Students' brigades - benefits, opportunities and disadvantages

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Abstract: The report is based on a research conducted by Dr. Vladimir Karadzhov among 500 students and their families in the period 2011-2016 year, which studies the phenomenon "international student labor migrations", also known as "student brigades." Large number of quantitative indicators is being studied by which different aspects of the phenomenon can be analyzed - benefit, cost, duration, workload and others. The survey also studies and some qualitative aspects of the phenomenon, associated primarily with the subjective impulses influencing the behavior of young people and influencing their decision-making.

Keywords: students, migrations, mobility, cross-border, employment

1. INTRODUCTION

Actuality of the topic

The international students' labour migrations, also known as “students' brigades” are a socio-economic phenomenon, which is remarkably widespread.

Since 2000 more than 337 500 Bulgarian citizens are falling directly under its influence, as personally participating, or as members of families/households of participants. Indirectly students’ brigades affect the life of more than half of the population of the country. This is an amazing scale of influence for any socio-economic phenomenon; therefore it must be examined and researched thoroughly.

Last, but not least, the phenomenon is popular in many other Central and Eastern European countries. There are many similar features between its characteristics in all these countries, including Bulgaria, since the young participants choose the same destinations and accepting countries, work and live under the same conditions there during their holidays. All the research about the students’ brigades that took place in Blagoevgrad will be of use for the rest of the areas, where the phenomenon is observed.

Object of study

Object of study for the research is the phenomenon of the international students’ labour migrations, also known as “students' brigades”

Main purpose and task of the study

This research aims to reveal 3 main features of “students' brigades”:

• Their benefits
• The opportunities they create for young people
• Their disadvantages
2. METHODS AND APPROACHES

**Author’s definition**

For being able to research the phenomenon, we must first introduce and accept an acceptable definition, since there isn’t a unified one until now. According to the author’s definition of the phenomenon, "students’ brigades" represent:

"The process whereby participating students in bachelor's or master's programs voluntarily change their place of residence for a certain period of time (usually between 3 and 6 months), going outside their own country, to participate in economic activities, with or without the assistance of an intermediary, as it does not change their status of students."

**Methods and approaches**

For the purpose of the study the following methods were utilized: representative sample surveys among approximately 500 students for a period of 5 years, between 2011 and 2016; method of comparison; analysis of statistical data from official sources; complex analysis.

In this survey was used the regional approach – defining the area of study and the selection of participants; the individual approach – working individually with many related respondents.

**Most preferred destinations**

At the first stage of study information was collected about the most preferred destinations of the participants. The accepting countries, chosen by students for summer brigades were summarized as following:

**USA** – 76% of the participants; **United Kingdom** – 15%, **Germany** – 4%, **others** (Canada, Denmark, Greece, Cyprus etc.) – 5%

**Benefits of participation**

In order to reveal the beneficial part of participation in a student brigade we first collected data about the predominant economic activities, which Bulgarian students are employed in.
These seasonal jobs are characterized by low qualification requirements, seasonal appearance (mostly in tourist and agricultural sectors), and they are also very profitable according to Bulgarian standards. These jobs also require sustainability to work hard, outdoors, often under the strong sunshine, wind and other unfavorable natural conditions. This is the reason for demanding young people (students) to employ.

The average monthly and hourly wages in Bulgaria were compared, for the similar activities, for a period of 4 months – that is the average period of residence on a brigade, with the financial funds spared averagely during a brigade in order to find out if the students brigades are more profitable than a seasonal work in the home country or not.
Then we calculated the total wage for the period, excluding the funds, necessary for one student’s maintenance, and these are the results concerning the possible financial savings:

For a period of 4 months in Bulgaria:

The biggest possible savings are 2133.16 BGN (1233.04 USD) at greatest possible scarcity, which means - if students are living at the poverty line according to the national standards.

The possible savings at normal maintenance are 897.00 BGN (518.50 USD), if students are living at the average maintenance, according to the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria (1 USD = 1.73021 BGN according to the National bank exchange rate for 10.06.2016).

For a period of 4 months abroad:

![Diagram showing savings](source)

Source: Karadzhov, V., 2013

**Fig. 3:** Average wage an hour in BGN in Bulgaria

**Fig. 4:** Money saved by Bulgarian students during a summer work program abroad
According to data collected in previous authors’ surveys is obvious, that students working abroad manage to collect between 3,000 and 5,000 USD for a period of 4 months, Fig. 4. This is way higher as a total wage than what can be collected at the local basis (518.50 USD).

This data corresponds and approves the results from another stage of the survey. According this stage most of the students who work abroad are predominantly satisfied with their incomes. The results are shown on Fig. 5.

Source: Karadzhov, V., 2013

Fig. 5: Income satisfaction of Bulgarian students working abroad

The conclusion is: Students’ brigades are very profitable! This is a very sustainable benefit, and among the strongest reasons for the attraction of students brigades together with the adventurous side of the process. Students’ brigades will continue to expand the number of participants, until they manage to sustain their high profitability.

Disadvantages of participation

During the survey some disadvantages were also observed. They included predominantly:

- The stress, suffered by the participants, caused by the hard and prolonged work;

- The exhaustion from the long working days, less resting and the long period of 3-4 or more consecutive months of hard work (Fig. 6 and 7);

- The psychological discomfort, caused by the lack of friends and family as a main supporters in life, their miss and the nostalgia for home;

- Some health problems appear within the participants. These are mainly: increase or decrease of weight, acne, skin problems, menstrual problems, allergies etc. Their symptoms mostly are quickly overwhelmed after returning home and having a good rest.
The conclusion is: Students’ brigades are exhausting! Despite that, students are more than happy to have more working hours in order to save more money during the student brigade.

Opportunities of participation

The international students’ labour migrations, also known as “students’ brigades”, create variable opportunities for the participants. Among the most important are:

- Students can collect some financial capital for future business
- Students can discover new ideas for business and new economic niches, which they can use after returning home.
- Students brigades create opportunities for language learning and improvement the foreign language skills
- Students’ brigades play a significant role in widening the participants’ general culture

3. CONCLUSIONS

As revealed so far, the main conclusions about the students’ brigades can be summarized in the following statements:

- Students’ brigades are very profitable.
- Students’ brigades are exhausting.
- Students’ brigades create opportunities for the young people.

Most of the participants are very satisfied with their summer brigade experience and are enthusiastically advising other students to participate.

Students’ brigades allow maximum utilization of the students’ free time during their vacation. Students’ brigades create chances for full realization of youth’s labour potential that are absent in their home countries. They are very profitable. The negative effects are acceptable. There are no adequate alternatives as seasonal activities at the present moment here.

The general influence that students’ brigades cause upon the participants and their countries is predominantly POSITIVE.

4. REFERENCES


