

Education, research, culture

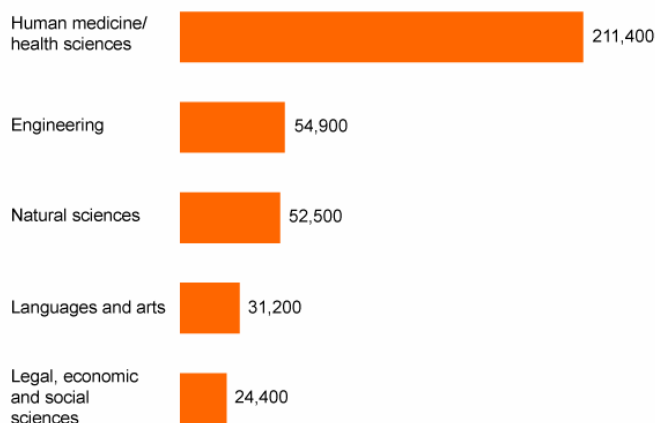
LEAVING FOR SWITZERLAND? PHYSICIANS GETTING MIGRATION FEVER

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Education in Germany is a precious (and costly) good. This is shown in many discussions in the society. The debate about Germany's score in PISA, the introduction of tuition fees and the planned increase in the education and research budget to 10% of the gross domestic product illustrate the economic and social importance of education for the future. At times when public budgets are subject to extreme cost reduction constraints, special efforts are made to maintain educational quality and its funding. So it is even more dramatic today if well-trained university graduates decide to continue their career abroad. This article takes the example of German physicians in Switzerland to explain why the German state loses much more than just tax revenue. The costs of training physicians and the number of doctors who have emigrated to our neighbouring country in the last few years give an idea of the extent of that loss of "human capital".

Training physicians has its price

Current expenditure of universities per degree obtained, 2007,
in EUR



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Among the courses at German universities, there are large differences in expenditure per student. On average, current expenditure per place at a German university in 2007 was EUR 8,400. The field with the highest costs was the subject group of human medicine/health sciences. Every university place of that subject group was subsidised by an average of about EUR 32,800 in 2007. This means that the annual funds flowing into the training of physicians were nearly four times the amount given to the training of mathematicians or natural scientists (EUR 9,000). A university place in the subject group of languages and arts cost EUR 5,200, while for legal, economic and social sciences the amount was EUR 4,600.

Altogether in 2007, the education and training of every physician, all the way from school to the start of working life, put a financial burden of about EUR 278,000 on the institutions responsible for school and higher education. School education up to the higher education entrance qualification caused costs of about EUR 67,000 per capita. In addition, every higher education degree – obtained after an average length of studies of over six years (12.9 semesters) – caused current expenditure of about EUR 211,000. As there were 11,363 graduates in 2007, the responsible institutions alone spent some EUR 3.2 billion on their training.

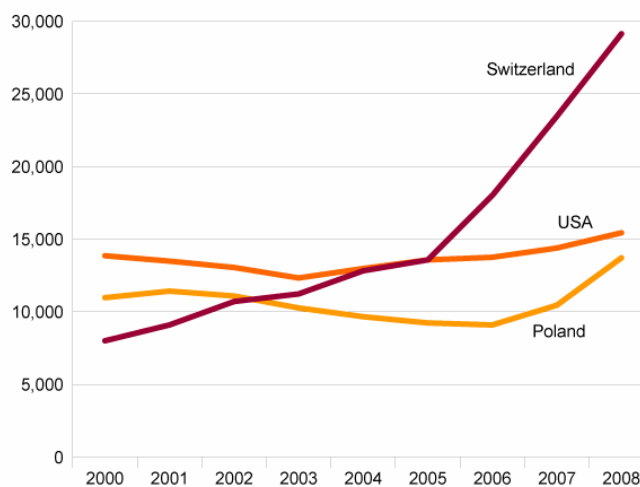
Switzerland: Tempting for physicians

In view of the emerging lack of physicians – especially in rural regions – it would be particularly important that the doctors trained here stay in Germany. However, similar to many other occupational groups, more and more doctors have left for other countries over the last few years, for example to Switzerland. Since 2005, that country has been the most popular emigration destination for Germans and in 2008 it was far ahead of the USA and Poland which ranked second and third.

According to Eurostat, the number of German doctors in Switzerland has growing continuously over the last few years. In 2008 about 3,300 German physicians lived and worked in the small country in the Alps who had immigrated shortly before (within the last 5 years). Assuming that the university studies performed by each of those doctors in Germany involved similar costs as in 2007, this means that expenditure of some EUR 917 million will now be to the benefit of the Swiss health system, at least for some time.

The emigration of physicians can certainly not be considered only as "migrating human capital" in economic terms. Behind every migration there is a person who has his or her personal reasons to accept a job abroad. Apart from individual reasons, working conditions and remuneration are major factors for physicians to look for a job in other countries.

Departures of Germans to the three most popular emigration countries, 2008



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Dear, but not costly

In the first phase of their working life, young doctors (up to under 35 years) in Germany have to settle for a relatively low pay. It is true that the low-paid 18-month internships (Arzt im Praktikum – AIP) were abolished in 2004, which led to an increase in the disposable net income also of young doctors. As indicated by themselves, the average net amount they had at their disposal as full-time employees in 2008 was over EUR 2,490 per month. Altogether, that is among all physicians, the average monthly income (in net terms) was EUR 4,350. However, the average income figures do not reflect the sometimes large income differences between established chief physicians and assistant physicians in German hospitals.

Doctors employed outside the public service earned most. They had an approximate net EUR 4,770 per month at their disposal.

Income cannot be considered separately but must be examined in relation to weekly working hours. Young physicians in Germany worked just under 46 hours per week in 2008 and, with slight fluctuations, has been stable over the last few years. Although young doctors thus worked about three hours less than the average of all German physicians (49 hours per week), they worked considerably more than other graduates starting their first job. When converted to hourly earnings, a young physician earned an average of EUR 12.50 in net terms in 2008. At the same time, however, many (even young) hospital doctors have a high degree of responsibility and their working hours include night service and weekend shifts.

Income and working hours of physicians employed full-time

Year	Physicians			Physicians aged up to 35 years		
	total	in public service	outside public service	total	in public service	outside public service
Average monthly net income in EUR						
2002	3,951	3,166	4,486	2,021	2,035	1,981
2003	4,091	3,251	4,624	2,008	2,044	1,930
2004	4,121	3,371	4,557	2,035	2,106	1,916
2005	4,284	3,571	4,705	2,310	2,361	2,220
2006	4,133	3,475	4,493	2,563	2,665	2,425
2007	4,333	3,581	4,740	2,477	2,511	2,429
2008	4,348	3,565	4,770	2,491	2,517	2,449
Average weekly hours usually worked						
2002	49,9	47,1	51,8	45,7	46,3	44,3
2003	48,0	45,6	49,5	44,8	45,3	43,9
2004	48,1	45,4	49,6	44,8	45,4	43,7
2005	48,8	46,0	50,4	45,7	46,3	44,7
2006	49,1	46,9	50,2	46,8	46,9	46,7
2007	48,8	46,5	50,1	46,1	46,8	45,2
2008	48,9	46,4	50,1	45,8	46,0	45,5

Source: Special evaluation of the microcensus

Even though the emigration of – in particular young – physicians does not meet with much enthusiasm when considered in economic terms, it does have advantages which are to the benefit of patients in Germany. This is because doctors who are ready to broaden their horizon in other countries will become acquainted with other health systems. Those who decide to return to their home country can use much of their experience to contribute to the further development of medical care in Germany.

Sometimes the German health system, too, benefits from the migratory disposition of young doctors: Among the total of some 14,000 practicing foreign physicians in 2005, about two thirds came to Germany directly after finishing their training, when they were aged between 30 and 34 years.