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ORIGINALNI NAUČNI RAD / ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION OF STUDENTS IN EASTERN CROATIA

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research is to describe student's intentions of migration and their satisfaction with life in the home country and also the factors that are important for staying in Croatia. Research also investigate how sociodemographic characteristics are connected to student's intention of migration from Eastern Croatia. The differences between gender, age, household income, place of residence, average grade in the previous part of the study, student status and close friends/family members live abroad were examined. This research was conducted on 420 students in Eastern Croatia during January and April 2023. Data was analyzed using SPSS and descriptive statistical analysis and Mann Whitney and Kruskal Wallis test. Research results identified that gender, place of residence, average grade in the previous year of the study, close friends/family members live abroad didn't have significant impacts on the intention of migration. Age, household income and student's status have significant impacts on the intention of migration. The results also recognized that most respondents are satisfied with life in Croatia and believe that Croatia is better than other countries.*

Keywords: *demographic characteristics, migration, Slavonia & Baranja*

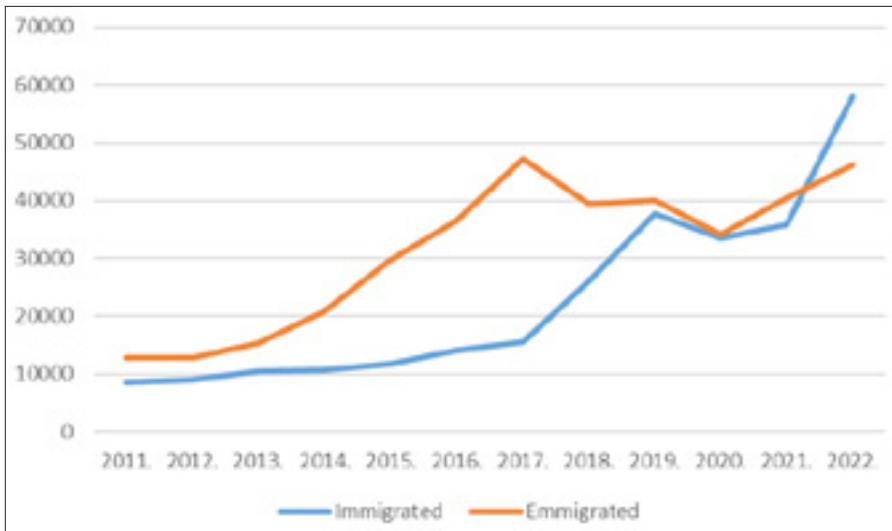
JEL classification: *J60*

INTRODUCTION

The gap between the underdeveloped and the developed part of the globalized world is growing. With globalization, migration is becoming an increasingly important factor shaping the global economy. In the developed world, it is impossible not to notice how much the term migration has started to be used in everyday speech, especially in the 21st century. Although the Republic of Croatia is traditionally a country of emigration, previous emigration and the current state of emigration has a strong impression on Croatian society. Since 2008, when the economic crisis started, Croatia has been experiencing large emigrations (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2023.) and with Croatia's accession to the European Union 2013., a new negative phase in its

demographic development began (Strmota, 2020.) This last emigrant wave perhaps is also the most unfavorable so far because it takes place in the circumstances of the accelerated aging of the population, natural decline and reduced fertility and total depopulation. What is particularly worrying is the high youth unemployment rate and the low share of the highly educated in the total percentage of the Croatian population.

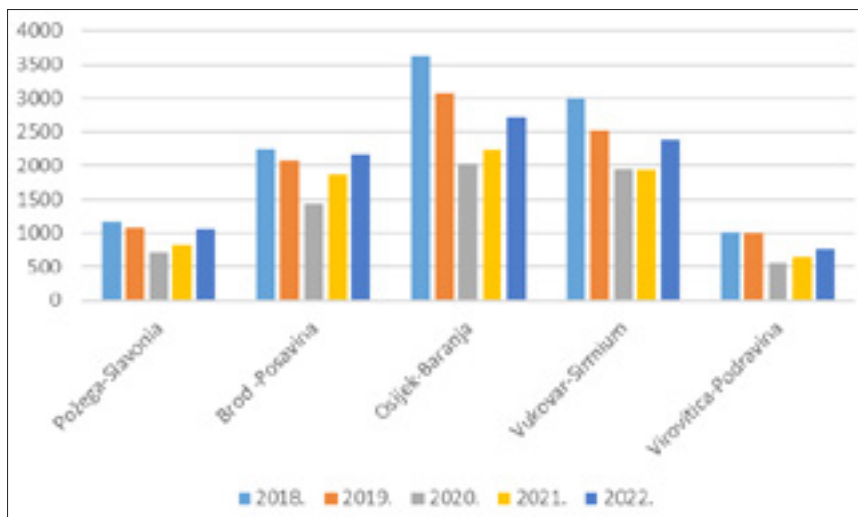
According to the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics, Croatia remains without its own population, which is shown in the following graph.



Graph 1. Relationship of emigration and immigration in Croatia

Source: authors according to (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2023.)

The graph shows that in the period between 2011 and 2022, about 375, 555 people left Croatia. As for the age structure of emigrants, “the largest share in 2022 is the population aged 20-39 (44,1%)” (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2023.), which indicates the fact that the majority is made up of young people. In the 2022. after years and years Croatia had a positive net migration (11 685). The reason for this is the large number of immigrants, even 19.3% persons arrived from Ukraine. A large proportion of authors like (Mesarić Žabčić, 2021.) consider that Croatian population will continue to decline, with expected further demographic decline especially including the emigration of the young people or (Jerić, 2019.) who believes that Croatia will lose 20% of its population in the next thirty years. Precisely for these reasons, it is necessary to develop new economic, pension, educational and other policies that will affect demographic changes. (Petreska, Prodanova, & Kocarev, 2023.) especially emphasize education (quality, efficiency and reputation) and that students should be able to recognize their education as beneficial for their professional future in the country. The following graph shows the emigration from Eastern Croatia region.



Graph 2. The emigration from counties of Eastern Croatia

Source: authors according to (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2023.)

The graph shows international emigration of the population of Eastern Croatia which includes five counties: Pozega-Slavonia County, Brod-Posavina County, Osijek-Baranja County, Vukovar-Sirmium County and Virovitica-Podravina County. There has been a slight increase in emigrants in the last 3 years in all counties. The situation in Eastern Croatia (Slavonia and Baranja), which used to be one of the richest Croatian regions, is much worse than in the rest of the country. The main characteristics are the sale of land, houses, poverty, agricultural production falls and disappears and emigration of the population. Demographer (Živić, 2017.) states that compared to other Croatian counties, this part is populated below average and the overall depopulation will continue and will take on more drastic proportions.

The main purpose of this work is to investigate why people move out of the area of Eastern Croatia, as well as why they stay in this area. Based on the above-mentioned considerations, this paper raises several research questions related to propensities to migrate. The mentioned research questions are:

How important are sociodemographic characteristics when intending to go abroad?

What encourages the local population to leave or keeps them staying in the county?

How the local population sees Croatia, as a desirable or undesirable place to live in?

In accordance with the aim and research question of the research, the following hypotheses were defined:

H1: Gender affects migration intention.

H2: The place of residence affects migration intention.

H3: Age affects migration intention.

H4: Socioeconomic status affects migration intention.

H5: Student status affects migration intention.

H6: The average grade in the previous part of the studies affects migration intention.

H7: Close family members/friends living abroad affects migration intention.

The results of this research can be used to discover ways mitigation of emigration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the migration has a long history. However, causes focused on the study of demographic change is expanding. Although most of the existing research deals with migration intention, a smaller number of researches pay attention to other sociodemographic characteristics that can also have an impact on migrations. In Croatia, so far there is no research on students from Eastern Croatia on the connection between socio-demographic characteristics and the intention to migrate.

E. Lee's theory says that there are pull and push factors in migration. (Lee, 1966.) Push and pull factors for the intention to migrate are the topic of many authors. The most common push factors for leaving the country are work opportunities and environment, political situation (Ružić, Jurčević, Ramljak, & Luchetti, 2023.), greater possibility of finding a job and the possibility for better incomes (Mrvica Mađarac, 2018.) corruption (Kurecic, Kokotovic, & Haluga, 2023.) (crime, poverty while among the attractive factors stand out are better prospects in employment, improvement of material status and, accordingly, better living conditions and a better future for individuals and families. (Perić Pavišić, Šakić, & Rihtar, 2022.) (Ivandić, 2021.) proved there is a relationship between net migration or migration abroad and tourism activity. It is evident from previous research that the migration of people from Croatia is mainly influenced by economic and social factors. (Draženović, Kunovac, & Pripužić, 2018.) showed that both economic and noneconomic factors are relevant for emigration decisions.

Furthermore, despite widespread dissatisfaction with the socio-political situation in Croatia, a non-negligible share of Croats chooses to stay here. Despite the large number of studies on emigrants, the number of works examining the reasons for staying or returning to the Republic of Croatia is smaller. (Kavain, 2022.) lists the most attractive factors: Family, Familiar surroundings, staying for a change, climate, friends... also some foreign authors proved that family ties, nostalgia and wanting to 'give something back' to their home country. (King & Gëdeshi, 2023.)

When talking about youth migration, there are large number of scientific research data on intentions migrations (Begović, Lazović-Pita, Pijalović, & Baskot, 2020.), (Adamović & Mežnarić, 2007.), (Potočnik & Adamović, 2018.)

Research often deals with students' issues. Factors influencing the migration intention among university students have been investigated by numerous authors (Relja, Reić Ercegovac, & Čerenić, 2015.), (Hallberg Adu, 2019.), (Orosová, Benka, Hricová, & Kulanová, 2018.), (Milić, Vuksan-Ćusa, Jakab, & al., 2023.), (King & Gëdeshi, 2023.), (Ojo, Oladejo, Afolabi, & al., 2023.) In all above-mentioned research most respondents had the intention to migrate abroad after graduation.

Although most authors examine the push and pull factors of the intention to migrate, some authors investigate the connection between sociodemographic charac-

teristics and the intention to migrate. (Relja, Reić Ercegovac, & Čerenić, 2015.) examined the attitudes of 400 students from Split and Sarajevo about the intention to go abroad, and the results showed that gender, level of study and city of study, and level of education are not statistically significant in relation to the intention of young people to go abroad. Also, research of (Mrvica Mađarac, 2018.) showed that with regard to the attitudes towards migration of the surveyed village and city residents, no statistically significant differences were found. (Milić, Vuksan-Ćusa, Jakab, & al., 2023.) Observed there are no statistically significant differences in gender about intention to migrate. Foreign authors like (Kase, 2017.) found that social demographic factors - age, sex, marital status, religion, education, job, residency status, and social relation have no correlation and influence on individual decision to migration.

On the other hand, results of other authors noticed a positive correlation between migration intentions and socio-demographic characteristics. (Orosova, Benka, Hricová, & Kulanová, 2018.) explore emigration intentions among 375 Slovak university students and their findings shown that more males than females having emigration intentions. (Ferreira, Rapos, Tavares, & Correia, 2020.) equally confirmed a tendency to emigrate were mostly men. (Goštautaitė, et al., 2018.) proved that emigration intentions are linked to socio-demographic (age, gender, family situation). (Özkan, Eryılmaz, & Ergün, 2023.) results revealed that intentions to migrate were related to gender, employment status, the language spoken at home, owning a property in the host country, accommodation conditions and education level. The strongest correlates for intentions to migrate speaking level, the number of children, and family income. (Saar, 2016.) concluded that socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, family status and socio-economic status are still relevant for migration intentions.

METODOLOGY

Sample of respondents

The study instrument was adapted from a validated survey previously used to assess migration intentions of students in Eastern Croatia conducted between January 1th, 2023 and April 1th, 2023. Data were collected from 420 students in five counties of Slavonia & Baranja: Pozega-Slavonia County, Brod-Posavina County, Osijek-Baranja County, Vukovar- Sirmium County and Virovitica- Podravina County. This area was chosen because of the large number of people who leave every day in search of a better life, mostly young people. The survey had the following sections: sociodemographic characteristics, intention to migrate, attitudes towards Croatia and attitude of staying in Croatia. Attitude towards Croatia was assessed using 4 questions with responses on a 5-likert scale and attitude of staying in Croatia was assessed using 7 questions with responses on a 5-likert scale. Each response was scored as follows: strongly agree=5, agree=4, neutral=3, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1.

Sample variables

Independent variables are: in this study, 7 background variables were included, namely: gender, age, household income, place of residence, average grade in the previous year of the study, student status, close friends/family members live abroad.

Dependent variables are: intention to migration

Data processing methods

Data was analyzed using SPSS and p value <0.05 was considered statistically significant. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to test the normality of the distribution. Of the non-parametric tests, the Mann Whitney test was used to examine the differences in results between two independent groups of subjects and the Kruskal Wallis test to check the differences in results between several groups of subjects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics

Characteristics	Total (N)	%	
Gender	Male	138	32,86
	Female	282	67,14
Age	18-30	352	83,80
	31-40	42	10
	41-50	25	6
	51-60	1	0,23
	< 700 €	37	8,81
Household income	700–1000 €	78	18,57
	1001–1500 €	116	27,62
	1500–2500 €	129	30,71
	> 2500 €	60	14,29
Place of residence	Town	243	57,86
	Village	177	42,14
Student status	Full-time	288	68,57
	Part-time	132	31,43
Close friends/family members live abroad	Yes	321	76,43
	No	99	23,57
Average grade	2	17	4,05
	3	198	47,14
	4	180	42,86
	5	25	5,95
	Pozega-Slavonia	50	11,90
County	Brod-Posavina	177	42,14
	Osijek-Baranja	82	19,52
	Vukovar-Sirmium	70	16,66
	Virovitica-Podravina	41	9,76

Source: author

Table 1 shows a higher proportion of women and a younger population. Most students have fairly good monthly household incomes, 30% have income from 1500–2500 € and 27,62 % have 1001–1500 €. Only 8,81 % have less than 700 €. Even 76,43 % of all respondents have close friends or family members live abroad. Most of the

respondents (47,14 %) have an average grade good (3) and 42,86 % have an average grade very good (4). About 57,86% of the respondents lived in town and 42,14% live in village. A large proportion of students are full-time students (68,57%). Respondents come from five counties of Slavonia and Baranja.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for emigration intention

Variable	M	Min	Max	K-S p
Intention to stay in Croatia	3,77	1,00	5,00	p < ,01
Emigration abroad	1,60	1,00	5,00	p < ,01

Source: author

Table 2. shows the descriptive statistics for migration intention. One sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was performed. Distributions for all observed variables differ from normal ($p < 0.05$) and non-parametric methods will be applied for statistical analysis.

In order to answer the problem of this survey, which is related to the examination of the sources of dissatisfaction/satisfaction with life in Croatia among students from Slavonia and Baranja, the respondents were asked four questions.

Table 3. Descriptive indicators measuring variables of satisfaction with life in Croatia

Variable	M	Median	Mode	Min	Max	SD	Skew	KURT	STD. ERR
Croatia is better than most other countries.	2,95	3,00	3,00	1,00	5,00	1,07	0,07	-0,57	0,05
I am satisfied with life in Croatia	3,33	3,00	4,00	1,00	5,00	1,05	0,46	-0,35	0,05
All people have equal chances to achieve their own goals.	2,32	2,00	2,00	1,00	5,00	1,08	0,62	-0,23	0,05
Knowledge and ability are valued in Croatia	2,34	2,00	2,00	1,00	5,00	0,98	0,39	-0,40	0,05

Source: author

Table 3. shows that the respondents mostly agree with the statement “they are satisfied with life in Croatia”, which indicates a low tendency to emigrate. Respondents think that Croatia is still better than most other countries considering that the result is above the middle of the scale. However, it is believed that they are divided on the statement “all people have equal chances to achieve their own goals” and “knowledge and ability are valued in Croatia” because the results are approximately equal a little below the middle of the scale. The obtained value of the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is .799 and confirms the consistency in the answers of the respondents through different scales, which indicates that the reliability can be considered acceptable. Life satisfaction is often considered a mechanism that leads to migration decisions. The links between negative life satisfaction people and intentions to emigrate have also been examined in various foreign research (Ivlevs, 2015.), (Otrachenko & Popova, 2014.), (Karabchuk, Katsaiti, & Johnson, 2022.) These findings show the importance of life satisfaction as a strong predictor of the migration intention.

Table 4. Descriptive indicators measuring variables of attitude of staying in Croatia

Variable	M	Median	Mode	Min	Max	SD	Skew	KURT	STD. ERR
Housing issue resolved	4,35	5,00	5,00	1,00	5,00	0,87	-1,58	2,88	0,87
Safe workplace	4,49	5,00	5,00	1,00	5,00	0,75	-1,78	4,01	0,75
Family	4,48	5,00	5,00	1,00	5,00	0,83	-1,85	3,41	0,83
Friends	4,07	4,00	5,00	1,00	5,00	1,01	-0,92	0,06	1,01
Love for the homeland	3,20	3,00	2,00	1,00	5,00	1,29	-0,08	-1,16	1,29
Country security	4,08	4,00	5,00	1,00	5,00	0,99	-1,06	0,73	0,99
The beauty of the land	3,66	4,00	4,00	1,00	5,00	1,16	-0,57	-0,51	1,16

Source: author

Table 4. shows that the respondents mostly agree that safe work place is the most factor for intention to stay in Croatia than family, housing issue resolved and friends. Respondents at least agree with love for the homeland and the beauty of the land.

With regard to the research questions, it can be said that the creation of circumstances which facilitate issues such as the initial housing issue and financial situation which includes safe workplace after the completion of University will helped young and highly educated people to stay in the Republic of Croatia, which is in line with the research that conducted (Borozan & Barković Bojanić, 2015.) the economic situation. Young people in Croatia often struggle with solving their housing issue. It is difficult to secure long-term apartment rentals for young people due to the unregulated market and while buying one's own house or apartment for the current generation is increasingly becoming impossible due to the rise in real estate prices. Many researches confirm that migration intentions decrease where importance is placed on being with family. (Cairns, 2014.) According to (Eurostat, 2021.) Croatia is at the very top of Europe in terms of the percentage of young people who still live with their parents, with an average age of 33.3 years.

Mann-Whitney U tests were used to investigate the attitudes of the students going abroad with regard to gender, place of residence, student status, close family members living abroad. Mann-Whitney U tests were used since the dependent variable is ordinal with a distribution that deviates significantly from normal.

Table 5 shows that conducted tests did not reveal significant differences with regard to gender, place of residence or close family members living abroad.

Table 5. Results of Mann-Whitney U tests for testing differences in migration intention

Variable	Independent variable	U	z	p	
	Gender	male female	17441,500	-1800	,072
	Place of residence	town village	21119,500	-,328	,743
Intention to stay in Croatia		Student status	full-time part- time	13203,500	-5,243
	Close friends/family members live abroad	yes no	14090,000	-1,778	,075

Emigration abroad	Gender	male	17872,500	-1,580	,114
		female			
	Place of residence	town	20565,500	-,891	,373
		village			
Student status	full-time	15045,000	-3,995	,000	
	part-time				
Close friends/family members live abroad	yes	15823,500	-,073	,942	
	no				

Source: author

With regard to age, socioeconomic status, average grade in the previous part of the studies, Kruskal Wallis tests was applied.

Table 6. Results of Kruskal Wallis tests for testing differences in migration intention

Variable	Independent variable	H	df	p	
	Age	18-30	22,627	3	,000
		31-40			
		41-50			
		51-60			
Intention to stay in Croatia	Household income	< 700 €	9,988	4	,041
		700-1000 €			
		1001-1500 €			
		1500-2500 €			
		> 2500 €			
	Average grade	2	5,301	3	,151
		3			
		4			
		5			
		5			
	Age	18-30	15,706	3	,001
		31-40			
		41-50			
		51-60			
Emigration abroad	Household income	< 700 €	10,092	4	,039
		700-1000 €			
		1001-1500 €			
		1500-2500 €			
		> 2500 €			
	Average grade	2	3,803	3	,284
		3			
		4			
		5			
		5			

Source: author

Table 6 shows that conducted tests did not find significant differences with regard to average grade, while there is a significant difference with regard to household income and the variable of staying in Croatia ($p < ,041$) and going abroad permanently ($p < ,039$). There is also significant difference with regard to age and the all three variables.

A summary of the results of the hypothesis verification is presented in Table 6.

Table 7. A summary of the results of the hypothesis

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Gender affects migration intention.	rejected
H2: The place of residence affects migration intention.	rejected
H3: Age affects migration intention.	accepted
H4: Socioeconomic status affects migration intention.	accepted
H5: Student status affects migration intention.	accepted
H6: The average grade in the previous part of the studies affects migration intention.	rejected
H7: Close family members/friends living abroad affects migration intention.	rejected

Source: author

Hypothesis 1 is rejected. Comparing data from the National Bureau of Statistics in 2022. and the results obtained in research, there were more men (61.9%) which is not consistent with the result that gender didn't have significant differences. Hypothesis 2 is also rejected. The place of residence does not affect migration intention which is in line with the previous research (Mrvica Madarac, 2018.), (Chan, Cheung, Chong, & al., 2022.) However, it is not in accordance with the research which has proven that European young people living in urban areas are more likely to migrate than those living in rural areas. (Williams, Calvin, Hania, & Gang, 2017.) Hypothesis 3 is accepted. The findings are in line with another study that found age, play a significant role in shaping migration intentions. (Abdelwahed, Goujon, & Jiang, 2020) Hypothesis 4 is accepted. Precisely this variable has been investigated and proven by many authors. (Aslany, Carling, Mjelva, & Sommerfelt, 2021.), (Özkan, Eryilmaz, & Ergün, 2023.) Hypothesis 5 is accepted. Today's world demands that young people develop knowledge, skills and competences that, upon completion of their studies, to be useful in the existing labor market. Hypothesis 6 The average grade in the previous part of the studies affects migration intentions rejected which is not consistent with the research that showed that education affect migration intention. (Borgonovi & Pokropek, 2019.)

Hypothesis 7 Close family members/friends living abroad affects migration intention is rejected and this result is not in line with the research of (Gödri & Gábor, 2017.), (Aslany, Carling, Mjelva, & Sommerfelt, 2021.) or (Santric-Milicevic., et al., 2015.) which said that household members living abroad significantly increased chances for migration or close family members abroad can aspire to migrate in order to be reunited with those family members.

CONCLUSION

The reality is that everyone wants to migrate to a place with a higher standard of living and a better job opportunity.

The research obtained data indicated a weak trend of student's willingness to migrate. The majority of students nevertheless expressed their desire to stay in Cro-

atia which is in line with their vision of Croatia. Unexpectedly, most respondents are satisfied with life in Croatia and believe that Croatia is better than other countries. As expected, respondents who share an optimistic view of Croatia's future showed a lower probability of intention to migration.

As for the reasons for staying they put safe work place, family and housing issue resolved ahead of love and the beauty for the Croatia. Despite this result, it is extremely important to continuously analyze the needs of young people and develop opportunities for them through the joint action of all key stakeholders at the national and local level.

The results further show that there are no significant statistical differences between gender, place of residence, average grade in the previous year of the study and close friends/family members live abroad and intention to migration. On the other hand, there are significant statistical differences between age, household income, student's status and intention to migration.

The importance of this topic is in understanding the reasons for emigration, but also in looking at unequal spatial, economic and sociodemographic development of Croatian regions, where the unfavorable conditions of the outflow of the population were mentioned should be investigated in order to possibly try to improve these conditions in counties mentioned above.

By creating better opportunities for young people, they will be encouraged to stay in Croatia, with a competitive status in the European environment. This work contributes to provide information on the connection between sociodemographic characteristics and migration intention and information about satisfaction with life in Croatia.

The conducted research also has certain shortcomings that could be corrected removed in future research. The research was conducted on students from the counties of Eastern Croatia, so the results of the research do not necessarily apply to Croatia. Future research can extend the analysis to other counties and countries in the region. The results can then be compared between different Croatian regions as well as between Croatia and other countries.

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