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Brain drain and demographic challenges in the Western Balkans

Motion for a resolution

tabled by Ms Albana VOKSHI and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

The sustained emigration of young and educated people from the Western Balkans is concerning, and this trend, combined with low fertility rates and an ageing population, is contributing to long-term population in the region. The loss of working-age and reproductive-age population weakens growth prospects, exacerbates labour shortages in key sectors, and increases pressure on pension and healthcare systems. According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in its Transition Report 2025-26, these demographic trends may reduce per capita GDP growth and intensify fiscal strain.

Improving education and human capital is key to addressing brain drain. This requires closer links between education and the labour market, increased investment in research and innovation, and better domestic employment opportunities. Expanding scholarships schemes with return incentives, improving university quality and strengthening international co-operation can help retain and attract talent.

Brain drain represents a significant loss of human capital built through public and family investment in education, health and training, with effects felt in the Western Balkans and across Council of Europe member States linked by migration. This phenomenon is driven by limited employment opportunities, low wages, weak public trust and restricted career prospects.

The Parliamentary Assembly should therefore examine, in co-operation with relevant Council of Europe bodies and international organisations, how migration policies, international protection standards and economic co-operation instruments can support balanced mobility, reduce involuntary emigration, and retain and attract talent through:

- policies to reduce emigration and encourage return, supporting youth employment, skills retention, innovation and economic diversification;
- enhanced co-operation between countries of origin and destination, including diaspora engagement, to facilitate return and brain circulation;
- improved sharing of good practices on brain drain economic and social impacts on labour markets, social protection systems and public services.

Signed (see overleaf)



Signed¹:

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1. EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
SOC: Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group
NR: Representatives not belonging to a Political Group