastern Europeans have left their home countries since the EU accession in 2004. These migrants mainly moved to Western Europe's more prosperous regions. Given this massive emigration, politicians, business associations, entrepreneurs and scientists stated that these Eastern European regions suffer from 'brain-drain' (the loss of young and skilled workers) and the home regions of the emigrants have to cope with labour shortages. Yet, this problem does not only affect Eastern European regions, also Germany has been characterized by emigration from post-socialist Eastern Germany to Western Germany. Additionally, even countries that have not gone through post-socialist transition such as Italy suffer from regional imbalances in terms of demographic development and labour supply. Italy's northern mountain regions at the border to Switzerland also suffer brain-drain to the high-wage Swiss labour market in particular. On the other hand, there is also reason for hope as return migration becomes more and more visible. Studies found that up to 50% of emigrants leave their host country again within 5 years upon arrival. In Poland 75% of immigrants in 2009 were Polish citizens returning to their home country. This number was smaller yet substantial in other countries.

In this context the report aims at highlighting the perspectives of the regional employers in the home countries on topics such as brain drain, labour shortages and human resource (HR) strategies. We have conducted interviews with 109 managers, business owners, representatives of business associations, HR managers in the following 8 case study regions: Usti (CZ); Görlitz (DE); Harz (DE); Mid-Pannon (HU); Piedmont (IT); Lodz (PL); Swietokrzyskie (PL); Podravska (SI). These regions share the fact that they were subject to massive emigration and that their labour markets show structural problems (below average wage levels; long-term and sectoral unemployment combined with labour shortages). In particular, we were interested in the employers' experience with and attitudes towards return migrants as a potential labour force in these regions. The interviewees were selected according to economic sector and company size, and we looked for heterogeneity in these criteria.

From a literature review on return migration we found that there are four basic hypotheses. First, return migrants are suspected to assist regional development and to be particularly valuable for businesses back home as they bring in new knowledge, skills and contacts from abroad. This human capital hypothesis mentions that businesses in the home regions can become more innovative and international if they achieve an appropriate exploitation of such important knowledge. Then, there are hypotheses that compare return migrants to other national and international immigrants. They are based on the assumption that businesses hire new staff from outside of their region, if such emigration regions suffer brain drain and labour shortages. So, a second hypothesis argues that return migrants are more probable to migrate to their home region on a permanent base, as they have an emotional and social attachment to it. Home sickness, mentality,

family and friends all become drivers for a return. The consequence for businesses would be to prefer return migrants to other immigrants as long-term investments in human capital development are less risky. Return migrants are simply less likely to leave again. A third hypothesis says that return migrants are also more willing than other immigrants to accept wage decreases upon return. While other migrants often expect companies to pay bonuses for going to structurally disadvantaged regions return migrants are more willing to trade off career and income disadvantages against social and socio-psychological advantages. A fourth hypothesis refers to the issue of integration. It is said that return migrants have less problems to accommodate in their home regions than other immigrants. This assumption is explained with the cultural proximity and biographic history of return migrants.

The interviews in our case study regions showed that the first hypothesis is shared partly by our interview partners. Generally, they evaluate return migrants' knowledge and skills as helpful for their own businesses. Yet, they limit the assumption by pointing to the importance of what 'type' of foreign work experience these remigrants actually had. If it was in professional fields that do not equal the educational profile of the migrant, or which are not relevant for the company back home, then return migration does not bring any additional value. Only non-specific knowledge and skills (language proficiency, development of personality and character, intercultural skills) can generally support this hypothesis.

Furthermore our interview partners did not completely support the second hypothesis. Some companies acknowledge the binding impact of family and friends on remigrants, but an opposite fraction of the interview partners stress that they would imagine the situation the opposite way. To the latter, return migrants are a very risky group in terms of human capital investment as they suspect return migrants to leave quickly again, if they have experienced far better labour market conditions elsewhere. These latter companies are also more cautious in hiring returnees.

Third, the suggestion that return migrants can trade off labour market disadvantages (lower income; worse working conditions) against social advantages is not shared by the interviewed employers. The experience of the employers is that return migrants are 'spoilt' for their home regional labour markets as they expect too high wages and income premia for their migration. Yet, regional companies in our case study regions cannot afford, or are not willing to pay such wage increases.

Fourth, from the interviews we could not clearly derive an answer about the 'easy integration' hypothesis. This is related to the general finding that across all case study regions the interviewed employers and business representatives have very poor own experience with return migrants. Thus, also the statements that are related to the other hypotheses are more or less interviewees' knowledge based on hearsay in regional business networks. The interviewees mirrored that return

migration is not an issue for their human resource strategies. This includes the poor knowledge about return initiatives in their region.

Generally, we also found that the companies have different degree of formalization when it comes to human resource strategies. Human resource management is more formalized and professional, if companies are large, operate in international markets, and demand specialists and high-skilled workers. On the contrary, small and micro-sized companies, focussed on regional markets and more manual and low-skilled labour rather rely on informal networks and word-of-mouth information. In our interviews we spoke mainly to the latter group of businesses, so we only could evidence a low formalization of human resource management.

Additionally, we observed that these companies actually do not intend to internationalize and they mainly focus on national or only on regional markets. As a consequence they do not evaluate foreign work experience and social ties to foreign markets as relevant.

Then, we also found differences between regions. Usti Region and Piedmont Region have large difficulties with the border situation to, respectively, Germany and Switzerland. Lodz Region, Swietokrzyskie Region and Mid-Pannon Region have problems with the strength of wage level differences to main destination regions abroad. In Harz Region and Görlitz Region, the demographic change is already so advanced – rapidly ageing workforce, decrease in labour supply through school graduates - that these regions must focus on external attraction.

These findings will be used to guide the future development of the Re-Turn project. Generally, we concluded that it is important to use the project for awareness raising in the field of return migration. Even though analysts agree that in the future, labour shortages might increase in these case study regions, companies do not yet efficiently secure their future labour supply. And they do not pay attention to the potential of return migrants. Yet, they might profit from the Re-Turn project's pilot activities. Further conclusions will also guide the future work. First, it will be necessary to respect the diversity of companies' labour demand. Not all companies and not all sectors will equally be affected by labour shortages. So, the project should be selective and focus on problematic sectors and groups of companies. Second, the selected sectors or businesses must actively be approached for participation in the project. Obviously, they know very little about return migration, and a good way for learning would be active participation. Third, this active participation will in the best way happen during the pilot activies' implementation, so that companies can influence pilots according to their needs and are able to develop an interest for sustainable maintenance after the Re-Turn project ends. Finally, regional difference must be respected. The complex of labour market problems is specific in each region, and Re-Turn's Regional Task Forces along with regional employers should adjust their pilots to their needs.

1. Introduction

Since the EU accession in 2004, many A8 countries (CZ, PL, SK, SI, HU, EST, LIT, LAT) have witnessed large-scale emigration of young and skilled people. In particular, more remote and rural regions have suffered from this brain drain, whereas large urban agglomerations – in particular capital regions such as Prague, Bratislava and Budapest – could attract internal migration. Between 2003 and 2007, it is estimated that about 2.2 Mio Eastern Europeans moved to Western European countries in order to find a better life and better paid work. Also other regions within Central Europe are witnessing strong emigration. Since the German reunification in 1989/90, Eastern Germany for example faced a loss of more than 2 Mio. people. Eastern Germans moved mainly to Western Germany but also to Switzerland, Austria and other countries. Furthermore, mountainous regions in Northern Italy struggle with negative migration balances and cross-border circulation to Switzerland.

This large-scale emigration resulted in a lack of skilled labour in the sending regions. Given that mainly the old people remain, these regions are affected by population ageing, and also the average age of the regional labour force is growing. Businesses located in these regions are struggling to replace colleagues that retire with young skilled people. This shortage of labour does not affect all regions and all economic sectors in a similar way. But it has consequences for the regional economic prosperity.

Yet, there is also reason for optimism. A large share of those who have left their Eastern European home regions is returning in recent years. The economic situation has improved and emigrants often faced socially and psychologically dissatisfying situations in their host countries. The proximity to friends and family and the feeling of home sickness draws them back to Central Eastern Europe. According to an OECD study (SOPEMI 2008), 20-50% of emigrants leave their host region again within five years after arrival, many of them heading back home. Emigrants often leave with the intention to come back, making emigration a temporary step in the life. Thus, return migration is not a marginal phenomenon. Using EU Labour Force Survey (2005-2008) and Eurostat data (2009), we found that the share of nationals compared to non-nationals immigrating to Central Europe varies between countries. In Poland 75% of cross-border immigration is composed of Polish return migrants. In other countries, the share is smaller: 29% for the Czech Republic, 23% for Germany, 13% for Austria, 10% for Slovenia and 8% for Hungary, Italy and the Slovak Republic. Yet, in all countries these return migrants represent a human resource to encounter the lack of skilled labour: They are younger than those who have stayed at home; their educational level is better than that of non-migrants; they cultivate connections with their home countries, facilitating their integration compared to international immigrants.

On the other side there are also indicators for problems upon return. Return migrants are often affected by irregular work conditions. They are more often

unemployed than non-migrants. They also work more often in part-time jobs. Furthermore, there is mixed evidence if the foreign work experience pays off in financial terms. Some studies remark that there is a sort of income premia (e.g. Martin/Radu 2011) and enhanced career opportunities (Vavrečkova 2009); others have found that this is not the case (Co et al. 2000; Grabowska-Lusinska 2010). Still it is relatively unclear, why some return migrants in some regions succeed upon return while others have difficulties.

As outlined above, return migration represents one important policy field – next to international/internal immigration and retention. Yet, most studies, that inform policy makers, focus merely on the return migrants' attitudes and motivations. This means they disregard the perspective of the businesses in the home regions. In fact it is these businesses being the potential employers for return migrants, defining to a certain extent the success of return migrants in home regional labour markets. Or vice versa, it is the return migrants being the potential labour force for businesses at home, helping businesses to encounter the lack of skilled labour. How do these two groups come together? In section 2 we will illustrate theoretical and empirical insights from the few studies that dealt with this nexus.

With this report we will shed light on the businesses' perspective towards the connection between these two groups, return migrants and employers. Based in a comparative set of interviews in our case study regions Usti (CZ), Görlitz (DE), Harz (DE), Mid-Pannon (HU), Piedmont (IT), Lodz (PL), Swietokryzkie (PL), and Podravska (SI), we intend to answer the following questions:

- What challenges and opportunities do businesses face in these regions?
- In what ways do businesses expect problems to hire qualified staff in the near future?
- Are businesses aware of major (public) regional strategies to secure the supply of skilled labour?
- How do these businesses secure the availability of qualified personnel? What formal and informal strategies exist for the attraction of qualified personnel? Is there any cooperation with other businesses or organizations?
- What strategies exist for the retention of qualified personnel?
- What positions are currently vacant in these businesses?
- Are return migrants a specific target group for attraction strategies? Are they already employed by the businesses?
- If so, what makes return migrants specific for the businesses?
- Do these businesses help return migrants with their return and reintegration?

Before we will answer these questions in section 4, we will outline the methodological aspects of the Re-Turn project and the business interviews. Section 5 will then highlight the case study regions' specificities. Finally, section 6 provides an overall conclusion and a discussion about the relevance of the findings.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

As mentioned above there are relatively few studies that directly study the relation between return migrants and the perspective of businesses in the home regions. There are some hints on the issue in the return migration literature which deals with migration between mature economies and developing countries. Gitter et al. (2008) have found that in some regions in Mexico, return migrants from the United States have a higher propensity to be employed than non-migrants. They interpret the finding as being caused by the acquired valuable experience and training, which is appraised by Mexican employers.

Antal & Wang (2003) studied the impact of Chinese return migrants on organizational learning among firms and organizations in China. China applies since several decades a policy of re-attracting Chinese emigrants through a complex system of benefits for returnees. Between 50,000 and 100,000 Chinese students go abroad each year to learn in Western countries; about one third returns; and half of returnees goes abroad again. Thus, there is a large pool of talented people that bring in knowledge from abroad. Yet, most companies and organizations do not know how to systematically make use of this new knowledge from abroad. Firms need to install systems of organizational learning which help to distribute the individual knowledge from the remigrants to non-migrant employees. Antal & Wang mention that both companies, policy makers and returnees have to pay attention to certain things in order to allow for organizational learning. Companies should adjust their organizational culture in an open-minded way, accepting the foreign and unknown as valuable information. Further, they should pay attention to efficient leadership, with leaders that prefer learning over knowing. An often repeated barrier to successful organizational learning is the fear of non-migrants and locals to be contaminated and criticized from returnees for their local routines and knowledge. Thus, there is an urgent need to moderate returnees' and non-migrants' interaction and their knowledge sharing. Tools could consist in platform for creative learning between locals and returnees, leader groups composed of returnees and 'internal outsiders' (those who are immobile, but do not think in conform ways) within companies, or a general shift in organizational culture. Antal & Wang remark (2003: 22): "*The "turtles from the sea" need the "turtles from the puddle" and vice versa.*"

Antal & Wang (2003) equally as Black & Gent (2004) point to the importance of discrimination between returnees and non-migrants, which might be caused by return assistant policies. As a consequence, sustainable reintegration and knowledge spill overs might fail. Furthermore, Black & Gent (2004) point out that traditional return assistance often fails, as it underestimates the returnees wish to maintain transnational ties to host countries. Newly developed and more flexible programmes account for that by not forcing returnees to return, but rather bring in their capacities (knowledge, skills, finance) from abroad and through temporary visits back home.

Cassarino (2004) points to another aspect that might influence the potential impact that return migrants can have on their home regions. A large share of remigration literature suggested that the difference between voluntary and forced return is decisive for regional development in the home region. Cassarino, however, mentions that a more important point is the preparedness of return migrants before their return. Preparedness consists of both the willingness and the readiness to return. He (2004: 21) defines preparedness as the 'returnees' ability to gather tangible and intangible resources', which then could be used to facilitate personal re-integration and to stimulate development at home. Such resources are not only of financial nature (remittances, savings). The level of preparedness is also connected to the intensity of social relations and the effectiveness of social networks (family, friends, acquaintances, colleagues) in both, host and home countries. This includes that the type and length of experience abroad is an important factor in determining the outcome of the migration process. Finally, Cassarino suggests that return migrants who are more prepared before return are also more likely to have success back home and therefore will probably stay longer before an eventual re-emigration.

For Germany, Matuschewski (2010) developed a multi-level research concept which should serve to estimate the regional effects of return migration in Eastern German rural home regions. Her approach is based on human capital theory, and considers return migration as a driver of regional development. She defines human capital as "*all person-bounded capacities, skills, and knowledge stocks which were acquired through formal education, learning by doing, learning by interacting, training on the job or even trial and error*" (Matuscheski 2010: 82[1]). Migrants are then transporters of this knowledge and information. Important to say, there are two types of knowledge: first, codified knowledge which could be acquired through formal education by everyone; second, tacit knowledge, which is informal and could only be acquired through social practice. Matuschewski calls the latter one '*embodied practice*' (2010: 82) which moves around with migrants. It is in particular this knowledge which could define competitive advantage for companies as other companies cannot simply access the same tacit knowledge. Audretsch & Keilbach (2005: 22, cited in Matuschewski 2010: 83) resume: "*The mobility of economic agents across different contexts and their creation of trajectories becomes an important mechanism for the process by which knowledge spills over from one context and organization to another.*"

Matuschewski points to the problem that migrants are often not employed according to their qualification and education. According to labour market segmentation theory this is because of the regional differences between labour markets, which do not provide jobs for all qualifications and professions (Matuschewski 2010: 82). Thus, a simple deduction of regional development effects from returning migrants' formal educational levels is not the appropriate way.

[1] Original in German: „*Humankapital umfasst dabei alle personengebundenen Fähigkeiten, Kenntnisse und Wissensbestände, welche durch formale Bildung,* learning by doing, learning by interacting, training on the job *oder* trial and error *erworben werden.*"

Matuschewski argues that studying the regional development outcome of return migration implies necessarily the observation of labour market insertion. In order to study the position of return migrants in home regional labour markets, one access to empirical data is provided by the employing businesses.

Only like this we can assess the regional development effects. Matuschewski mentions (2010: 84[2]): "*The unfolding of positive impacts depends on the compliance of individual expectations and experiences, the compatibility of return migrants' qualifications, knowledge and skills with the home region's knowledge stock and knowledge demand, as well as on the potential to reintegrate return migrants into the professional and social environment.*"

While these theoretical aspects might be valid for migration in general, what's so special about return migration then? Matuschewski used an explorative empirical design to study the role of return migrants for regional development. In two case studies in Saxony and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, she interviewed both return migrants and businesses about their expectations and opinions.

Matuschewski (2010: 90ff.) spoke to SMEs and business associations, which mainly were in a positive economic atmosphere in 2008, still before the crisis. The majority of businesses expected employment growth and thus had developed distinct human resource (HR) strategies. For example, companies directly addressed potential returnees, who still lived outside their home region, but who were interested in return migration. Yet, all businesses reported problems in filling vacant positions, of which about 55% were positions in operative units, 28% medium management, 20% high level management/CEO, 10% research and development (R&D), 9% field services/sales. Most of the businesses already experienced a lack of skilled labour.

Matuschewski's business interviews reveal that many businesses have focussed on return migrants because 'return initiatives' allowed them to post job vacancies for free. Yet, for 28% of businesses this free offer was not the only important driver to focus on return migrants. These companies mentioned that they expected return migrants as more bounded to the region, and thus less likely to leave again after a short period. Furthermore, businesses expected return migrants to have a high job motivation. The businesses, thus, formulated job vacancy descriptions with a type of wording that was more likely to attract return migrants than other migrants. These formulations included 'ambition', 'pioneering spirit', 'experience', 'competency', 'qualification'. While it seems rather unclear why these notions should address return migrants more than any other migrant, there is a more obvious reason to focus on return migrants. The businesses are located in regions in which wage levels are comparably low, and the probability to successfully attract someone from the region is higher than for someone who is not from that region.

[2] Original in German: *„Die Entfaltung positiver Wirkungen hängt ab von der Übereinstimmung der individuellen Erwartungen und Erfahrungen, der Passfähigkeit der Qualifikationen, des Wissens und der Fähigkeiten von Rückwanderern, dem regionalen Wissensstand und –bedarf sowie den Möglichkeiten, Rückwanderer in das berufliche und soziale Umfeld zu integrieren."*

Businesses are aware of the fact that 'being back home' is traded off by return migrants against wages and economic aspects in the job. Yet, also in Matuschewski's study businesses realized that some return migrants have still higher wage expectations than non-migrants, and sometimes it becomes even impossible to re-attract return migrants.

Matuschewski's interviews also point to the positive experiences that businesses have made with return migrant as labour force. On the one hand, professional experience, the skills and knowledge that return migrants bring from other regions are an important issue. Businesses say that return migrants help to improve production processes and make the business more competitive. Yet, this might also account for other incoming migrants.

The specificity of return migrants consists in that they share a certain regional mentality, which makes it easier for them to become accepted by colleagues and integrated in the job environment. Businesses report that return migrants show a more honest and long-term interest in the company than other migrants. This fact is considered an important advantage of return migrants as it facilitates knowledge spill over compared to other migrants. Additionally, return migrants – based on the shared cultural values, dialects, origin – have a higher appreciation as sales and service personnel among regional clients. Trust is easier built, if cultural proximity is higher. And trust also affects positively client/customer relations, visible in turnover and sales figures.

Finally, businesses also acknowledge the fact that return migrants are strongly orientated towards their private life, family and friends. Thus, they try to allow a better work-life balance, which is positively evaluated by return migrant employees.

In sum, 2/3 of Matuschewski's business interview partners will again focus on return migrants in the future. Companies here see the large future issue in how to organize the succession of management and high skilled positions, when current employees retire. In particular, family-owned businesses and SME will have difficulties to find new owner-managers. Return migrants will be of importance here, as they possess local social capital and regional ties.

Matuschewski concludes that bringing both perspectives, the return migrants' as well as the businesses' ones, together is a necessary conduct in order to understand the labour market reinsertion.

Hypotheses

Based on the indications in the remigration literature we can formulate the following working hypotheses:

1. Human Capital Hypothesis: Employers in the home regions appreciate the knowledge and soft skills that return migrants bring from abroad. This leads to a competitive advantage against non-migrants in the home regions' labour market. In particular tacit knowledge can lead to competitive advantages for employing

companies. Return migrants are considered motors of product and process innovation and can provide new management models. But organizational learning methods are necessary here. Then there is also the important aspect of allowing for continued social relations to the host country networks in order to allow return migrants to fulfil the bridging functions between knowledge networks at home and abroad.

2. Local Rootedness Hypothesis: Return migrants are a particularly interesting workforce for companies in rural and less attractive regions, because they are supposed to be emotionally tied to that region and less affluent to leave again after a short while. Other immigrant might leave more rapid again, which equals a lost human capital investment.

3. Lower Salary Hypothesis: Return migrants are supposed to be an attractive workforce as they are suspected to accept lower wages than other immigrants. Yet, empirical evidence is mixed in this respect: some studies also found that returnees ask for above average salaries.

4. Easy integration Hypothesis: Return migrants are suspected to have less problems to become (re-)integrated, both in the broader social community as well as the companies' teams, than other immigrants. Return migrants share the humour, values and habits of their home region. This in addition affects positively sales numbers in home regional markets.

3. Methodology

The Re-Turn project intends to compare the perspectives of return migrants as well as potential employers in home regions. In order to gather information on the perspective of potential employers we decided to use qualitative interviewing as a method.

In particular the expert interviews are well suited to gather information on specific and abstract topics (cf. Bogner et al. 2002). A person is considered expert, if she/he has specialized knowledge on a specific topic. In a closer definition this might be related to a specific profession, but an expert can also provide expertise on social facts in general, not only related to professional spheres (cf. Bührmann 2005). '*Expert interviews are an attractive data collection method, because they allow researchers to bridge the divide between case studies and the comparison of a large number of countries based on more general and publicly available data. Further, expert interviews give the researchers control over the dimensions that are central to the comparative research.*' (Dorusson et al. 2005: 317).

The Re-Turn project focusses on the specific topic of the '<u>employers' perspectives on return migration and the value of returnees as employees</u>'. Thus, we considered business representatives (managerial positions, shareholders, owners) and multipliers (business associations, Chambers of Industry and Commerce, business promoters) as experts in this given field.

Yet, the data gathered through expert interviews is highly dependent on the quality of expertise that the interview partner provides. In order to assess the quality of data gathered in expert interviews, Dorusson et al. (2005) suggest paying attention to coherence between individual experts' answers to a certain topic. The higher the accordance between interviewees' statements, the higher the reliability of information gathered. Dorusson et al. (2005: 334) remark: '*Even though reliability does not guarantee validity, it makes it more likely that a valid conclusion will be reached. At the same time, reliability should not be pursued at all costs: there is always a possibility that one expert is 'right' and all others are simply 'wrong'.*'

In order to ensure the quality of data and thus reliability and validity of our analysis, we adopted a multi-level quality control scheme. Our project partners were supposed to do the expert interviews in a decentralised way – meaning each project partner did interviews in his own case study region. To allow for comparison of interviews across case study regions, local teams should apply identical interview designs. Each local team of interviewers was taught how to do interviews in a joint training session organized before the interviews were conducted. In this workshop interviewers were made familiar with the interview method in general and the Re-Turn interviews in particular. They received information on sampling, the questionnaire guideline, the opinion card method, the codes of conduct during the interviews, and the ways of data recording. Then, a

methodological guideline in which the central information from the training session was summarized was sent to each interviewer.

Then interviewer teams were also responsible for a first interpretation and analysis of the data collected in their case study regions. A standard analysis template was used, in which first information from individual interviews were extracted. The extraction of information followed the logics of content analysis (cf. Mayring 1993). Then comparison across interview partners concerning certain items was applied within individual case study regions, and an overall conclusion on the survey within one case study region was written by local teams. In the next step, comparison across case study regions was done by the Lead Partner in a centralized way.

3.1. Sampling, case study regions and interview situation

The Re-Turn project aimed at understanding and enhancing barriers and potentials in the process of return migration towards case study regions in post-socialist rural areas that had suffered from significant brain drain during the phase of post-socialist restructuring of the economy and the political environment. Most of these regions today are confronted with an ageing workforce and expected lack of skilled labour in the near future. Therefore, we have selected 8 case study regions in Central Europe (see figure 1).

In the specific case of Eastern Germany we selected the Harz Region & Görlitz Region (both yellow in fig. 1). Harz Region is located at the border with Lower Saxony in Western Germany. It suffers rapid ageing and continuous migration loss (about -6% in 2009). Furthermore, the working population is characterized by a small share of tertiary educated people. Yet, this reflects the demands of the regional labour market, with 32% of employment in a dynamic production sector (mainly automotive, plastics, engineering) and in a strong tourism industry. Here, apprenticeships and vocational training play a larger role than academic education (only 7% tertiary education). Main problems arise from the wage differences with the Lower Saxon labour market, which is in commuting distance and attracts many workers. The Görlitz Region is located at the Polish-German border. In this peripheral situation within the country, it suffers a stronger migration loss (-8% in 2009) and more rapid ageing than Harz Region. Also the regional economy is performing worse, with GDP per capita 13% below Saxon average. The region is characterized by a strong primary sector employment (about 40%), which is mainly concentrated in coal mining and the related energy sector. The production sector is composed of many small and medium sized companies, which all face human resource problems in the near future, but so far being unable to offer competitive wages and career opportunities. Emigrants from both regions mainly emigrated to prosperous Western German regions, Austria and Switzerland. In Görlitz Region, small emigration to Poland can be observed, too.

The Czech case study region is the region around Usti nad Labem (blue in fig. 1). This Czech region in fact is experiencing small migration gains (+1% in 2009). But it still suffers from a rapidly ageing population. Usti region has a strong industrial tradition and even after massive re-structuring after 1989, the production sector accounts for 49% of employment (mainly in geodesy, chemicals, industrial engineering). Yet, restructuring of the production sector caused high unemployment which continues to be a regional problem. Unemployment is accompanied by below average wage levels. Similarly as in the German case study regions, apprenticeship and vocational training characterize the demanded qualifications. Graduates of universities have few opportunities on the regional labour market. As an effect of the regional labour market problems, many workers commute across the German border in order to work in Saxony's companies. Yet, some promising developments show up in Usti Region, with a growing IT sector, demanding high-skilled workers. Czech emigrants from Usti Region mainly emigrated to Prague, to Saxony (German region behind the border) or to Western German regions.

The two Polish case study regions are Lodz and Swietokrzyskie (both pink in fig. 1). Lodz Region is specific in terms of having less problems with ageing. Yet, emigration increased massively after the EU accession, doubling within two years after 2004. The regional labour market is characterized by a high share of primary sector employment (20%). The regional production sector is based on textiles, but it suffers a low R&D input. Only the chemicals sector could have been restructured successfully during transition. The regional service sector, even though employing about 50% of the workforce, is still struggling and could not lead regional development. In the Swietokrzyskie Region ageing is also less dramatic than in the German case study regions. Yet, migration losses reached between -5 and -7% in the last years. In particular, young people left the region after EU accession. The regional workforce is dominated by low qualification levels, with only 12% having tertiary education. Similarly to Görlitz Region, the primary sector is dominant in the regional labour market (48% of employment in mining and agriculture). The small production sector is concentrated around the construction industry, metal and metallurgy, energy and chemicals. Swietokrzyskie Region mainly suffers from the proximity of more competitive regions such as Warsaw, Lodz, Silesia and Krakow. The massive emigration of Swietokrzyskie Region's inhabitants caused regional employers to organize and discuss return initiatives with the government already in 2007. The Polish emigrants mainly headed towards the UK, Ireland and Germany.

The Hungarian case study region Mid-Pannon in Central Transdanubia (green in fig. 1) is characterized by migration gain of about 2% in 2010, but ageing remains a problem here, too. Equally as in the other case study regions, employment in the production sector remains important after transition (59% of employment), while service sector activities play a minor role. Many hopes lie in the tourism sector, but this is not yet reflected in high employment. 19% of the work force has tertiary education. Given the increasing ageing process, one of the larger problems is the

low labour market participation of people aged 45-64 years. Also in the case of the Hungarian emigrants, Austria and Germany are two main destinations in the EU.

In Slovenia, Podravska Region was selected as case study region (purple in fig. 1). It is located between Austria and Croatia. While the region was a centre of the Yugoslavian industry, it could not restructure its production sector after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Today the region is still characterized by an unemployment rate of about 14% and a high share of commuting to Ljubljana and the neighbouring Austrian regions. Employment is currently dominated by the service sector. Second sector production is focussed on chemicals, metallurgy as well as food and beverages. Demographically the region is characterized by a rapid ageing process and low labour market participation of the age group 50-65 years (53%). In combination with the decline in the job entrant age group (15-24 years), the problem of a lack of skilled labour will increase in the close future. Slovenian emigrants moved mainly to Austria, also to Croatia and Germany.

Even though not a post-socialist region, we also included the Piedmont Region in Italy, in particular the Ossola Valley in the Alps. The region provides a similar situation as other case study regions. The Alpine valleys in the North of Piedmont are bordering Switzerland, where wages are up to three times of Italian ones. Thus, the Ossola Valley, with direct access to Switzerland, is losing young workers to the Swiss labour market. Yet, this loss is rather caused by cross-border commuting than by real emigration. Actually, the Ossola Valley is experiencing migration gains. Employment is concentrated in the tertiary sector (56%; mainly tourism and leisure), while only production is less important (construction and metallurgy). About 8% of employees have passed tertiary education. The Ossola Valley is also suffering rapid ageing and a shrinking active workforce. On the other hand, young job entrants suffer high unemployment (only 35% of 15-24 years old participate in the labour market). Furthermore, unemployment is increasing in the Ossola Valley, currently levelling 21%. In combination with high living costs, there is an urgency to increase youth employment, partly tried for by the government via youth entrepreneurship programmes.

Thus, our case study regions are all characterized by demographic problems which will affect the availability of skilled workers in the medium and long-term. Ageing, emigration and structural problems like youth unemployment stand for the difficulties that entrepreneurs have to deal with when operating in these regions. Furthermore, they often face the problem that cross-border commuting reduces their access to skilled workers, when more competitive labour markets with higher wages lie only some kilometres from the own location.

Figure 1: Case study regions in Central Europe

Sampling: How we found and selected interview partners?

Sampling was organised in a two-fold way. First, multipliers were approached in each case study regions. These multipliers were assumed to have a general and encompassing knowledge about the regional business climate and problems of regional companies. Furthermore, multipliers were asked to provide information on interesting companies in the case study region, which they would recommend to speak to about the issue of return migrants as labour force. Following up multiplier interviews, business representatives were approached as interview partners. Thereby, theoretical sampling was applied, meaning that business were supposed to vary in terms of company size and economic sector. Yet, it was open to local interviewer teams to decide about the relevance of individual economic sectors within the case study region.

Interview technique

Interviewers were asked to record the interviews or to bring an assistant to take notes during the interviews. In order to gather comparable information interviewers were equipped with questionnaire guidelines for multipliers and business representatives (cf. Annex 1 & 2). Guideline questions were divided into three content blocks. In block 1 (question 1-8), the focus was put on the challenges

and opportunities of the region and the companies' strategies to secure the availability of highly-qualified personnel. Further, questions related to the general image of returnees in the region. The second block (opinion cards) specifically focused on the attitude of employers towards "work experience from abroad". The third content block (question 9-12) dealt with specific strategies, currently applied to find appropriate staff.

The opinion-cards were used as a method to uncover attitudes which respondent might hold back because of their fear of exposing socially undesirable views. During the interview respondents were shown three statements that other persons had expressed. Presenting the statements as the opinions of others helped to legitimise sentiments and stimulated discussion and 'story-telling' by offering a range of viewpoints, some of which would reflect and some of which would challenge the respondent's own point of view.

3.2. Profile of businesses interviewed

As table 1 shows, the sampling led to a very heterogeneous group of interview partners. Thus, expert interviews covered a wide variety of different perspectives within the case study regions.

Table 1: Sample overview

Case study region	Number of interview Partners & No. of employees	Economic sectors	Position of interview partners	Business climate
Usti Region	Multipliers: 4 Businesses: 10 <50: 8 50-250: 1 >250: 1	financial and insurance services, technical ceramic manufacturing, education/school, IT, retail, construction, tourism, engineering, transport and mining vehicles repair services, components manufacturing	2 Financial managers, 1 HR manager, 5 Directors, 3 Executive directors, 1 General representative manager, 2 Chairmen	Growth: in particular IT and manufacturing
Görlitz Region	Multipliers: 4 Businesses: 8 <80: 5 350-700: 2 2100: 1	manufacturing, industry (glass, wood, solar energy), service (hotel business, software, housing, water)		Growth: 4 companies Decline: 4 companies

Harz Region	Multipliers: 8 Businesses: 7 <50: 1 50-250: 4 >250: 2	metal and electrical industry, social and health care, service and consulting sector	Members of management boards, HR managers, Network managers	Growth: All but one company
Mid-Pannon Region	Multipliers: 3 Businesses: 10 <50: 7 50-250: 3 >250: 0	Manufacturing (glass); services	2 HR managers, 5 managing directors, 1 quality control manager, 1 director, 1 trade leader	
Piedmont Region	Multipliers: 4 Businesses: 10 <50: 8 50-250: 2 >250: 0	social work, building industry, stone industry, restaurant industry, floricultural, dairy industry, ceramic industry	Directors, Managers, HR managers, technical staff	Stable: only one company in decline; two companies slight growth
Lodz Region	Multipliers: 3 Businesses: 11 <50: 11 50-250: 0 >250: 0	carpentry, motorization, gastronomy, engineering, social studies, license to deal with oil products, advertising agency, legal services, Real Estate, clothing sector, chemical industry	Owners, Head of HR, Presidents, Team leaders, Head of business development, department director for business consulting and public sector	Stable: only one company in growth; two companies in decline
Swietokrzyskie Region	Multipliers: 3 Businesses: 12 <50: 8 50-250: 0 >250: 4	business support, construction industries, chemical industry, trade and manufacture, warehouse groceries, entertainment, advertising industry, electrical apparatus, production of vehicles	Owners, Managing Director, 3 HR managers, Specialist in Administration and Organization Field, Director of Board Office, The Company's Vice President for National Projects, The Branch Managers, Chairman of the Board	Growth: but for 2 companies
Podravska Region	Multipliers: 2 Businesses: 10 <50: 7 50-250: 1 >250: 2	production/manufacturing (3) and services (7)	directors, human resource managers	Growth; but for two companies

In our rural case study regions, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are dominant against large companies. Thus, in our sample SMEs are more strongly represented, too. The large companies that were interviewed in the case study regions are often dependent branches of multinational corporations. The sampling strategy also looked for variety across economic sectors. As we can see in table 1, interviews in the manufacturing and service sector were equally interviewed. Only in Piedmont Region (IT) agricultural producers were included in the interview series. Furthermore, in several case study regions also businesses at the intersection of public and private sector were interviewed (e.g. education and health care).

The interview partners were mainly people who hold positions with strategic decision taking power and high responsibility for their companies. An important target group were managing directors, owner and HR managers, who all are well represented in the sample.

Similarity in terms of low foreign work experience and low relevance of high-skilled labour

Most of the interview partners have not been abroad for longer periods, they have few experience with working abroad themselves. Yet, several interview partners reported to have people with foreign work experience among their companies' staff. Yet, this includes foreigners as well as returnees.

High-skilled personnel is less relevant for most of the interviewed companies. Generally, high-skilled occupations are to be found among managers and in administrative positions. The role of high-skilled employees also depends on the economic sector. In services the share is much higher than in manufacturing industries. Furthermore, smaller companies employ a higher share of high-skilled people than large companies.

Differences in terms of business climate and HR strategies amongst regions and businesses

Against these similarities between the sub-samples in the case study regions, we also found difference in terms of the general business climate in which the companies operate, and which affects their own stocks of employees. Companies in Usti Region (CZ), Harz Region (DE), Swietokrzyskie Region (PL) and Podravska Region (SI) face a prosperous regional economy and were able to increase their staff throughout the last ten years. Companies in Lodz Region (PL) and Piedmont Region (IT) operate in a climate of business stagnation, maintaining stable stocks of employees. And finally companies in Görlitz Region (DE) indicated both decline and growth.

Difference could also be found in terms of regional human resource (HR) strategies (meaning if regional policy makers or multipliers engage in joint activities). In Usti, Görlitz, Harz and Mid-Pannon such regional and encompassing HR strategies do

exist and they are available as a framework for the companies. In the other case study regions there are no such policies.

Also in terms of own HR strategies, businesses report difference between case study regions. In Görlitz Region (DE), Podravska Region (SI) and Mid-Pannon (HU) the majority of businesses interviewed were able to name own strategies to attract and manage the business HR. In Usti Region (CZ) and Harz Region (DE) still half of the interviewed companies have such strategies, too. In Piedmont Region and the two Polish regions, companies have not yet developed own HR strategies.

The transnational team of the Re-Turn project visiting a regional employer in the Harz Region, Germany. The company is developing production lines for candy production. The company is experiencing the competition for skilled workers and has developed an own human resource strategy. This strategy does not focus on return migrants, but rather on keeping skilled workers. The company offers attractive training schemes and career paths. The products are sold worldwide. The employees have to go abroad both for selling and for installing their production lines in the customers' locations. Mechanics and engineers are thus short-term emigrants and return with important knowledge and skills from their stays abroad. The employees in the sales department are often international immigrants who have their cultural background in the important markets such as South America or the USA. Also return migrants with experience of having lived in these markets would be a valuable human capital for the company.

4. Global analysis

In this section, we will present the findings in a global way, with a special focus on similarities and differences between the case study regions in relation to specific thematic fields.

4.1. Companies' view on challenges and opportunities of the companies and the region today and in future

In the beginning of the interviews we have asked company representatives to evaluate the situation of their own businesses as well as the regional market in general. A similarity between case study regions concerns the idea that the situation of the regional market is strongly dependent on the economic sector. If regions were dominated by a specific industrial sector, then there is a historic path dependency which cannot simply be ignored. In particular the primary and secondary sector activities which were major employers throughout socialist times have left their traces in the case study regions and affect labour markets until today. Restructuring did not always work well, as the examples of the heavy industries in Usti Region or Podravska Region show. This causes continuing problems with unemployment. Yet, these people often cannot be hired by uprising companies in new sectors (such as e.g. IT services in Usti Region) as their skill profiles do not fit the labour demands new companies. In particular industrial paths that need long-term investment such as the mining sector in Görlitz Region will pre-define opportunities for development in a long-run. If these sectors slide into difficulties, the whole region will be affected. Thus, unemployment and a lack of skilled labour often go hand in hand. For the regions it is very difficult to develop new sectorial profiles.

Furthermore, the situation of the individual regions is very much dependent on the geographic location. Those regions in border locations to more prosperous regions face serious problems with out-migration and cross-border commuting. While this might reduce the unemployment, the mobility of the workforce increases the lack of skilled labour. The employers in the home regions often cannot compete with wage levels behind the border, and thus lose skilled workers.

Another important point is the proximity to clients and markets. Wealthy and prosperous regions are often those who buy the products from companies in our case study regions. Thus, business representatives say that being located close to these markets is advantageous for the regional development. This is for example the case for the Usti Region where a lot of business is done with the Czech capital region Prague as well as with Saxon companies in Germany. Also the Slovenian Podravska Region profits from the proximity to Austria, such as Ossola Valley in Piedmont from the proximity to Switzerland. Vice versa, regions that are located

far from economic centres such as Görlitz Region, or which are poorly connected to them through train and road infrastructure such as Swietokrzyskie Region, face serious problems in remaining competitive.

Evaluating the current situation of the own region, business representatives express different opinions in the case study regions. In Podravska Region (SI), Usti Region (CZ), Harz Region (DE), and Swietokrzyskie Region (PL) the interviewed entrepreneurs think positively about the current situation. They interpret the regional business climate as defined by growth and they stress the achievements after the transition period and the integration into the EU market.

By contrast in Piedmont Region (IT) and Lodz Region (PL) entrepreneurs express a feeling of nostalgia for better times. They mainly think of the regional business climate as defined by stagnation. The regional markets are perceived as less dynamic, and defined by growing problems. Finally, in Görlitz Region (DE) business representatives showed mixed opinions about the situation of their region. Some mentioned to operate in a prosperous climate of growth; others disagreed and pointed out that Görlitz Region is characterized by decline and long-term problems.

4.1.1 Regional challenges as seen by the businesses

If it comes to main challenges that result from the current regional situation, the businesses representatives, there is astonishing agreement across individual companies as well as across regions. The main problem for regional development and the individual business development is the future labour supply. As mentioned, the emigration waves of the last decade(s) since 1989 and 2004 caused dramatic changes in the composition of the regional workforce, being older and less qualified for new and innovative business activities. Also cross-border commuting was mentioned as a threat to individual business development, meaning that the regional workforce is not willing to work for affordable wage levels. Companies can simply not compete with wages paid in the more prosperous regions.

> *"The good and qualified people are not available on the market, they're out of the market."*
>
> (Business association representative, Harz Region)
>
> *"Every new staff member is a treasure for the company."*
>
> (Business representative, Harz Region)

This implies that labour supply might affect the innovativeness and competitiveness of the businesses we have talked to. Businesses representatives express worries about the own market position. This is mainly related to three aspects. First, companies in our case study regions see difficulties in the field of regional branding

and product placement. While other regions exist as a brand, our case study regions do not so equally. Often companies have difficulties to enter into existing markets in their own field, because they have no renowned brand – neither the product itself nor the region where it was produced. Second, this raises worries in the field of internationalization. In order to access wider markets and to place the own products, the companies we have talked to would need experienced and transnational employees that can help to enter international markets. Third, there is a question of competition. Many firms find themselves confronted with increasing competition from other firms in their field which operate from different regions and situations. Also, here market relevant information might be obtained through internationally experienced workforce.

Finally, many business representatives we have spoken to express the feeling that the world economy slows down and that the financial crisis reaches their own regions and companies.

> *"In the current situation it is hard to plan further than six months ahead."*
>
> (Business association representative, Swietokrzyskie Region)

In addition to these inter-regional similarities, there are also specific challenges, which only affect some regions. In Harz Region (DE), Görlitz Region (DE), and Swietokrzyskie Region (DE) businesses see themselves particularly confronted with the problem of an ageing workforce. The ageing process among workers results in a reduced capacity to innovate and to adapt to new knowledge and processes. Companies might thus face competitive disadvantage to competitors with a younger and more flexible workforce. Yet, as companies in these regions express difficulties to find new and young workers, they have to develop strategies to include their older workers in the innovation process.

In Mid-Pannon Region (HU), Harz Region (DE), and Lodz Region (DE) companies also felt that the firm size structure was rather disadvantageous in their region. The regions are characterized by a high share of small and medium sized companies, and an absence of global players and multinational companies. This leads to difficulties in entering international markets, but also in finding regional customers. Furthermore, business representatives in these regions add that there are institutional problems in their case study regions. Finally, also individual sectors face economic problems at the moment, which affect the wider regional economy.

Other challenges that were not equally spread to all case study regions were: the general business environment; the lack of appropriate leisure facilities and quality of life; the lack of appropriate infrastructures; the region in general; the backwardness of regional authorities; the difficulties in implementing regional innovation systems; the regional unemployment; problems in providing appropriate

education systems; too high tax levels; and finally the missing possibilities for business financing.

4.1.2 Regional opportunities as seen by the businesses

Given all the challenges mentioned above, the business representatives also expressed different opportunities to deal with the challenges. The first thing mentioned equally across the case study regions concerns the ways through which businesses might improve their business networks. Business representative consider business-to-business (B2B) networking as the most important step to improve the own companies market position. This includes individual activities such as cooperation in product development or marketing, knowledge transfer, or the development of joint human resource strategies. Thereby, regional B2B networks are equally important as transnational ones.

A second and very important issue is the school-to-business nexus. Business representatives know that they operate in a demographic situation in which many young have left the region, the main stock of workers ages rapidly, and school graduates become less. Hence, it is more important to recruit graduates directly from school before other companies do so. Thus, many employers have developed own networks with regional schools and they engage in projects that enable school students to investigate their regional employment opportunities already when still in school.

Third, innovation strategies are considered by most of the business representatives we have talked to. In order to stay competitive even when located in disadvantageous regions, business representatives and their companies develop strategies to innovate their products as well as their production and management processes. In addition, also innovation in terms of identifying and accessing new markets becomes more important.

Fourth, the current staff is a resource which the companies try to work with in an efficient way. Given the fact that most of our interviewed companies are struggling with an ageing workforce, they have to develop to capitalize on them. The positive aspects of an old workforce are put central here. An old workforce which is loyal to the company since several years works mainly in climate of mutual trust between employer and employee. Thus, business representatives expect workers that work for them since years to have a stronger working attitude than young job entrants. Furthermore, they also mention that the old workforce is valuable in terms of practical and tacit knowledge, which is company specific and need time to be acquired. Yet, older workers' practical knowledge is not sufficient for a company. Thus, life-long learning becomes a large topic for the companies. New models for continuous trainings and requalification models might enable even older employees to support company innovation through a mix of practical experience and new formal knowledge.

> *"Further and additional education and training is one of the most important topics."*
>
> (Business association representative, Harz)

A fifth opportunity is the field of quality management and customer satisfaction. The companies increasingly acknowledge that binding customers in quickly changing markets is helpful to achieve a stable position in the market. While many companies did not pay attention to that issue in their founding years, the quality of products and service become more important today.

Finally, another opportunity is seen in the extending market of temporary labour and headhunting. If the companies business environment is defined through short-term changes and the lack of skilled labour, both these services become valuable tools for human resource management.

What this section told us, is that each region has its own history; and each region has its own way of accepting this history and turning it into a starting point for future development. Yet, this does not happen equally successful in all the case study regions. Furthermore, the individual businesses express diverging opinions about the business climate in which they operate. Both these observations, the situation of the region as well as that of the individual businesses are much dependent on the sector and geographic location towards main markets.

4.2. Strategies to secure the availability of highly-qualified personnel

In this section we analyse regional as well as company-based strategies to secure the availability of highly-qualified personnel. In sum, regional strategies are implemented in all case study regions but Podravska Region and Lodz Region.

4.2.1. Formal strategies in the region

One aspect of securing the availability of qualified labour is the presence of formal over-arching regional strategies, which include a broad variety of regional actors.

As our interviews reveal, these regional strategies are composed of very different topics. The most important is the nexus between regional schools and regional employers, which could be found in various forms in the case study regions. One business association representative in Usti Region e.g. mentions that:

> *"We have a special competition for students from secondary and tertiary schools – Dobrý list komory. It rewards the best students (graduates) and it is a very positive signal for potential employers."*
>
> (Business association representative, Usti)

As the example shows, companies, business associations and other regional stakeholders actively try to approach graduates before they leave the region for informing them about career opportunities in their home regions.

This topic also includes the integration of educational institutions in stakeholder networks in order to influence the educational offer according to the needs of businesses. Another point for intervention is the expansion of life-long learning concepts, which address post-graduates and employees, and which should help the regional labour markets to include the existing elder workforce. Another target group of these strategies is composed of unemployed as well as non- and low-skilled employees, which should be requalified with the help of the regional educational infrastructure. Companies report to test new vocational and advanced training in their company, which is used to re-qualify the existing staff. Furthermore, trainee and internship programs are implemented in order to allow for 'quick assessment' of new potential workers. University students are also systematically approached by companies, and there are contracted to write their final theses on applied and business-relevant issues.

> *„It is important to continuously invest in human capital, the young people have the potential in themselves, and combined with their passion can bring tangible benefits."*
>
> (Business representative, Swietokrzyskie)

Content-wise, business administration knowledge becomes ever more important for regional companies. So, a lot of regional educational content is designed to tackle these needs. Through seminars and courses on venture capital, fundraising, marketing, business start-ups, and leadership, regional workers should be encouraged to become more self-reliant.

Apart from direct educational issues and the qualification of the regional workforce, also business networks are an important component of regional HR strategies. In Usti Region e.g. a strong focus is put on cross-border business co-operation with Saxon companies, which should be addressed to build up trustful value chains. In Piedmont region business co-operation targets the pooling of business service demand. Small and medium-sized companies co-operate in buying specialized business services (such as accounting or consulting).

There are also activities that help to attract new staff only in indirect ways. This can be done through corporate social engagement in the region (e.g. sponsoring sports and cultural associations), or through the participation in regional job fairs.

Additionally, soft factors became an issue in the companies in our case study regions. Family-friendliness and healthy work environments are two fields, in which new procedures are tested. Employees can flexibly organize their working hours. They are allowed to work from home, if they want to do so. Also check systems for the physical and psychological stresses at the workplace are developed and tested. They should guarantee that elder employees can better deal with the high requirements to their work. This includes trainings of acquiring healthy lifestyle, and support of healthy rehabilitation and prevention techniques.

Finally, specialised employment offices (both public and private) were mentioned as important actors in the regional labour market. Often, these employment offices offer individualized and tailored services to look for specialized staff according to companies' labour needs (similar to head hunting services). Also temporary labour agencies are relevant actors in these regional labour markets, as they provide a flexible workforce which can be used by companies to respond to short-term changes in the markets.

Regional strategies have different degrees of formality and different forms of organization. In Mid-Pannon Region, the strategy has a more formal character, written down in the Central Transdanubian Operational Programme, while in other regions strategies have a less binding and formal character, and exist rather in the form of shared ideas about problem-solving in the region.

Next to businesses themselves, important regional actors in all case study regions are labour offices (private and public), headhunting companies, temporary work agencies, universities and schools, public authorities, business associations, and chambers of commerce and industry.

A final interesting observation concerns the role of return migrants in these regional strategies. Actually, return migration does not occur as an issue in all these regional strategies. Rather, the strategies focus on the exploitation of the human capital within the regions.

4.2.2. Strategies of the companies in the region

We subsequently asked the companies, what strategies and key messages they apply to attract new staff. A first observation here is that the size of the companies matters. The few large employers that were interviewed could name formalized strategies (e.g. in form of HR departments; monitoring tools to evaluate the development of staff) and company mottos for external advertisement and image building, while the smaller and micro-sized companies tended to not dispose of such tools. A second general observation is that the economic sector's specialization matters. Those businesses with high specialization are confronted

with stronger difficulties to acquire new staff. Thus, they often have HR strategies which are more precise and methodologically more refined. Businesses who demand low-skilled and manual labour face less difficulties to recruit in regional labour markets, so they are less forced to develop specific strategies.

Generally strategies can be differentiated by their degree of institutionalization/formalization. A rather formal strategy is one which is not bound to a specific individual within a company. It implies explicit formal knowledge. Such HR strategies might e.g. be written down in strategic papers and HR manuals. Common formal strategies of the interviewed companies include monetary aspects, educational/training aspects, the use of headhunting services, aspects of work regulation, external PR, and temporary labour pools.

Monetary aspects

The monetary aspects refer to the wages and salaries that a company has to pay for good workforce. The companies are aware of the fact that they are participating in competitive labour markets, and that they have to excel other employers in terms of the offered monetary aspects. This includes fixed wages as well as additional benefits (lunch tickets, fitness studio and swimming pool access, company cars, company mobile phones and laptops), shares in the company's profits and premia (extra vacation). Still they mention that this type of 'handwheel' is only available in a limited scope, namely that of regional labour profitability. Most companies realize that their location is a competitive disadvantage as productivity in the rural case study regions is below national average. Therefore affordable wage levels are disadvantageous, too. Only those companies who operate on global markets (e.g. machinery and engineering in Harz Region) and in innovative sectors (e.g. IT in Usti Region) can afford to pay attractive wages. Other companies, which mainly target regional private customers, face serious problems to keep up with monetary incentives development.

Educational aspects

In the field of educational aspects, employers increasingly offer access to new knowledge to their workers. This can happen through refresher courses, language training or other formats. Again, the interviewed businesses report that they engage in the school-business nexus, and they do this also independently of the existence and activities of a regional strategy. They have acknowledged the necessity to keep their school graduates in their regions, and they promote their jobs profiles in schools.

Work regulation

In terms of work regulation it was already mentioned in the section before that employers experiment with new schemes. Working hours become more flexible in order to allow for a better match between family and work life.

External public relations (PR)

Activities in external PR mainly aim at constructing and distributing a specific image about the company as an 'attractive employer'. These images are often transported through campaigns and advertisement in local, regional and national media (newspapers, internet, TV etc.). Yet, this field of activity also includes the reflection of the own presence in the internet. Companies have realized that their websites have to be appealing and that they must provide easy channels to the own vacancies and job descriptions. Another point is the individual participation of companies in career exhibitions.

Temporary labour

The aspect of temporary labour has also become more important for the interviewed companies. They engage in long-term and trustful relationships with temporary labour agencies and head hunters. In order to secure the short-term and flexible availability, companies often also engage in thematic business networks that deal with HR issues within their region. They circulate relevant information about vacancies, skilled employees within the region and efficient channels to attract human capital from outside the region.

Headhunting

Companies in one region are not only tied through trustful and co-operative relationship, but also through competition. In terms of informal ways of HR development this becomes evident in the fact that companies also actively engage in headhunting using informal sources of relevant information, such as those circulating in private and personal networks.

After we have examined what role these formalized strategies and activities play in HR management, we had asked companies for their rather informal strategies. Informal strategies are those strategies which are heavily dependent on individual persons and cannot easily be handed over to other colleagues. These informal strategies are e.g. linked to an individual HR manager's conviction and mode of conduct, and they rely on tacit knowledge. Yet, they affect the wider company's attractiveness for employees. In terms of these informal ways of handling HR, we found atmospheric aspects, inclusion of workers, and networking in regional contexts to be important. In particular, small and medium-sized companies often

rely mainly on these rather informal ways, as they cannot afford or do not see the necessity for formalizing HR management.

> *"Strategic planning is not necessarily the strong point of small businesses."*
>
> (Multiplier, Görlitz)

Atmospheric aspects

The atmospheric aspects refer to the work environment and atmosphere. Employers acknowledge that employees are more satisfied, if the work environment is peaceful, co-operative and relaxed among colleagues, and if hierarchy allows for informal and friendly interaction between different organizational levels. The atmosphere among colleagues and to supervisors has to be trustful. Also measures for 'team building' are applied. It was mentioned by employers that they pay attention to the birthdays of their employees in order to express their esteem of a worker as a person but also of his merits for the company. Another activity consists of socializing events that include all staff members, e.g. Christmas parties or excursions. This means workers appreciate if the management of the company maintains a direct und uncomplicated contacts with all departments and workers. One manager in Görlitz Region illustrates this by explaining that it is the aim of his management style…

> *"… to run a company so that you still can meet someone individually, that they* [the staff] *feel that the company lies at my heart, that I take a stand for it and I would never leave them alone."*
>
> (Business representative, Görlitz)

Here, also the design of interesting workplaces, which are stimulating and challenging, is an important aspect. Finally, the healthy work environment plays into these soft aspects of HR strategies. Employers offer company-based health insurance schemes, or supplements to public health care. They pay attention to the furniture and design of workplaces.

The inclusion of the own staff

One informal way of attracting staff is using informal personal networks. Entrepreneurs exchange information on good staff members among each other. But managers also speak with employees and tell them about their HR needs for that these employees can distribute the message in their personal networks. This strategy is perceived as very efficient as information about a job or a company

which circulates through personal networks is seemingly considered very reliable from the perspective of potential future employees. If people get information about a vacancy from a friend or acquaintance, they can also ask for additional implicit information which is not displayed in published job descriptions. Therefore, the entrepreneurs and managers make use of these private networks of their employees to distribute the information about vacant positions. Own staff is also integrated into decision making within the company, which allows staff members to develop a feeling of responsibility for the company. As a consequence, the interview managers, expect that staff members engage in a better way for the company and their personal interests are aligned with company interests. Yet, integrating employees into decision making does not only have this functional character in terms of emotionally binding staff to the company. Managers also esteem the HR relevant knowledge of their employees.

Relational ties in the region

Another informal way of looking for new staff is through rather informal contacts to the above mentioned regional organizations (cf. 4.2.1). Apart from over-arching regional strategies and more formalized bi-lateral alliances with other actors in the region, companies also maintain more informal ways of interaction with these actors. These informal relations are sometimes based on acquaintanceship, which includes mutual trust and empathy. This channel is also used to 'brand' the own company as an attractive employer. Particularly the informal relations to educational organizations in the region play a role. They are used by entrepreneurs to constantly monitor the availability of young experts and professionals.

To conclude, informal strategies in the interviewed companies heavily rely on word-of-mouth information flows within private and personal networks. The own employees are considered as the most important resource in these strategies. Additionally, other organizations' engage in informal relations with the company, too. HR relevant information circulates in informal meetings and interaction between companies, companies and business associations, companies and educational institutions. Also in informal strategies, return migration was hardly mentioned as specific issue.

Generally it can be observed that companies, during the interviews, had difficulties to properly differentiate between 'formal' and 'informal' strategies. Both seem to intersect in everyday life operation. As a consequence we suggest understanding both complexes of HR development not as solitary ones, but they have to be understood as interrelated and interdependent – going hand in hand.

On the other hand, it has to be mentioned that companies clearly differentiate between HR measures that focus on the 'attraction of new personnel' and HR measures to develop the potentials of the 'existing staff'. Still a large share of measures and content of strategies refers to the latter one, the development potential of the own staff.

We also found regional differences between the external necessity (e.g. through labour market structures) for companies to engage in formal strategies. Piedmont Region's companies e.g. mention that they had lots of problems to find skilled staff in the last decade, but since the crisis has hit the Italian market, they have no problems in finding people. Since unemployment has risen, employees even become more loyal towards their companies as they are dependent on their jobs.

In other regions such as Lodz Region and Podravska Region, the interviewed companies are internationalizing. Therefore, they need employees who dispose of foreign language skills and foreign work experience. Yet, to them it is very difficult to find appropriate staff. Thus, they are forced to be more pro-active in HR strategy development. In Podravska Region e.g. companies and business associations try to become part of EU funded networks and projects in order to extend their range for recruitment.

Also in Swietokrzyskie Region, companies developed internal incentive systems (e.g. tenure fast track) to motivate employees to acquire international skills (language, trainings abroad), and thus allow the company to enter foreign markets. In particular people with technical skills are demanded, while the demand for people with certificates in humanities is satisfied.

As for the rather over-arching regional strategies, return migration was not named as a topic. It remains unclear from the interviews, if this is caused by the strong focus on measures to develop the 'existing staff's potential' – and the generally subordinated role of attraction of new people – or if this phenomenon is linked to a disinterest or conscious turning-away from return migrants as labour potential in the specific field of 'attraction measures for new staff'.

4.3. Experiences with staff returning from abroad

In this section we will present insights into the thematic field of the 'practical experience' that the interviewed companies and business representatives have with staff returning from abroad. We have structured this section according to four important points. First, we will look at the general experience that companies have with remigrants as employees. Second, the perception of the specificity of returning migrants, as compared to the local non-migrant but also to international immigrants/foreigners, will be examined. Third, we will present the ways in which the interviewed companies try to support return migrants. Fourth, we will show which difficulties companies see in the field of return migration.

4.3.1. Experience with remigrants as labour force

At first we requested our interview partners to state some experiences which local companies made with returnees. It turned out, that the extent of the experiences is highly different between the regions. The selected companies in Usti Region,

Görlitz Region und Harz Region had no or just limited empirical knowledge with the inclusion of returnees. Respondents mentioned, one problem is that many (especially small) companies do not have sufficient personnel capacities to send staff abroad for gaining new impressions and skills there.

Another aspect, which makes sending employees abroad a problematic issue, is the fear of the companies to lose human capital. Employers said it is hard to make qualified employees come back. Emigrants are seldom available, especially when they studied somewhere else. Furthermore there are less young people who want to go abroad.

Actually, the origin of potential employees is less relevant in the consideration to hire new staff for most companies in the above-mentioned regions. They do not focus on returnees or pay any special emphasis to them. Rather future employees are evaluated on the basis of their practical and job-specific skills and knowledge. This might in some cases include foreign work experience, but in most positions that must be filled in these regions foreign work experience is not important.

In the frame of our business survey it seems that in the regions Mid-Pannon, Piedmont, Lodz and Swietokrzyskie there is more experience with returnees. Therefore, the companies can better evaluate the opportunities of remigration. Companies in Mid-Pannon appreciate the experiences, language skills, work culture and up-to-date technological knowledge that the returnees brought from abroad. In Lodz two of the respondents said, that their employees were sent abroad for training to gain technological and cultural knowledge for the company in which they work. Furthermore, the improvement of the English language abroad is very important because software, machinery interfaces and correspondences in Poland are working in English.

In Piedmont and Swietokrzyskie, returnees are seen as potential staff which developed in terms of their own personality. This personal growth is positively evaluated by the interviewed employers. All agreed that a foreign experience would add value at least on a personal level by allowing individuals to understand a different culture and a different way of organization. In many cases, the knowledge that is learned abroad by returnees can be useful to the interviewed businesses because there could be possibilities of making returnees carriers of innovation in organizational, management and production fields.

However, it depends on the professional field whether a stay abroad is a useful support for the improvement of the professional skills. There are areas, such as construction, where foreign experience is not necessary and field experience is much more important.

4.3.2. Commonalities and differences: Reasons to employ return migrants

In another step we asked which arguments support or contradict the potential employment of return migrants. In general all interview partners told us that the companies are very open-minded concerning an employment of returnees. Most of

employers haven't seen returnees as a specifically problematic group of applicants in the labour market. In Görlitz almost all companies said if returnees have exactly the same qualifications like any other potential non-migrant employee from the the region plus having experiences abroad than of course they would prefer the returnee.

The positive attitude to employ returnees is based on four arguments: The first one are the language skills, which returnees improved during their stay abroad. Especially in internationally active companies the communication at the management level is mostly in English. The second argument relates to cultural aspects and understanding different ways of organization and different views of thinking. It is quite important to have people with work experience abroad when it comes to the organization of work in different fields and countries. Also personal experience from abroad is considered by the interviewed business representatives as allowing to see the bigger picture, be more self-confident, and be able to come to terms with different situations easily. The knowledge which is learned in another country can be a plus in business because it contains often innovative perspectives on company development. The respondents mentioned that returnees are able to integrate new good practices and novelties to the company. The third point focuses on the individual growth and the learning of some professional abilities. In many cases returnees gathered up-to-date technological knowledge in international acting companies abroad. This knowledge can be used by the home company. Last but not least, the fourth argument for employing return migrants are the networks the employees build while abroad. The home companies can use these contacts to spread their international focus. In general a mixture of regional know-how and experiences from abroad would be the best combination an applicant should have.

On the other side there are some factors which impair the interest to hire return migrants respectively send staff consciously abroad. In general view many companies in fields like manufacturing, school, retail, insurance service or construction don't see foreign experience as necessary. They have the opinion that practical professional experience is more important for the successful business. The necessity to integrate personal which has worked abroad exists primarily for internationally active companies, not for small regionally operating ones. Multipliers and businesses often agree that it is unlikely that they would send staff abroad since they need them in the region. Therefore, in Görlitz Region just some have contact with other organizations or companies to exchange staff. In Swietokrzyskie Region there weren't any companies that were especially looking for return migrants. In a regular recruiting process return migrants were treated like everyone else who took part of it.

In the case of sending staff abroad, a problematic thing is to prove and judge the experience they gained abroad – in many cases they were hired away to a different position than their previous one. In other cases a little group of employers was afraid of financial claims of the return migrants, as one business association representative highlights:

> *"If they worked in their profession, after the return, they will have unreasonable wage demands."*
>
> (Multiplier, Swietokrzyskie)

4.3.3. Companies' support for remigrants

To evaluate the intensity of the efforts to make emigrants come back, we were in search of companies/organizations/initiatives assisting people in their potential return. In general, it seems that institutional and corporate activities are not focused on the issue of promoting remigration. No representative of our selected case regions could name a concrete organization or company which is specialized in the recruitment of potential return migrants. Only a small number of agents cares about this topic. One of the respondents in Lodz said that companies are not responsible to support the returnees. This support should be given by the Polish State. Also in the Regions Usti, Podravska, Piedmont and Swietokrzyskie there is no special support to the returnees. Yet, there are a few measures for the incipient stage of arrival of new employees. For example one of the respondents in Podravska said that they are trying to be a socially responsible company. Therefore they offer a day off for voluntary activities so the team could help the returnee with different tasks like the relocation. In Swietokrzyskie an employee of a company reported, they can offer an apartment for these high-skilled employees who can only be found abroad.

In Harz Region there was no special support for returnees mentioned, too. New employees were supported independent of their status. Some companies offer financial and technical support with respect to housing, relocation expenses or other aspects, but this happens independent from the individual background of the new staff member. In Mid-Pannon Region only multinational companies developed some measures to support the return of their former employees. In the case of national companies, supporting returnees is not in focus at all - though they like to hire returning migrants. Multinational companies can motivate their employees to gain experience abroad, to participate in a project at another company unit in a different country. These missions are for a certain period of time, and the mother companies would like to get back their employees. Therefore, they often offer a new position or a salary raise after the completion of the project abroad. One multiplier in Görlitz Region built up a webpage with job offers, so that returnees already can search from abroad. One company offered support in the past with paying a hotel room for a week, building networks for the returnee, helping with housing, giving information. Some companies help with social networking.

A lot of businesses say that returnees actually do not need support because they already know what they are coming back for and most times they have family and friends there who support them. Some businesses said they would assist them, for example give financial support, pay for flights, help to find accommodation, help

them to get same wages. They would also support staff exchange or send staff abroad for special training.

4.3.4. Difficulties of returning migrants from the perspective of the companies

For the returning migrants exist a lot of barriers and difficulties impairing their assimilation in the home society. The survey revealed different kinds of problems. First, many companies mentioned difficulties related to aspects of social re-integration. In this context one of the respondents in Swietokrzyskie pointed out, that the length of the period of staying aboard is significant. If the length is about two to three years, the returning person can switch relatively quickly to the conditions dominant in the home country. However, if this time is much longer it will be hard for a person to accommodate with the prevailing realities and to renew old acquaintances. Both the own personality and the conditions in the home region changed during the stay abroad. Old friends moved away, the composition of the urban districts changed or other economic and social aspects have changed over the course of time. Therefore, it is important that returning migrants have someone to help them to adapt to the new reality. One respondent in Lodz said that he had two friends who had returned to Poland for a short period. His friends quickly went abroad again. They could not accept how people act and they did not comprehend procedures and rules of operation in businesses. The social and organizational differences between abroad and life back at home might be a problem and people need time to adjust, as the interviewed business representatives mentioned.

Another problem which is connected to the difficulties described above is the difference of organizational systems in the host and the home country. Emigrants came in contact with either economic or social organizational differences, or with both at the same time. This could cause a problem of readjustment to the practices at home. In this respect, main problems are the slow and heavy terms of bureaucracy. Employers experienced that returnees in Piedmont und Swietokrzyskie complained about the impaired freedom of action in the economic sphere. Business representatives in Usti and Podravska observed that returnees queried the legal difficulties for founding an own company.

A couple of enterprises mentioned financial and qualification mismatches. A qualified professional in Mid Pannon can only earn a quarter up to a third of their former salary in some Western European countries, and the work load is even bigger. So the main concern of managers is how to keep returnees motivated, if they have to work harder for far less money. Many of them are afraid that a returnee would seize the first opportunity to go abroad again so they don’t consider returning migrants as permanent staff. One of the respondents in Lodz said that people who return will be unwilling to accept the Polish salaries. Also one entrepreneur in Piedmont argues that the remuneration in Italy is much lower as compared to the situation in the neighbouring Switzerland. On the other hand, some return migrants might face difficulties in finding a decent job, appropriate to

their profile, and they might even risk being overqualified for the positions in their home regions. One consequence can be longer periods of unemployment. In the Harz Region one of the most relevant difficulties is related to family aspects such as finding a house or flat and school or child care aspects.

4.4. Attitudes towards staff with foreign work experiences

After asking the interviewed business representatives for their experience with remigrants and staff with foreign work experience, we further looked at the attitudes of the interviewed business representatives concerning this group of workers.

4.4.1. General attitudes towards staff with foreign work experience

A first point here refers to the general attitude towards staff with foreign work experience. This question focussed more on a wider perspective, which is independent of personal experience and actual needs within the company. Generally, the companies we interviewed expressed a positive attitude to foreign work experience. In particular, employers, who already had direct experience with employees who had worked abroad, would also generally recommend to other employers to hire such employees. As positive aspects, the interview partners mentioned that foreign work experience is an indicator for an employee's capacity to tackle unknown and foreign situations, or to translate and compare contexts.

Also the development of character and personality is mentioned. Working abroad, people are suspected to become more self-confident, autonomous, co-operative, or knowledgeable. Intercultural competencies and language skills are valuable for the businesses. Additionally, employers think that people with foreign work experience can bring new knowledge to the company. This might refer to different fields. First, this knowledge can be technical: This refers to products and production processes, or equivalently to services and the way services are provided. Second, the transferable knowledge might be rather in the field of the organizational structure and the management of businesses. Workers with foreign work experience might bring in innovative ideas in all these fields of knowledge.

> *"The one who can handle to live and work abroad, can live and work everywhere."*
>
> (Multiplier, Harz Region)
>
> *„People with experience from abroad are per se more valuable."*
>
> (Other Multiplier, Harz Region)

Yet, the relevance and utility of foreign work experience heavily depends on the situation and the specific job in the home region. Furthermore, in particular the Polish businesses are aware of the fact that Polish people sometimes work below their level of qualifications or in different professional fields, other than the one in which they once graduated in Poland. So, some businesses – in particular in Poland – point to the importance of what the emigrants had actually worked abroad. If he/she worked in jobs that do not correspond to their education or work experience at home, they foreign work experience might be less relevant. The valuable technical and organizational knowledge is then not acquired by the migrants, and the company back at home has no access to such knowledge relevant for innovation. This viewpoint is also shared by companies in Piedmont Region, who think that foreign work experience should mirror a progression in career. If the foreign work experience was not combined with personal career advancement abroad, it seems less helpful.

> *"But, like it was said before, in our field of activity working abroad is not so important."*
>
> (Multiplier, Swietokrzyskie)

Particularly, in Usti Region – less so in other regions – business representatives mentioned that they do not see the sense in treating remigrants as preferred group of workers. Some companies also mention that it would be a form of discrimination against local non-migrants. And this is something that would be against law.

> *"I have personally the feeling that foreign experiences are very often overestimated in CZ. Lots of people look at these persons as he/she is a god, he/she has something different than others. I don't think these people are significantly better or worse than others. I suggest it is very individual."*
>
> (Business representative, Usti Region)

In all regions there is also intra-regional difference between individual companies, their size, their degree of internationality and their need for foreign work experience. This becomes obvious on a statement from a business association representative, who is also from the Usti Region, just like the business representative beforehand (quote above), who thinks that 'foreign work experience' is over-estimated. The business association representative (see quote below) stresses the importance of such foreign work experience and illustrates what the business association is doing to enhance it:

> *"We organise German language courses for graduates and apprentices, and they can get paid master training in Germany afterward. The master certificate is eligible through the EU. Master training is still missing in CZ."*
>
> (Multiplier, Usti Region)

So, it depends strongly on the individual perspective of the company, the estimation of the companies' representatives, and the economic sector, how relevant foreign work experience might be. Then there are companies who would generally not differentiate between migrants and non-migrants for they do not see an indicator of difference. They say it is more important to look at the facts: the relevant skills and knowledge and its development and improvement.

> *"Knowledge gained, always is a plus."*
>
> (Business representative, Swietokrzyskie)

The idea that return migration might indicate 'failure abroad' was not shared by the companies. The interview partners are aware of the fact that return migration is strongly related to personal and social factors: They mention as imagined motives 'home-sickness'; 'proximity to family and friends'; or a 'lack of social integration abraod'. The business representatives understand such motivations for return migration and they do not interpret them as 'return of failure'. Some businesses use this conviction to argue that return migration is mostly an issue of the private life and thus companies do not need to support return migrants. Their private networks should be supportive enough.

Finally, some companies also expressed they would expect return migrants and people with foreign work experience in general as people who are more mobile than non-migrants, and who are more probable and perhaps more willing to leave the region again. From the companies' perspective this would be an argument against hiring migrants, as the investment in human capital and tacit knowledge is risky. This also includes that companies fear inflated salary demands. They expect return migrants to have experienced work environments with higher wage levels, which companies in the case study regions cannot offer.

So, basically the interviewed businesses evaluate foreign work experience and return migrants as positively, but they also express certain conditions to do so (e.g. type of professional experience abroad; willingness to leave home region again; job expectations at home).

4.4.2. Judgement of the return process

We also asked the companies in the case study regions, how they would evaluate the return process itself. Our interviewees report several aspects that guide their personal perspective on return migration. They welcome return migration, if returnees come back with the attitude to also engage for their home region in wider civic terms. They also mirror positive opinions about the fact that returnees come back for their families and stabilize regional social networks. Return migration is not regarded as return of failure, but as a natural desire, a longing for social, cultural and geographic proximity. Yet, again the idea is repeated that return migration is first of all a phenomenon of the private life sphere. These interviewees think that businesses and employers should not interfere here. Again this is interpreted as an argument to not become active in assisting return by some. Other interviewees argue that in particular employing companies should help their remigrant employees also in private re-integration. Some mention that they provide help with relocation costs, with travel costs, with finding an apartment or child care and schooling. Yet, this direct assistance from companies only happens in exceptional cases. In particular, in Podravska Region, the interviewed company managers state that they would even prefer returning migrants to other applicants in order to facilitate their way back home.

Only some interviewed business representatives express suspicion towards return migration. In particular in Lodz Region this concerns the idea that mostly unskilled Polish people return, while highly-skilled people stay abroad. But Polish companies, who want to enter international markets, would need highly-skilled persons to manage this process.

4.5. Currently applied recruitment strategies

In this last section we will present findings on the currently applied recruitment strategies of interviewed companies. In this part of these interviews we focussed on the immediate moment, and not on general and wider timeframes.

At the moment of the interview not all companies needed to hire and look for new staff. So they also were not able to name current strategies of recruitment. Furthermore, returnees and other people with foreign work experience are not targeted in particular by most of the firms.

Companies named several channels for recruitment, which they use if they need personnel. Among these channels they report public and private employment agencies, temporary labour agencies, head-hunters, local newspapers and the internet. Only very sparsely, existing return initiatives' channels are used for recruitment. E.g. only one company in Görlitz Region named the return initiative '*Sachse komm zurück*'. The interviewed business representatives stress the role of business associations in assisting recruitment through channelling information on vacancies. In Harz Region, where labour shortages are acute, concerned companies

employ people without decent qualification and they retrain these people in internal apprenticeships. In Mid-Pannon Region, informal networks are important to find appropriate staff from within the region. The same accounts for Piedmont Region, where word-of-mouth information is the preferred way of recruitment. In Piedmont Region, there is the specificity that employers do no engage in the school-business nexus as they evaluate school education as too theoretical. As such they rather hire through testing an employee's practical skills during stages of internship. In Swietokrzyskie Region, the university is mentioned as a source for qualified staff. Co-operation starts when companies hire students for internships and thesis writing.

To sum up, a similarity in all case study regions is that many companies do not have recruitment strategies, and in most of the cases return migrants do not play a role in recruitment.

The transnational team of the Re-Turn project visiting a regional employer in the Podravska Region, Slovenia. The company is producing plastic profiles which are used for windows and doors in the building industry. It is one of the largest family-owned businesses in Slovenia and employs several hundreds of workers. The company itself is the symbol of successful return migration: It was founded by a Slovenian returnee, who had lived and worked in Germany. Saving money from work there, he founded first businesses in the construction sector. At the beginning of Slovenian transition, there was a massive need for building machinery which he imported second hand from Germany. With the profits made he started the visited company, which now has its main markets in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. This example shows how transnational ties can be an important aspect of return migration.

5. Case study regions

In this section, general conclusions for the situation in each case study region are presented as they were drawn by the local interviewer teams.

5.1. Usti Region (CZ)

by Zuzana Bartipanova, Otto Mertens & Jan Schroth

Regional employers see the Ústí region as region with good tradition (especially manufacturing tradition) and with great geographical position (neighborhood with Germany and Prague). The negative aspect they see in low qualification of local people and brain drain to main centers of CZ (Prague, Brno, Plzeň – young expert stay there after studies) and slow reaction of regional secondary/vocational and tertiary schools on their demands.

Generally they see returnees as skilled group on labour market but they don't look for them directly or don't look for them for example abroad. They educate and skill experts in own companies or through training courses during their studies. Foreign experience they see as benefit generally but they know it can't be rule.

Local multipliers try to stop brain drain or help to get qualified staff through qualification courses and development of staff requirements database. Moreover they cooperate for example with German business chambers or relevant bodies on improving of Czech qualified people.

The issue of migration and returning migration is not popular and important for employers or multipliers in Ústí region. It can be because of more often daily work migration to Germany than longer emigration abroad and following returning migration to Ústí Region.

5.2. Görlitz Region (DE)

by Roger Schmidtchen, Franziska Schubert & Gabriele Schönfelder

It is obvious that Return Migration for businesses doesn't play a significant role comparing with multipliers who already see Returning Migrants as an important potential source with special knowledge and social skills. Some businesses still think that it is enough to offer potential employees a work place to make them stay in the region. Interestingly, a lot of interview partners first said they don't know any Returnees never mind having them in the company and after talking for a while they remembered someone they know who returned. Also interesting is that many interview partners mention that there are not many young people willing to

go abroad even if the company offers paid exchanges or half/full year stays abroad. The question is if this is truly the fact or if the requirements for going abroad within the company are just not offering an unproblematic stay in another country. On the one hand multipliers as well as businesses recognize what kind of potential experiences abroad might have (social/soft skills, work experiences, personal experiences to strengthen the personality) but except a few they link it to returning migrants.

Important to mention is that many companies as well as multipliers claim family and school politics to do too little in cases of education, recruiting, motivation and social skills. Often it is in the businesses hands to educate their trainees in working and soft skills as well so the qualifications from school are already bad. A few other businesses complain about regulations of EU and the state concerning certain branches; these regulations limit the chances of potential qualified personnel since they are too hard. First, less people apply and second, the ones applying fail. As a consequence, qualified personnel are rare. Important for the future is that businesses seem very interested about Returnees, some said they would like to get in contact, one asked even if there are Returnees in the administrative district Görlitz. The same one also mentioned that it is also the job of those responsible for district and town, to make the region more attractive for young people especially from outward.

5.3. Harz Region (DE)

by Thomas Brammer & Heike Zembrod

Overall the business survey shows that the knowledge and experiences of return migrants and people with foreign experiences were regarded very positive. There were almost no negative experiences or statements about the topic of re-migration and foreign experiences. Nevertheless, did the interview partners mention that re-migrants were no special target group within their HRM strategy due to relatively low number of re-migrants.

The demographic change with the decreasing population, especially the reduced number of younger people, as well as the difficult market situation and competition of the companies and the region were regarded as the main challenges. The regional SMEs are often depending on oligopoly clients or suppliers and do have relatively low influence within the market. The size of the regional companies makes it also harder to attract new staff members or apprentices compared to bigger companies in more metropolitan areas (competition between regions and employers). Regional branding as well as employer branding were seen as very relevant and successful factors in this competition. One open question with respect to this is how the region can increase its regional branding, reaching a better cognition as an attractive region for living and working.

The interviews confirmed the general assumption about HRM strategies of SMEs. The interviewees mentioned that smaller companies, which are the majority of the regional companies, do mainly not have a long term and sustainable HRM strategy due to a lack of time and capacities. HRM strategies predominantly exist in bigger companies. Nevertheless do all interviewed businesses (independent from their size) use an active participation in networks and cooperation (e.g. with schools or universities) to secure an early binding of new staff members and to improve their employer branding.

5.4. Mid-Pannon Region (HU)

by Agnes Fiedler & Tamas Kovacs

During the interviews we also tried to monitor the companies' and multipliers' opinion about potential institutional services especially developed to the returnee's needs. At first they found strange this idea but they more or less agreed that there would be need for such services and if flexible and fast tools were available perhaps more people would feel motivated to turn back home. Such services could be: housing, childcare, help in administrative issues.

1. The surveyed companies don't have special policies for returnees in their HR development strategies. The regional HR development strategy is not dealing with returning migrants either.

2. Most of the companies have experiences with employing returnees. They are considered a valuable workforce, mainly due to their language skills and up-to-date technological knowledge.

3. When hiring a new professional, the companies don't focus only on returnees. In fact, many enterprises think that local knowledge and company specific competences are more important than the experience gained abroad. However, this kind of experience is always an advantage at job interviews. Companies appreciate the language skills, intercultural knowledge and flexibility of these candidates.

5.5. Piedmont Region (IT)

by Erich Giordano, Nuria Mignone & Emanuela Dutto

There are issues raised by some respondents that require attention. The territory we are talking about, the Ossola Valley, is a relatively small area, with a concentration of about 70.000 inhabitants.

It is easy to imagine that there are not major leading industries that can host large pools of workers. The leading sectors of the territory, the domestic services and

the construction industry, are still in crisis, even if not in loss, with the subsequent dismissal of resources that have troubles to relocate in the labor market. Indeed, a critical highlighted fact is that there are no clear and strong development policies for this region and, in this delicate economic climate, the line of credit almost disappeared, creating a vicious circle that begins in banks reluctance and ends in the inability of companies to make investments, considering the current very long time of payment. At present, companies are struggling to survive, the area is getting older and the idea that emerges is that we should work to keep young people who are there rather than thinking about policies to bring them back; many of them, in fact, are going to study at the Universities in Pavia, Milan and Turin and will stay there if they find a job in these cities.

Right now the aim for the territory of the Ossola Valley is not to bring back the skills that are migrated since for them there would be no possibility of a return, or to recognize them an appropriate value. The commitment is, rather, to avoid that resources go elsewhere to look for a work. Indeed, currently, those who work abroad do not have the desire to return, given the uncertainty that they would find in the region of origin. It is important to note that, at present, the cross borders of the Ossola Valley region are about 50 000 which is an added value and a great opportunity for the territory because from those figures depends many families that can count on a fixed salary, much higher than the Italian one. It would therefore be possible to provide a collaboration with schools to ensure a path towards professionalism to those who probably will make the future of this territory and that will ensure a development. These areas, separate from the declining traditional ones of household and building, could be the niche ones, those related to professional and sophisticated details, such as handicrafts and stone industry, and those related to an aging society that certainly needs particular services, such as those of the assistance. In this regard, a good experience could be UniversiCà, a project originally developed in Druogno for the recovery of ancient crafts and traditions that might be represent a good development opportunity for local resources.

During the workshop in June it will also be organized a meeting between businesses, entrepreneurs and students who are entering the world of work to ensure a match between demand and supply of labour and to ensure that the main stakeholders will discuss about these issues.

5.6. Lodz Region (PL)

by Nina Krajewska & Malgorzata Mastalerz

Statistics show that 95% of companies in the Lodz region are the smallest ones (micro-sized firms). Companies do not develop dynamically. They have poor access to sources of financing. The tax system is not favourable for to the development of companies.

On the other hand, entrepreneurs want a quick and large profit. Few of them know about the benefits of employing people who are workers with professional experience. Companies want to employ young people and school leavers, who work for little money. There are no real motivation systems. Companies operate in a short term perspective and they do not want to invest in their employees. They offer a higher salary than the present one to the person already employed in another firm, in order to gain a new employer. Thus, return migrants are actually no real target group of human resource strategies.

5.7. Swietokrzyskie Region (PL)

by Mariusz Kowalski

There was one thing raised by respondents, that maybe we should suggest migrants to start a new business on their own, after returning. But people, interested in this solution may be about 5% of all returnees. In those cases maybe the good method of support will be to select a group of business partners for those who, after returning want to start a new business.

There also appeared a suggestion among respondents to form a data base of skills and qualifications of returnees, so that companies could have access to them. In addition, the employer could use such a base to post their own vacancies, so that migrants could be aware of them.

Some interviewees said that there should be more interest from the authorities about the matter of the outflow of skilled workers, not only “theoretical interest”, but maybe some practical activities should be taken. “Perhaps authorities should learn from their mistakes and restore trade schools”-one of the interviewees said.

Right now the aim for the territory of the Swietokrzyskie Voivodship is to avoid further migrations of experts in technical field. After the close of trade schools, we are lacking specialist such as: welders, varnishers, logistic engineers, construction machinery and equipment engineers, maintenance engineers, engineers for construction of bridges.

Indeed, currently, those who work abroad do not have the desire to return, given the uncertainty of finding satisfactory job in the region of origin. The main reason of not coming back is lower pension in Poland than in countries of Western Europe.

5.8. Podravska Region (SI)

by Darja Borsic

According to the feedback received from the interviewed representatives of businesses and multipliers it may be concluded that:

- There is no regional strategy which would secure the availability of highly-qualified personnel in Podravska region;
- There is a positive attitude towards employment of returning migrants, but neither interviewed businesses nor have multipliers had any experience with it so far;
- Returning migrants mostly have problems with administrative procedures and adjustment to the new life style;
- The companies doing business abroad are of the opinion that employing a staff with international experiences has an added value, since people working abroad gain foreign language skills, social skills and networks. They find these people as more open-minded, communicative, and with a potential to bring new good practices and novelties to the company;
- Return process is not formulated in Slovenia and there is a lack of experiences with returning migrants' issues therefore potential employers are not used to look for (potential) returnees.

Businesses and multipliers identified the following existing problems which are specific for the region: highly qualified staff leaving the region, not enough experience and practical knowledge of potential employees, companies don't have enough time and resources to educate employees, no interest of unemployed to work on specific, physically intensive work places, lack of professional workers, young people are no longer interested in educating themselves in these areas, lack of technological development and lack of response of businesses to ideas from multipliers.

The transnational team of the Re-Turn project visiting a regional employer in the Mid-Pannon Region, Hungary. The company is developing alloy profiles which are used in the automotive and ship-building industry. It is one of the largest industrial employers in the case study region, having contracted about 900 workers. The company has a long tradition and survived the post-socialist transition, now extending into global markets. Renowned clients are Audi or Aston Martin car manufacturers. While the largest share of workers must not necessarily have international work experience, the company sends individual employees abroad for training and learning from other companies that are part of the same multinational group. Upon return, these workers bring in market-relevant knowledge, which helps the company to remain innovative and competitive. As product development is a very complex process, done in close cooperation with major clients, developers often have to go abroad, too. This example shows that foreign work experience and knowledge is an important resource for this company. Yet, even when operating in global markets, wages are comparably low in this company. Thus the company is confronted with international head hunters that chase for engineers and developers as well as management staff. Once lost to countries such as Switzerland, Austria and Germany, these high-skilled professionals earn up to 8 times what they could earn in the Hungarian company, and return is nearly impossible.

6. Conclusions

This report has provided relevant insights into the businesses' perspectives on return migration in general and on return migrants as potential workers in particular. We have seen that many of our case study regions are hit by the financial crisis in some ways. This might be more obvious in Poland and in Italy, and less relevant in Germany or Slovenia. Yet, all regions show the duality of growing or constant high unemployment rates in some sectors (low-skilled work, traditional sectors) and growing labour shortages in other sectors (high-skilled positions, new sectors such as IT; export based companies; care sector). Therefore, it seems important to reflect the potential role of return migrants for tackling problems of regional labour markets.

6.1. Remigrants as labour potential: Reflecting the hypotheses

In chapter 2 we have reviewed the body of literature on return migration and its development potential for the home regions. We have derived four hypotheses which will now be reflected in the light of our empirical findings from the business interviews.

Challenging the Human Capital Hypothesis: Basically, this hypothesis suggests that return migrants acquire new knowledge and skills, while they work abroad (cf. above p. 13f). Upon their return, and upon employment in the home regional labour market, companies can profit from this extra-regional knowledge in order to innovate their processes and products.

Given our findings, we can only partly say that this hypothesis is verified by our case study regions' companies. The overall estimation of return migration is positive, and it is associated with human capital development. Yet, there are aspects which limit the predictive power of this hypothesis. The benefit of foreign (extra-regional) knowledge is constrained by the respective work experience abroad. Not all jobs done abroad lead to relevant human capital increase. On the other hand, not all companies in the home region require particularly foreign work experience, but they ask for the 'right' work experience. This means new knowledge and skills must be relevant to the home regional company, yet it does not matter where (if abroad or at home) this work experience was acquired. Finally, not all companies operate internationally, so there is no general utility of professional skills from abroad.

A general agreement to this hypothesis can be given when it comes to non-specific (meaning not related to a profession or job) foreign knowledge and skills. The interviewed companies esteem the value of foreign work experience and return for

the development of a person's character and knowledgability. Return migrants are considered as more open-minded, more self-confident, and more co-operative as they had to orientate and integrate in a foreign environment. The learned mechanisms of adaption and translation are positively evaluated by our interview partners.

Challenging the Local Rootedness Hypothesis: This hypothesis argues that for rural regions return migrants are a more promising workforce than other immigrants, as the fact that they have an emotional attachment to the region, they are less willing to leave again. Thus, investing in their human capital is more profitable, than investing in other migrants who supposedly leave again after a short while.

Based on our interviews, evidence is mixed for this hypothesis. Only some interview partners shared this idea, when comparing remigrants to other immigrants. These companies referred to the binding ties of family and friends in the home region. Yet, a large group of companies also argued in the opposite direction. They have the impression return migrants – based on their experience in more attractive regions – have a high propensity to emigrate again, if their frustration back home increases. Having said this, companies rather are also cautious in hiring return migrants. They still prefer to focus on non-migrants from the own region.

Challenging the Lower Salaries Hypothesis: This hypothesis says that remigrants are more favourable than other immigrants as they are more willing to accept lower salaries back home. This hypothesis, however, has been created based on the specific empirical background of Eastern Germany (cf. Matuschewski 2010). In that specific situation there were only two main groups of immigrants to Eastern German regions: Western Germans with high wage expectations, and returning Eastern Germans with lower wage expectations. Western Germans would not accept a degradation of their career and income position, while Eastern Germans would accept it as a trade-off against the increase in social satisfaction back at home.

Based on our interviews in Central European regions, we cannot support this hypothesis. The interviewed companies rather reported that return migrants ask for income premia and higher wages, when they look for jobs in their home regions. Yet, as wage levels are below national average in our case study regions, most companies cannot afford to pay the expected wages. As such return migrants are even unattractive for companies in the home regions.

The wage level differences are even more pronounced between the case study regions and Western European regions of destination than they are for the specific case of German migration between Eastern and Western Germany. Therefore, this counter-argument becomes even stronger, and it can be formulated as an antagonistic hypothesis: 'From a financial point of view return migrants are less attractive than non-migrants as their expected wages are far above regional

average.' This observation supports the counter-positions to this hypothesis which can also be found in the literature.

The general problem in this negative estimation lies in the perspective that one takes to look at return migrants. Companies in our case study region compare them to the regional, non-migrant average as other (international) immigrants often do not move to these regions. As such the only group for comparison is the local non-migrant workforce, which accepts what is offered. Yet, if the companies really need to look for workers outside the own region, they might perhaps start to compare return migrants to other (international) immigrants. Then the question becomes: Are other immigrants available that would accept lower salaries than the remigrants? An empirical example for such a development is the Görlitz Region. In Görlitz Region local Eastern Germans in the health and care sector emigrated from the region to work in high-income regions like Western Germany, Switzerland, Austria, or also Scandinavian countries. Even though they are generally willing to go back home, they stay abroad as wage difference exceed a tolerance threshold. Yet, the regional health and care industry must not fight for these people to come back as there is enough labour supply from Czech and Polish neighbouring regions. Nurses and medical doctors are increasingly cross-border commuters. An opposite case would be that of Harz Region. Situated in the centre of Germany, it had the same problems with emigration of health and care workers, but cannot rely on a geographically given availability of cheap labour supply. In this context, return migrants could become more relevant again.

Challenging the Easy Integration Hypothesis: This hypothesis argues that return migrants are familiar with the mentality of people in the home region, and as such they are more easy to integrate into the wider community and the individual company's team than other immigrants.

The interviews with the companies reveal very few insights concerning this hypothesis. Only some companies have mentioned that issue. This observation points to the fact that the issue of social or mental reintegration is not an issue that companies reflect. Yet, the few statements we could get on that from the interviewed companies tend to support this hypothesis, while also critically remarking that remigrants personally change during their stay abroad. And the environment back home changes, too. So, further study on this issue is necessary to examine this hypothesis.

6.2. Outlook: Consequences for the design of return initiatives

This business survey has proven that companies in our case study region are still at an early stage in terms of strategically dealing with human resources (HR). Many companies also do not have the sufficient size to run own HR departments. Yet, business associations seem to be more aware of the fact that labour shortages will

increase in the future. Business associations inform companies about that fact and point to the importance of strategies. Yet, companies still rely to a large degree on sourcing staff from the regional labour market. Thereby they concentrate on the school-business nexus. As school graduate numbers stagnate or decline, the sustainability of such strategies to rely on endogenous labour supply can be questioned.

Given our observations so far, we have to think about the way how the Re-Turn project can be designed to benefit regional companies, and on the other hand, what role companies can play within the wider field of return initiatives and the Re-Turn project in particular. For securing labour supply, a HR strategy focussing on return migrants is one amongst many other possibilities (e.g. regional focus: school graduates; integration of elderly; integration of unemployed; international focus: immigrants). Return migration, thereby, combines the positive features of both – regional non-migrants and international immigrants. Just like regional non-migrants, returnees consider the case study regions as 'home' and they can emotionally relate to it. On the other hand, they can also bring in new knowledge, contacts and experiences from abroad. We call for stressing these positive viewpoint on return migrants and encourage the integration of businesses into the Re-Turn project and return initiatives in general.

The Re-Turn project should…

1) Respect the diversity of individual labour demand of the local economy. Companies needs and expectations vary according to company size, the degree of internationality, the economic sector and its current situation, the current staff and vacancies. As not all sectors and businesses are affected equally from labour shortages, the Re-Turn project should identify the specific needs of labour markets in each case study region. For further activities, such as pilot activities in the fields of 're-attract', 're-integrate' and 're-employ', individual sectors or company groups with a certain regional urgency can be picked out.

2) Actively address local businesses and inform them about the topic return migration and the results and progress of the Re-Turn project. In particular, businesses must be convinced that return migration is an important issue in the light of increasing interregional competition for labour in the European Union. The demographic development in the whole European Union suggests that tensions might increase. In this competition our case study regions have a competitive disadvantage: Through out-migration they have lost population in favour of other European regions. This translates into something which can vaguely be observed as 'regional culture of emigration'. Having said this, we should encourage companies to engage in the field of return migration as it is in their own favour. The Re-Turn project should help to raise awareness about the potential of remigrants.

3) Involve local businesses into the pilot activities. In particular, the field of matching companies' with remigrants' needs and interest is one of the tasks for the project. Therefore, the project should primarily ask companies to provide information about their vacant positions. While generally all pilot concepts leave space for the engagement and active participation of the businesses in case study regions, mainly the service concept and pilots relating to 're-employ' call for business involvement in defining needs and expectations on the regional labour market. In the activity line 're-attract' businesses could engage in terms of providing their information to the centralized attraction tools like websites, telephone hotlines, apps, or ambassadors. To assist the installations in 're-integrate' companies can provide help in the fields of company-based assistance to finding apartments/housing, child care, jobs for family members, etc through circulating information in their regional business networks.

4) Respect regional differences between case study regions. Usti Region and Piedmont Region have large difficulties with the border situation to, respectively, Germany and Switzerland. Many people actually do not emigrate. Yet, they are lost for regional labour market, as they commute into regions on the other side of the border where wage levels are higher. In these cases measures to retain people in the own labour market are necessary. Lodz Region, Swietokrzyskie Region and Mid-Pannon Region have problems with the strength of wage level differences to main destination regions abroad. While many people return to these regions, they often leave again after a while as they do not find appropriate employment. Here, measures to moderate the return in terms of informing about the home regional realities might be more effective for sustainable return than uncontrolled return flows. In Harz Region and Görlitz Region, the demographic change is already so advanced – rapidly ageing workforce, decrease in labour supply through school graduates- that these regions must focus on external attraction. So, there needs to be an appropriate mix of measures which reflects the regional situation.

7. Literature

Antal, A.B. & J. Wang (2003): Organizational Learning in China: The Role of Returners. WZB Discussion Papers, SP III 2003-103. Berlin: WZB.

Black, R. & S. Gent (2004): Defining, Measuring and Influencing Sustainable Return: The Case of the Balkans. Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty Working Paper T7. Brighton: University of Sussex.

Bogner, A.; Littig, B. & W. Menz (eds.) (2005, 2nd edition): Das Experteninterview. Theorie, Methode, Anwendung. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Bührmann, A. D. (2005): Rezension zu: Jochen Gläser & Grit Laudel (2004). Experteninterviews und qualitative Inhaltsanalyse [16 Paragraphs]. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 6(2), Art. 21, http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0502212.

Cassarino, J.-P. (2004): Theorising Return Migration: a revisited conceptual approach to return migrants. EUI Working Paper RSCAS No. 2004/02. San Domenico di Fiesole: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute.

Co, C.; Gang, I.; Yun, M. (2000): Returns to returning. Journal of Population Economics, 13: 57-79.

Dorusson, H.; Lenz, H. & S. Blavoukos (2005): Assessing the Reliability and Validity of Expert Interviews. In: European Union Politics, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 315-337.

Gitter, S.R.; Gitter, R.J. & D. Southgate (2008): The Impact of Return Migration to Mexico. In: Estudios Económicos, 23, 1: 3-23.

Grabowska-Lusinska, I. (2010): People on the move. Return Migration to Poland. Presentation on the European Job Mobility Day, Brussels, 16th Nov. 2010.

Martin, R. & D. Radu (2011): Return Migration: The Experience of Eastern Europe, International Migration (forthcoming).

Matuschewski, A. (2010): Stabilisierung der Regionalentwicklung durch Rückwanderung? Theoretische Konzeptionalisierung und empirische Umsetzung am Beispiel von Ostdeutschland. In: Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie, 54, 1: 81-95.

Mayring, P. (1993). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken. Weinheim: Deutscher Studienverlag.

SOPEMI (2008): International Migration Outlook. OECD.

Vavrečková, J. (2009): The Effect of Brain Drain in the Czech Republic and Earnings Motivation for Qualified Specialists to Work Abroad. Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs, Prague.

Annex 1: Questionnaire guideline Multipliers

Face-to-face interviews:

Introduction text:
Hello, my name is _____, and I work for_____. Thank you very much for being available for this interview today. As you know, I'm conducting interviews in the scope of the European Project "Re-Turn". This project's main activities are linked to development and implementation of services needed to support skilled migrants in their wish to return. The interview will be about human capital strategies to secure skilled personnel in companies and will last about 40-60min. It would be very important to digitally record this interview, to guarantee a thorough analysis of the data. We respect confidentiality issues and have prepared an informed consent form in which we guarantee proper use of information. Shall we briefly have a look at this and sign it?

The content of the interviews will be summarized and only used in an anonymous format. Recordings will be deleted after the project's end.

Do you have any questions? Ok, then let's start!

1. Thanks for being available for this interview. Could you please tell us a little about your activities at [name of organisation] and about your personal background?
2. What are - from your perspective – the biggest challenges and opportunities for companies within [name of region]?
3. In what way do you expect problems in future to attract qualified personnel to the region?
4. In what way do companies here in [name of region] secure the availability of highly qualified personnel? Are there any explicit strategies of the region or of particular companies and what are their key messages?
5. How does your organisation support companies to keep highly qualified staff in the region?
6. How easy or difficult is it for companies in [name of region] to find new staff on a qualified position? What is your experience in this respect?
7. What are your key strategies to support companies to find appropriate staff?
8. Does your organisation support the internationalisation of human capital by sending staff abroad? Why?

Opinion cards:

Instruction: Next, I will present you three statements that employers have said. Please tell me what you think about them?" *[Read out statement 1 and show the corresponding card. Wait for an answer. Then go on with statement 2 and 3 applying the same method]*

Statement 1: Local knowledge and company specific competences are much more relevant to us than work experience abroad.
Statement 2: Intercultural competences and foreign language skills are more and more important in professional life. We try to prefer new staff with such competences.
Statement 3: I often ask myself why local people return to their home regions. Did they fail abroad? Are they too risky? I am not sure if I can trust these people.

Current strategies:

Instruction: Now I like to know more about current personnel strategies and how you would evaluate them.

9. Would you suggest companies to employ more people with experience from being abroad? Why?
10. In our project we are focusing on emigrants and returnees in particular. How do you value their experience from abroad?
11. Are you aware of any difficulties returnees were facing when returning to the region?
12. Are you aware of any offers in the region to give returnees additional support (e.g. relocation allowances, professional development courses)?

Final part:
Instruction: We are close to the end.

13. Do you have any issues, which you deem relevant but we didn't get to speak about? Any comments, remarks?
14. Can you name companies, which could be interesting for our project and we could come in contact with?
15. Do you have any questions to us?

Farewell:

This was the final question. Can we check some general information about your organisation? [please verify your data]
If you are interested in the results, we could send them to you. If you have any questions, you can contact me or our project leader [name of institution /or name of project responsible] at any time. [please provide project flyers and contact data]. Thank you very much for your participation.

Annex 2: Questionnaire guideline Businesses

Face-to-face interviews:

Introduction text:
Hello, my name is _____, and I work for_____. Thank you very much for being available for this interview today. As you know, I'm conducting interviews in the scope of the European Project "Re-Turn". This project's main activities are linked to development and implementation of services needed to support skilled migrants in their wish to return. The interview will be about your human capital strategies to secure skilled personnel in your company and will last about 40-60min. It would be very important to digitally record this interview, to guarantee a thorough analysis of the data. We respect confidentiality issues and have prepared an informed consent form in which we guarantee proper use of information. Shall we briefly have a look at this and sign it?

The content of the interviews will be summarized and only used in an anonymous format. Recordings will be deleted after the project's end.

Do you have any questions?

Ok, then let's start!

1. Thanks for being available for this interview. Could you please tell us a little about your activities in the company and about your personal background?
2. What are - from your perspective – the biggest challenges and opportunities of your company at this location?
3. In what way do you expect problems in future to attract qualified personnel to your company?
4. How does your company secure the availability of highly qualified personnel? If there are explicit strategies, what are the key messages of these strategies concerning personnel?
5. How do you manage to keep highly qualified staff in your company?
6. Have you recently looked for or are you currently looking for new staff on a qualified position? Which field? What is your experience in this process?
7. What are your key strategies to find appropriate staff? Do you cooperate with further institutions in recruiting?
8. Are you sending own staff abroad? Why? How do you support them if you do?

Opinion cards:

Instruction: Next, I will present you three statements that employers have said. Please tell me what you think about them?" *[Read out statement 1 and show the corresponding card. Wait for an answer. Then go on with statement 2 and 3 applying the same method]*

a) Local knowledge and company specific competences are much more relevant to us than work experience abroad.
b) Intercultural competences and foreign language skills are more and more important in professional life. We try to prefer new staff with such competences.
c) I often ask myself why local people return to their home regions. Did they fail abroad? Are they too risky? I am not sure if I can trust these people.

Current strategies:

Instruction: Now I like to know more about current personnel strategies and how you evaluate them.

9. Would you suggest other companies to employ more people with experience from being abroad? Why?
10. In our project we are focussing on emigrants and returnees in particular. What interests you when you lead job interviews with returnees? In what way do you judge their experience from abroad?
11. Are you aware of any difficulties returnees were facing when returning to the region?
12. Did you offer returnees additional support (e.g. relocation allowances)?

Final part: We are close to the end. I have just three questions left.

13. Do you have any issues which you deem relevant but we didn't get to speak about? Any comments, remarks?
14. Do you have any questions to us?

Farewell: This was the final question. Can we check some general information about your company? [please verify your data]

If you are interested in the results, we could send them to you … If you have any questions, you can contact me or our project leader [name of institution /or name of project responsible] at any time [please provide project flyers and contact data]

Thank you very much for your participation.

Regions benefitting from returning migrants

After 1989 Central Europe has gone through important political, economic and social changes. The entry of many CE countries to the European Union during first decade of 21st century enhances the European integration. Joining European space accelerated economic growth of these countries and opened work migration flows, mainly from Central Europe to North-Western Europe.

Economically motivated migration of in particular young and well educated people from the New Member States to high-income countries is currently dominating international migration flows in Europe thanks to the free right to work in any other EU Member State. This is intensifying a brain drain process for many regions in Central Europe and certainly for the Re-Turn case study regions.

On the other hand statistics show the willingness of these people to come back to their countries. However, this process is often associated with significant problems of reintegration. Often the home regions neglect the returning migrants' contribution to regional economic development of these countries, and they do not support migrants in their return. It is estimated, that up to 50% of these outmigrants would return to their home countries within 5 years after emigration – a huge potential for regional development as these people gained new social, cultural and professional competencies while being abroad.

Project message:

"Re-Turn perceives returning migrants as a key factor for innovative regional development and therefore it creates new services and tools in order to facilitate their return and reintegration in their home region."

Re-Turn's main objectives are linked to the development and implementation of services needed to support migrants in their wish to return, the promotion of returning migrants as a human capital resource for innovative business development, the creation of framework conditions for reintegration into their home countries' labour markets and social communities. The project aims at developing, testing and implementing joint strategies, new support policies, tools and services in the participating regions.

Target groups:

1. decision takers, senior officers from regional authorities and labour market organisations
2. training and qualification organisations
3. business associations and economic development organisations
4. social groups representing migrants
5. returning migrants

The project seeks to gather original knowledge on the specific situation of returning migrants. Therefore an online survey is available under http://return.ifl-leipzig.de until July 2012 addressing emigrants who have already returned home, or who want to do so in the future. This knowledge will be used to push the topic of 'return migration' on the political agenda, providing an account of the specific motivations and problems of returning migrants, and offering solutions for regional stakeholders to support them in their return.

Further information:

www.re-migrants.eu

Dr. Thilo Lang

Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography)

Tel: +49-341 60055-159

email: T_Lang@ifl-leipzig.de

Project information:

Project partners:

Countries involved: Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, and Italy

Case Study Regions:

Ústí Region (CZ)

Görlitz Region (DE)

Harz Region (DE)

Mid Pannon Region (HU)

Lodz Region (PL)

Swietkrzykie Region (PL)

Piemonte Region (IT)

Podravska Region (SI)

Main outputs:

1. *CE remigration online visualisation platform*
2. *Toolkit with methods and instruments of success stories*
3. *Handbook with Transnational joint planning and management tools*
4. *Tools and services to re-attract emigrants*
5. *Transnational Strategy for attracting and reintegrating migrants*

Project duration: 5/2011 – 4/2014

ERDF funding: 1.774.160,56 €