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Original scientific paper
 doi: 10.5937/snds25012V

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN SERBIA: CHANCES AND CHALLENGES

Abstract: The paper focuses on analyzing the importance of international education as a key factor in social development, with special attention to the challenges faced by individuals, policymakers, and universities. Through historical context, publicly available data, and empirical research, the paper emphasizes that international education is fundamentally essential for the continuous development of states. According to data from the World Trade Organization, countries that promote research and international mobility of the academic community are leaders in international trade, capital flow, and foreign direct investment. In the case of Serbia, there is awareness of the benefits of attracting academics from abroad, but problems in coordination and creating better conditions for their integration are becoming apparent. However, the collected data also show that Serbian students abroad face similar challenges. In conclusion, the paper offers recommendations for the development of public policies regarding international students in Serbia.

Key words: international education, public policies, international students, chances, challenges.

Međunarodno obrazovanje u Srbiji: šanse i izazovi

Apstrakt: Rad se fokusira na analizu značaja međunarodnog obrazovanja kao ključnog faktora društvenog razvoja, sa posebnim osvrtom na izazove sa kojima se suočavaju pojedinci, donosioci odluka i univerziteti. Kroz istorijski kontekst, javno dostupne podatke i empirijska istraživanja rad ukazuje na to da je međunarodno obrazovanje suštinski važno za kontinuirani razvoj država. Prema podacima Svetske trgovinske organizacije, zemlje koje podstiču istraživanja kao i

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međunarodnu mobilnost akademske zajednice predstavljaju lidere u međunarodnoj trgovini, protoku kapitala i stranim direktnim investicijama. Što se tiče Srbije, postoji svest o koristi od privlačenja akademaca iz sveta, ali se nazire problem koordinacije i stvaranja boljih uslova za njihovu integraciju. Međutim, prikupljeni podaci pokazuju da se sa istim problemima suočavaju i naši student u inostranstvu. U zaključku se navode preporuke za kreiranje javnih politika koje se odnose na međunarodne studente u Srbiji.

Ključne reči: međunarodno obrazovanje, javne politike, međunarodni studenti, šanse, izazovi.

Introduction

Based on the results of empirical research conducted among an international student population and secondary analysis of data from other domestic and foreign studies, this paper aims to highlight the potential benefits for Serbia from investing in international student mobility, as well as the challenges faced by society and public administration. Migration and population mobility characterize the modern world, called the age of migration³ (de Haas et al., 1998), and the number of international students increases every year. Therefore, this phenomenon deserves careful consideration when creating public policies.

In the age of globalisation and relatively easy exchange of knowledge on a global level, as well as the openness of universities to students of foreign origin, and due in part to their strong motivation for international student exchange, there has been significant growth in the migration of the academic population. According to UNESCO data for 2021, the number of international students has tripled compared to the beginning of this millennium (UIS, 2023), reaching 6.4 million in 2022, whereas in 2001 that number was 2.2 million. According to available data, the main destinations remain the USA and Western and Northern European countries. However, data on the movement of this population show that other countries, such as China, Japan, and Oceania, are also emerging, with their universities becoming increasingly popular. Regarding Serbia, as a coun-

3 Namely, the number of migrants is continuously increasing. According to United Nations data, in 2024 there were approximately 304 million international migrants in total, meaning that this number has doubled compared to the last decade of the previous century, when it was around 154 million (UN DESA, 2025:2). A significant portion of this increase is attributed to refugees from war-affected areas, primarily the war in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, as well as prolonged conflicts in African countries. In addition, globalisation, accompanied by interstate agreements on the free movement of people, capital, and goods, has contributed to the rise in the number of economically motivated international migrants.

try of origin for international students and as a host to students from various parts of the world, growth is also being recorded here.

In addition to awareness of academic programs, various scholarship schemes —initiated and implemented by governments and different foundations — have contributed to the volume and direction of student mobility. Without these programs, such mobility would be far less accessible, especially for students from lower social strata (Lopez-Duarte et al., 2021). Furthermore, state policies aimed at this population are also crucial in creating a social climate that would attract them. The motivation of states to develop appropriate policies lies in the proven significant impact of this population on the growth of economic profit, as well as cultural and human capital. However, the studies referenced in this paper indicate that, despite efforts by states and a relatively long history of international education in Serbia, students still encounter numerous barriers during the initial integration process into the host country's education system and society.

International Education as a Significant Factor in Understanding the Societal Prosperity of Countries

There are numerous reasons for the increase in the number of international students and the identification of specific patterns in their movement. Still, they are generally recognized as the result of social transformations⁴ and state policies developed based on identifying the multifaceted importance of student mobility, not only from the individual's perspective, but also from that of universities and states (Sidhu, 2011). Research conducted in the United States shows that the presence of international students shapes the identity of each university and significantly contributes to its overall well-being (Hegarty, 2014, p. 225). First, international students represent a vital component in university research. According to some authors (Chellaraj et al., 2008) a 10% increase in international grad-

4 The importance of international education was recognized even earlier. In the second half of the nineteenth century, European universities became accessible to all social classes. Despite the differences between the German, French (Napoleonic), and Anglo-Saxon models, universities opened their doors to foreign citizens. One of the basic premises of the mass type of higher education (as it exists today) is openness to student mobility, allowing individuals to further develop capital in the form of knowledge and social connections in their home countries (Jarić & Jovanović Ajzenhamer, 2020). This was particularly important for France as a colonial power, since graduates would return to their countries and participate in building their societies according to the French model. Thus, the diversification of knowledge and students lies at the very core of the idea of mass higher education, even before the intensification of globalization processes.

uate students correlates to a 4,5% increase in a patent applications. In that sense, it could be said that international students are picking up the mantle of innovation in the USA universities where they study and research and are essential to these universities' research function. On the other hand, most of them must pay their fees which have significant impact not only on universities but also on local economy. Injecting almost 43,8 billion dollars in to the USA economy during the 2023-2024 academic year (NAFSA, 2025), international students are a vital source of revenue. From tuition and fees, to food, clothing, travel and textbooks almost every other industry on the local level benefits from their presence.

Viewed from a broader economic perspective, analyses of the economies of developed societies point to the advantage of prioritizing the creation, storage, use, and transfer of knowledge as essential conditions for development. According to the World Trade Organization's analysis, research focused on growth is the primary driving force determining the scale and direction of international trade, capital flows, foreign direct investment, and the advancement of integration processes (Grečić, 2010). Aware of the importance of scientific and technological progress, the countries that are statistically the most attractive to international students—and at the same time global geo-economic leaders—carefully design immigration policies and invest in the diversity and quality of tertiary education. Their goal is to attract highly educated migrants from underdeveloped and developing countries, which represents their leading strategy for progress (Chua, 2007; Florida, 2003).

In the 'war for talent,' national governments and public policies play a key role, as national development needs and the needs of international students create them. In addition to attracting highly educated individuals from other countries, the public policies of developed states are also aimed at creating a context that would motivate the domestic population to engage in academic mobility, to acquire and transfer knowledge and best practices, and direct them toward the development of their home country. Contrary to the views of some early globalization theorists—such as Appadurai (Appadurai, 2011), who argued that the role of the state would diminish as globalization progresses—research on international student migration shows that the state continues to play a vital role in the decisions of individuals and their families to participate in academic mobility. Depending on whether the goal is to attract foreign students or to encourage domestic students to pursue mobility for the sake of knowledge, states create attractive conditions for life and research at home, or provide scholarships for talent to study abroad and establish conditions for easier (re)integration.

Historically, the encouragement of Serbia's educated elite to acquire knowledge abroad dates back to the 19th century, when young men were sent to Vienna and Pest to gain experience and contribute to the creation of a modern state. The history of higher education in Serbia — from the development of the *Velika škola* (Grand School) in the early 19th century to the founding of the University (in 1907) as a formal and mass higher education institution with guaranteed autonomy (separation from church and state) — is closely tied to educational migrations of key actors and students. After World War I, during which a large number of students perished, hundreds of young men from Serbia went to European educational centers to complete their studies and acquire new knowledge (Trgovčević, 2003). State-funded scholarships were suspended during periods of deep socio-economic crisis, particularly in the 1990s. In that period students got scholarships from foreign governments and foundations, which did not necessarily have representation in the Republic of Serbia (Vesković Anđelković & Vasojević, 2023).

Today, international students of Serbian origin are funded from various domestic and foreign sources, indicating, on one hand, Serbia's interest in gathering educational and social capital from around the world, and on the other, the interest of different countries in our talents and the knowledge acquired in Serbia. One of the motives for the growing attention to student mobility and the increased investment in the mobility of students of Serbian origin is Serbia's accession to the Bologna Process, which, in addition to other higher education reforms, also emphasizes mobility. The Bologna Declaration significantly influenced the increase in the number of international students in Europe, and through programs such as TEMPUS and ERASMUS, it has contributed significantly to the rise in the volume of student mobility from Serbia⁵.

On the other hand, considering the findings of various analyses on the importance of attracting foreign students—not only from an economic standpoint but also from the perspective of international relations—as well as the obligations set forth by the Bologna Declaration, Serbia is shaping a policy aimed at creating conditions to attract students from other countries to study at its universities. In addition to joint programs of the European Union, the 'World in Serbia' program, launched in 2011, stands out. It annually awards scholarships to around 200 foreign students from more than 60 countries, not limited to those from Europe. Besides financial support, scholarship recipients are provided with accommo-

5 According to UNESCO data, in 2021, there were a total of 11,247 Serbian students enrolled at universities worldwide, making up about 0.2% of the total international student population (UIS, 2023).

tion and free Serbian language courses, an additional incentive to choose Serbia as a study destination. Implementing this program significantly contributes to the increase in foreign students in our country⁶, opening the door to greater knowledge exchange and creating emotional capital, which can play an important role in bilateral international relations. Given the long-term development goals of the Republic of Serbia, which include a knowledge-based economy and closer international networking, it is expected that policies aimed at attracting foreign students will continue, alongside efforts to encourage the mobility of Serbian students for knowledge transfer, expanding social capital, and establishing bilateral relations with host countries.

Challenges International Students Face in Studying Abroad

In the age of mass migration and population mobility, the decision to change one's place of residence—even when motivated by war, political crises, or natural disasters—gives a person the feeling that they are in control of their life and strong enough to adapt to new contexts and living conditions. Therefore, we can assume that „hope for a better present or future elsewhere drives the individual to experience migration or mobility“ (Papatsiba, 2005, p. 30). Thus, students' mobility becomes an act expressing the individual appropriation of an “enlarged” action-space, which is supposed to become less constrained by social determinism. According to this assumption, mobility can also be seen as a form of elective biography (do-it-yourself biography) and would favour the emergence of a freer individual (Ibid, 29). Results of a few research (Vesković Anđelković & Vasojević, 2024; Vesković Anđelković, 2019; Nada & Araújo, 2018; Papatsiba, 2005) have shown that student mobility reinforces the individual belief of being able to face changing environments, to monitor the self and to be monitored as a self, and to take control of one's life-path reflexively, by accepting risks impelling new dynamics. From the students' perspective, mobility experience seems to release impulses for personal growth and individual autonomy. Yet this advantage, however important it may be, often dominates the other outcomes of a mobility period, such as cultural and political awareness, intercultural competence and enlarged feeling of belonging (Papatsiba, 2005, pp. 29 – 30).

6 The share of foreign students in Serbia within the total international student population in 2021 was similar to that of Serbian students in that population, 0.2%, which in absolute numbers amounts to 15,060 students (UIS, 2023).

So, migration could have double-edged benefits – as we saw, students' migration has the potential for hugely positive consequences for the person and their communities of origin. Whether through the flow of ideas, remittances or technology transfer, migration positively enhances human capabilities (Castles, 2010, p. 1568). However, it is also important to acknowledge that migration can destabilize the security of individuals who are confronted with significant changes in language, culture, food, and climate, often without the supportive networks of family and friends. A sense of security is critical to enable individuals to make the necessary academic adjustment, to build new relationships and adjust to a different sociocultural milieu (Sidhu, 2011, p. 13). Some authors (Marginson et al., 2010, p. 35) have summarized factors that could have big impact on students sense of wellbeing and security: lack of equal respect, problems of intercultural mixing, language barriers, financial difficulties, work, housing, health care, safety, immigration, university bureaucracies, loneliness.

Among all the factors listed, insufficient language proficiency is the most frequently mentioned issue. Even within the European Union, where English is used as a lingua franca at universities, students often feel isolated from the local community and their peers in the host country. Taking lectures in a language different from the local one fosters the creation of language-based clusters that keep international students away from locals. According to some authors, "relations with locals might be the key to moving forward on loneliness" (Sawir et al., 2008, p. 172). At universities where there is no option for instruction in English, students who have not sufficiently mastered the language of the host country find it more challenging to follow classes and pass exams. They often achieve poorer results than domestic students, which becomes a source of frustration and can be one of the reasons for a quick return to their country of origin.

Insufficient language proficiency can further lead an individual into isolation and loneliness, especially if they do not already have an established network of acquaintances before arriving in the host country. Students often report that during their stay abroad, due to limited language skills, they faced difficulty bringing their personality to life in a foreign language (Nada & Araújo, 2018, p. 315). Although some of them recognized the language barrier as a motivating factor for learning the language of the host society (Nada & Araújo, 2018, p. 316), in most cases, this obstacle is most easily overcome by creating a positive context at the university and in society at large. Adapting lectures to meet their needs and organizing more frequent consultations along with language classes has proven to be the most effective way to integrate international students. Additionally, a supportive atmosphere at the university and within the local community helps mitigate cultural dissonances that formed barriers to meaningful discourse (Peacock & Harrison, 2009, p. 429).

As with the case of language, a positive and friendly atmosphere in the environment where the students find themselves plays a crucial role in the lives of many foreign students. According to the results of the empirical research, „students can feel emotionally deprived in their host country without their support network from their home country“ (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 703). Most of the students included in the research recognised that their successful adaptation in host countries is highly dependent upon the support they received from other people in the local environment. Therefore, their engagement in network relationships gained significant benefit for the participants' adaptation process (Gill, 2007). In that process, support should not be provided from a paternalistic perspective, as this will result in foreign students' levels of belonging being weakened, and they could feel unable to become full members of their higher education institution. Universities which accept foreign students should effect changes in their own structures in order to adequately welcome them (Nada & Araújo 2018, p. 320).

A positive and motivating atmosphere in the host society, primarily at the university and in the surrounding environment where students find themselves and begin forming their first networks, plays a key role in overcoming other challenges they may face. One of the significant difficulties in the lives of international students is their financial situation. Therefore, some authors argue that international student migration is selective concerning the students' socio-economic status (Lopez-Duarte et al., 2021). Scholarships, which students primarily rely on during academic mobility, generally do not cover all the living expenses in the host country. Most students are financially supported by their families, which shows that they usually come from families with an above-average economic status (Beerens et al., 2015). Student employment is another way to cover the additional costs of living abroad. However, this brings us back to the issue of insufficient language proficiency and cultural barriers—obstacles that can only be overcome if a supportive network of people in the host country accompanies the student's persistence and determination for success.

Other difficulties mentioned by Marginson and colleagues (Marginson et al., 2010) are more or less pronounced depending on the society in which the student finds themselves. Health care depends directly on the system of that society. Also, universities and state bureaucracies rely directly on the established system in the host country. Adapting university bureaucracies to the needs of international students is especially important in countries participating in the Bologna Process, which emphasises mobility and the mutual exchange of knowledge. Therefore, in this sense,

we can say that policies aimed at facilitating student integration, not only as a necessary condition for student mobility but also when accompanied by a supportive social environment, can contribute to reducing, and perhaps even eliminating, feelings of loneliness among students.

Methodology

The data presented in this paper were collected during the implementation of the project “International Student Migration in the Serbian Context and (Re)Construction of Identity: Main Issues and Inputs for Policy Making (IS-MIGaIN)”, funded by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia. The project consisted of several phases that involved different data collection techniques, and therefore, the methodology was diverse – data were first collected through focus groups, followed by a survey, and finally through interviews (for more details, see Stojšin, 2025). However, this paper focuses exclusively on the data collected through interviews. The interviews were conducted in April 2024 with a sample of 19 respondents. The collected data were transcribed, then processed and analyzed using the MAXQDA software. During the coding process, more than ten categories were identified, including benefits and challenges experienced during the stay abroad and some recommendations for public policy makers, which are the topic of this article. However, since the sample includes only 19 cases, the conclusions presented in this paper cannot be generalized to the entire population.

The sample was divided into three groups:

1. Students from Serbia currently studying abroad,
2. Students of Serbian origin who studied abroad and have returned, and
3. Foreign students currently studying in Serbia.

The sample included a total of six men and thirteen women. The average age of the respondents was 29.1 years, with the majority—eight respondents—being between 30 and 34 years old. A total of six international students were studying in Serbia. Among the Serbian respondents, four were studying in Germany, two in Austria, two in Hungary, two in France, and one each in the UK, the USA, and Taiwan.

Given that this paper also aims to define certain recommendations for public policy development, the conclusion will include insights drawn from the data collected during the workshop “International Academic Migration: Toward a Positive Experience for Students,” conducted by mem-

bers of the research team with potentially interested stakeholders. The workshop's goal was to identify guidelines for social support and develop a model of cooperation among relevant institutions at various levels of governance.

Results and Discussions

Based on the analysis of all 19 conducted interviews, we can conclude that, without exception, international students believe they have gained a lot by going abroad. The benefits they mention do not relate solely to themselves as individuals but also to their faculties and the society of their country of origin as a whole. In the conversations themselves, respondents refer to the material aspect the least, which is understandable given their stage of life, as well as the goals of their mobility. The analysis of responses shows that all respondents primarily emphasise changes in their personality, such as building self-confidence and a sense of independence, and they also mention a sense of maturity. Ena, who returned from Austria, says:

“Studying abroad is a great opportunity for growing up, rapidly so, and everyone should take advantage of it” (Ena, 33, returnee from Austria).

This can be explained, especially in the context of Serbia, by the fact that mobility is often the only way for young people to become independent and separate from their family of origin. In addition, going abroad empowers them by strengthening their social capital. Unlike the period spent within the parental home, where social capital is primarily based on that of their parents, international students have the opportunity to meet new people independently. These new acquaintances lead to the discovery of other cultures, their norms, and values. Sava, a returnee from France, says:

“From studying abroad, the most valuable experience for me was meeting so many different nationalities in one place.” (Sava, 33, returnee from France)

What can be observed in the interviews is the importance of living in student dormitories, which are often, especially in countries with a longer tradition of international student exchange, explicitly designed to accommodate students from different cultural backgrounds. The importance of getting to know and integrating into new cultures is multifaceted. It is primarily recognised in shaping an individual's identity (Vesković Anđelković & Vasojević, 2023) and in acquiring competencies that can be very useful in international relations (Predojević Despić, 2022). Arul, an international student in Serbia, describes the overall impact of international experience on an individual as follows:

"I feel when you move abroad, you face different situations, you get to experience different things, and this helps you build your character, and it gets you adjusted, you adjust to different situations that life throws at you. I feel like if you should move out of your comfort zone rather than stay in one place, obviously some people prefer the comfort, but if you move abroad, it gives you an opportunity to experience new things and how to adjust to, you know, different challenges. Studying abroad, for example, allows you to experience a new culture, learn a new language, and meet different people. And basically, it develops you as a person, because if you're used to something and you're comfortable, you're not going to build your character yourself. Whereas if you study abroad, you're going to face a variety of different challenges, experiences, good and bad. This will build your character and make you a better person, as you will have been in various situations and will know how to act accordingly" (Arul, 27, Bangladesh).

What's important to highlight is the recognition of the importance of international migration for institutions, whether a faculty or research institute, where the respondent is studying or employed. The acquisition of human capital is a key benefit of migration, particularly for highly educated individuals. Primarily, the focus is on the transfer of that capital and its investment in the development of the home country, which is why developed countries often encourage young, educated people to gain experience at foreign universities (Grečić, 2010). Jovana, Serbian student in Austria, recognises the importance of migration even for the academic community she belongs to:

"Well, it can be beneficial for them in the sense that they send their students there who could bring some knowledge back to us, because professors don't usually participate in such exchanges. They are already established individuals, while students, being younger, have the opportunity to go somewhere, learn something new, and perhaps start developing their scientific skills. They might get an idea that they could achieve something here with their instrumentation or possibly improve something they are already working on. Or if some team has an excellent project, it could be based on expanding the science they learned abroad, buying some new instruments, or something like that" (Jovana, 29, Serbian student in Austria).

On the other hand, respondents also mention the challenges and difficulties they faced, which serve as valuable input for shaping future supportive population policies. Undoubtedly, they identify language as the biggest obstacle to living abroad and integrating into a new society. For this reason, most of them begin by learning the language of the country in which they are. It has become evident that the English language, although often considered universal, is generally not sufficient for everyday life in a foreign country. Respondents note that in some countries, such as

Germany, there is a practice of refusing to speak any language other than the country's official language (Svetozar, 30, Serbian student in Germany). On the other hand, they also report that professors—not only at Serbian universities but also at universities in different countries—often lack sufficient English proficiency to lecture and work effectively with international students (Arul, 27, from Bangladesh; Tamara, 27, Serbian student, returnee from Thailand; Marina, 23, Hungary). This problem often leads students to stop attending lectures, which in turn lowers their academic achievement. This is confirmed by Serbian student studying in Hungary:

“On the other hand, a couple of professors at the faculty don't speak English well, and they are the ones teaching me directly. This faculty ranks among the top 200 in the world in our field. How can we address the issue of hiring a professor who doesn't speak proper English? My reaction to that was to decide not to attend those lectures. Maybe that's not the best decision, but I think it's a waste of time to go to a class where I don't understand half of what's being said.” (Marina, 23, Serbian student, Hungary)

Lack of language proficiency creates challenges both on a personal and institutional level. When it comes to individual difficulties, students struggle with mastering the course material due to a limited understanding of the language. They often have to translate the literature first, which significantly prolongs the learning process and raises concerns about whether they can truly acquire knowledge to its full extent. As a result, international students often show lower academic performance compared to their local peers (Nada & Araujo, 2018). Besiana, shares her experience:

„Everything that I do now for the masters takes like double time for me, because of the language, because I have to translate everything either firstly to myself from Serbian, or myself to Serbian if I need to present something. Therefore, everything takes a bit more time.” (Besiana, 30, Albania).

Another issue, which extends beyond academic success and relates to the individual, is the challenge of integration. The first problem that arises is that, due to insufficient language proficiency, international students struggle with self-presentation, which hinders their ability to establish closer relationships with peers and other members of society. Serbian student, who is currently studying in Austria, says:

“Language is something you master over time. It's not a problem now, but there are certain things a person just can't express in another language the way they can in their own. You can't express your feelings the same way—over there, it's all a bit more stiff, at least for me.” (Jovana, 29, Serbian student, Austria)

Knowing the language is crucial for handling administrative tasks. In some Western European countries, as reported by respondents from Ger-

many, France, and Austria, officials generally do not speak English, which is especially problematic for students who have not yet mastered the local language. However, as noted by a respondent from Germany, in some places, there is even a prohibition on speaking a language other than the country's official language.

"They have institutions where foreigners come, where they have their first contact with Germany, and there, by law, they are not allowed to speak English. I asked, 'Do you speak English?' He said, 'I do, but I am not allowed to speak English.' I said, 'But this is an institution and an office for foreigners who have come from who knows where—how do you imagine this working?' They just shrugged their shoulders" (Svetozar, 30, Serbian student, Germany).

When it comes to Serbia, in addition to the usual administrative difficulties encountered in other countries, one must also consider the signage and forms written in Cyrillic script—a script not used outside Serbia.

„And then it was hard to find detailed information because when you have to open these documents that are like scanned, and they are written in Cyrillic“ (Besiana, 30, Albania).

What should not be overlooked, however, is that the positive atmosphere in student dormitories—and society more broadly—is something that greatly aids integration and provides strength to persevere in achieving one's goals. Not a single respondent in the study reported experiencing discrimination or having any issues with anyone at the university or in the broader social environment, despite being aware that they are not fully integrated. Foreign students studying in Serbia particularly emphasise the kindness of people on the street and their peers at university. This gives hope that the population of Serbia, as well as that of other countries where Serbian students go, is becoming more open to immigration, at least when it comes to professionals.

Conclusion

It is indisputable that the benefits of studying abroad are manifold, both for the student and the wider community. Something that has been repeated many times, and which the practice of highly developed countries has confirmed, is that the economy and technological progress are based on knowledge. Moreover, knowledge grows only through exchange and circulation, which is best achieved through cooperation among individuals who acquire it in different circumstances. However, the migration of experts presents a challenge for public policy. Openness to students

from diverse countries, cultures, and religions, first and foremost, requires institutional adaptability to meet the needs of these students. Based on the analysis, we have seen that language is one of the main challenges faced by foreign academics. Insufficient language proficiency has consequences not only on academic achievement but also on a personal level, in terms of forming friendships with peers from the host country and in the limited exchange of feelings, goals, and intentions. Therefore, language emerges as a key factor behind students' decisions to abandon their studies abroad.

In response to this challenge, Serbia has introduced the "Serbian as a Foreign Language" program, which is available to all students participating in the "World in Serbia" program. Discussing this foreign language learning program at the workshop "International Academic Migration: Towards a Positive Experience for Students," held within the same project, participants who are either lecturers or users of the program pointed out that despite the good intentions of the initiators and funders, there are problems and a need for further improvement. Respondents noted that the duration of this program is not adequate — this year, the course was extended to one year. Still, even that is insufficient to master the language to a level suitable for studies and integration into Serbian society. Additionally, there is a very limited number of teachers available for this program. Therefore, respondents suggest increasing the financial allocation for this program as well as the number of engaged instructors. One proposal was also to establish a criterion requiring a certain level of language proficiency before arriving in the country, which would ensure the program's effectiveness.

The interviews revealed that insufficient language proficiency has dual consequences, affecting both the individual and institutional levels. Regarding the impact on the individual, the primary concern is improved integration into the social environment. One of the proposals is to design informal social programs for foreigners. For these programs to be successful, it is necessary to allocate more funding for their implementation, find ways to motivate people to participate (for example, awarding extra credits in studies to those who assist colleagues from other countries), and increase their visibility. Better integration and connection with peers positively influence the sense of security, thereby reducing the likelihood of dropout.

What is missing for successful integration is a dedicated body responsible specifically for foreign students. In Serbia, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Centre for Serbian as a Foreign Language, universities, faculties, cultural institutions, and NGOs are involved in this work alongside their other responsibilities. The recommendation is

to finance a separate, independent but state institution whose sole responsibility would be working with foreign students. This body would also coordinate the activities of all institutions, which would report what they do and how they support integration.

Last, but not least, is the need to adapt the administration to the needs of this group. Specifically, translating documents into several major world languages, or at least into English, would greatly facilitate navigation. Furthermore, the availability of all procedures on websites was also emphasised in conversations with the respondents. Additionally, administrative staff should use English to avoid poor communication with service users.

*This article is the result of the project „International migration of students in the Serbian context and (re)construction of identity: main issues and inputs for policy making“ (IS-MIGaIN), Grant No: 1434, financed by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia within the program „IDENTITIES“.

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