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Review of the HE programs in migration, diaspora and border studies - Serbia

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HE courses focusing on migration, diaspora and border studies in Serbia

There are five universities in the Republic of Serbia: the University of Belgrade, the University of Novi Sad, the University of Niš, the University of Kragujevac and the University of Priština, the last one being displaced in Kosovska Mitrovica, in 2001, after the war in Kosovo. These universities include various faculties which are divided according to the scientific departments. Thus, there are faculties of: Social Sciences and Humanities, Medical Sciences, Sciences and Mathematics, and Technology and Engineering Sciences.

The courses focusing on migration and diaspora, as well as on border studies, are mostly performed at the faculties of social sciences and humanities such as: philosophy, law, political sciences, economics and security sciences. When it comes to faculties of sciences and mathematics, it is only geography that has courses on migration within two departments: spatial planning and demography. However, it is evident that none of the aforementioned faculties has BA or PhD program on migration nor do they provide systematic, integrated and comprehensive study of migration and diaspora in all its manifestations. Moreover, they do not provide students with comprehensive knowledge about consequences of migration. Thus the master program ‘Studies of Migrations’ at the University of Belgrade is a unique one in that sense and will be presented in more detail in the second part of this report.

Despite the fact that all universities and their faculties in Serbia have almost the same programs, yet their structure is not the same. Having analyzed their curricula, we concluded that courses focusing on migrations are mostly represented at the University of Belgrade. According to our analysis, there are 43 courses altogether, whereas 32 of them are at the University of Belgrade, five at the University of Novi Sad, three at University of Niš, two courses at the University of Priština and one course at the University of Kragujevac. Most of these courses are at the undergraduate level (BA), whereas four are at the graduate level (MA), and the other four are at doctoral level (PhD). All of them are taught in Serbian language. Generally, there is a small number of foreign students at the University of Belgrade which is why most of the courses are lectured in Serbian. Also, most professors are ready to deliver lectures in English language (or in other foreign language) if needs be. Currently, after analyzing all the curricula, we can only conclude that professors and students use literature in English upon request. In addition, most professors who teach courses related to migration published their articles and results of their research in a few foreign languages (most often in English). If we analyze scientific approach or disciplines (presented in the Appendix 1), we could assume that these are - demography, sociology, geography, law, political sciences, economy and security studies.

It is interesting that the courses which include notion “migration“ in their title are available at the University of Belgrade – at the Faculty of Philosophy, the Department of Sociology and at the Faculty of Geography, the Department of Demography. At the Faculty of Philosophy there are two such courses – the first one is called Contemporary Economic Migrations and it is an optional/voluntary course at the third year of BA studies at the Department of Sociology. Throughout this course which is entirely devoted to migration issues, professors present different

types of migration: both forced and voluntary/labor migrations. Students also get familiarized with refugees and asylum-seekers phenomena, migrations related to the EU legislation and labor migration in different regions of the world. Lecturers try to make a link with practice by making visits to NGOs in the field or by inviting speakers from state institutions, NGOs, etc. As a part of their practical work, students have a task to collect data on migrants and migrations in line with the survey designed with teachers, then analyze and interpret empirical evidence by applying referent theories and paradigms. The next step encompasses drafting their own paper/essay, which is the main part of the exam. This is realized as a team work of several students. Lectures and seminars are in Serbian language. As a result, it is expected that students become ready to analyze data based on the important migration theories. The second course is at the graduate level (MA) and is called 'Migration and Sustainable Development'. It is also in Serbian language. This course is voluntary and focused on the relationship between migration and sustainable development in the sense of population renewal, economic development and development of a welfare state. Professors present local and global examples of a good practice. As a final result students are requested to draft projects on migration and process data which they collected themselves or which they plan to collect as part of their future master thesis. They can also prepare an essay based on the review of literature and then defend it as a second part of the exam.

At the Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade there is only one core/obligatory course called 'Population Migration' and it consists of two parts. The first part is at the second year of undergraduate studies (BA) and the second part is at the third year of BA. Both of them are in Serbian language. In the second year of BA, professors present current migration statistics, census data, population registers and research on migration, methods for studying migration of population and an overview of the past studies of migration and history of migrations. As to the course called 'Population Migration 2', lecturers present contemporary international migration, its determinants, social and professional mobility of population, global and regional trends in contemporary international migrations. At the end of the courses it is expected that students will be able to use and analyze statistical data and compare migration in different periods and territories. It is also expected that they will be able to disentangle demographic, economic and other factors which set up migration of people.

When it comes to other faculties of Serbian universities - migration and diaspora are included only as lectures in other similar courses. Actually, they are presented only once or twice throughout the courses. In addition, most of these courses are voluntary/optional except for the courses at the Faculty of Geography, University of Belgrade, where these are core and compulsory. At the faculties of philosophy (at all universities in Serbia), only course titled 'Social Demography' is a compulsory one and is taught among larger number of students. It encompasses a lecture on migration phenomenon.

Structure of lectures on migration, which are presented throughout other courses, are not the same – the content depends on the main topic of the courses they belong to. However, if we divide them according to the structure and topics, we see that there is one group of them with a thematic scope on migration theories related to international movements which are applied onto and compared to regional and national ones. These courses provide students with a wide theoretical

knowledge and prepare them to understand main issues of contemporary migration. In the second group, there are courses which familiarize students with refugees, asylum seekers, with their problems, their rights and their obligations. Refugees and asylum-seekers phenomena are taught at faculties of philosophy, geography and political sciences. The aim of these courses is to prepare students to recognize these specific kind of migration and migrants and make students eligible to work in organizations that deal with these groups. Courses or lectures which deal with rights and responsibilities of migrants are taught in a few classes during a semester at law faculties. The goal of these lectures is to make students be able to resolve legal problems that refugees and asylum seekers deal with in different host countries.

In the last group, there are courses with lectures about history of migration, starting with the first society (or better to say human groups) until the contemporary times. In the frame of these lectures, teachers present causes and consequences of migration throughout the history with the accent on the modern world. For example, professors at the Faculty of Security Sciences, University of Belgrade, discuss about geopolitical causes of migration in the context of their further geopolitical consequences. They prepare students to be able to recognize and analyze geopolitical causes that can lead to mass migrations and their possible consequences. According to this, students could be of great use in public security systems and NGO sector which deal with the security of people.

Even though courses which belong to the aforementioned groups have the same thematic scope, yet, their structure is dissimilar and lectures are very dispersed (for more detail see Appendix 1). Opposite to the expectation which one could gain after analyzing curricula, it seems evident that students cannot use much of their knowledge in practice and in best possible way. None of the courses are created as a reply/outcome based on the real needs of stakeholders, decision makers, public administration, NGOs and the private sector where students might find an employment. It can be assessed that students graduate from faculties with a wide range of theoretical knowledge (they become familiar with myriad of theories and paradigms, they learn and study many issues related to migrations, they analyze statistics/demographics and study methods on migration phenomena, learn about causes and consequences of migrations, etc.) but the main problem persists since they do not receive enough practical skills and expertise and they do not develop expertise needed for resolving migration problems at the ground which Serbia faced and has still been facing. In short they don't learn how to translate theory into practice and recommendations for stakeholders and decision makers. One of the reasons lies in that faculties of social sciences and humanities in Serbia are not sufficiently connected to non-academic world, to public, non-profitable and private sectors in general. The second problem is that there is not a cooperation between faculties and industry (nonacademic organizations) in terms of an exchange of knowledge, practical experience and good practice. Furthermore, professors have not created some multidisciplinary practical courses or lectures with authenticable structure which are the same at every faculty that have migration and diaspora in their courses. After a lot of analysis, we have come to the conclusion that MA Studies of Migration at the University of Belgrade could have become the most useful program in Serbia. This program was created based on cooperation within faculties of the University of Belgrade, with the support of relevant national and international institutions. The idea was to contribute to eradicate existing dispersion and

fragmentation of knowledge, so called “running in place”, repetition and ineffectiveness of the current knowledge and actions in this field.

At University of Belgrade, Faculty of Law, at the fourth year of studies, there are voluntary courses - Legal Clinics. One of legal clinics of the module B is called – Clinic for asylum and law on refugees. These courses last two semesters. The first semester is intensive and comprises interactive training in the topic since they are not thoroughly covered in the core curriculum of the Faculty. The second semester is devoted to practice – students are sent to national partners’ organizations – GO and NGOs to learn ‘by doing’ and ‘from experience’. The Legal Clinic in the field of migration is supported by UNHCR and CRMRS (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration RS).

In 2018, the Migration Training Center was created in Plandište, Vojvodina, as part of the project “Support to Strengthening Migration and Asylum Management in Serbia” carried out by IOM, with the help of the British Embassy. It is aimed at advancing training and capacity building in the field of asylum and migration, with the special focus to vulnerable groups, women and unaccompanied minors. It is basically targeted to the staff of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia and other government officials/professionals and is planned to further grow into a regional training unit for Southeast Europe. During 2020 only online courses were convened due to the pandemic.

MA Studies of Migration

MA Studies of Migration is designed as a unique multidisciplinary master program of the University of Belgrade. There is not any such program in Serbia at the HE level. It is created by a group of professors and researchers from various faculties of the University of Belgrade (Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Geography, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Political Science, Faculty of Security Studies, and Institute for Social Sciences). It was conceived on the basis of findings of one previous research carried out by the leader of the Program, prof Dragan Simić, PhD (Simić, Živojinović, 2015). Under the auspices of IOM, office in Belgrade, professor Simić explored all the curricula and syllabi at the undergraduate and graduate level of the universities in Serbia and its various faculties where migrations had been studied. The main conclusion was that the higher education in Serbia, especially a graduate one missed a systematic, comprehensive study of various dimensions of migrations in its full variability, covering complexity of both causes and consequences of these movements and people involved. The second core finding was that the knowledge students had been gaining was dispersed along various disciplines and thus fragmented. As authors concluded “All of the above helps to explain why the Republic of Serbia, in spite of the efforts invested by the whole society to respond to challenges, risks and threats related to migration, is unable to be an appropriate and sufficiently efficient partner to the relevant institutions in the international community increasingly faced with this global phenomenon. In other words, such “dispersed” knowledge is of little use to the government and its institutions. We are especially thinking of “running in place” and repetitions which are present in some of the analyzed universities at all academic levels, from undergraduate to PhD studies.” (Simić, Živojinović, 2015:41)

Hence they arrived to the conclusion that there was a need to create a multidisciplinary master program that would combine various scientific fields, but also diverse research methods

and develop applicability and ability of graduates to adapt to the labor market and to offer a knowledge based consultancy to stakeholders and civil society when it comes to strategic thinking and decision making in this global and regional/local phenomenon that is currently one of the most dynamic population and social processes in Europe and globally.

The master program 'Studies of Migrations' was designed by professors, lecturers and researchers from different faculties of the University of Belgrade in the course of 2015, with the support of International Organization for Migration, office in Belgrade. It was accredited in 2016, and the first generation was enrolled in 2017. Owing to 5 grants received from the IOM - Office in Belgrade, the first generation was the most numerous (17) while over the time, their number was decreasing and in last couple of years it hardly reaches - 10. The quota of publicly funded students (by Ministry of Education, Science and Technology) is low (in 2020 only 4, in 2017 only 2, in 2020 - 4), while the rest have to pay a full tuition. This fact as well as the lack of employment positions brings about the slim chances to enlarge the entry of future candidates. It should also be stated that the very issue of migrations is not the priority on the political agenda in the country and that its significance as a developmental drive has yet not been recognized. Therefore the lack of opportunities for those who graduate out of this MA program should be placed into the wider context.

The program is carried out in Serbian language. It is a multidisciplinary program that encompasses 3 core courses and 3 modules. The first semester is devoted to core/obligatory and the second semester to elective/voluntary ones. Other than attending courses, students have to spend internship in relevant institutions and NGOs dealing with migration and migrants. In the end they have to submit and defend a master thesis.

Students are required to attend and pass 3 obligatory/core courses and 3 voluntary/optional ones. Each module covers 3 courses and students may select 2 from their preferred/chosen module and 1 from the different one. Obligatory or core courses are: 1. Introduction into the Studies of Migration; 2. Legal, Political and Security Aspects of Migration 3. Migration Research. Modules are as follows: 1. Migration and Security (optional courses are: Crisis, Conflicts and Migrations in the World; Migrations and Human Security; Security of Serbia and Migrations). Second module is Migration and Development with voluntary or optional courses: Internal Migrations and Regional Disparities; Migrations and Sustainable Development and Migration and Labor Market. Third module is: Migration and Social Policy, with optional/voluntary courses: Social Challenges of Migrations, European Social Policies and Migrations, Social Administration, Civil Sector and Migrations.

As to the thematic scope: both global and local dimensions are covered with many different areas included, like international migration, internal migration, diaspora, globalization, regional studies, theories and methods, refugees and forced migration, ecological migrations, public opinion and media, social policy, social protection, civil sector, NGOs, etc.

Geographic scope covers Serbia and global (international) territories with specific regions included in voluntary/optional courses (like Post-socialist countries, Near East, Africa, etc.) Also, the voluntary/optional courses encompass different historical periods: First and Second World War, world revolutions, contemporary crisis and conflicts in the world, North South Divisions, ex-Yugoslav conflicts and migrations, etc.

The Studies of Migrations are highly interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary curriculum which include following social sciences and humanities and sciences and mathematics: Sociology, Geography, Demography, Economy, Political Sciences, Law, Security Studies, Research Methods, Public Administration, Social policy and Social Protection.

After graduation students receive the title: Master in Social Crisis Management. When it comes to skills, this program aims to provide candidates with ability to integrate and combine expertise gained through various scientific disciplines in one multidisciplinary framework. They should be equipped to analyze and synthesize various empirical data in the field of international and internal migrations. Then, students are entitled to use various data sources, including IT, then to interpret findings, with a special emphasis to translate them into practical recommendations and action on the ground. They should also be able to plan, organize and carry out their own research projects on migration and human mobility, as well as the obtain skills necessary to convey theoretical knowledge of migration to a variety of different audiences and institutions (dissemination, communication and outreach).

Reference:

Simić, D. and D. Živojinović (2015) *Migration Studies in Serbian Universities Curricula*, Belgrade: IOM.