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National Report on Migration Policies and Dynamics - Serbia

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Contents

Overview of Key Data in National And Historical Context.....	3
National Policies and Strategies in the Field of Migration and Migrant Integration	10
Readiness of HEI Graduates for Work in the Field of Migration and Migrant Integration	17
Conclusion.....	26

OVERVIEW OF KEY DATA IN NATIONAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Currently as well as throughout its recent history Serbia has predominantly been country of emigration. Thus five major waves of emigration could be discerned. In the first wave, by the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, migrants moved overseas, primarily to the USA, Canada and South America. By the end of WW2 and immediately after that, in the second wave, a large number of people, mostly royalist fighters left Serbia and territories of ex-Yugoslavia where Serbs had been autochthonous population. Most of them settled in the USA, Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Australia and Latin America. The third wave took place after the former Yugoslavia had opened its borders in 1960s. People moved to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, and some other West European countries and the USA and they were mostly economically motivated ('guest workers'). The latter emigration was instigated mainly by socio-economic problems deriving specifically from the lack of employment opportunities due to economic crisis in the state of command socialism. Thus people moved to economies which were promising in terms of decent wages and standard of living. The initiation of the fourth wave, which started by late 1980s and early 1990s, coincided with the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. In 1990s there was a voluminous forced immigration of Serb refugees due to the armed conflicts in ex-Yugoslav republics (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina). The first census carried out by UNHCR and Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations (CRM) in Serbia in 1996 registered 617.728 refugees and exiled persons¹. According to the census carried out by CRM and UNHCR in 2000 there were 187.129 internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the territories of central and north Serbia (without Kosovo and Metohija), while in the period 2000-2005 some 20.000 IDPs arrived. Currently their number is 201.047². They were exiled from the southern province due to conflicts with ethnic Albanians and NATO bombardment in 1999 .

During this period a large number of mostly young and educated people left Serbia. According to census from 2002 the volume of emigrants was 414.000, which was an increase of some 140.000 people compared to 1991 (50%), while foreign statistics register even bigger numbers of

¹ Lukić, V. (2015) *Dve decenije izbeglistva u Srbiji*, Beograd: Republički zavod za statistiku. (Two decades of Refugees in Serbia)

² <https://kirs.gov.rs/eng/internally-displaced-persons/internally-displaced-persons>, 24.03. 2021.

emigrants from Serbia. Thus their real volume must have been higher (cf. Despić, 2015)³. Their motivation was both political and economic, stemming from the need to escape mobilizations of 1990s for armed conflicts in ex-Yugoslav republics and to enhance living standards, as well. The fourth wave splashed over USA, Canada, EU, Switzerland, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. The last wave of emigration could be traced from the beginning of the 21st century. Political changes in the country which occurred in 2000, were promising for prompt economic reforms toward market economy, democracy and global integrations. Thus many members of Serbian diaspora returned willing to take part in fast progress. But their hopes were soon abandoned, so many left again. Together with them, a large number of young and mostly educated people continued to leave Serbia, too. Latter were predominantly economically motivated, but many of them had received scholarships at the renowned world universities. It was a unique chance to improve their knowledge, meet key experts and get in touch with some other cultures. For some of them, a chance to become independent of their families of origin was also a significant drive. Had there been a good diaspora policy, it could have been a chance for prosperity of homeland as well. Instead the state was immersed into many other urgent political, economic and social challenges, exuberated by demographic crisis and advanced depopulation.

Political upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa resulted in conflicts, large-scale economic disruption, and major losses of life, thus prompted many citizens to flee, initially with no aim other than saving their pure lives, but later on in search of better economic opportunities as well. These flows, both regular and irregular, first occurred in 2010; the peak however, was recorded in 2015, when the largest number of migrants had been on the move. As the Balkans are situated at the intersection of various migration pathways, the one going through Serbia was officially named 'the Balkan Route'. The route was closed not long after the migration peaked, in March 2016, but its

³ Despić, J. (2015) Migracije visokoobrazovanih lica iz Srbije od 1991. godine u Kanadu i Sjedinjene Američke države, *odbranjena doktorska disertacija*, Beograd: Ekonomski fakultet. (*Migration of Highly Educated Persons from Serbia to Canada and the United States of America since 1991*, defended PhD thesis)

Some local scholars estimated that around 30.000 people with tertiary education and around 400.000 with secondary one left the country in 1990s, (Bolčić, 2002). Bolčić. S. (2002) „Iseljavanje radne snage i odliv mozgova iz Srbije tokom 90-ih“, u S. Bolčić, A. Milić (ured.) *Srbija na kraju milenijuma: Razaranje društva, promene i svakodnevni život*, Beograd: Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta, 159-166. (“Emigration of the labor force and brain drain from Serbia in the 90s”).

closure did not stop the movements (cf. Bobić & Šantić, 2019)⁴. The influx of migrants continued, mainly through Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, albeit with one major difference: as borders became sealed and thus difficult to be crossed regularly, an increasing number of migrants turned to irregular paths and activities, with human smuggling and trafficking becoming much more common. Even though migration is notoriously difficult to track due to its fluid nature and illicit acts they embrace, estimates put the monthly number of refugees and migrants in Serbia nowadays at around 4,000, while CRM and local NGOs estimate around 5000⁵. UNICEF and its partners, however, reckoned that as of 2019 as many as 18,000 people transiting through Serbia required assistance⁶.

Based on the last Census of 2011, share of national minorities in Republic of Serbia is quite low (2-3%), most of whom originate from neighboring countries (Hungary), former Yugoslav republics (Bosniaks) and Roma (table 12 in appendix).

According to referent data from Migration Profile of the Republic of Serbia (MPRS)⁷, shares of immigrants have been very low throughout the last decade – less than 1% (table 1).

The volume of temporary residence permits of foreign citizens is rising over the last decade, from 7.285 to 11.119 or 1/3 (34.5%). Most foreigners have been arriving in Serbia due to work, with higher prevalence of men (table 3.2.), while women outnumbered men when it comes to family reunification (table 3.1). Work based permits are dominant (69,6% in 2019), over family reunification (20,1%) and education (5,6%), (tables 3.1-3.4)⁸. Nevertheless it is assumed that number of foreigners arriving and residing in Serbia for professional reasons (table 6) is bigger than registered in data on work permits, since some foreigners are engaged as consultants without being employed in accordance to the local regulations, or serve as members of boards, etc.

⁴ Bobić, M.&Šantić, D., (2019) Forced Migrations and Externalization of European Union Border Control: Serbia on the Balkan Migration Route, *International Migration*, DOI: 10.1111/imig.12622

⁵ Personal communication and interviews with representatives. See also chapter 2 of this report.

⁶ Source: unicef.org/serbia/en/refugee-and-migrant-crisis, visited on 21.03. 2021.

⁷ Migration Profile is the main document that integrates all information on migrants in the country in line with the Regulation 862/2007 of the European Parliament and Council of Europe and Serbia's commitments as part of visa liberalization and EU accession. Serbia aggregates and publishes MP on its own since 2010, on the annual basis. The last one available is from 2019, <https://kirs.gov.rs/eng/documents-and-publications/publications>, 24.3.2021.

⁸ The rest (4,7%) are 'other reasons'.

Volume of foreigners permanently residing in the country is overall very low (0.1%) and increasing over time from 6.750 (2010) to 8.721 (2019), (22.6%), (tables 4,5). Marriage is the main reason for settling in - 61.5% (2019).

However, the volume of newly admitted citizens is falling over the period, from 24.294 in 2010 to 15.554 in 2019 (-36%), (table 8). Most of these have been coming from former Yugoslavia and presumably had been of Serbian nationality. They usually moved to Serbia because their partner/family had already been living there and less due to work or education.

Generally speaking Serbia is not attractive to foreigners, especially to people from developed, West European countries. As we can see from data (tables 1, 2, 3.1, 8, 9,10), most immigrants residing or crossing through Serbia, both documented and irregular ones, come from Asia, North Africa and former Yugoslav republics.

When it comes to particular nations, since the last decade of the 20th century majority of immigrants have been coming from China. They developed their businesses in Serbia which represented the main reason for their settlement. Furthermore, there was also many incomers from Russian Federation (table 6). Like Chinese, they also primarily arrived because of business. Unlike Chinese, however, who were coming to Serbia since 1990s, an important number of Russians had settled in Serbia after WW2 and at the beginning of the 21th century.

In 2015 there was a huge increase of undocumented migrants or illegal crossings – five times the number of 2010 (table 9), most of whom coming from the Middle East, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq. But as is evidenced, vast majority had not had plans to stay in Serbia – very low share expressed an intention to seek asylum (table 10).

Migration Profile includes only data for return of citizens of the RS based on Readmission Agreement. Most returnees arrived from Germany, Sweden, Hungary, France and Austria. When they decided to re-emigrate (mostly Roma), because of lack of jobs in the country, it was usually to the very same country they had already been (cf. the part 2 of this report).

The only data on diaspora we could gain from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region referred to their organizations per country of destination (Table 11). Out of their total number (109) more than half (60) come from two countries well known for long-term immigration of Serbian citizens (Austria and Swiss

Confederation)⁹. However, the real and effective number of these organizations throughout the decade is quite uncertain, since some are inactive, some re-register and/or change names because they apply for funds, projects, etc.

Public in Serbia are well aware that the state is faced with advanced depopulation which has been caused by continuous emigration as well as long term low fertility and low mortality. Consequently, they don't bear positive attitudes towards current advanced emigration of young educated people. But, when it comes to remittances, their predominant attitude is different. Despite the fact that there are not so many diaspora organizations (table 11), which are otherwise recognized as the biggest donors for home countries in literature¹⁰, the fact is that remittances make up a higher part of GDP in Serbia compared to foreign direct investments. Those funds have been transferred from citizens living abroad to their families. They are usually spent for everyday living, alleviating poverty, purchasing or building houses, health care and education, and quite rarely for starting a business.

People's attitudes toward immigrants depend on groups they refer to – responses in the empirical research vary when they refer to refugees from former Yugoslavia, IDPs from Kosovo and Metohija or immigrants from Middle East or Africa. Furthermore, their opinions depend on the context of local communities they live in (economic situation, poverty, security, presence of reception centers, personal experiences, etc.). Negative attitudes are likely to be reported in those communities which are more affected by socioeconomic crisis and impoverishment. Generally speaking, respondents' views of these immigrants are mostly neutral, but negative attitudes outweigh positive as time passes by, i.e. especially in the most recent period 2017-2019 (chart 4, table 14).

Vast majority of respondents express huge social distance and resistance to integrate immigrants (table 15.1, chart 7). The main obstacle in accepting migrants concerns differences in culture, religion, customs, and language (table 15.2). The surveyed population recognizes conflicts and general insecurity as the key motives that cause migrants to leave their countries of origin, but there has been a significant increase in support of the opinion that social and economic issues are

⁹ Some empirical research on returnees, both readmission ones and those with HE will be given in the second part of the Report.

¹⁰ In 2018 the value of remittances was 3.43 billion euro, according to the National Bank of Serbia (cf. Radonjić, O. & Bobić, M., 2021, Brain Drain Losses – Case of Serbia, *International Migration*, 51 (1), doi: 10.1111/imig.12710).

primary drivers of migration. In recent years more respondents draw a distinction between migrants coming from the Middle East and those who arrived in Serbia in the 1990s, with key perceived difference being that refugees from former Yugoslavia were fleeing armed conflicts and thus were forced to abandon their homes, whilst today's refugees have mainly been motivated by poor economic situation in their countries of origin (table 12.3).

In recent years, Serbian citizens have become more aware of both positive and negative effects of migration. They mostly recognize importance of diaspora in different spheres of social life – primarily in economy. Serbian politicians are prone to speak about citizens living abroad before each round of elections. They have been promising to strengthen connections between Serbia and diaspora. However, as could be concluded from relevant empirical researches, diaspora don't seem to be satisfied with their relationships to the homeland. On the other hand, politicians have been also speaking about improvement of conditions in Serbia in order to motivate young educated people to stay.

Based on the data negative attitudes toward immigrants from the Middle East and Africa outweigh positive ones (part 12, chart 4). As the biggest challenges respondents point out - safety of women, children, young people and sanitation (table 14.) They have been frightened by terrorism (linking it to immigrants) and finally, of changing Serbian national identity. These topics have become very popular before recent elections especially in discourse of right oriented nationalist political parties. Government has been criticized by nationally oriented parties because it doesn't reckon danger of Muslims' arrivals. On the other hand, government uses immigration to present itself as a tolerant and democratic one because Serbia is ready to help everyone. It is also due to the need of a support from EU for winning the elections.

Migration has become very important topic in Serbia since the beginning of "migration crisis" in 2015. At first Serbian authorities declared a 'refugee friendly' country which was reflected in public discourse, media coverage and accepted by common people. Politicians urged population to recall memories of mass waves of refugees arriving in the country in 1990s and thus thrived to present themselves as good hosts. In line with the country's EU enlargement policy, state adopted some new laws, regulations and strategies or updated existing ones (see in the next part of this report), the most important being the new Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection in 2018, (cf:

Bobić&Šantić, 2019: 9)¹¹. Later on, however, as the policy of many EU states shifted toward a securitization approach, and since Serbia's accession negotiations, trade exchange, financial aid, etc. became conditioned by safeguarding borders of EU, Serbian authorities amended their initial attitude accordingly, which was followed by a shift of public discourse, media and public opinion (cf. Bobić&Šantić, 2019:10)

For significant part of local population migration crisis and sudden arrival and passing of almost a million of foreigners of different language, culture, race and religion, triggered reflections on their own identity and security. Some expressed a big social distance to this people. A transformation of attitudes toward migrants, who have increasingly been perceived as a threat to political, social, economic, ecological order and security – led eventually to greater resentment and xenophobic outbursts in some local communities. Such viewpoints and sometimes even physical acts against immigrants represent a big challenge to the integration of significant portions of immigrants who are either stranded, have to, or wish to stay in Serbia, especially in case of families with children, who need to be included in education.

On the other hand, there are Serbian citizens, local employers, etc., who perceive immigrants like a potential labor force which could be used to compensate for relatively old population and related shortages of working age contingents, then shortages of some fields (wholesale trade, retail, etc). It has some impact on the recognition of migration as an important topic by politicians both in ruling parties or in in opposition.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus and closing state borders across the world led to the mass return of the citizens of Serbia immediately before and after declaration of the state of emergency in March 2020. It is assumed that some 300.000 local citizens have returned to the country at the outbreak of the pandemic (cf. Šantić and Antić, 2020: 2)¹². The measures of health supervision and of self-isolation were the key response of mobility management in Serbia.

¹¹ Bobić, M.&Šantić, D., (2019) Forced Migrations and Externalization of European Union Border Control: Serbia on the Balkan Migration Route, *International Migration*, DOI: 10.1111/imig.12622

¹² Šantić, D.& M. Antić (2020) Serbia in the time of Covid-19: between “corona diplomacy”, tough measures and migration management, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1780457>

On the other hand, there was a short period when citizens from other countries couldn't come to Serbia, which was reflected on arrivals of refugees from Middle East. Immigrants who found themselves in Serbia before closing borders were forced to stay in the country. There is no evidence about them being infected by coronavirus.

NATIONAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN THE FIELD OF MIGRATION AND MIGRANT INTEGRATION

Republic of Serbia has developed relevant normative framework in the field of migration, primarily in line with its EU integration policy and requirements related to accession. The national legislation and strategies tackle entire empirical variety of migrants and migration dynamics, issues of migrants' admission and integration, including readmission returnees, refugees, displaced persons, vulnerable groups, women, children, victims of human trafficking, etc.

Migration is understood as a global, complex and multifold phenomenon, affecting both home and host countries and regions, EU and Serbia's EU integration. Migration management is therefore founded on the following principles: security of borders and citizens, respect of human rights of all migrants, facilitation of social integration, especially of vulnerable groups, undocumented migrants, Roma, readmission returnees, etc., as well as international cooperation in the field, non-discrimination, facilitation of reunification of families and respect for the needs of all stakeholders.

The concept of immigration, however, is for the first time acknowledged only in 2012 in Law on Migration Management, which was harmonized with EU Directive 862/2007 (RS 2012).

There are 9 relevant strategies (cited per year of entering into force):

Strategy for Integrated Border Management in the Republic of Serbia (2006),
Strategy for the Combating Human Trafficking in the Republic of Serbia (2006),
Migration Management Strategy for the period 2009-2014 (2009)

Strategy for the Suppression of Illegal Migration in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2009-2014 (2009),

The Strategy for Reintegration of the Returnees Based on the Readmission Agreement (2009)

Sustainable Return and Subsidence Strategy (2010),

National Strategy for Resolving Problems of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons for the Period 2011-2014 (2011)

The Strategy on Preserving and Strengthening the Relations of Mother Country and the Diaspora and Mother Country and Serbs in the Region (2011)

Economic Migration Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for the 2021-2027 period (2020)

Besides these, there are 7 relevant laws and an Agreement with the EU:

Law on Refugees (1992) and Law on Refugees with Amendments and Supplement (2010)

Law on Asylum (2007)

Law on Diaspora and Serbs in the Region (2009)

Law on Migration Management (2012)

Law on Employment of Foreign Nationals (2014)

Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection (2018)

Law on Foreign Nationals (2018)

Readmission Agreement (2007) signed in between RS and EU.

Most recent normative changes are the following documents (basis is in the European Convention on Human Rights)

- 1) Law on Asylum from 2018 – its aim is to clarify procedures and differentiate obligations of various stakeholders related to integration of these immigrants
- 2) Law on Foreigners in 2018. It stipulates 2 types of temporary stay:
 - a) Humanitarian stay (aimed at victims of human trafficking)
 - b) Tolerated stay (for long term residents in Serbia who have not realized return).
- 3) Law on Employment of Foreigners (2014) with amendments (2017, 2018, 2019)

'Blue card' is in the process of drafting and will integrate both stay permits and work license.

The new Strategy on Economic Migration of the RS for the period 2021-2027 is in progress. It is targeted towards diaspora and 'brain drain' and aims at weakening of emigration of working age population from Serbia. It is designed to link migration and development.

RS adopted a Strategy for preserving and strengthening of relationships of homeland and diaspora and homeland and Serbs in the Region (2011).

Furthermore, on February 27th 2020 the Economic Migration Strategy for the 2021-2027 period was adopted aimed at efficient prevention of emigration and encouraging of the return of professionals from the diaspora. It is also directed at creating of business and economic conditions for foreign experts' immigration. This document has specifically introduced general and specific goals, means to obtain them i.e. concrete activities as well as indicators to allow for following of their implementation. However, although an action plan was foreseen to pass afterwards, it did not occur most probably due to the outbreak of pandemic.

Thus not much has been done in practice, i.e. in its implementation. There is also several research done and recommendations drafted, however, without instigating some more initiatives.

Members of Serbian diaspora are entitled a right to vote in country of origin – in diplomatic and consular units abroad, according to the Law on the Election of Members of the Parliament (2000).

Although Serbia has developed a comprehensive normative framework in the field of migration, its full implementation, especially in terms of different categories of migrants is lacking. It seems obvious that Serbia is mostly focused to the management of forced (undocumented) migration. Recently economic emigration (of the youth) has been placed on the agenda.

There misses an official stance and management of **voluntary immigration** and especially - **labor immigration**.

The lack of reception, admission and integration of immigrants might be related to many reasons, historic, socio-demographic, economic, cultural, political, etc. As was already mentioned in the first part, Serbia has a longstanding tradition of a country of emigration. Current social and economic conditions are very difficult in the country: the high unemployment of local population, especially

working age and youth, an overall slow economic recovery and vast poverty due to socio-economic transition, a huge immigration of refugees and IDPs in 1990s and 2000s as well as big most recent waves of forced migrants passing through Balkan route on their way to EU. This context is also very unfavorable for attracting foreign labor migrants. Speaking of migration cycle paradigm, Serbia is still in a pre-transitional phase, with immigration still pending. Finally, local population does not have much experience of mixing up with foreign nationals (except with Serbs from ex-Yugoslav states) especially with different languages, races, cultures, religions and ethnicities.

Some good examples of integration could be found among recent flows of Muslims i.e. in Sjenica and Tutin, municipalities in southwestern Serbia. They were well received because of the same religious background. Also good integration is noticed with immigrants staying in private accommodations in Belgrade, who are assisted by NGOs, volunteers and private persons¹³.

Returnees based on the Readmission Agreement with EU – According to the Strategy for Reintegration of the Returnees Based on the Readmission Agreement from 2009 - around 100.000 Serbian citizens returned as a result of abandonment of visa regime with countries of the EU. In the following years, their number is decreasing both in terms of emigrants and returnees.

Two field researches have been carried out by IOM and GIZ (in 2011 and 2019) on their position, needs and social inclusion upon return in Serbia. Among returnees more than 75% are Roma, with young and middle aged (31-45) prevailing (60%). Majority have under aged minors (less than 15 years old - 69%), they live in numerous households (median is 4.7), but due to relatively low share of aged persons, they rarely have elderly to take care of (only 10%). In 38% of all households none of the members is employed and in 48% it is only one. Small portions of children attend schools as a consequence of their vast poverty.

Over the time, the number of returns has been falling, in 2015-2018 even four times (compared to 2009). Majority come from Germany and in recent years from France. Their economic situation has been improved in between 2011 and 2019 owing to increased employment and better social protection (allowances - parents', familial, children's). However, challenges remain in terms of their still poor social inclusion, which pushes many of them to multiple emigration. In general they possess very low education (only 16% with secondary and tertiary), cannot find good jobs (work under precarious conditions), and are very poor, facing problems with low quality housing and

¹³ Personal communication with the CEO from NGO 'APC-CZA' (asylum protection center).

lack of sufficient social protection. Some still do not possess personal documents (do not understand procedures), and therefore cannot be entitled to health care. Over the time health care coverage has nonetheless been improved. Yet, 16% of children aged 7-18 are out of school and 60% of those 0-7 do not attend crèches.

Return of highly educated – UNDP (2019) carried out a research of Repats (voluntary returnees) in Serbia. The sample was small (N=13). They spent at least 3 years abroad and have returned more than 3 years before the research. Some were motivated to start business in Serbia, some got retired, and others finished studies abroad or came back due to unstable conditions in a foreign country. Some came back due to family reasons (care, partnership). All tend to be financially independent from Serbian state and also from unfavorable government regulations and institutions. They complained about lack of free and independent media reporting, report living in social bubbles with restricted wider contacts. They also complain about complicated bureaucratic procedures and inefficient administration. Similar findings on highly educated returnees were found in another research on transnational entrepreneurs/repats from Serbia¹⁴.

Key national actors in RS:

Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia is a governmental organization in the field which is actively involved in managing humanitarian migrations and also for accumulating data on migrants, flows and stocks on annual basis.

Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the RS is charge of publishing of Migration Profile, integration and voluntary return for irregular migrants (<http://www.kirs.gov.rs/eng>) mail: svetlana.velimirovic@kirs.gov.rs

Ministry of Interior – in charge of issues related to the legal status and stay permits. <http://www.mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs - for visas, diaspora and consular issues, There is an Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region – previously Ministry for Diaspora, dismantled in 2012. The office is not very active. <http://www.mfa.gov.rs/sr/index.php>

¹⁴ Predojević-Despić, Pavlov, T, Milutinović, S, 2015. “Transnacionalni preduzetnici u Srbiji: resurs ekonomskog razvoja”, u: Kostić, R. Ćosić, E., Babić, B. (ur) *Migracije u funkciji razvoja*, (Sarajevo: UNDP, Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbeglice Bosne I Hercegovine) (“Transnational entrepreneurs in Serbia: a resource of economic development” in: Kostić, R. Ćosić, E., Babić, B. (eds.) *Migrations as a driver of development*) 23–33.

<https://www.dijaspora.gov.rs/> (Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region)
Ministry for Work, Employment, War Veterans and Social Issues – in charge of work permissions.
Also in charge of migrant children without escort arriving and residing in Serbia – 10-12 of age
(their assistance is assessed as poor by Commissariat for Refugees and Migration).
<https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/srb-lat/ministarstvo>
Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development – integration of migrant children,
irrespective of their status in Serbia. <http://www.mpn.gov.rs/?lng=lat>
Ministry of Health – health protection <https://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/>
Ministry of State Government and Local Self-Government – In charge of issuing registers – all new-
born migrant children in RS receive regular birth certificates. <http://mduls.gov.rs/>
According to the Law on Local Self-Government each municipality is obliged to monitor fulfilment
of basic conditions for migrants residing on its territory – water supply, housing, etc.

NGOs: In Serbia these are more active and operational than GO, except for Commissariat.

Grupa '484' is the leading NGO in the field. They deal with migration as a complex issue: theory,
research, fund raising, policy recommendations. They have a Center for migrations.
<https://www.grupa484.org.rs/en/> Mail: vladimir.petronijevic@grupa484.org.rs
Beogradski centar za ljudska prava, deal with legal issues, human rights advocacy.
<http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/eng-lat/> Mail: sonja@bgcentar.org.rs
SeConS, think tank, deals with research on immigrants, returnees, social inclusion, policy
recommendations. <https://www.secons.net/topics.php?t=38> Mail: scvejic65@gmail.com
APC/CZA, asylum protection center, socio-psychological assistance, employment and legal issues.
<https://www.apc-cza.org/sr-YU/> mail: rados.djurovic@apc-cza.org
IAN, psychological support www.ian.org.rs; mail: bpetrovic@ian.org.rs
ADRA, protection, socio-psychological support, awareness raising on migrants' vulnerability.
adra.org.rs Mail: andja.petrovic@adra.org.rs
Caritas Srbije, humanitarian aid, counselling of readmission returnees and their families.
<https://caritas.rs/caritas-counselling-centre/?lang=en> email: marko.salic@caritas.rs
PIN, psychological support, educational programs, counseling, advocacy work, research.
<https://psychosocialinnovation.net/en/about-us/> mail: masa.vukcevic@f.bg.ac.rs

IDEAS, social protection, unaccompanied minors. (contact was not established because they did not reply to our repeated emails) <https://ideje.rs/>

Good practices in local or regional contexts concerning migration management

“Kanjiža calling” – an example of cross border relations and circular mobility

Kanjiža is located at the northeastern part of Serbia. The municipality encompasses 13 settlements. According to census 2011 there was 25,343 inhabitants (16,270 non-migrants and 9,073 migrants). Out of the migrant population, only 728 persons have moved to the municipality from abroad, while 375 persons (out of that number) originates from former Yugoslav republics. Majority moved out from another settlement of the same municipality.

The 2011 census registered 832 persons from Kanjiža municipality who have been continuously residing abroad for at least one year or less than a year but with the intention of staying abroad for at least one year. These persons are considered as emigrants and are not included in the total usually resident population of the municipality.

There were significant foreign investments in the municipality of Kanjiža as a result of privatization process. However, one of the negative consequences was a huge number of layoffs as well as a large number of young people being still unemployed. The economic situation is hard combined with adverse demographic trends in terms of negative natural change, emigration, depopulation and ageing. During the last 30 years, the highest intensity of migration in the municipality has taken place in the last five-year period prior to the census.

Kanjiža is the most ethnically homogeneous municipality in the province of Vojvodina, with the latter being the most ethnically heterogeneous area in Serbia. The Hungarians make up 85 per cent of the total population of Kanjiža. The empirical research show that 80% citizens possess a passport of the EU (Hungary) which facilitates cross border mobility, emigration and circular mobility. Circular mobility and rare returns are enabled to those who are financially independent (worked abroad for some period in Hungary, Germany, etc.,), who possess high human capital (tertiary education gained abroad in addition to work experience, foreign languages, etc.,) as well as social capital, and/or possess material resources to start their own business (land ownership,

finances, etc.,). These are mostly free professions, artists (costume designer, graphic designer, choreographer, creative entrepreneur, etc.), IT experts, technologists, entrepreneurs.

As an illustration see video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP0ry882eaw>

Regional initiative - Eastern Serbia

Digital platform “Diaspora Business Info Platform” was presented to the Director of the Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by the end of 2020 and is aimed at attracting diaspora investments in Eastern Serbia (free information on conditions, advantages and benefits of investing in the region and in the country). It will be connected to Facebook and Viber community.

Digital platform was supported by RARIS – the first agency for regional development registered in Serbia. RARIS is oriented toward Eastern Serbia and gathers together 2 towns and municipalities of that region (Bor and Zaječar) and 6 municipalities (Majdanpek, Kladovo, Boljevac, Knjaževac, Sokobanja, Negotin), Regional Chambers of Commerce, Road Company Zaječar, NGO Timočki klub and Faculty of Management from Zaječar.

<https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/predstavljena-platforma-dijaspora-biznis-info-regionalne-agencije-za-razvoj-istocne-srbije/>

READINESS OF HEI GRADUATES FOR WORK IN THE FIELD OF MIGRATION AND MIGRANT INTEGRATION

This part of the report is created on the basis of 11 interviews – 2 with state actors (CRM, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Office for Diaspora and Serbs in the Region) and 9 NGOs.

It should be pointed out that there were general (parliamentary, local and provincial) elections in Serbia in June 2020. Having in mind overall lack of interest in migration issues and changes in public administration in the country the collection of data was quite challenging, especially when it comes to state actors.

Evaluation of the readiness was conducted by self – assessment of interviewees/experts in the field including also critical views on the gaps in knowledge, skills and attitudes.

HEI graduates' readiness for work in the field of migration and migrant integration stems from their following high education expertise in:

GENERAL EXPERTISE in the field (social sciences):

- Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological knowledge; historical, religious, political and customary contexts of intercontinental migration and countries of origin of exiles; Gender studies (Gender based violence, etc). Cultural studies and Humanities.
- Disciplinary: Sociology, Law (human rights, criminal law, family law, refugee/asylum law, etc), Political Science (International Organizations, Diplomacy, Media, Communication, Public Service), Social work (vulnerable groups, women, children), Medicine (physical and psychological vulnerabilities) Psychiatry and psychology (mental health, psychological screening, prevention, counselling, psychotherapy).
- Foreign languages
- Teaching and presentation skills

Public administration:

- Ability to understand work and functioning of local institutions;
- EU, local and regional policies in the field: existing local/regional/EU policies related to migration and asylum;
- Policy assessment, counselling, monitoring and evaluation (including EU accession policy),

SOCIAL INCLUSION:

- Legal aid (human rights assurance and humanitarian assistance, personal documents, permits, housing, livelihood, health and social protection)

- Work with media and local citizens.
- Moderation skills.
- Advocacy (communication with stake holders)
- Creating policies, guidance for practitioners, trainings for other professionals involved in the field of migration, etc.
- Activism (Human rights).

PROJECT MANAGEMENT and ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS:

- Project cycle management,
- Staff management skills.
- Managing of the organization dealing with migrants and integration,
- Fundraising
- Representing organization in public and before media

Actors' evaluation of gaps of HEI graduates who work in the field: STATE ACTORS

The evaluation of state actors by NGO representatives is in most cases critical. Some NGO actors express ambivalent, while others openly negative assessment. Positive evaluation is gained only by a highly ranked officer from CRM. Most critical notes stem from legal barriers to exercising full package of human rights, lack of legal knowledge on the side of state actors, both national and international regulations, and lack of integration programs for refugees, asylum seekers and overall undocumented migrants. Also lack of understanding of cultural diversity is pointed out.

Below is the illustration of the variety of responses of actors:

Openly negative is the following verbatim:

"Nevertheless, they are seriously lacking expertise with highly static, incompetent and ignoring approach toward needs of beneficiaries". And further on: "They should improve their professional knowledge (obtain university education in the fields related to migration – law, social work, special education, psychology, political sciences, etc.) and to improve skills via master programs,

internships, obligatory practices, special trainings, in learning languages, communication skills, administration, managerial and camp management skills, in integration, improving knowledge related to history, customary, religious, political background of the countries of origin, in conflict management, etc.), but also changing their attitudes toward beneficiaries and toward migration (perceiving migrants and refugees as beneficiaries and not as intruders, not as a burden and threat to the peace and prosperity of local community and institution in matter, adopting compassionate, humane, person to person, unbiased and equitable approach" (NGO- CEO, field of legal support, asylum protection and psychosocial support).

Similarly, **openly negative stance** is expressed by another legal expert (CEO-NGO in human rights). Mostly critical are the parts of the discourse related to the possibility of integration of immigrants but also lack of knowledge on the side of state actors and those who are in charge of the admission and insurance of human rights of immigrants: „Obstacles to permanent integration are still legally unregulated possibility of naturalization, limited freedom of movement due to inability to issue travel documents, and the long-lasting and heightened problem of employment that has been further intensified in the period of pandemic. Asylum-seekers and persons granted asylum are not sufficiently visible to the general public and employers in Serbia as yet, this type of activities proved very beneficial. Most of the employers were not aware of the legal status of persons granted asylum, the conditions for their employment stipulated in the *Law on Employment of Foreigners*, personal documents issued to these persons by the authorities of the Republic of Serbia, etc.).

When asked what needs to be done, the interviewee cites: "Bearing in mind the current situation in this area, the majority of doubts arise regarding *inability to exercise the refugee's rights in practice, primarily due to insufficient knowledge of national and international regulations*. There is a lack of harmonization of state institutions' practices as well as the equal implementation of existing laws by the Serbian state authorities to asylum seekers and foreigners granted asylum in the Republic of Serbia." And further on: „People working on migration and integration issues in the public sectors firstly need to be fully *familiar with refugee law and regulations*, national and as well internationals ratified on behalf of the Republic of Serbia". (CEO-NGO in human rights).

State actors need to be better trained: „Get educated on basic human rights issues, improve relevant knowledge and adapt *an attitude that being different doesn't mean that you do not have rights*. Be flexible, stand up to prevent discrimination in your work and when you see it. Include authorities and local actors, all in order to raise awareness and prevent xenophobia“ (CEO-NGO in human rights)

Also one critical stance with the emphasis on the lack of (legal) mechanisms for integration is expressed in the following discourse: “Refugees are currently facing numbers difficulties regarding integration, mainly concerning access to *social, cultural and economic rights*. Needed mechanisms to ensure integration facilitation have been provided to a limited extent or have not been provided at all. For example, public sector provides *limited hours of Serbian language classes and cultural orientation only to those granted asylum protection*. There are not enough professional trainings for refugees. Retraining and *additional trainings are not organized*, neither are assistance and support in order to access the labor market. There are certain legal gaps in terms of exercising the right of residence and travel documents. All the above-mentioned obstacles are among reasons why people who seek protection are seeing Serbia as a transit country and not a country of their destination. In order to improve and overcome these obstacles and strengthening access to rights, the national asylum and durable solutions system is required. “ (CEO- NGO psychosocial assistance).

Ambivalence with somewhat prevailing negative attitude:

NGO activist and HEI lecturer points out KIRS (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration) as an outstanding organization, and only partly Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Education, whereas for the rest of state actors, he claims not quite competence nor readiness to deal with migration and integration: “My experiences with state actors are mixed, both with regard to expertise and competence on one hand and overall approach on the other. Their attitude and capacity ranges from partial knowledge and prejudices and general reluctance to seriously deal with integration to superior knowledge, experience and motivation to deal with the issue. I worked with multi-sectorial teams in several occasions and learned that the Commissariat for refugees is superior in any terms over the others. Also, the Ministry of Interior shows positive attitude and good, but rather peculiar knowledge (only the topics related to their field of activity). The same stands for

the Ministry of Education: probably the most supportive attitude towards the integration of migrants and good knowledge about the institutional and legal capacities to conduct this task” (professor, NGO- CEO).

Some other NGOs are expressing ***a positive stance*** with a tentatively critical note regarding lack of full comprehension of cultural diversity of immigrants and an unifying EU legal response to migrants’ crisis. It should be stressed that NGOs depend very much on the support from GO and state actors in terms of projects and other support, so this might have influenced their viewpoints.

“When it comes to the Serbian government i.e. state actors, it could be said that they embraced and welcomed the NGO and INGO assistance. In order to become competent and attain high level of expertise, one first must have a certain level of experience. Serbian government has extensive experience when it comes to emergency responses in various types of crises. However, it (Serbian government, i.e. state actors) lacks one important dimension due to the predominantly homogenized structure of the beneficiaries during the previous refugee and other type of emergency responses. This dimension is *cultural awareness* which is, generally speaking, acquired through having worked with people from different cultural backgrounds that are very different from the culture of the host country providing the humanitarian assistance. Considering the cultural and national structure of the beneficiaries within the Balkans Refugee Crisis, Serbian government alongside numerous local NGO’s an INGO’s, responded adequately, if not, very well, especially taking into account the suddenness of the enormous influx of people that passed through the Balkan Route since 2015.” (CEO – NGO in migration and humanitarian activities)

“One more issue that should be mentioned are obsolete asylum laws and (NON) implementation of various existing EU regulations and laws related to refugees and migration e.g., Dublin Conventions. New rules are on the table, states acting unilaterally, EU has no clear vision and not enough strength or will to resolve new migrant situation. Since 2015 with enormous influx of migrants, enormous shifts in migrant’s policy occurred and policy become politiques.” (CEO- NGO in migration and humanitarian activities)

The only **genuine positive attitude** is expressed by the representative of Commissariat (CRM) who gives some reasons for the lack of professionalism on the side of other state actors:

“There is sufficient level of expertise. The problem is that migrant issues are not priority to the ministries that have huge workload with own nationals. Persistent lack of resources is also demotivating factor.” However, the same interviewee adds: “There is a need to raise awareness on migrant’s rights and needs and state obligations prescribed by national legislation.” (Employee from Commissariat – CRS).

ACADEMIC SKILLS needed are the same as mentioned beforehand, with addition of:

SPECIFIC SKILLS:

- digital skills
- communication and moderation skills, organizational skills
- time management
- respect for human rights, tolerance and cooperativeness
- personal traits like: flexibility, capacity to work under tight deadlines, open mindedness, creativeness
- driving license
- animation skills (playing guitar, acting, sports)

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT SKILLS:

- integration models and policies (international and national)
- migration and asylum regulations/policies/practices in a comparative perspective (international)

The respondents insisted on *the links between academic¹⁵ and non-academic expertise* to be gained in tertiary education, through volunteering and internships (NGOs, reception centers, etc.), then in providing services related to medical care, legal advising, shelter, cultural mediation and interpretation, provision of food and non-food items, prevention and identification of gender-based violence and human trafficking, etc.

They very much highlighted the *lack of practical, vocational skills*, then, need for training in: communication, social, administrative, project related skills and language skills. And first and foremost they pointed to the significance of adopting *an overall - humane, compassionate, righteous, reasonable and professional attitude*.

To illustrate the aforementioned, one of the respondents says concisely „From our experience the easiest things you can do on your journey to becoming a human rights activist *is to become involved*. Many human rights and civil society organizations usually have local calls that you can join as a volunteer, if not as an employee. Pretty much all career activists will volunteer before they are paid; it proves you're really in it for the cause and are willing to sacrifice your free time.“ (CEO- NGO in human rights).

Bellow we present classified information gained from our respondents according to knowledge to be expected from future graduates:

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE:

- *Basic theoretical, methodological and interdisciplinary knowledge* about migrations (types, drivers, history of migrations - world, Europe, Western Balkans and Serbia), disciplinary expertise: law and legal skills (laws and regulations in the field, national and international, etc.), knowledge in economics, political sciences, social and cultural diversity (cultural studies), psychology (psychological and psychosocial support and

¹⁵ One of the respondents (CEO – NGO in migration and intercultural issues) said that each higher education institution in social sciences should include studies of migration in its curriculum.

counselling, prevention). Gender studies (protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, GBV), Social work (work with vulnerability groups, gender violence survivors, women, children)

- *Basic presentation skills* (to know how to deal with data and how to present them in different forms and for different purposes)
- *Permanent education* and upgrading of knowledge and methodology
- *English language – proficiency level*

VOCATIONAL TRAINING:

- *Specialized vocational studies in migration instead of academic master studies.*
- More stress onto *policy development* in the field of migration (legal framework, policies, laws, regulations in the field of refugees/migrants and their human rights, development of sustainable solutions and policies, evaluation of the efficacy of programs). Be aware of differences of skills and knowledge needed in creating policy and implementing policy.
- Theory and practice on working with trauma. Crisis management skills. Psychological support for service providers (burn out syndrome). Psychosocial integration skills, prevention (workshops, first aid, early identification of highly vulnerable individuals, families, groups).
- Work with interpreters, who are actively involved in assisting to migrants.
- Cultural mediation. Cultural awareness training and education (theoretical and practical).
- Visits to Reception Centers, volunteering in NGOs, INGOs.

SPECIFIC/ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS:

- Planning, managerial skills, HR skills, communication; project development
- Fundraising
- Problem solving
- Team work
- Administration related skills
- Workshops moderation

- Field work
- Dissemination of project results
- Communication with decision makers and stakeholders and their active involvement
- The ability to work in multitasking environment
- Ability to cope with emotionally demanding situations
- Desk research skills

VALUES & ATTITUDES:

- Humane, compassionate, good listener, patient, open minded, positive and active; Respect for one's choice, capacities and resources of each and every individual. Flexibility.
- Cultural sensitiveness (to be informed on cultural background, family and social institutions of immigrants, beliefs and habits, cultural differences and barriers to integration, etc).
- Righteous, reasonable and professional attitude.

CONCLUSION

Serbia is a longstanding country of emigration. The volume of immigrants is overall very low. The country is not an attractive destination for settling in. Serbia is usually depicted as a middle developed country at the European semi-periphery, undergoing process of uncertain accession to the EU. Serbia has been facing a prolonged socioeconomic transformation into market economy, followed by slow economic growth and vast unemployment. Most of foreigners who stay in the country are only temporary residents and they move in because of work or business. These are predominantly men. Among foreigners who settle on a permanent basis - women are prevalent and their main reason is marriage or family reunification. Most of foreigners are actually citizens of ex-Yugoslav states, then China and Russian Federation. Share of ethnic minorities is very low and these are mostly Hungarians, Bosniaks and Roma.

Not only is the volume of immigration low but it is not recognized as a priority of the government and decision makers despite their full awareness of challenges related to advanced ageing, fertility

crisis, high emigration of youth, especially at the territories of south, southeast and western parts of the country, which are hit by massive poverty and economic stagnation.

At the moment management of migration is mostly oriented toward humanitarian streams, refugees, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, etc., those coming from Middle East and Africa and thriving to enter neighboring EU states, and reach western, wealthier states. Management of these migration flows is carried out with an active roles played mostly by CRM, local and international NGOs.

The fact is that students in Serbia are indeed offered by very diverse academic courses in very relevant disciplines which tackle migration and related issues (Sociology, Demography, Geography, Law, Political Sciences, Security Studies, Economy, etc), at undergraduate and graduate levels at universities throughout the country.

An attempt was made to overcome some disciplinary boundaries, divisions and fragmentation of knowledge by introducing an interdisciplinary graduate program at the University of Belgrade – A Study of Migration. The latter is running from 2017 and lecturers come from various faculties, disciplines and research backgrounds. Many students, the number of whom is, however, falling (less than 10 in recent years and in current academic year only 7), enroll this program either to fill in gaps in their academic knowledge (i.e. medical doctor working with migrants) in addition to their practical expertise (employees from NGOs, GOs, ministries, CRM) or because they cannot find jobs (graduates from philology, demography, geography, psychology, etc.).

The most important weakness as reported in our research is the lack of practical training and better integration of academic and non-academic expertise. Respondents very much pointed out a shortage of vocational training and specific skills that graduates should acquire at the university.

Master students should spend some more time in the GO and NGO organizations in the field, take up volunteering and learn how to apply their knowledge on the ground, especially when dealing with concrete individuals or with vulnerable persons (children, women, victims of gender based violence, human trafficking, etc). Digital skills are cited as missing as well as communication, cultural mediation and psychological expertise, such as dealing with trauma. Knowledge in international laws, but also fuller understanding of local ones, their application in practice as well as knowledge of public administration and integration mechanisms are also highlighted in the

interviews. Mastering of humane, open minded and problem solving attitudes are pointed out, as well.

Based on the analyses of interviews carried out with various stakeholders, it is evident that current higher education in Serbia only partly addresses the needs of migrant integration. Education is mostly oriented toward accumulation of academic knowledge i.e. knowledge from various, though relevant disciplines in the field of migration, basically theoretical and methodological (research methods, data processing, reporting, etc).

However, some important skills such as those related to everyday practice, especially social skills, problem solving, communication and cultural mediation are vastly missing. Conflict management and management of reception camps and refugee centers are very much needed and also lacking, as well as fundraising and project and staff management skills.

Human rights advocacy, then knowledgeability in application of laws and existing legal framework in practice, as well as European are stressed. Then, assistance around social inclusion of refugees and persons granted asylum (personal documents, employment, shelter, etc.), visibility of migrants in public, eradication of xenophobia, which is on the rise, recognition of the right to be different, are all very much needed.

Higher education graduates, currently working in the state organizations very often lack specific training in migration, in particular on laws and especially those related to human rights. They are also reported to lack expertise in: social work, special education, psychology, political sciences, etc. They need to improve skills via better organized master programs, internships, practices, special trainings, etc. Many need mastering of foreign languages, improvement of communication skills, administration, managerial and camp management skills.

Skills related to integration of migrants is a huge gap identified in interviews. Higher education graduates who currently work in the field need to improve specific knowledge related to: history, cultural studies (customs, ethnic, religious, political background of the countries migrants come from) as well as gender studies. These are very much required to ensue better approach to migrants and their smoother integration in host society. They also have to improve communication skills with stakeholders and mass media to contribute to the higher visibility of immigrants and their better social inclusion (contacts with employers, ordinary people, etc). Not only do they need to learn skills in conflict management, but as often highlighted in our research,

they are very much requested to change overall attitudes toward beneficiaries and immigration as such. An adoption of a compassionate, humane, egalitarian and unbiased attitude and approach are of utmost importance.

Cultural integration, education and retraining of refugees and immigrants are also underlined and recognized as important among interviewees in our field research. Graduates need to constantly upgrade their knowledge (permanent education), since many possess obsolete knowledge and an outdated expertise.