

The migration pattern of university graduates in Austria

Background & aim

In Austria, higher educational institutes are specifically targeted by regional policy, and many had been established in smaller towns that are not state capitals due to their assumed contribution to regional economic development. However, regions are unable to benefit from the generated human capital if graduates cannot be retained: In the year 2019 (pre-COVID-19), 18 out of 41 university locations in Austria experienced an outflow of people in the age group 20-24 years.

The aim of the project is firstly, to examine migration patterns of people with tertiary education in Austria, whereby the geographical unit of analysis shall comprise political districts with a special focus on those hosting campuses of higher educational institutes (HEIs). The purpose is to acquire knowledge of the direction and volume of bilateral migration flows, split into age groups, gender, and level of education, and thereby determine, which Austrian districts experience an inflow and which an outflow of human capital. In a next step, influencing factors on a region's attractiveness for human capital (so-called "push and pull factors") shall be assessed. The novelty of this approach and concurrent, the academic relevance is the role of HEIs as producer of human capital, which has so far been neglected. In this regard, the presence of HEIs, offered fields of studies, their match to regional business activities, number of students and graduates, spin-offs, catchment area etc., shall be considered to determine the extent to which HEIs act as talent magnet for a region.

Academic and practical relevance

From existing literature, it is known that the migration patterns of people with tertiary education differs from those with lower levels of education. And although there is already a variety of studies available on the migration pattern of highly skilled people, the role of higher educational institutes for regional development and the attraction of talent in this regard have not been thoroughly examined so far. This research gap shall be closed.

Practical relevance is given by facilitating the development of targeted concepts for university locations to retain graduates in the region and attract new talent, which in turn leads to an economic strengthening of the (often rural) region and realizes a competitive advantage.

Methodology

In a first step, a thorough literature review will be conducted to outline the current research status in the field of migration of the highly skilled as well as the influencing role of higher educational institutes on these flows as well as their role as growth poles for the region. After descriptive statistics on the direction and magnitude of bilateral tertiary migration flows, amongst others illustrated with circular migration plots, catchment area of universities, regional match between HEI and the economy, etc., econometric modeling will be deployed. A regional "retention rate based on the prior determined migration flows as independent variable will be calculated, that is, measuring how well a university region manages to keep and attract human capital, and to determine statistically significant influencing variables. Where migration flows including demographic characteristics is not available, e.g., in the case of foreign-born migrants, they will be estimated.