



# How does *brain drain* affect the Danube Region?

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*A Cumulative Essay of the EUSDR Danube Youth Council*

October 2023

# FOREWORD

The involvement of present and future generations in the shaping of societies is high on the political agenda on local, regional, national and European levels. In the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), this has led to the establishment of the Danube Youth Council (DYC) in October 2022.

By becoming part of the governance system of the Danube Region Strategy, the role of the Danube Youth Council is to provide ideas and new perspectives to the EUSDR and beyond, to enable dynamic exchanges and mutual learning processes. Moreover, the young generation has the opportunity to draw attention of decision-makers from EUSDR states and regions and, in contributing to the EUSDR priorities and policies, to highlight the importance of their regions at the transnational level and to enable an active involvement of young people in political and policy-driven processes. Bringing visibility to youth perspectives as well as the active contribution of young people to the implementation of the EUSDR gives the young generation opportunities for real impact. In doing so, a stronger long-term perspective to the goals of the EUSDR is added.

The DYC is composed of 28 members, between 18 and 29 years. Each of the 14 Danube Region countries (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine) is represented by two members.

Under the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency (1 November 2022 – 31 October 2023), youth involvement has been one of the priorities of the Presidency. In the preparations for the 12th EUSDR Annual Forum, where the DYC also organised an own panel “Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking the Danube's Potential with Emerging Voices”, the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency asked the DYC to think about the issue of brain drain in their regions, countries and all along the Danube. 16 DYC members provided their individual approaches, ideas and perspectives, published as this cumulative essay.

*Slovenian EUSDR Presidency*

&

*Danube Strategy Point*



**Slovenian Presidency  
of the EU Strategy  
for the Danube Region**



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## Irina Apostol

Republic of Moldova

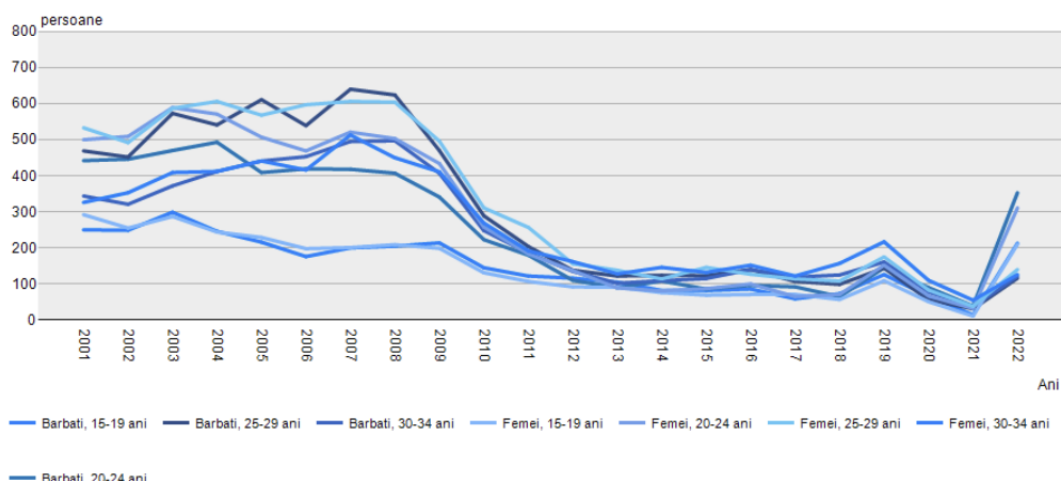
*How do you think brain drain affects young people and how it affects the Danube Region?*

Brain drain leads to a loss of talented and highly skilled young individuals who could contribute to the development of their home country. The departure of young professionals deprives the local economy and society of their knowledge, innovation, and potential contributions. Brain drain can create a scarcity of skilled labour in the home country, resulting in limited employment opportunities for young people. This situation can lead to unemployment or underemployment, contributing to economic stagnation and discouraging young people from pursuing their careers locally. Also, brain drain affects the educational system as well. The departure of highly qualified professionals, such as teachers, professors, and researchers, can impact the quality of education and research institutions. This can result in a less competitive educational environment and fewer opportunities for young people to acquire advanced knowledge and skills.

The Danube Region, including Moldova, faces economic consequences due to brain drain. When highly skilled individuals emigrate, it leads to a loss of human capital and hampers the development of industries that require specialized expertise. For example, in Moldova, every year about 50 000 persons between the age of 15-34 emigrate, which represents about 2% of the total population. Excluding the age restriction, yearly about 120 000 persons emigrate.

Moldova heavily relies on remittances sent back by its citizens working abroad. Brain drain exacerbates this dependency as a significant portion of the Moldovan diaspora is composed of skilled professionals.

While remittances provide financial support to families and contribute to the national economy, it can create a long-term reliance on external sources of income rather than internal development.



*What could be done to encourage talent retention and development in your country and in the Danube Region as a whole?*

To mitigate brain drain, countries like Moldova can undertake various measures like improving local job opportunities, wages, and working conditions, it can incentivize skilled individuals to stay in their home country. This involves fostering an attractive business environment, promoting entrepreneurship, and investing in key sectors that require specialized skills.

Investing in high-quality education and research institutions can help retain skilled individuals and attract talent back to the country. This includes providing scholarships, research grants, and opportunities for collaboration with international institutions to create an environment conducive to innovation and growth.

Establishing platforms for knowledge-sharing, networking, and collaboration can facilitate the exchange of ideas and expertise between local professionals and the diaspora. Such initiatives can help retain connections with skilled individuals abroad, encourage their involvement in the home country's development, and create avenues for their return.

*What kind of employment would be most attractive for young people in the future especially in the thematic area you are interested in?*

Beside most attractive areas like: Artificial Intelligence Research and Development; Data Science and Analytics; Machine Learning Engineering; Cybersecurity; Software Engineering; User Experience (UX) Design; Robotics and Automation, young specialists often seek employment that offers flexible working arrangements, remote options, and competitive compensation. These factors have become increasingly important in shaping the preferences of young professionals.

The ability to work remotely provides flexibility and work-life balance, allowing young professionals to have more control over their schedules and locations. Young professionals often value jobs that offer flexible working hours. This flexibility allows individuals to adapt their work schedules to accommodate personal commitments, pursue further education, engage in hobbies, or pursue entrepreneurial ventures. Adequate financial rewards and competitive pay are essential factors that attract young professionals. They seek opportunities that offer good compensation packages, including base salary, bonuses, benefits, and opportunities for career growth.

Young professionals are often drawn to jobs that provide opportunities for skill development, learning, and advancement. They seek positions that offer training programs, mentorship, and clear paths for career progression. Young professionals appreciate employers that prioritize work-life integration, recognising the importance of personal well-being and allowing time for personal pursuits outside of work. Organisations that offer flexible leave policies, wellness programs, and a supportive work environment are likely to attract and retain young talent.

The culture and values of an organisation also play a significant role in attracting young professionals. They often seek out companies that align with their own values, such as diversity and inclusion, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility. A positive and inclusive company culture fosters a sense of belonging and engagement among young employees.



## Daniel Arwonga

*Hungary*

*How do you think brain drain affects young people and how it affects the Danube Region?*

Young people live with the idea in mind of finding a better place to live and opportunities in other places other than the present area which makes them not to be devoted to highly contributing to the present Danube Region where they live.

*What could be done to encourage talent retention and development in your country and in the Danube Region as a whole?*

Absorption of talented people into various organisations in the country where they can be utilised effectively and given room for improvement. Creation of talent shows for various groups where the people can have an opportunity to showcase their talents and have an opportunity to win a prize.

*What kind of employment would be most attractive for young people in the future, especially in the thematic area you are interested in?*

Wide use of advanced technological equipment to identify problems and be used in solution planning. A work environment where there is the use of technology in combination with physical activities.



## Bence Bíró

*Slovakia*

*How do you think brain-drain affects young people and how it affects the Danube Region?*

I think the Danube Region is particularly badly affected by the brain drain, because it is very easy to move and work abroad, especially to Western Europe, and the Danube Region countries attracts fewer people than it loses. And the young people who stay are correspondingly affected by the brain drain in a number of ways: more limited public services, health, education, labour shortages, etc. And the young people who have left: first generation emigrants, in my opinion, have a much harder time settling in, especially if they did not go to university abroad. For example, they have a much smaller network of contacts, they can't get really well paid jobs, they face with advanced bureaucracy, etc.

*What could be done to encourage talent retention and development in your country and in the Danube Region as a whole?*

In my view, one of the biggest problems in the Central and Eastern European Region, especially in my country, Hungary, is that most of the work is unfortunately low value-added and inefficient. My basic assumption is that a country can have a strong and healthy economy if it is not dominated by foreign multinationals (who come here mainly because wages are lower than in Western Europe), but if a strong layer of small and medium-sized enterprises can develop, and if there are large companies in the country that are capable of exporting. And for this we need domestic entrepreneurs. And young people who want to be entrepreneurs. This is what I consider important and a realistic, more easily achievable goal, namely to get as many young people as possible to become entrepreneurs, even in the short term, primarily by setting up innovative businesses. For this, I believe that several things are needed: - teaching entrepreneurial skills from a young age, through education programmes - more favourable tax conditions, including tax exemptions for young entrepreneurs - new company forms, less capital requirements - easier access to venture capital - state and EU subsidies to supplement salaries A good example for the region to follow is Estonia, where many young people want to set up startups and where the state provides all the

support they need, from e-citizenship to favourable company forms and financial support, because they know that this will pay off many times over, even though a significant number of businesses will go bankrupt. On the other hand, there is a need to create high added value jobs in the region.

In my opinion, this requires substantial research and development aid and, above all, support for small and medium-sized enterprises that produce for export. If the Central and Eastern European region, including Hungary to a large extent, could achieve 75-80% of the Western wage level, the brain drain would, in my opinion, be radically reduced.

*What kind of employment would be most attractive for young people in the future especially in the thematic area you are interested in?*

Although I am starting from my own experience, I definitely think that work from home is the future. Young people no longer like to be in the office every day, a lot of time can be saved and working from home is more efficient. Not to mention the cost savings for both the employer and the employee. And working from home also means less environmental impact. In particular, it is not necessary to be in the same country as the place of work. This could even be a big advantage for the countries of the Danube Region, as the cost of living is lower than in the West. Of course, this is not feasible for all jobs, but office jobs in general will, in my opinion, be replaced by remote working.





## Pejo Bosnić

*Bosnia and Herzegovina*

The brain drain definitely has a negative effect on young people, especially those in our region, because it brings with it many negative and discouraging implications such as: demotivation of young people to stay and personal development in the region where they live, lack of desire to develop the region where they were born or they are adult, negative demographic trends that year after year make our region more and more poor in terms of young and talented people and so on. Investing in the development of science and research as well as the popularisation of the entrepreneurial way of thinking as well as the growth of the level of trust in public sector institutions are definitely some of the burning points from which one should start when solving the problem of brain drain both in our region and in each of our member countries, individually. We have witnessed that an enormous number of our talented workers, motivated by various reasons, sought their fortune in Western Europe, so we also see how in the countries of our region we have an increasing need for importing labor, which until a few years ago sounded like science fiction, but today it is cruel and harsh reality. We are facing a shortage of labor in certain areas, and all this leads us to a worse quality of health, education, trust in the state as an umbrella body of a certain geographical area, and the like.

How to encourage talent retention and development in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Danube Region? Key steps include investing in education and research, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, and improving the business environment. It is also important to promote cooperation between educational institutions, the public and private sectors, and to provide support to young people in developing their skills and careers. Investments in infrastructure, technology and digitisation can create an attractive environment for talent. It is also crucial to ensure transparency, the rule of law and the fight against corruption in order to improve trust in institutions. Encouraging cultural diversity, promoting mentorship and creating sustainable business opportunities are also important to developing talent in these areas.

The most attractive type of employment for young people in the future, especially in the thematic area of competitiveness, may include several aspects. First, working in the field of technology and digital innovation, such as software development, artificial intelligence, data analytics and cyber security, can be extremely attractive. Second, jobs dealing with sustainable development, renewable energy sources, ecological solutions and green technologies can attract young people who are aware of the importance of environmental protection.

Also, working in the field of entrepreneurship and creating your own business opportunities, with the support of start-up incubators and mentors, can be very stimulating for young people. Additionally, jobs that encourage creativity, innovative thinking and teamwork can attract young people who want to use their talents and ideas. In any case, it is crucial that future jobs provide opportunities for growth, development, continuous learning, adaptation, and opportunities to contribute to society and create a positive impact on the world.



## Jana Burzyková

Czech Republic

### *How do you think brain drain affects young people and how it affects the Danube Region?*

I believe that the brain drain concerning young people is shown particularly with the common pattern. The model is usually that after graduating from high schools, young people decide to continue their studies in bigger cities than where they lived so far, or even in different countries. They study a university there and after graduation they often decide to settle down in these bigger cities or foreign states and do not come back to their hometowns.

The brain drain therefore affects young people by forcing them to make a difficult decision. And very often they, in the end, choose to move to bigger city where they know that they will get better education and they may even get better paid jobs after graduation. In the Czech Republic, young people often go to big cities such as Brno or Prague, where the universities are the best in the country and also the labour market offer is the best.

However, brain drain has negative effect on the region and the countries as a whole by instead of closing the gap between 'West and the rest' the gap is still kept open.

### *What could be done to encourage talent retention and development in your country and in the Danube Region as a whole?*

One idea which comes to my mind is that by attracting young people to study in the region it may increase the chances that they will settle down there and do not move out. And one way how to achieve that could be by launching new and modern study programs which would attract students and also professionals in the particular field. Right now, it is very fashionable to keep up with modern technologies. Therefore, if the universities in the region would be able to launch new programs focused on the field of technologies, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence which would be modern, unique, updated and would be keeping up the curriculum with the trends, I am convinced that this could be a strong argument that many young people would consider in their decision-making after graduating from high schools. They may choose these unique and modern programs of the universities which are not the famous western colleges.

This could also lead to creating new research and science locations and hubs which would attract young professionals interested in this field.

*What kind of employment would be most attractive for young people in the future especially in the thematic area you are interested in?*

The rapid changes we are facing now with the application of artificial intelligence have also impact on the labour market. From the experience I have, I feel that the young people are more and more leaning towards using it on daily basis. Therefore, I assume that the attractive employment for young people would be the one allowing them to keep up with the trends in technologies, such as nowadays inducing them to use artificial intelligence or other modern tools.

Another phenomenon for young people is traveling. We want to see and explore. Therefore, the attractivity of the employment could be increased by offering opportunities as part of the job which involves traveling such as trainings abroad.



## Vana Ćendo

*Czech Republic*

European Union's free movement of labor opened many new possibilities for workers around Europe, especially young ones who are starting their careers and want to access better employment possibilities and working conditions. With Germany and the United Kingdom being the biggest receiving countries, many sending countries have been hit with negative impacts of brain drain such as reduction of the stock of human capital, reduced economic growth, reduced productivity, reduction of tax income, labor market changes (e.g., reduction of wages) and limited capacity to innovate. When it comes to the Danube region is a macro-region that has been experiencing a population decrease, both for migratory and natural reasons. The Action Plan by European Commission includes challenges under Priority Area 9 – People and Skills that include policies regarding migration challenges, showing how significant this problem is in the region.

When it comes to young people, there has been a strong international student migration that can benefit students and their sending countries, especially if students decide to return to their home countries and enrich them with the knowledge they acquired abroad. This would, of course, require countries to improve their labor market conditions and education systems, making them desirable for those students that have spent time abroad to return. Since the Danube Region consists of countries that vary between members of the European Union and those that are not, often possibilities also vary from country to country. The problem I find the most recognisable is young workers' lack of opportunity, especially at the start of their careers. Internships and traineeships that equip young people with skills and give them an opportunity for future employment in companies/institutions would be an amazing first step in starting young careers and recognizing talents while keeping them in their home countries, or at least countries of the region. Priority Area 9, which I am personally a part of, can play a significant role in motivating companies but also state institutions to open their doors to students and graduates and not be afraid of their new outlooks but instead embrace them and show them that their views are appreciated, both by encouraging them but also compensating them for their work.

The new generation of workers is more flexible since they value their personal time more, being more willing to engage in more modern types of employment such as part-time work, working from home, and freelancing.

Region's policies, as well as job opportunities, should continue to catch up with those trends in order to keep the talent inside the region's borders and not continue losing it to Western countries.



## Viktorija Ćosić

*Serbia*

Brain drain affects young people and the Danube Region in several ways. Firstly, when talented young individuals leave their home countries in search of better opportunities elsewhere, it deprives their home countries of their skills, knowledge, and potential contributions to the local economy. This can lead to a shortage of skilled professionals in various sectors, destroying economic development and innovation. We are all witnesses that medical staff professionals are leaving Balkan Countries in search of better conditions elsewhere.

Secondly, brain drain can have a negative impact on the social and cultural fabric of the Danube Region. When young people leave their communities, it can result in a loss of human capital and a decrease in the overall vitality of the region. This can lead to a sense of stagnation and limited opportunities for those who remain, as well as a potential decline in the quality of public services and infrastructure.

Furthermore, brain drain can exacerbate existing inequalities within the Danube Region. Often, it is the most talented and educated individuals who have the means and opportunities to migrate, leaving behind those who are less fortunate or lack the same opportunities. This can further widen the gap between regions and contribute to socio-economic disparities.

To encourage talent retention and development in my country and the Danube Region as a whole, several strategies could be implemented:

- **Enhancing educational opportunities:** Investing in quality education and vocational training is crucial to equip young people with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in their home countries. Strengthening educational systems, promoting research and innovation, and providing scholarships or financial incentives for talented individuals can help retain and develop local talent.
- **Creating favorable economic conditions:** It is important to create an environment that fosters economic growth and entrepreneurship. This can be achieved by reducing bureaucratic barriers, improving access to financing and business support services, promoting innovation hubs and startup ecosystems, and fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and government.
- **Providing attractive career prospects:** Developing attractive job opportunities and career paths is essential to retain young talent.

This can be done by promoting sectors with growth potential, such as technology, renewable energy, healthcare, and creative industries. Encouraging public-private partnerships and foreign direct investment can also contribute to the creation of sustainable and diverse employment opportunities.

Enhancing quality of life: Improving the overall quality of life in the Danube Region is crucial to retain young people. This includes investing in infrastructure, healthcare, cultural amenities, and recreational facilities. Additionally, fostering a vibrant social and cultural environment, promoting work-life balance, and ensuring a safe and inclusive society are important factors in retaining talent.

In terms of employment attractiveness for young people in the future, the thematic area I am interested in is People and skills. Here are some employment opportunities that may be particularly appealing:

- **Renewable energy sector:** With the increasing focus on transitioning to clean and sustainable energy sources, there will be a growing demand for professionals in renewable energy technologies, such as solar, wind, and hydro power. Jobs in engineering, research and development, project management, and policy and advocacy related to renewable energy can be highly attractive to young people. Also different NGOs and youth work.
- **Environmental conservation and restoration:** As the need for preserving and restoring natural ecosystems becomes more urgent, careers in environmental conservation, wildlife management, and ecological restoration are likely to gain significance. This can involve working in national parks, wildlife reserves, environmental NGOs, or research institutions, contributing to biodiversity preservation and ecological sustainability.
- **Sustainable agriculture and food systems:** The need for sustainable and resilient agricultural practices is on the rise. Careers in organic farming, agroecology, sustainable food production, and food waste reduction can offer rewarding opportunities for young people interested in creating a more sustainable and equitable food system.
- **Digital and technology sectors:** With the rapid advancement of technology, there will be increasing demand for young professionals skilled in areas such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, cybersecurity, software development, and digital marketing. The digital economy offers opportunities for innovation, remote work, and entrepreneurship.
- **Healthcare and biotechnology:** The healthcare sector will continue to grow in importance, especially in light of global health challenges. Careers in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, medical research, and biotechnology can be attractive to young people. Specializations in telemedicine, personalized medicine, genomics, and medical innovation can be particularly promising.
- **Creative and cultural industries:** The creative economy, including arts, design, fashion, film, gaming, poetry, writing and entertainment, offers diverse opportunities for young people. With their skills in visual arts, multimedia, content creation, and marketing, they can find employment in creative agencies, media companies.



## Dávid Kecskeméti

*Hungary*

*How do you think brain drain affects young people and how it affects the Danube Region?*

In the past few decades, globalisation has come to another level and the world has opened up to us. Thanks to cheap plane tickets, more people travel than ever, and even the furthest ones became relatively easily accessible. This phenomenon could also contribute to the brain-drain, as people get used to the distances and when they are abroad, they might get the idea of moving there. However, the most significant reason for brain drain is the lack of opportunities and decent salaries. Young professionals see limited career prospects in their home countries, and this can discourage them from pursuing their chosen fields or advancing in their careers. Developed countries and regions often attract skilled professionals by offering better job prospects, higher salaries, advanced infrastructure, greater research and development facilities, and improved living standards.

In many countries, migration has increased after they joined the European Union, as the EU membership has facilitated the free movement of people, making it easier for individuals to seek employment opportunities in more developed EU member states. The ability to work in other countries without the need for visas or work permits has encouraged skilled professionals to migrate in search of better economic prospects. Brain drain affects the countries of the Danube Region to different extents, corresponding to their development level. From my country, Hungary, many young people consider moving to other countries of the region, like Austria or Germany. An important limiting factor is the language barrier, as not everyone feels comfortable living in an international community. In more developed countries, where living standards and salaries are relatively high, reasons to leave the country are less career-oriented, but connected to lifestyle or cultural differences, or personal preferences, such as climate. As I can see, most countries in the region are exposed to the loss of intelligent people, while a few of them attract more people, than they lose. However, if someone moves abroad, doesn't mean that they stay there for the rest of their lives, they might return to their home country and utilise the experience gained abroad.

*What could be done to encourage talent retention and development in your country and in the Danube Region as a whole?*

The most important factors are improving the working and research conditions, and offering competitive salaries and benefits.

Investing in research and development, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, and creating an environment that attracts and retains skilled professionals could also help. Moreover, strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders can help create more opportunities and incentives for professionals to stay in the country and contribute to its economic growth and development. Also, strengthening industries that align with the region's strengths, such as technology, engineering, healthcare, and creative industries, and providing incentives for companies to invest in research and development, thereby creating high-quality job opportunities for talented individuals.

*What kind of employment would be most attractive for young people in the future especially in the thematic area you are interested in?*

Nowadays liberty and flexibility are highly appreciated, if one feels imprisoned doing their job, won't be able to provide peak performance, and will get tired of doing it. If there are career opportunities, offering a salary that is competitive on an international level as well, gives the motivation to work on improving the specific industry of the country.





## Dejana Petranović

*Montenegro*

Insufficient employment of young people is a problem and can have harmful and long-term consequences for the countries and region they come from, in this case the Danube Region. This problem has a wide range of negative effects on the economy, society and individuals, leading to economic decline, brain drain, social instability and demographic changes. In my opinion the brain-drain in the Danube Region may lead to a scarcity of high-quality jobs and mentorship opportunities, making it challenging for young people to find suitable employment and career advancement prospects. It also can result in a skills and knowledge gap in the Region since the departure of talented professionals means that young people may miss out on valuable learning experiences, mentorship, and the transfer of expertise, hindering their professional development. Brain drain can also reduce the availability of inspirational figures and role models for young people. Talented individuals who leave their home often serve as examples of success and innovation. Their absence may impact the motivation and aspirations of young people who could have otherwise been inspired by their achievements.

The educational and professional development of young people outside the borders of the Danube Region leads to employment problems in the region's countries, especially in the countries of the Western Balkans, since there are limited employment opportunities, which leads to the slow development of the region and these countries. Brain drain can have adverse economic consequences for the Danube Region. The loss of skilled professionals means that the region may face a shortage of talent and expertise, making it challenging to drive economic growth, innovation, and competitiveness. This can hinder the development of industries and impede the region's overall economic progress. The departure of skilled individuals can lead to a loss of cultural diversity and intellectual vibrancy. It may also impact the region's capacity to address social challenges effectively, as talented professionals often contribute to social development initiatives and policymaking.

To encourage talent retention and development in Montenegro and the Danube Region as a whole, it is necessary to implement basic social strategies, such as: enhance education systems, foster research and innovation, develop entrepreneurship opportunities, improve work-life balance, enhance networking and collaboration, provide financial incentives, support startups and innovation hubs, promote cultural exchange and collaboration, strengthen regional cooperation.

These strategies can create an environment that attracts and retains talent, fosters innovation and economic growth, and ensures the long-term development of the Danube Region and its countries.

As a member of the DYC, I am engaged in the Priority Area, Tourism, Culture and People to People Contact, that in my opinion is the area with a lot of possibility for improving business offers that

could be attractive for young people. I come from a coastal city in Montenegro where tourism and the promotion of cultural heritage are the main source of economic stability. The attractive employment opportunities for young people in this thematic area regards focus on developing and implementing eco-friendly initiatives, promoting responsible travel practices, and engaging local communities in tourism development. Also, facilitate cross-cultural interactions through cultural exchange programs, international student exchanges, language immersion programs, and fostering intercultural understanding. There is need to utilise marketing and digital media skills to promote destinations, create engaging content, and leverage social media platforms for attracting tourists. Curate unique and immersive travel experiences with personalised itineraries, share local culture and history as a tour guide and cultural ambassador. Combine tourism with community development, collaborating with local communities, NGOs, and tourism organizations to develop initiatives that benefit local economies and preserve culture. Provide guide tourists in outdoor activities and organize conferences, festivals, and cultural events that bring people together.



## Biljana Popović

*Montenegro*

Brain drain, the emigration of highly skilled individuals from one region or country to another, poses significant challenges for young people and the Danube Region. It leads to talent loss, hampers economic development, and has social implications. To counteract brain drain, strategies must be implemented to encourage talent retention and development. Additionally, identifying attractive employment opportunities in line with young people's interests can contribute to their engagement and the region's growth.

### *Measures to foster talent retention:*

- Enhance education and training: Invest in high-quality education aligned with market demands and collaborate with educational institutions, businesses, and government agencies.
- Create attractive work environments: Improve conditions, offer competitive salaries, foster innovation and growth culture, and provide mentorship programs and professional development opportunities.
- Support entrepreneurship and innovation: Establish incubators, startup hubs, and funding mechanisms to promote entrepreneurship and encourage young people to create businesses.
- Strengthen networking opportunities: Facilitate platforms for collaboration, learning, and networking among young professionals through conferences, seminars, and workshops.
- Promote regional cooperation: Foster partnerships in research, innovation, and education among countries in the Danube Region through joint projects and initiatives.

### *Attractive Employment Opportunities for Young People:*

- Technological Innovators: Jobs involving cutting-edge technologies like AI, blockchain, IoT, and data analytics.
- Sustainable Development Specialists: Roles focused on environmental sustainability, renewable energy, and sustainable practices.

- Digital Content Creators: Careers in video production, graphic design, blogging, podcasting, and social media management.
- Cybersecurity Professionals: Jobs related to protecting digital assets and combating cyber threats.
- Health and Wellness Practitioners: Positions promoting physical and mental well-being, such as personal trainers and mental health counsellors.
- Social Impact Entrepreneurs: Careers centered around addressing social or environmental challenges.

*To address brain drain and foster talent retention in the Danube Region, it is vital to implement strategies that enhance education, create attractive work environments, support entrepreneurship, strengthen networking opportunities, and promote regional cooperation. Additionally, offering attractive employment opportunities aligned with emerging trends and young people's interests can further engage them and contribute to the region's growth.*



## Ana Šabanović

*Serbia*

I see the main problem of brain drain in my country as a lack of promising work opportunities. Due to a lower standard of living compared to other European countries, salaries are relatively small and do not allow for a decent livelihood, especially for those in the early stages of their careers. This, combined with high rental prices, forces young intellectuals to rely on their parents even when they are employed. Additionally, new opportunities for student and youth mobility contribute to the brain drain phenomenon, as individuals are less willing to return to their home country due to the aforementioned lack of prospects.

The way I see brain drain affecting the Danube Region is that many countries "invest" in the education of young people through free public-school systems, and some even provide university-level education. However, this investment often ends up benefiting more developed countries, as these individuals contribute, work, and pay taxes there. I believe that the inability to hold this brain drain has a major impact on the present and future economies of the original countries.

From the perspective of the young intellectuals leaving the region, they often encounter uncertainty in a new country, without the support network they would have had if they stayed closer to family and friends. Many of them struggle for a few years until they establish their lives and navigate the complicated administrative processes involved in settling in a new place.

One solution that I believe could help retain smart and ambitious young people is to create space and opportunities for them to pursue their ideas through innovation and experimentation, while also having their basic needs met. Mentorship and funding programs for young entrepreneurs and startups could provide them with the resources to create their own "dream" jobs while also ensuring financial security. This way, they can fully commit to their personal development and bring about societal and economic benefits to their surroundings.

We should also consider those young people who may not have such initiatives and ambitions, as not everyone can be an innovator. This would involve creating employment positions in fields that align with their expertise, providing fair conditions. The majority of young individuals do not appreciate stagnation, so jobs with opportunities for skill development are important.

A dynamic work environment with different surroundings could also be an interesting approach to creating a workspace that appeals to the young workforce.

Personally, an attractive employment opportunity for me would be one that offers the chance to develop my skills and knowledge, with support from the employer. Nowadays, most training courses are taken by young individuals, and vacation days need to be utilized for this purpose. Of course, the financial aspect of choosing a workplace always plays a significant role. In this regard, a job should at least cover basic living expenses, such as rent, bills, food, recreation, and participation in occasional cultural events. Additionally, the possibility of traveling in the early stages of my career would be highly appealing to me.



## Ratin Sazedul

*Germany*

Brain drain affects the region, as the Danube Region thus loses economic and research attractiveness in the long term. This effect influences young people in such a way that new jobs both in the free economy and in public research or education become sustainably more attractive compared to competing regions.

In Germany, highly talented people should already be encouraged in school and sustainably supported in both primary and higher education. They need sufficient freedom to pursue their interests and also need systematic support. In the Danube Region, talent, especially in research, must be supported by generous scholarships.

A job that is flexible and sustainable, with sufficient funding and great personal freedom.



## Ivona Šimunović

Croatia

Brain drain, the migration of skilled individuals seeking better opportunities elsewhere, has profound effects on both young people and the Danube Region as a whole. For the youth, brain drain presents obstacles to personal growth and professional advancement. The departure of skilled individuals deprives them of access to valuable mentorship and career progression opportunities, hindering their development and limiting their networks and support systems. Simultaneously, the region suffers from a loss of potential innovation and expertise, impeding progress in critical sectors such as technology, research, and entrepreneurship. This ultimately stunts economic growth and societal development within the region.

By providing young people with opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge, countries within the Danube Region can instill a sense of hope and confidence, making them more likely to stay and contribute to the region's growth. Furthermore, the establishment of networks, partnerships, and collaboration among the Danube Countries is essential. By fostering regional cooperation, young professionals can benefit from cross-border job opportunities, knowledge exchange, and collaborative projects. This not only enhances the attractiveness of the region but also facilitates the circulation of talent, allowing individuals to gain diverse experiences while remaining connected to their cultural and social roots. In terms of employment, young people in the Danube Region, especially those interested in the knowledge and society sectors, should be encouraged to pursue careers aligned with emerging trends. The region should focus on developing industries related to technology, innovation, sustainable development, and digitalisation. By creating an environment that nurtures and supports these sectors, the Danube Countries can provide attractive employment opportunities for young people, enticing them to stay and contribute to the region's growth and prosperity. In conclusion, brain drain poses significant challenges for young people and the Danube Region as a whole.

The loss of talented individuals not only affects young individuals' personal growth but also hampers the region's economic development and competitiveness. However, through proactive measures such as investing in education, fostering regional cooperation, and promoting emerging sectors, the region can address the brain drain challenge, retain and develop its talent pool, and create a brighter future for its young generation. To counteract brain drain and foster talent retention and development, targeted strategies must be employed in Croatia and across the Danube Region.

The first step is to invest in high-quality education and vocational training. By offering comprehensive educational programs that are accessible to all, young individuals can acquire the necessary skills and competencies to excel in their chosen fields. It is essential to align educational curricula with the

evolving needs of industries, ensuring a smooth transition from academia to the job market. Establishing partnerships between educational institutions and businesses can facilitate internships and work-study programs, providing practical experience and industry exposure.

Creating an ecosystem that supports entrepreneurship, research, and innovation is crucial for encouraging young talents to remain within the region. Mentorship programs, networking opportunities, and cross-border collaborations can foster a culture of innovation, while providing guidance for aspiring entrepreneurs. Additionally, the establishment of incubators and startup hubs can offer young entrepreneurs the necessary resources, funding, and mentorship to turn their ideas into successful ventures. By cultivating an environment that supports and nurtures innovation, the region can retain its brightest minds and drive economic growth. Looking towards the future, certain employment sectors hold particular allure for young people, especially those interested in the knowledge and society domains. The convergence of technology and society presents exciting prospects in fields such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity. These careers offer intellectual stimulation and attractive remuneration, attracting young individuals seeking dynamic and cutting-edge work opportunities. Furthermore, the emphasis on sustainability and renewable energy opens doors for young professionals passionate about environmental preservation. Fields like renewable energy engineering, sustainable architecture, and environmental consultancy offer promising prospects aligned with the aspirations of young individuals.

Additionally, healthcare and biotechnology, with their constant advancements and potential for meaningful impact, are becoming increasingly attractive options for young professionals. By investing in education, supporting entrepreneurship and innovation, and aligning skills development with industry needs, the region can empower its young population and drive sustainable development. Collaboration between governments, educational institutions, NGOs and businesses is essential to create an ecosystem that nurtures and harnesses the talents of the youth, ensuring a prosperous future for the Danube Region. My answers are based on the perspective of someone who works with young people and who is a youth worker.

I am particularly familiar with the field of youth work and the needs of young people. I work in the main organization for youth in Croatia, Croatian Youth Network, so I am especially familiar with these issues.





## Ana Karina Suditu

*Romania*

Although not a new phenomenon, the brain drain process is regrettably becoming more widespread. Several factors contribute to this, including a lack of jobs, economic underdevelopment, and poor working conditions. Young people are particularly affected by brain drain, because, despite their aptitude and dedication to a particular field, they do not have adequate prospects and government assistance. A country's economic growth is dependent on healthy demographics. Brain drain, combined with low fertility rates and the population decline, has long lasting effects on the country's demography and economy. One of the more complex consequences of brain drain is economic downturn.

Industry and innovation also play a huge role in the growth of a country's economy. If many students and professionals leave their country, this will eventually only make catching up to other developed countries harder, innovation wise, leading to a loss of opportunity and know-how for the young generation due to lack of progress and continuous development.

*Young people aim for better living conditions in a stable social and political environment.*

Romania has been one of the countries in the Danube Region which has suffered one of the most significant cases of talent retention in the last two decades due to its slow start to innovation. The exodus of professionals, caregivers, taxpayers, and medical staff has been mainly caused by the people's resistance to globalization and social change. We must determine those sectors that require industrial development in order to promote talent retention there.

Organizations can keep talented and productive people while reducing turnover by fostering a pleasant work environment to boost engagement, showing appreciation to workers, providing competitive pay and benefits, and encouraging a good work-life balance. Employee retention is essential to team building and workplace cohesion because it helps workers establish a sense of trust and reliability among themselves. Employees want to feel that their contributions are respected and appreciated.

The amount of knowledge and opportunities available today seem limitless as a result of technological advancement and the way of life that goes along with it. By investing in employee training programs, mentorship programs, and other development tools, young people will have access to more information and a wider range of know-how.



## Philip Tudor

*Austria*

Brain drain refers to the emigration of highly skilled individuals from their home countries, and it has significant implications for both young people and the Danube Region. This phenomenon can shape the socio-economic landscape of nations, impacting their development and progress. In this essay, we will explore the effects of brain drain on young people and the Danube Region, propose strategies to encourage talent retention and development, and discuss the types of employment that would be attractive to young individuals in the future.

Brain drain presents unique challenges for young people in countries where skilled individuals are leaving. Firstly, it creates a scarcity of role models and mentors in various fields, limiting opportunities for young people to learn from experienced professionals. This lack of guidance can hinder their personal and professional growth, leading to a diminished sense of ambition and motivation. Moreover, brain drain can cause a shortage of skilled workers in certain industries, resulting in limited job prospects and increased competition. This can be frustrating for young individuals who may be compelled to seek employment abroad, perpetuating the cycle of brain drain.

The impact of brain drain on the Danube Region is complex. Firstly, it represents a loss of human capital, depriving the region of talented individuals who could contribute to its growth and development. The departure of highly skilled workers often triggers a brain drain spiral, as the absence of opportunities and a stimulating environment further incentivise young people to leave their home countries in search of better prospects. Consequently, the Danube Region may struggle to retain and attract investment, while facing challenges in fostering innovation and competitiveness.

To encourage talent retention and development in individual countries and the Danube Region as a whole, a multi-faceted approach is needed. Governments and policymakers should prioritise investment in education and research, ensuring that young people have access to quality educational institutions and programs that meet the demands of the evolving job market. Creating an environment that fosters innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration between academia and industry is crucial to retaining and attracting talented individuals. Additionally, policies should focus on providing attractive working conditions, competitive salaries, and opportunities for career advancement to incentivise young people to stay and contribute to their home countries.

In the Danube Region, promoting cross-border cooperation and knowledge exchange can play a vital role in addressing brain drain. Encouraging collaboration between countries within the region can

lead to the development of joint initiatives, research projects, and employment opportunities that attract and retain talent. Moreover, fostering regional networks and partnerships can create a sense of belonging and identity, making the Danube Region an appealing destination for young professionals.

Looking ahead, the types of employment that will be most attractive to young people, particularly in my thematic areas of interest (PA 1a), will likely revolve around technology, sustainability, and innovation. As the world continues to advance technologically and tackle environmental challenges, careers in fields such as renewable energy, digital technologies and sustainable transportation are expected to be in high demand. By aligning educational programs, policies, and job opportunities with these thematic areas, countries in the Danube Region can attract and retain young talent, creating a sustainable and prosperous future.

In conclusion, brain drain has profound effects on young people and the Danube Region. By understanding the challenges, it poses and implementing strategic measures like investing in education, creating appealing working conditions, promoting cross-border cooperation, and focusing on emerging thematic areas, countries in the Danube Region can mitigate the negative consequences of brain drain and foster an environment that encourages talent retention and development.



## Alexandrina Vărzari

*Republic of Moldova*

Brain drain, the phenomenon of educated and skilled individuals leaving their home region for better opportunities elsewhere, can significantly affect young people and regions like the Danube Region. It leads to a reduction in the intellectual capital and economic output of a region, which can particularly impact the younger generation who might struggle to find mentors, job opportunities, and the support needed for innovation.

For young people, brain-drain can discourage their own human capital development as the prospect of their skills and expertise being undervalued in their home country looms. The shrinking pool of talented and educated individuals to learn from can create a cyclic effect, perpetuating a decrease in the local talent pool and potentially stifling innovation.

The Danube Region, a diverse and vibrant area that includes EU and non-EU countries, is particularly susceptible due to its economic discrepancies. The more affluent Western nations often draw talents away from the less developed Eastern counterparts, creating disparity in economic development, innovation, and opportunities.

To encourage talent retention and development, several approaches could be considered. Firstly, improving local job markets by fostering entrepreneurship and supporting SMEs can create job opportunities that can compete with those abroad. Secondly, investing in quality education and research institutions can help retain local talent and attract foreign students and researchers.

Thirdly, policies to incentivize skilled individuals to stay or return could include tax benefits, opportunities for professional development, and housing subsidies. It's crucial to ensure these initiatives are inclusive, targeting not only those who are already highly skilled but also those with the potential to upskill and innovate.

Finally, it would be valuable to develop cross-border initiatives in the Danube Region that can encourage cooperation and mutual growth. This could include research collaborations, student exchange programs, joint businesses, and cross-border infrastructure projects.

Regarding the thematic area of 'Institutional Capacity & Cooperation,' the future holds promising employment opportunities. Young people today seek meaningful work that contributes to societal progress.

Roles that offer the chance to affect policy, work in multicultural teams, or involve in sustainable development projects could be very attractive.

Jobs in international relations, policy analysis, project management, or those linked with NGOs or intergovernmental organizations like the EU could be particularly appealing. The potential to make a positive impact on a regional scale, combined with opportunities for personal and professional development, could make these roles highly sought-after by young professionals in the future. Creating an environment that nurtures these opportunities will go a long way in talent retention and regional development.

## First generation of the Danube Youth Council

The members of the first generation of the Danube Youth Council  
(01 October 2022 – 31 October 2023) are:

Irina Apostol, *Republic of Moldova*

Daniel Arwonga, *Hungary*

Bence Bíró, *Slovakia*

Pejo Bosnić, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Kristijan Briški, *Slovenia*

Jana Burzyková, *Czech Republic*

Vana Ćendo, *Czech Republic*

Luisa-Maria Cocia, *Romania*

Viktorija Ćosić, *Serbia*

Anja Filipović, *Serbia*

Dávid Kecskeméti, *Hungary*

Sofiia Korol, *Ukraine*

Olena Lemak, *Ukraine*

Maty Mihaľko, *Slovakia*

Martin Penov, *Bulgaria*

Dejana Petranović, *Montenegro*

Biljana Popović, *Montenegro*

Ana Šabanović, *Serbia*

Ratin Sazedul, *Germany*

Andrej Ševa, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Ivona Šimunović, *Croatia*

Julian Stöckle, *Germany*

Anna Strigl, *Austria*

Ana Karina Sudit, *Romania*

Alen Šukurica, *Croatia*

Philip Tudor, *Austria*

Dimitar Uzunov, *Bulgaria*

Alexandrina Vărzari, *Republic of  
Moldova*

As of 1 November 2023, the Danube Youth Council moves from its first to its second generation, entering the second year of its existence.

The elected DYC spokespeople are (as of October 2023): Maty Mihal'ko and Philip Tudor. They can be reached at [dyc@eusdr-dsp.eu](mailto:dyc@eusdr-dsp.eu)

More information about the Danube Youth Council can be found [here](#).

*Disclaimer:*

*Views and opinions expressed in this essay are those of the respective authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, the European Commission, the Danube Strategy Point or the Slovenian EUSDR Presidency.*

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