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International mobility of students and academic staff in tertiary education

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Summary

The working paper presents the international mobility of students and academic staff in tertiary education in Slovenia in the period 2000 and after, examining international comparisons with EU countries and the factors influencing mobility. Other forms of international mobility include the mobility of study programs, institutions/providers, etc. International student and teaching staff mobility benefits students, teaching staff, institutions, and the higher education system and the country as a whole. The benefits that students derive are improved specialist knowledge, foreign language skills, career development; teaching staff become aware of new pedagogical methods and establish contact with their counterparts abroad, thus improving the quality of teaching. International mobility is an important quality factor for higher education institutions and for the H.E. system as a whole; the international mobility of students and academic staff benefits the country.

European Commission distinguishes between 'long-term' mobility, where students go abroad for a longer period and complete their degree abroad, and 'credit mobility' of between a few months and a year, after which students return to their studies in the home country. The latter include Erasmus, the Ceepus program and mobility on the basis of bilateral agreements between domestic and foreign country. Erasmus also enables the international exchange of teaching staff.

Between the 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 academic years, and also in the period 2000/2001 to 2006/2007, Slovenia saw an increase in the number of foreign students (i.e. foreign nationals)¹ in tertiary education. There was, however, only a slight increase in the share of foreign students proportional to the total number of students, which in the 2006/2007 reached 1.3%. In Slovenia, between 2005 and 2006 and in the period 2000-2006, the number of foreign students was higher than in the majority of European countries but, in proportion to total student numbers, their share was one of the smallest, compared to European countries. In 2006/2007, 76.2% of the foreign students were students from the countries of the ex-Yugoslav Republics. As in other European countries, the share of foreign students is the highest in doctoral study, which is also the area with the fastest rate of increase compared to other programs. Quality of study, availability of scholarships and appropriate accommodation, language and the recognisability of Slovenia abroad are important factors in the low proportion of foreign students opting to study in Slovenia.

¹ Source of data: SORS, EUROSTAT. They concern long-term mobility.

Between 2005 and 2006 and also in the period 2000-2006, there was an increase in the number of Slovenian students studying abroad, although the relative growth in the number of students studying abroad was below the European average. The majority of Slovenian students studying abroad in 2006 were in Germany, Austria, Italy and the UK. The share of Slovenian students abroad, compared to other European countries is rather modest and, in 2006, amounted to 2.2%. The living and tuition costs of studying abroad and the availability of scholarships have great impact on the decision to study abroad, among other factors.

The number of foreign Erasmus students in Slovenia and the number of Slovenian Erasmus students abroad are on the increase. In Slovenia, between 2005/2006 and 2006/2007, the number of foreign students in Slovenia increased faster than the number of Slovenian students abroad in both relative and absolute terms, but the number of Slovenian students studying abroad is still greater than the number of foreign students in Slovenia. In the period 2000/2001 to 2006/2007, both categories increased considerably in number. The rate of increase in the number of students enrolled in exchanges is higher than in the majority of European countries.

In the period 2000/2001 to 2006/2007, there was a significant increase in the number of Slovenian teachers abroad and the number of foreign teachers in Slovenia under the Erasmus scheme, the increase being particularly marked in the period 2005/2006 to 2006/2007. The number of foreign teachers in Slovenia exceeds the number of Slovenian teachers abroad, undergoing a more rapid increase from 2005/2006 to 2006/2007 and from 2000/2001 to 2006/2007 in both absolute and relative terms.

Action could be taken to increase the international mobility of students. For achieving this goal, the quality of tertiary education would have to be improved, Slovenia's profile abroad would have to be raised, accommodation facilities improved, more scholarships made available, and entire programmes offered in foreign languages. Greater numbers of Slovenian students could be encouraged to study abroad by increasing the number of scholarships and reducing obstacles to the recognition of qualifications acquired abroad. Increasing the international mobility of students could also be achieved by correlating the share of public funding allocated to higher education institutions to the level of international mobility of students and teachers.

It is not just the volume of the international mobility of students and teaching staff that is important but also the quality of such mobility. The positive effects of mobility are enhanced if an institution's goals in that respect are clearly defined and activities carefully planned as part of an institution's strategy. It is also important that both employees and students are aware of the importance of the quality of mobility, that the international mobility of students is planned systematically on the base of agreements between universities and that institutions properly evaluate all forms of mobility and develop and monitor appropriate quality indicators.