



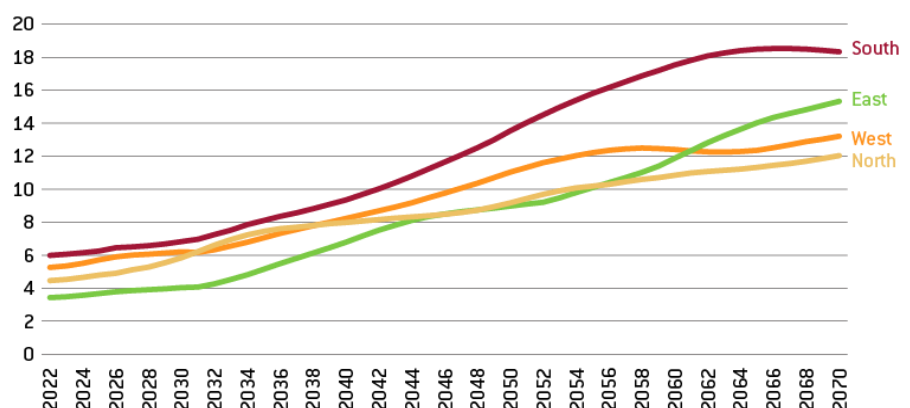
Brain Drain And Regional Inequality in the EU : Supporting Balanced Development

KEY POINTS

- 1. Brain drain can reduce skilled workers in Eastern and Southern Europe especially in health and engineering.**
- 2. The EU supports mobility through Erasmus but cannot fully prevent skilled worker loss in less developed regions.**
- 3. Regional inequality can be reduced through a Brain Gain and Return Fund, an education compensation Fund, and Horizon Europe funding.**

Summary

In this policy brief, the efforts to address the problem of brain drain and regional differences within EU member countries have been explored. The brief is based on the idea that special assistance and better career perspectives will be able to retain and attract the right professionals in their origin countries. Although the opportunity to move freely and programs such as the Erasmus+ Program are important and necessary, they often aggravate the phenomenon of brain drain as people go to the more developed countries and create shortages of professionals in fields such as Romania and Bulgaria. Through analyzing the current policy framework, three mechanisms have been proposed.



The EU's freedom of movement gives citizens the right to live, study, and work in any member state—a freedom that opens up incredible doors for young people and professionals, especially through mobility programmes like Erasmus+.

Yet, this mobility isn't without its downsides for every country involved. In practice, a steady flow of skilled young professionals—like doctors, engineers, and researchers—moves from Eastern and Southern Europe toward Northern and Western Europe in search of better pay, improved working conditions, and clearer career paths.

Consequently, nations such as Romania and Bulgaria face severe brain drain, losing the very talent they need for their own national development. While these origin countries invest heavily in educating and training their workforce, it is often other member states that reap the long-term benefits once those professionals relocate.

Although the EU actively supports education, research, and mobility, it still lacks a robust mechanism to offset the burden on countries losing their skilled workers. Left unaddressed, this imbalance deepens regional inequalities and makes it increasingly difficult for impacted countries to strengthen their public services and economies.

My role in this research is to analyse existing EU policies and identify actionable solutions.

Specifically, I focus on how EU funding and policy cooperation can lessen the negative impacts of brain drain while fully respecting citizens' fundamental freedom to work and study across member states.

Policy Recommendation

Brain Gain and Return Fund: The EU should launch a targeted fund offering tax incentives and research grants for returning professionals. Tailored support for returning doctors, engineers, and researchers helps home countries retain talent and bridge regional skill gaps.

Introduce an Education Compensation Fund:

Destination countries benefiting from imported talent should contribute to the origin countries' education and healthcare systems. Reinvesting in local training ensures a fairer share of costs and helps fund future generations.

Earmark "Horizon Europe" Funding for

Eastern & Southern Europe : A dedicated share of Horizon Europe grants should go to universities in underrepresented regions. Upgrading local facilities and career paths allows young researchers to thrive at home, closing the regional innovation gap.

FOOTNOTES *

1.

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2026/01/could-restricting-eu-free-movement-help-tackle-brain-drain>

2. <https://www.cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions/cdr-4645-2019>

3. <https://www.bruegel.org/policy-brief/demographic-divide-inequalities-ageing-across-european-union>

4 <https://www.euronews.com/2025/10/31/is-the-risk-of-brain-drain-overlooked-in-the-eu-enlargement-process>

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This Policy Brief has been prepared as part of the participants / students' assessment in the framework of the EU Politics lecture.

The content of this policy brief lies entirely with the author. It does not reflect the official opinion of Çağ University.