

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

LEAVING SERBIA

Aspirations, intentions and drivers
of youth migration

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Youth outflow from Serbia has increased in recent decade. Together with unfavorable demographic trends, this could lead towards the long term consequences and destabilizing effects.



Young people have very high mobility aspirations. Main drivers of emigration are unemployment and low standard of life thus political instability, crime and corruption do not feature as much



How to improve the transfer of research results into policy-making and how to enhance the evidence base policies on migration? Proactive migration policy model and properly design measures can shape ongoing and future migration, mitigating incentives to migrate and encouraging return

Contents

1.	INTRODUCTION	2
2.	SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF RESEARCH	3
3.	ASPIRATIONS, INTENSIONS AND DRIVERS OF YOUTH MIGRATION	4
4.	MOBILITY ASPIRATIONS	5
5.	MOBILITY DESIRE AND INTENTIONS	6
	MAIN DRIVERS OF MIGRATION	7
6.	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING POLICY MEASURES IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH MIGRATION	10
	REFERENCES	11

1

INTRODUCTION

Migration has played a pivotal role throughout history in shaping the world as we know it today. In the current era of global migratory flows, an increase in international migration has been evident – both numerically and proportionally, making this phenomenon complex and multifaceted. Mobility is more pronounced among youth than among the overall population. The estimated number of young migrants (aged 15 to 24) rose from 22.4 million in 1990 to 30.9 million in 2019 and accounted for 11.4 percent of the total number of international migrants, being the most mobile social group¹. Also, there are 77.6 million migrants under 30 years of age, which is one in every three persons².

Migration of young people today is more frequent than before, taking diverse forms. The global financial crisis and economic downturn have resulted in the largest cohort of young people struggling to find work, with global youth unemployment rate of 15.4 percent³. In general, the most important push factors are closely linked to the political and/or economic situation in countries of origin, which affects everyday life. For many young people, migration is a way out of insecurity, discrimination or abuse. Since migration has become the crucial question in the lives of young people all over the world, there is a need to engage youth as key partners in migration governance. Also, youth are being referred to as the “torchbearers” of the 2030 Agenda, having the most

important role both as beneficiaries of actions and policies under the Agenda and as partners and participants in its implementation⁴.

The Republic of Serbia is traditionally a country of emigration and youth mobility, usually driven by economic and political factors, which presents a particular challenge. According to estimates, the number of young people aged 15-29 is decreasing due to negative rate of national population growth and youth emigration, amounting to 1,166,404 million or 16.7 percent of the total population in 2019. This is 1.8 percent less than the figure reported in the 2011 population census (1.3 million or 18.5 percent of the total population)⁵. Youth are often excluded from social, economic and political life and perceived as a problem and even considered responsible for the position they have found themselves in, facing unemployment and risk of poverty and marginalization. In such circumstances, emigration is recognized as an opportunity to provide a better life for themselves and their families, seek better job opportunities and find their place in society. The lack of organized state response to those challenges has caused the absence of an indispensable new role of young generations in the 21st century Serbian society⁶.

1 <https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/child-and-young-migrants#-definition>

2 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/news/2019/02/migrant-youth/>

3 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sl.uem.1524.zs>

4 World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

5 <https://www.stat.gov.rs/>

6 https://ybhwbteu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Baseline-Analyses_Social-Economic-and-Political-Inclusion-of-Youth-in-Serbia.pdf

2

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

Since the 1960s the country has been one of the major sources of labor migration. Migration of young unskilled persons in the first phase and highly skilled ones in the second phase (from 1990s) had a deep impact on the country's overall development. Multiple changes began in the 1990s with economic collapse and crash of financial, material and human resources, which resulted in large-scale emigration with approximately 500,000 youth having left the country between 1991 and 2001⁷. Although economic trends have been encouraging since the year 2000, there are serious concerns about their sustainability. The demographic trends reveal Serbia's shrinking and ageing population, low fertility rate (below the long-term replacement rate) and outward migration. The geo-political transition is linked mainly to the country's candidacy for EU membership. Serbia is committed to its strategic goal of EU accession. While negotiations to that effect were launched in January 2014, certain issues still remain unsolved.

According to the 2011 population census, the size of emigrant stock dropped from 414,839 in 2002 to 313,411 persons. The negative net migration accounted for 15.3 percent of Serbia's overall depopulation in this period. In sum, emigration varied between 10,000 and 15,000 persons per year during this period⁸. Some recent data sets from Eurostat show that in the period from 2008 to 2018 the number of citizens of Serbia with valid residence permits in the EU28 was 491,199. In 2018 alone, 52,049 new residents in the EU were from Serbia⁹. According to the OECD, at the beginning of the 21st century the outflows from the country towards OECD member states amounted to 598,200 persons¹⁰. In the same period the World Bank reported emigration equal to 14 percent of the total population. A 2019 report about Serbian youth¹¹ stated that 240,000 citizens had left the country in the period from 2008 to 2015. Emigrants from Serbia are younger, with average age of 28.7 years, than the total population in the country with average age of 42.2 years (accord-

ing to the 2011 census). The share of graduates from tertiary education in emigration is 20 percent¹².

The emigrants are young, highly educated and skilled. This affects Serbia's labor market and overall development, as the country is losing its young and most talented professionals from specific areas, such as the IT sector and technical engineering, as well as medical workers (nurses and doctors), whose outflow has been revived since the 1990s¹³. Serbia is among the top-ranked countries with the highest brain-drain in the world (with value – 2.31¹⁴). Outflows of young, highly educated persons caused a drastic decline of -31 percentage points of highly educated ones who stayed in the country in 1990-1995¹⁵. On the other hand, recent data shows that almost 200,000 people aged 15-29 was unemployed in 2014 with no clear perspective of employment or financial independence. Five years later, this number declined by 42 percent to 114,679 persons. The decline of unemployment has of late been based on the changed methodology of statistical definition of unemployment¹⁶ rather than on real improvement in the economy and the position of workers in the labor market. In the structure of youth unemployment, persons in the age group of 25-29, i.e. 84.914 of them, prevail. The unemployment rate in 2019 amounted to 27.5 percent (compared to 10.4 percent in the total population)¹⁷ and is among the highest in Europe. The problem of youth unemployment is not only economic in nature; it is also deeply social and has long-term negative effects on society. Youth unemployment is fueling brain drain and erosion of human capital in Serbia¹⁸.

7 Marjanović (2016): Labour market transitions of young women and men in the Republic of Serbia. Geneva: ILO.

8 <https://www.stat.gov.rs/>

9 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/>

10 https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c3e35eec-en/1/2/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c3e35eec-en&_csp_=5484c834d3b-947b42e43a8aee995b48b&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book#execummm-d1e134,

11 Popadić, Pavlović, Mihailović (2019): Mladi u Srbiji, 2018/2019. Beograd: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

12 <http://popis2011.stat.rs/>

13 Youmig (2019): National policy recommendations for improved co-operation on youth migration.

14 The Global Competitiveness Report, 2019 (<https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-competitiveness-report-2019>)

15 Pejčin-Stokić, Grečić (2012): Socijalni Uticaj Emigracija i Migracija Selo-Grad u Centralnoj i Istočnoj Evropi. Beograd: EK, GVG.

16 Unemployed persons included only people whose employment was not based on any of the recognized models of the National Employment Service (NES), such as "long-term employment" or "temporary and occasional employment". This fact is important for understanding the overall labor force situation in Serbia where a significant number of the working population lost their status in the National Employment Service database or was never part of the official NES database.

17 SORS (2020): Labour Force Survey (<https://www.stat.gov.rs/>)

18 Jojkić, Mitrović, (2017): Da znanje ostane u Srbiji, Studija o položaju mladih osoba na tržištu rada u Republici Srbiji. Beograd: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

3

ASPIRATIONS, INTENSIONS AND DRIVERS OF YOUTH MIGRATION

The number of publications on migration has increased more than tenfold since 1990, as migration issues rose up the policy agendas. Academics and researchers have faced a demand for knowledge about the factors that shape migration flows and, by extension, might be influenced by policy measures¹⁹. There is a long-term trend of a gradual increase of academic involvement in research and publishing on migration in Serbia despite modest institutional support. This implies scientific and research focus on migration-related topics mainly addressing emigration, forced migration and the migration-development nexus, which significantly contributed to the expansion of academic literature production in this field, as well as to the increased prominence of migration research in Serbia.

This analysis is determined by recent predominantly qualitative research on emigration, to better understand how the context in which migration is occurring is evolving. The analysis was based on the 2019 study titled “Research on aspirations and mobility intentions and the impact of migration on aging in four municipalities in Serbia in order to create recommendations for population policy”, which was conducted by the Belgrade University Faculty of Geography and developed for the Minister without portfolio responsible for demography and population policy. The study provides detailed

insights into regional differentiation of the migration phenomenon in Serbia through an analysis of four municipalities (Zrenjanin, Zaje ar, Užice and Leskovac), highlighting mobility aspirations and intentions and identifying the main drivers in order to find effective ways of mitigating outmigration and managing migration for the benefit of local communities in Serbia. The data obtained can be considered as representative for Serbia, especially due to similarities in responses by both urban and rural residents, with differences only in terms of intensity and frequency of responses. The results of this study will be complemented with a systematic review of several, mainly primary research studies²⁰, summarizing recent research on migration in Serbia, exploring the drivers and determinants of youth migration, and discussing its effects and implications on society.

19 Carling, Collins (2018): Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:6, 909-926, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134

20 Young people in Serbia 2015, FES, SECONS, 2016; Bobić, Andjelković, Kokotović-Kanazir (2016): Study of external and internal migration of Serbia's citizens with particular focus on youth. Belgrade: IOM, UNDP, SDC; Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (2018): Alternativna izveštaja o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji (<https://koms.rs/>); Migracije studenata (2018). Beograd: RZS, Kabinet ministra bez portfelja zadužen za demografiju i populacionu politiku; Youmig (2019): National policy recommendations for improved cooperation on youth migration. Belgrade: SORS, IDN. Popadić, Pavlović, Mihailović (2019): Mladi u Srbiji, 2018/2019. Beograd: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Swis pro (2019): Zadovoljstvo građana kvalitetom života u lokalnoj zajednici i uslugama lokalnih samouprava. Beograd: CESID, Vlada RS, SDC, UNOPS; Petrović, Brčetočić, Šaranović (2020): *Migracije sa istoka na zapad Evrope: Da li Srbija može da odoli naletima vetra?* Beograd: Fiskalni savet Srbije.

4

MOBILITY ASPIRATIONS

Aspirations to migrate are essentially a way of looking at global and specific aspects of spatial mobility in correlation with perceiving the main characteristics of the indigenous population and migrants from temporal and spatial perspectives. People may observe the migratory achievements of their peers, come to see migration as a realistic prospect and develop migration aspirations²¹. In line with that, they may create their own image of migration, initially through support to such flows in their environment. The research conducted in four municipalities in Serbia shows that a predominant response relating to **support to migration** (both internal migration and outmigration) is in favor of supporting or fully supporting mobility, i.e. 41.4 percent in total or 44.7 percent in urban and 33.7 percent in rural population. As for socio-demographic factors, higher aspirations to move are present among younger cohorts, especially in the age group of 20-24, with more than 50 percent. Overall, women have higher mobility aspirations than men. Another socio-demographic factor that is positively associated with the likelihood of desire to migrate is present among individuals with secondary or tertiary education who are unemployed, unmarried, living with parents and have relatives and friends abroad. It is important to highlight that factors positively associated with mobility aspirations in Serbia are in line with the findings of the global Gallup survey in 2017²².

The perception on **who is leaving** is pretty clear among local residents. The highest share of all respondents stated that young people were moving out from the selected municipalities. The amount of emigration of young people is so intense that 71 percent of respondents both in urban and rural settlements have given this answer. This question was significant because of the widespread perception in Serbia's public discourse that more and more families are leaving the country in recent years. However, 20 percent of all respondents claim that complete families are leaving, which is more prominent in urban areas. The importance of this is linked with the duration of stay abroad, as well as with changes in the demographic profile of migrants. Families are usually ready to leave permanently, which means a total loss of social and econom-

ic capital in the place of origin. Even though youth mobility is often met with brain drain concerns and the so called 'mobility celebration'²³ encouraged by host countries, there is a chance of return and transfer of knowledge, skills and money.

Furthermore, 84.5 percent of respondents think that **migration intensity** is much higher today than it was 10 years ago, which is in line with the current statistical data. The perception of the present emigration trends as a mass phenomenon is compatible with the fact that today's migration issues are more widely presented in the media discourse and in all segments of social, political and scientific spheres in Serbia.

As for the question of **migration of young people observed as a threat or opportunity for development** (in line with the migration-development nexus), very interesting answers were provided. The highest share of unspecified answers (19.6 percent) and those referring both to opportunity and threat (16.7 percent) lead to a conclusion that the population in Serbia is insufficiently aware of the importance of economic and social capital of the diaspora, failing to see the possibility and benefits of return and circular migration. To that effect, a predominantly pessimistic perception on migration as a threat and a limiting factor for development is evident. Thus, 56.1 percent of respondents see the phenomenon of migration as a threat and only 6.6 percent see it as a positive link between migration and the development of local communities. However, the highest share of all respondents who emphasize a positive correlation is found among youth cohorts aged 20-24 (14.8 percent). Also, this is the only age group with a less than a 50-percent share (45.7 percent) of answers relating to the negative connection between migration and development.

Along the lines of O. Bakewell's assertion that "people do not aspire to migrate; they aspire to something which migration might help them achieve", when migration is considered as something instrumental – a means to an end – the nature of the underlying aspirations can be pivotal to migration theory²⁴.

21 Carling, Collins (2018): Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:6, 909-926, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134

22 Migali, Scipioni (2019): Who's About to Leave? A Global Survey of Aspirations and Intentions to Migrate. *International migration*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd. IOM.

23 Carling, Collins (2018): Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:6, 909-926, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134

24 Carling, Collins (2018): Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:6, 909-926, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134

5

MOBILITY DESIRE AND INTENTIONS

The intention to emigrate is an indicator of migrants' potential preferences, or more precisely, of the extent to which respondents will realize their aspirations to leave the place of permanent residence. The desire for migration has been scrutinized by focusing on the individual dimension. It refers to migration possibility which is describing a belief that leaving would be better than staying. The wish to leave may determine the intensity of making a plan and evaluation of the likelihood of materialization of that decision. The desire to migrate usually overestimates the pool of potential migrants, but despite this, the migration desire has been extensively used as a proxy for potential migration²⁵.

The desire to emigrate indicates the current and future migration potential, with 42.3 percent of respondents stating they often or very often consider leaving. The share of such responses is higher among respondents in urban areas. As for the young respondents who are more prepared for emigration, 63.8 percent of them are in the age cohort 20-24 and 56.3 percent in the age cohort 25-29. Being young, female, highly educated, unemployed and with migration history, they are more likely to prepare for an internal journey, but more often for an international journey. Recent studies also indicate that the percentage of those who have voiced readiness to leave varies between 50 and 78 percent, while the percentage of those who have already taken concrete steps in that direction is smaller, but still significant²⁶. This represents the largest share in the Western Balkan region. It is important to stress that 28.5 percent of the total number of respondents do not think about changing their place of residence, of which 37.2 percent are from rural areas.

The **plans and preparation for emigration in the next year** are certain among 26.3 percent of the total population. However, this share is almost two times higher among young respondents: 50.4 percent in the age cohort 20-24 and 44.7 percent in the age cohort 25-29. As expected, young, predominantly male respondents, who are more educated, in the optimal fertile and working age, are the most mobile in

the total population, and these categories are more likely to emigrate in the next year. Therefore, they can be considered as a demographic potential ready for emigration. More precisely, 14 percent of young people will leave the country in the next six months, 26 percent in the next two years, and 31 percent in the next five years. Despite this, almost a half of the respondents (48 percent) did not take any concrete steps towards emigration²⁷.



A man, age 20-24, lives in a city, together with his parents or as a tenant, has a high school or university degree, unmarried and unemployed, and has relatives or friends abroad.

Potential directions of future mobility show that the most common answer is outmigration with 45.7 percent of the total population, 57.1 percent of those aged 20-24 and 63.8 of those aged 25-29. Potential destinations include Germany, Austria, Switzerland, United States and Canada, and this answer is almost unanimous in all examined studies. As for the intentions for internal migration, an almost equal, very low proportion of answers is in favor of choosing another municipality or even Belgrade as a future destination (8.5 percent as opposed to 9.1 percent). It is obvious that, beside the fact that Belgrade is still in the focus among young²⁸, predominantly female population who mainly stay after graduating, the attractiveness of the capital city has declined significantly. Only ten years ago that was not the case. A survey from 2009²⁹ showed that more than a quarter of high-school students preferred internal mobility towards "the first next instance". Therefore, the greatest level of dissatisfaction with the existing place of living was expressed by young people from rural areas in southeast Serbia, while youth from Belgrade was the most satisfied. The sharp increase in mobility intentions to move abroad is, among other factors, closely related to the process of EU accession, more travel opportunities, better job opportunities for young people and chances of better education, etc.

25 Docquier, Peri, Ruysen (2018): The cross-country determinants of potential and actual migration. *International Migration Review*. Volume: 48 issue: 1.

26 Migracije studenata (2018). Beograd: RZS, Kabinet ministra bez portfelja zadužen za demografiju i populacionu politiku; Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (2018): Alternativna izveštaja o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji; Pavlović, Mihailović (2019): Mladi u Srbiji, 2018/2019. Beograd: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

27 Pavlović, Mihailović (2019): Mladi u Srbiji, 2018/2019. Beograd: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

28 Bobić, Anđelković, Kokotović-Kanazir (2016): Study of external and internal migration of Serbia's citizens with particular focus on youth. Belgrade: IOM, UNDP, SDC;

29 CESID (2009): Mobilnost, način provođenja slobodnog vremena i najčešćalji oblici neformalnog obrazovanja mladih.

Although it may be expected that with an increase in the level of education, the share of population that intends to go abroad will increase significantly, the percentage of those with lower education level involved in international migration is surprisingly high. This means that emigration from the country is a dominant direction, which proves that the exodus already exists and has a tendency to continue. Therefore, it is important to reduce emigration, especially of young, skilled and educated people, by creating effective measures and managing migration in a more favorable way.

One in every three respondents would move permanently, mostly among the young cohort (20-24). Potential returnees might be found among 11.6 percent of respondents who would leave the country and stay abroad until living conditions have improved, together with 10.8 percent of those who would move out and stay abroad for more than a year (20 percent of respondents aged 20-24). Circular migration is represented among 2.6 percent of respondents, with a slightly higher proportion of persons aged 25-29. It is evident that short-term mobility is not perceived as an alternative to improved standard of living in the near future. A large number of youth is considering leaving the country after graduation, never to return. Around 30 percent of students (out of 11,013 respondents) are planning to leave after graduation, while 50 percent of them have no intention to return. The vast majority of them - 90 percent have parents' support, while 70 percent of them have relatives and friends abroad³⁰. The question is how young adults could be encouraged to develop their human capital through mobility, but also prompted to return and exploit this capital in their home country.

MAIN DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

The starting point is to identify the pull and push drivers of migration, such as economic, political, demographic, social and environmental drivers and their importance in the hierarchy of factors related to the decision to leave. The general determinants of migration and their specificity can be seen by answering the question about **the main factors of staying in the place of residence**. The predominant reason to stay is related to social and emotional ties i.e. attachment to family and friends (32 percent). Several studies also suggest the importance of friends and family relations in making a decision to stay³¹. Having one's own property (resolved housing issue) ranks second - 19.9 percent, followed by 10 percent of respondents who indicate that they do not plan to emigrate out of patriotism and sense of belonging. Only 9.2 percent of respondents state a good job as a reason for staying, 5.1 percent voice satisfaction with the quality of life, whereas 2.6 percent state their desire to help the local development. This

indicates that material aspects of life have not yet significantly endangered the family values as the fundamental pillar of Serbian society.

Young respondents also highlighted the importance of social ties and emotional attachment to the place of residence: 31 percent of those aged 20-24 and 33 percent of those aged 25-29. Far less respondents in the youth cohort 20-24 state the importance of housing, patriotism and sense of belonging (around 10 percent, respectively). A higher share of housing issue in positive correlation with the decision to stay is found in the age cohort 25-29. Attachment to family and friends, patriotism and sense of belonging decrease as the level of education and problems in the housing and good job categories increase. This shows that for young age groups in Serbia, a satisfactory job could be a factor that may mitigate emigration of highly educated people, which is an issue that urgently needs to be addressed. On the other hand, it is clear that housing dependence is closely linked with unemployment, low wages and poverty risk for youth in Serbia. These aggravating circumstances present another challenge for young people, making it more difficult for them to build independence from their parents and start a family in Serbia³².

Conversely, **the perception of the most important push factors** is in negative correlation between happiness and life satisfaction on the one hand, and desire to migrate, on the other. The main driver of emigration is dissatisfaction with local and country related circumstances, especially in the sphere of economic development. Namely, unfavorable economic situation and a lack of better paid jobs, with the share of 17 percent, respectively, top the list of priority reasons to leave. Along with that, but with the smallest share (9.1 percent), is inability to find a job. As far as young cohorts are concerned, a better paid job is the top priority for 18 percent of respondents. Respondents aged 20-24, i.e. 16 percent, ranked second the inability to find a job, while 15.7 percent of them ranked third the unfavorable economic situation. In the age cohort 25-29, the situation is slightly opposite, with similar shares. Among older respondents aged 30 plus, the most important reason is unfavorable economic situation, while a better paid job and inability to find a job are ranked second and third, respectively. The transition of main drivers of emigration is interesting, and is linked with the experience in the labor market and economic sector during lifetime. Educational level is also creating different perceptions on the issue. Persons with high education point out the unfavorable economic situation, those with secondary education equally point out unfavorable economic situation and a better paid job, while those with primary education single out a better paid job. The negative relation between income and desire to migrate becomes progressively stronger. The decision to emigrate is also affected by the functioning of the state, but this does not feature as much: the lack of rule of law (8.8 percent), coupled with corruption and lack of prospects (8.6 per-

30 Migracije studenata (2018). Beograd: RZS, Kabinet ministra bez portfelja zadužen za demografiju i populacionu politiku;

31 Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (2018): Alternativna izveštaja o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbiji; Bobić, Andjelković, Kotković-Kanazir (2016): Study of external and internal migration of Serbia's citizens with particular focus on youth. Belgrade: IOM, UNDP, SDC.

32 Young people in Serbia 2015, FES, SECONS, 2016; <https://serbia.iom.int/sr/projects/zajedni%C4%8DKi-program-un-%E2%80%9Epo-dr%C5%A1ka-nacionalnim-naporima-za-promovisanje-zapo%C5%A1javanja-mladih-i>

cent, respectively). Among young respondents, these shares are higher (around 10 percent), especially in the age cohort 25-29. As opposed to these, potential migrants primarily expect that their new communities will provide them with better job prospects and a better quality of life.

The majority of recent studies on migration in Serbia prove these results: since unemployment and poor living conditions are the main drivers of emigration, political instability, crime and corruption do not feature as much. Among other problems in local communities, youth also perceived as important the postponed independence from their parents, lack of cultural events in local communities, accessibility of housing and transportation, lack of participation in social and political life, lack of support, poor quality of education, unregulated labor market, etc³³. Even though there is a high correlation of most answers, it is important to point out a certain transition in terms of ranking of significance of major emigration drivers. In most recent studies, dominant answers include lack of opportunities for young people in local communities and insufficient quality of the education system (education and labor market outcomes)³⁴. A study provided by the Fiscal Council of Serbia³⁵ also sheds a new light on the main mobility drivers which are connected with institutional capacity of the state (corruption and the rule of law), as well as necessary structural reforms in the public sector. Identification of main emigration drivers, no matter how complex and numerous they are, can obviously help mitigate the negative effects by creating systematic policy measures on the national, but more preferably, on the local level.

Despite the fact that the likelihood of moving represented a generic movement, including both internal and international migration, the results confirmed traditional, economic drivers

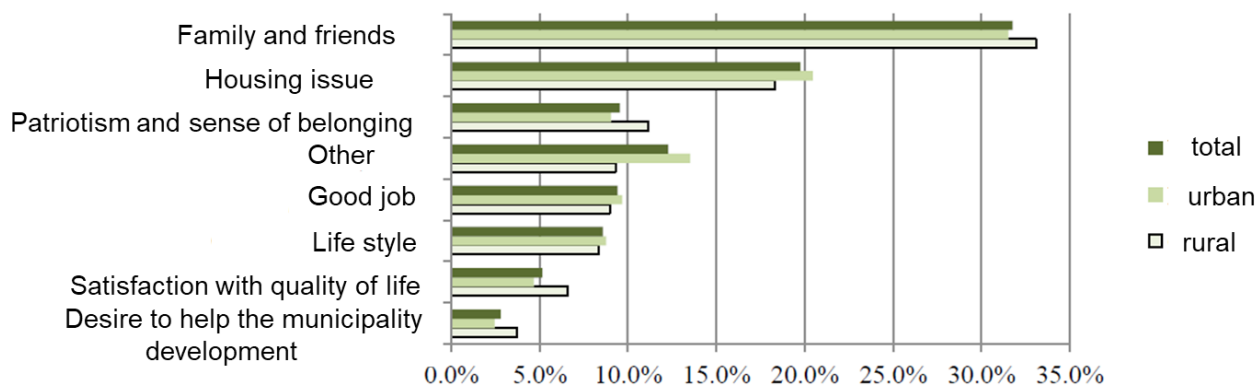
of migration movements. These findings suggest that increased dissatisfaction with living conditions and more pessimistic views about the future standard of living and local economy are associated with higher aspirations to move to another country. It is also clear that the population of Serbia is primarily preoccupied with improving their economic circumstances and standard of living, while global and regional (geo)political issues are not on the top of the agenda in their everyday lives.

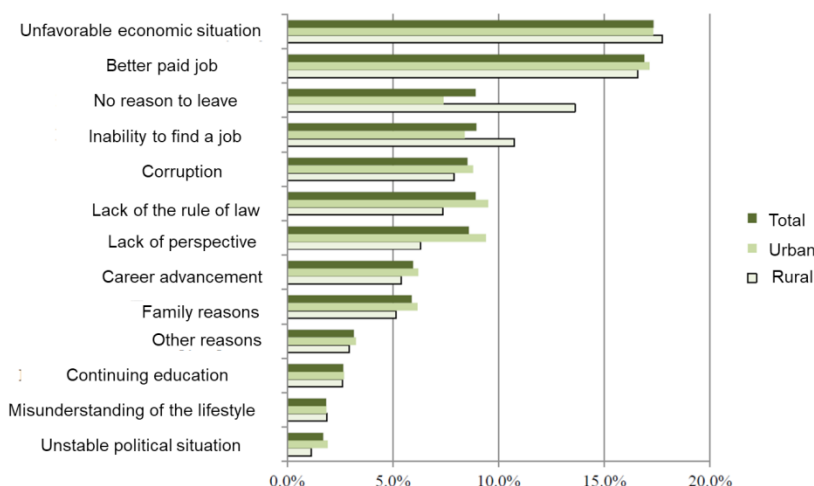
The final question concerning the drivers of migration refer to the most important issues which also include social improvements in local municipalities in the near future that could have a major impact on respondents' decision to stay. The responses highlighted a coherent framework of links between the root causes and migration outcomes and pointed to the direction of population policy measures to reduce emigration and mitigate its effects. Most of the respondents pointed out the progress in the economic sphere, i.e. higher chances of employment (22.2 percent) and improvement of employment status (13.5 percent), which indicates that economic drivers are the most important ones in the set of factors of emigration, i.e. improvement of economic development could be a key factor in the decision to stay. Improvements in the area of social and health protection, highlighted by 13.1 percent of the respondents, was ranked third in terms of factors that impact the decision to stay in the place of current residence. High on the list of factors, ranked fourth, is the need for a cleaner and healthier environment (9.9 percent), which seems to be more important than better education, leisure time, security, cheaper housing, having more time for friends, and information accessibility. This framework seeks to focus the attention away from the idea that environmental change directly causes migration, towards an understanding of the broader drivers of migration and how they are susceptible to environmental change in different and inter-linked ways³⁶. The smallest proportion of respondents opted for greater participation in po-

- 33 Krovna organizacija mladih Srbije (2018): Alternativna izveštaja o položaju i potrebama mladih u Republici Srbij;
- 34 Swis pro (2019): Zadovoljstvo građana kvalitetom života u lokalnoj zajednici i uslugama lokalnih samouprava. Beograd: CESID, Vlada RS, SDC, UNOPS.
- 35 Petrović, Brčetočić, Šaranović (2020): Migracije sa istoka na zapad Evrope: Da li Srbija može da odoli naletima vetra? Beograd: Fiskalni savet Srbije.

- 36 Carling, Collins (2018): Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44:6, 909-926, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384134

Graph 1
The main factors in decision to stay, 2019.





Graph 2
Main drivers of emigration, 2019.

litical life (only 1.3 percent), which means they are faced with concrete existential issues.

The youngest respondents in the age cohort 20-24 emphasized the importance of creating better employment conditions (28.6 percent), equal opportunities for career advancement (13.5 percent) and improving the quality of education (11.1 percent). They stressed the need for higher education institutions on the local level, since education is a significant driver of emigration. The need for a cleaner and healthier environment was recorded among 10.9 percent of youth, which is the largest share compared to all other age groups and indicates that young people are focused on environmental protection as one of the important preconditions for a better quality of life. Young people aged 25-29 also pointed out higher employment prospects (27 percent) as the most important factor for staying, but, unlike the youngest respondents, they emphasized more the importance of progress in the field of achieving equal opportunities for improving the employment status (19.8 percent), as well as importance of better social and health care (9.3 percent).

The results obtained confirm previous findings in the literature dealing with migration issues. More precisely, individuals who are satisfied with their overall standard of living tend to be less likely to wish to move abroad than those who are dissatisfied. Dissatisfaction with life in Serbia on a broader scale is evident in the data which best illustrates both the level of dissatisfaction of the young population with living conditions in their communities and the absence of any prospects. Social and health care systems are leading indicators of development of society and, being a highly-ranked deterrent to migration intentions, they should be one of the key drivers of migration policy. The results of the survey unequivocally indicate the need to review and improve health and social policies. Environmental protection and improvement is perceived as one of the priority activities of society, which must be correlated with economic policy in order to achieve sustainable development. In fact, these and other segments require a higher standard of living as a general factor in spatial mobility.



The most important reason for stay among young people aged 20-24 are more job opportunities, they want to live in a cleaner and healthier environment, and they need a better quality of education. Respondents in the age group 25-29 believe that when they are employed it is necessary to have (equal) chances of advancement, those with young children and the elderly believe that greater progress should be made in the social and health care segments, respondents with lower educational level want better quality of leisure time and with higher education better environmental conditions.

6

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING POLICY MEASURES IN THE FIELD OF YOUTH MIGRATION

Since the 1990s, and especially after 2009 (Serbia's candidacy to the EU) and 2015 (Balkan migration route), the issues of migration have been attracting constant attention of policy makers in Serbia. However, institutional capacities for cross-sectoral coordination are still insufficient to enable designing of effective and sustainable migration policies and legislation, despite recent improvements. Various documents look at migration in conjunction with numerous aspects of life. Therefore, migration topics are mainstreamed into policies in the fields of employment (including not only the development of industry, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, but also the development of agricultural sector), social inclusion, education, youth and security³⁷.

In January 2019, the Government launched an initiative aimed at systematically addressing the issue of economic migration and, as a result, passed the Economic Migration Strategy for the period 2021 to 2027. The Strategy is directed towards mitigating emigration and encouraging the return of professionals from the diaspora, as well as creating a business and economic environment for immigration of foreign experts. Some of the recommendations are repeated in different documents, but it is clear that their number is increasing, with old recommendations being complemented with new ones, and they should serve as a basis for all institutions, organizations and other actors in the process of improving the position of young people in Serbia³⁸.

In creating efficient measures for managing migration flows it is certainly imperative to use an evidence-based policy principle, to find out 'what works under what conditions'. This pragmatic approach, complemented by improved databases and techniques for analysis and evaluation, could lead to identification of root causes of the problem rather than just recognizing its consequences. Clear and urgent measures should be based on two maxims: 'Youth in all development policies' and 'Nothing about youth without youth'. In recent, turbulent times, migration is becoming complex and multifaceted, leading to greater demands on policy.

Addressing the role of research in helping design migration policies identifies a number of ways to improve the science-policy dialogue. These include closer interaction and effective communication between researchers and policy-makers regarding research needs. It is important to conduct more interdisciplinary research on migration to better

contextualize the current migration patterns. Policy-makers need more rapid, reactive research to help respond to quickly unfolding events. Furthermore, the question of dissemination of research results, which will target a broader audience beyond the scientific community, is of immense importance. There is also a need for a more comparative research across countries and increased research collaboration with local researchers, including analyses focusing on the micro level³⁹.

Improving migration data is a basis for evidence-based policies. There is a need for improving and strengthening databases and for establishing long-term cohorts in order to evaluate and identify the influence of different variables. Quantitative data needs to be more reliable to achieve better estimation of the number of migrants and to project the scale of current and future migration. Behind every migration statistics, there are individuals or families starting a new life. A central register of the population has to be established, as well. Future research should develop more sophisticated methodologies and produce more rigorous analyses addressing the complex and multiple drivers of migration in a comprehensive way. Having in mind all of the above, migration issues become a part of the national strategy aimed at enhancing the statistical capacities of the country. Coordinated measures are needed to overcome the obstacles, but the process is still rather slow.

Skills mismatch encourage youth emigration. Education is invaluable in terms of personal development and it enables young people to readily enter the labor market. That is why formal education should fit the needs of both existing and new jobs and vocations with required skills and qualifications. Weak skills development systems and policies constitute a push factor for young people in Serbia, contributing to brain drain. Therefore, it is important to continue structural reforms of educational and training systems, with focus on learning outcomes, including non-formal ones. Also, it is highly necessary to update regulatory documents in this field, as well as new occupational classifications, as a prerequisite for more effective reforms of curricula and labor market needs. Development of a modern monitoring information system will update data on current and future trends in the labor market skills anticipation systems. One of the priorities of the education system is to develop "creative and productive qualities" of human resources in general, namely high quality workers. The skills can also be acquired through vocational training programs, non-formal education and learning programs (e.g. career guidance). Proactive policy approaches can help young people find jobs, especially, those

37 Report WP1 (2020). Migration, Integration and Governance Research Centre (MIGREC). H2020.

38 <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/usvojena-strategija-o-ekonomskim-migracijama-republike-srbije-za-period-2021-2027-godine>

39 More on this: https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/publication/understanding-tackling-migration-challenge-role-research_en

matching their skills. This can also be directed towards raising the potential to develop and implement skills-related measures to support the broadening of the pool of available skills. The country needs to strengthen the skills anticipation systems to inform migration policies, increase access to education and training, and establish bilateral or multilateral recognition of qualifications and skills⁴⁰. As part of the education system, the policies to **promote student mobility** should encourage what is called ‘brain circulation’ because people migrating for education are more likely to return.

Improvement of youth employability should offer young people better opportunities for training, employment and decent work. This should primarily focus on reducing the unemployment rate in the long run and at economic empowerment of youth through direct and indirect employment measures. The country should be active in creating a supportive business environment and in supporting the development of the private sector and small and medium-sized enterprises. Successful start-up programs represent the most important mitigation tool in the emigration process among the population aged 20-29. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage the development of youth entrepreneurship, especially through first job programs. To that effect, public administration reform is necessary, as well as reform of the tax system towards a more stimulating tax regime for young people, support measures for youth entrepreneurship and self-employment, and increased accessibility and coverage of these measures. New youth employment policy measures are based on reducing the cost of youth employment through financial incentives and reducing social contributions of employees. Like in some EU countries (e.g. Spain), it is necessary to establish a new economic model based on productivity and added value, and a labor framework for quality employment and dignity at work. The Serbian government should be committed to contributing to the development of a new productive model and long-term strategies to support innovation in specific sectors or branches. Good practice examples in youth employment, such as business incubators, entrepreneurship education (e.g. Business Innovation Program, Youth achievements), job fairs and on-the-job training, social enterprises as a way of tackling the unemployment problem of vulnerable groups, are a good starting point and a framework that must be improved.

Promotion of return and circular migration has in recent years emerged as an integral part of effective migration management, sufficient for development in Serbia. The networking with the diaspora and fostering of transfer of skills, knowledge and remittances (including social remittances) is extremely important in terms of the migration-development nexus. Furthermore, policies to promote return migration should improve the legal framework and conditions of migrants, enabling them to move freely and safely between countries of destination and origin. Capitalizing on return migration by making it more attractive and sustainable⁴¹ is

one of the priorities of the government in the near future. Return migration can lead to mitigation of the brain drain and creation of a brain gain, where those who return bring augmented local skills. Circular migration is often perceived as a triple win for sending and receiving countries as well as migrants, and has been taken up recently as a policy instrument to better manage migration. This is a significant step forward in the traditional ways of understanding migration in general, being advocated as a potential solution for mitigating permanent emigration of young, skilled and highly educated people from Serbia.

Regional inequalities within the country have raised the perception that “some places and people” are left behind⁴². Regional inequality and economic divergence across Serbia have steadily increased over the last 50 years. An effective policy to mitigate this relies on a correct assessment of the amount and causes of such disparities. Demographic revitalization perceived in reducing emigration and brain drain and increasing human capital in underdeveloped regions could be a good basis for future development. This could be done by creating measures for a balanced regional development to encourage young people to stay in their communities by creating new jobs and opportunities for self-employment and vocational trainings tailored to the needs of the labor market; creating housing policies and active measures adjusted to young people, especially those still depending on their parents; creating policies and measures for decentralization; measures for promoting agriculture among young people, and creating a better general climate for dealing with these branches of economy; measures for reducing poverty risk rate in undeveloped regions, etc. Private-public partnerships could be formed with the aim of retaining highly educated and qualified young people in the local communities. It would also be advisable to revise and update a number of local strategic plans, especially those dealing with youth and migration.

Serbia is facing a number of challenges when dealing with migration issues and they must be kept on the political agendas to be responded to in a timely and flexible way. The state does not have adequate responses or policy measures to prevent mass emigration. Since the migration issues are seen as constituting part of life’s trajectory, they lead to discernible changes towards ‘new geographies’ and ‘new temporalities’. How to improve the transfer of research results into policy-making and how to enhance the evidence base of policies on migration? In Serbia there is no leading institution responsible for coordination and monitoring of migration strategy. This leads towards the lack of coordination and information sharing among different institutions; inconsistencies and partiality in the implementation of policies and measures, and in particular the monitoring and evaluation of the success of completed programs. Nevertheless, data from recent research reveals that despite all measures created by the government, one quarter of respondents have already decided to leave Serbia permanently. The results in preventing the causes rather than consequences should lead towards mitigation of youth emigration. After all, migration is what we make it.

40 More on this: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/-ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_651238.pdf

41 More on this: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264265615-12-en.pdf?expires=1587555602&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=482DDD5868A70808FE9E058341B7DF8A>

42 Regional Inequality and Fiscal Policy, WP/19/88, May 2019 (www.imf.org)

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LEAVING SERBIA

Aspirations, intentions and drivers of youth migration



Youth outflow from Serbia has increased in the recent decade. Together with unfavorable demographic trends, this could lead towards long-term consequences and destabilizing effects e.g. an increasing demographic burden on future generations of workers, labor market disruption, burden on social services and social care, education and health systems, organization of the pension system, etc.



Young people have very high mobility aspirations. Being young, highly educated, unemployed and with migration history, they are more likely to prepare for an international journey. Since the main drivers of emigration are unemployment and low standard of living, political instability, crime and corruption do not feature as much. The most important issues, which also refer to social improvements in local municipalities in the near future that could have a major impact on the decision to stay, include progress in the economic sphere and social and health protection, as well as the need for a cleaner and healthier environment.



How to improve the transfer of research results into policy-making and how to enhance evidence-based policies on migration? A proactive migration policy model can be efficient in managing migration flows. Well-created measures can shape ongoing and future migration, mitigating incentives to migrate and encouraging migrants' return to their home countries, thus fostering positive changes.

More information about this subject:
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