

QHPSM

MIGRATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

A FEASIBILITY STUDY



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Introduction: Migration

Migration is a long-known phenomenon that happened since the existence of humankind. Recently, migration has become more common in some countries and there are different reasons why migration happens. Whatever the case, migration is considered to be very stressful that affects mental health and decision-making. But, who is a migrant? A migrant can be defined as a person who changes their country of residence. More precisely a migrant can be someone whose country of birth is different from their country of residence or someone who changes their country of usual residence for at least a year so that the country of destination effectively becomes the country of usual residence (Sturge, 2019). A person becomes a migrant when they change their country of usual residence for some time, if this period lasts for more than a year then this person is considered a “long-term migrant”, whereas if the person moves to another country and lives there for three months to a year then that person is called a “short-term migrant” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017). To make sense of migration and the reasons behind migration, researchers came up with several theories.

Migration Theories

Numerous fields study the phenomenon of migration, each of them with its different theories and perspectives. The neoclassical economic theory links migration with the differences between countries regarding their capital and labor force, proposing that the labor force migrates from low-wage countries to high-wage ones (Harris & Todaro, 1970). Similarly, the dual labor market theory states that individuals migrate to countries with more work opportunities. But it also adds a distinction between the primary market which requires high-skill labor, and the secondary market which is more labor-intensive, the latter being the dominant destination of migrants (Piore, 1979). Taking into account the social aspect of migration the new economics of labor migration approach brings forth the fact that many households send their members to more developed countries so that they can get high-paying jobs and send remittances back home (Stark, 1991). Lastly, according to Lee (1966), two factors encourage migration, push factors are related to the sending country of the migrant and they include a lack of job opportunities, inadequate living conditions, political fear of persecution, disease, and war. Whereas pull factors are related to the receiving country and

include: job opportunities, better living conditions, education, medical care, family links, marriage, and security.

In addition to the aforementioned theories, there are also several theoretical frameworks regarding the phenomenon of return migration. The orthodox theory states that the main catalyst which leads migrants to return to their home country is the inaccurate expectations about the costs and benefits of migration (Borjas and Bratsberg, 1996). On the other hand, the new economics of labor migration (NELM) postulates that return migrants anticipated a limited stay in the host country due to economic or other types of objectives, and when those objectives are fulfilled the migrants return to their home country (Cassarino, 2004). As such, all the theories mentioned above have different perspectives regarding the cause of migration. However, as adults are making all the decisions, there are specific groups that suffer the consequences such as children and adolescents.

Migration Effects on Adolescents

Children and adolescents can be considered one of the most susceptible groups to the effects of migration. This susceptibility may occur because children lack the experience and coping strategies which aid adults to persevere through challenges. As a result, adolescents that belong to families that migrate in search of better opportunities are more prone to developing mental health problems (Suárez-Orozco, Kim, & Bang, 2011). According to Stevens and Vollebergh (2008), there seem to be three main components of migration that lead to this occurrence. The first one is the alteration of the environment which constitutes a loss of family and friends, customs, and surroundings as well as the addition of a new cultural environment, often including different moral values and standards and a new language. These components can become challenging if the migrants have a hard time adapting to them, which in turn can create feelings of isolation and alienation (Davies & McKelvey, 1998). The second reason is related to the society of the host country, and its perception of migrants. Generally speaking, migrants transition from being part of the majority in their home country to being part of a minority group in their host country (Coll et al., 1996). This may create segregated residential, economic, social, and psychological environments that have adverse effects on the mental health of migrants mental health (Stevens & Vollebergh, 2008). The third reason is linked to the cultural background of the migrant which can influence the mental health of children through their parents and which behavior they regard as acceptable.

We can see the effects of migration on Spanish and Italian immigrant adolescents, even though they represent only 10% of the total adolescent population, they still make up 20% of teenagers that receive child therapy and 50% of the total children with social assistance (Rodriguez, 1973). Another example can be found in Sweden, where 5.2% of immigrant adolescents were subject to social welfare interventions, and only 1.4% of native-born children were subject to such interventions. (Aronowitz, 1984). Studies have also shown migration's effects on teachers' perception of migrant students. Aronowitz (1984), reported results from two studies that compared the perception of teachers of migrant and native students, results showed that teachers reported migrants to be more anxious, aggressive, and show poorer interpersonal relationships compared to native children. Even though these results show that migrant students are perceived to have more mental health problems it doesn't mean that these perceptions are unbiased and true, but they still can influence the behavior of teachers which can, in turn, lead to the development of mental health issues in students. The effects of migration on the mental health of adolescents seem to diminish over time. This was the main finding of a longitudinal study conducted by Krupinski and Burrows (1986) whose purpose was to investigate the prevalence of diagnosable disorders in Vietnamese refugee youth over a 2-year follow-up period. This can be explained by the completion of the acculturation and enculturation processes which are shown to promote positive adaptation for migrants (Bornstein, 2017). Although we may know that migration affects children's and adolescents' mental health, we do not have much data regarding this in the Kosovo context. However, below we will present some general secondary findings in context.

Secondary Findings: Kosovo and Migration

Whereas, the latest wave of emigration from Kosovo, was after 2000 and spatially in late 2014 and early 2015, where, according to estimations of the respective institutions, for around 6 months, approximately 100,000 Kosovar citizens left Kosovo, emigrating to European countries and wider. In the latest wave of emigration, besides other social and economic factors, the major influence was the political situation (political stoppage), six months after the central political elections (2014) in Kosovo, the local institutions were not established (government and parliament), thus causing a loss of hope for the citizens of this country, that shortly there may be social and economic progress. In this direction, the study

conducted with 497 emigrants in Kosovo (face to face), namely in the municipality of Suhareka, points out that in the selection of the immigrating country the emigrants have taken into account the better living conditions of 40.2% in the immigrating country, then emigrants who migrated for family reunion 39.6%, reunion with friends and relatives 6.1%, easier documentation providing (residence and work permit) 3.4%, closeness with the place of birth 0.2%, and other reasons 10.5% (Gollopeni, 2015). All these forms of migration are an integral part of the migration of Kosovo society. While the above-mentioned indicators determine the selection of the immigrating country (state) and other migratory societies everywhere in the world, with some differences. With an unemployment rate of around 45 percent and a youth unemployment rate of 76 percent (World Bank, 2008), with 15 percent of the population living “in extreme poverty” and 45 percent living “in poverty” (World Bank, 2007), conditions favor emigration for economic reasons. In Figure 1 you will find the main reason why Kosovars emigrated to other countries.

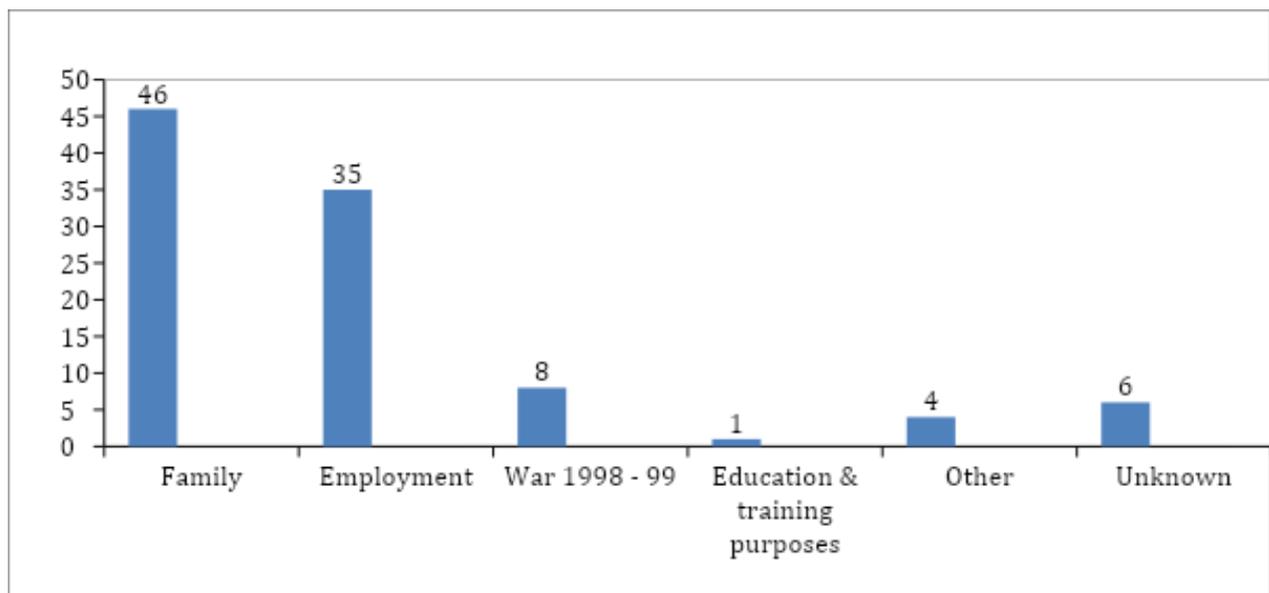


Figure 1. *The main reasons for international emigration by reasons for migration.*

Even though Kosovo is a relatively young and small country it still maintains the highest emigration rates in Eastern Europe from 1989 to 2003 (World Bank, 2011). This feat was achieved by the high number of migrants, approximately 874,000 Kosovo migrants between 1981 and 2011 (UNDP, 2014). Another estimation by KAS (2018) measures 703,978 Kosovars between 1969 and 2011, while in 2017, net migration was estimated at

833,739. These numbers consist of both regular and irregular migrations, mainly for employment, education, or family reunion reasons (BPRG, 2020). The reason why there are not any definitive numbers but only rough estimations is that many individuals migrate in illegal ways and go unnoticed by the authorities (Qirezi, 2015). However, there do exist estimates about the number of migrants who left Kosovo in the last decade and they are presented in figure 1.

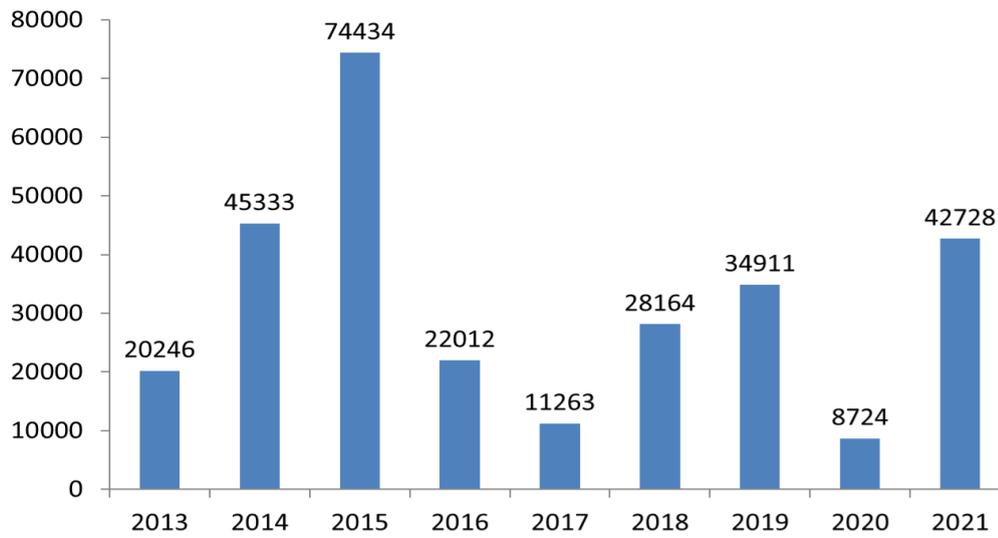


Figure 1. *The number of citizens who migrated from Kosovo throughout the years*

Kosovo has a long relationship with migration, which can be explained by the constant wars and conflicts taking place in the territory throughout the years (Malcolm, 2018). Even though there isn't much data about migration before the 70' we can assume that the same factors which lead to migration in the current times were also present back then. Beginning in the 70' there were ethnic tensions that ultimately led to the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1992. These occurrences were accompanied by the fact that Kosovo was the poorest part of Yugoslavia causing a large number of citizens to leave the country and become migrants (Dimova, 2007). This migration saw its culmination in the Kosovo War of 1999, where approximately 600,000 people left between 24 March and 19 April 1999 heading mainly to Albania and other bordering countries (Wilkson, 1999).

There are also very few sources that detail the composition of people who migrated from Kosovo, the most prominent and cited one being the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, and practically all of their data spans from the year 2000 to 2011. The Republic of Kosovo

consists of 7 districts and 38 municipalities, each of them with its own culture and industries, which affects the migration rates. From them, Prishtina, Gjakova, Mitrovica, and Suhareka showed the highest rate of migration with approximately 30,000 migrants per municipality (Figure 2; KAS, 2014). This may be since up until 1990, these communities were among the most industrialized in Kosovo, however, following 1991, the companies were shut down and the employees lost their jobs.

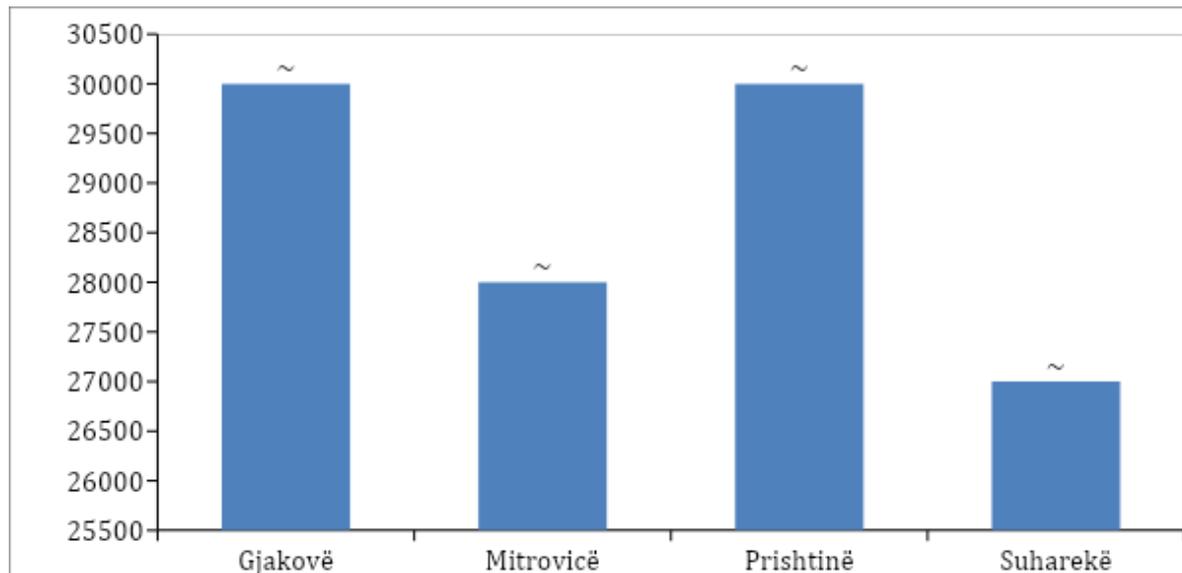


Figure 2. *The number of emigrant population by municipalities in Kosovo (2014).*

The main destination for these migrants has been European states such as Germany, and Switzerland, with only these two countries accepting more than 60% of migrants (Figure 3; KAS, 2014).

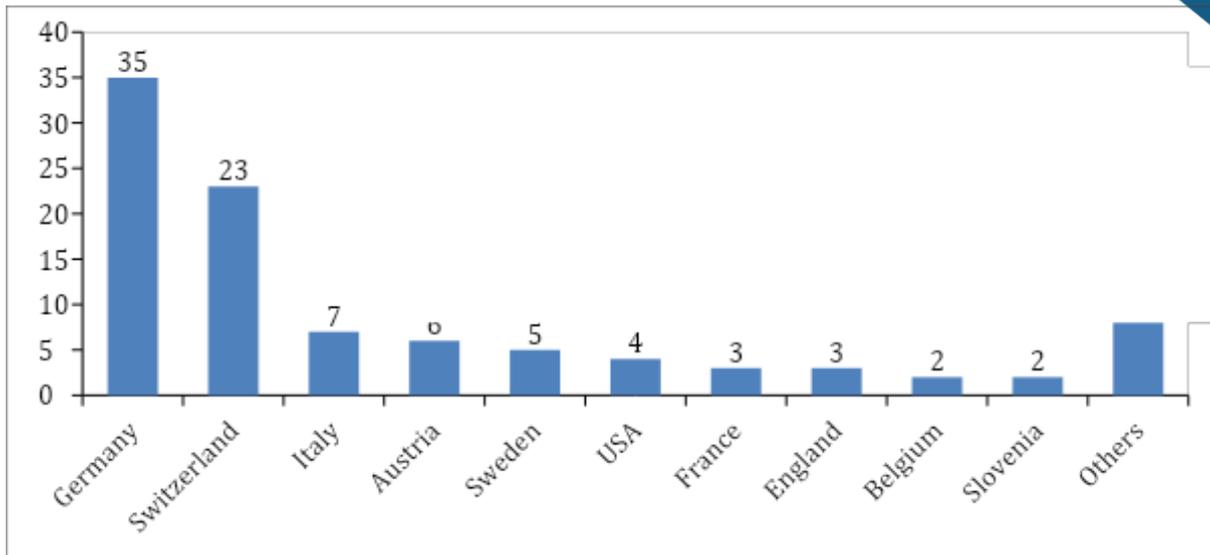


Figure 3. *Emigration by country (top 10 destination countries).*

Regarding gender, Kosovo's composition has a slightly higher percentage of male than female citizens, coupled with the social and economic gender roles in the country may explain the reason why males have migrated in larger numbers than women (Figure 4; KAS, 2014).

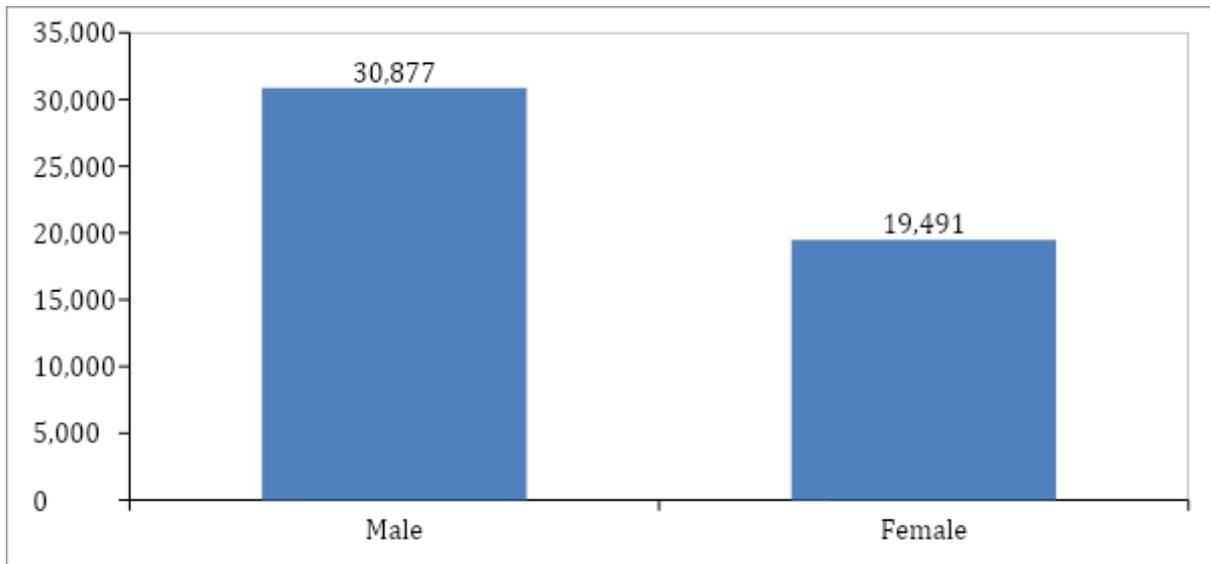


Figure 4. *Number of immigrants by sex.*

In terms of the age groups of migrants, the major number of the population belongs to the 25 to 34-year-olds (Figure 5). This could be because Kosovo is known to have Europe's youngest population (Bank, 2017)

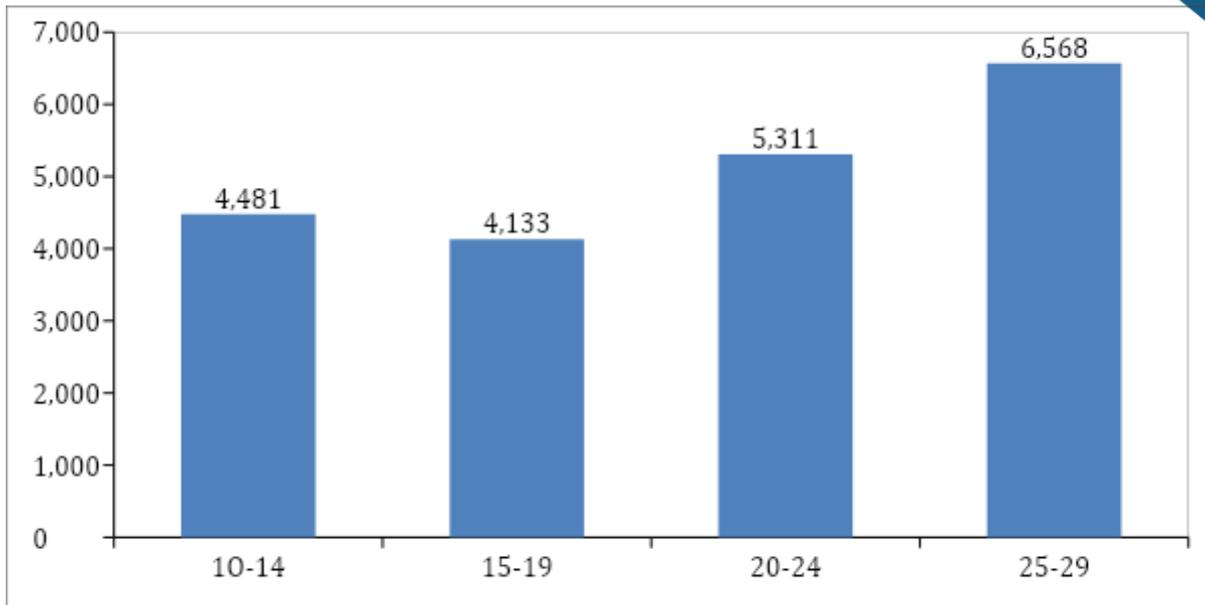


Figure 5. Number of immigrants by age.

Other interesting findings regarding the composition of the demographics of the emigrants from Kosovo were found by Gollopeni (2015). He found that 44.4% of emigrants have completed secondary school, 26.8% primary school, 12.7% incomplete primary education, 5.8% have a university degree, 3.6% uneducated, and 6.7% other.

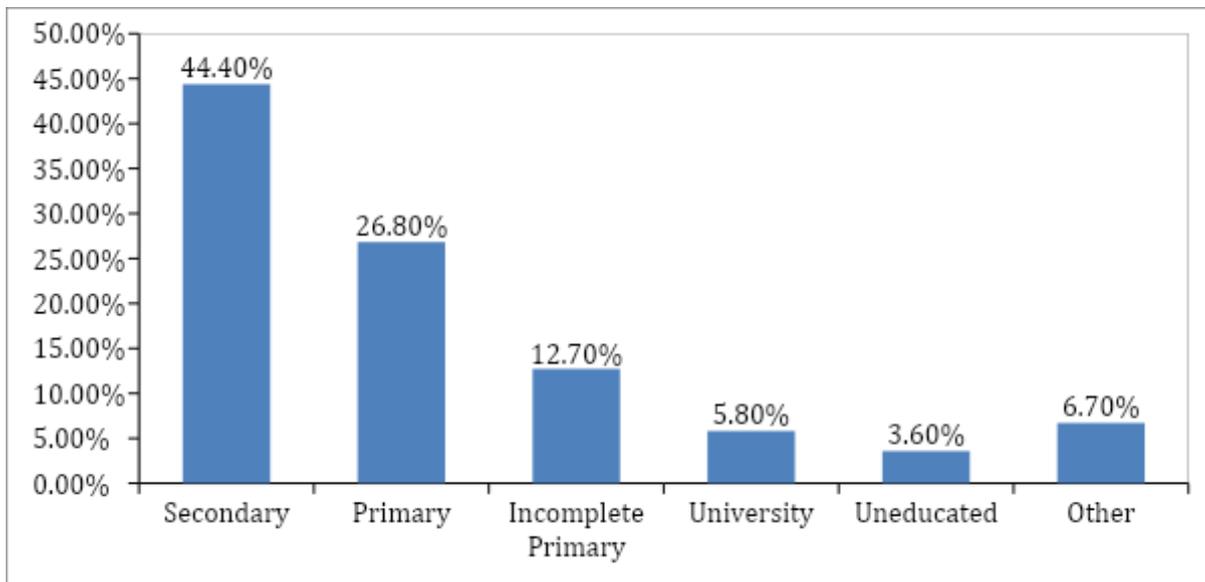


Figure 6. Education level of migrants.

Returning Migrants: Cycle Migration

The data concerning return migrants are even scarcer than the ones for migrants in general. This may be since the process of return migration is not documented by governing

authorities, or if it is those data are not made public and accessible. When a migrant returns to their home country they do so voluntarily (see the new economics of labor migration) or involuntarily. Return migration patterns are influenced by the social, political, and economic conditions of their native countries. When migrant workers opt to move back home, they usually take resources with them. How they employ these resources relies on several variables, including the ease of doing business and the accessibility of information about investment opportunities. Additionally, migrants may contribute with contemporary knowledge and skills that can help the host nation's human capital development. In terms of returning migrants' composition, the International Organisation for Migration (2013) reported that in 2013, most of the returnees came from Austria and Belgium. The larger part of the sample identified as male and almost 70% were adults.

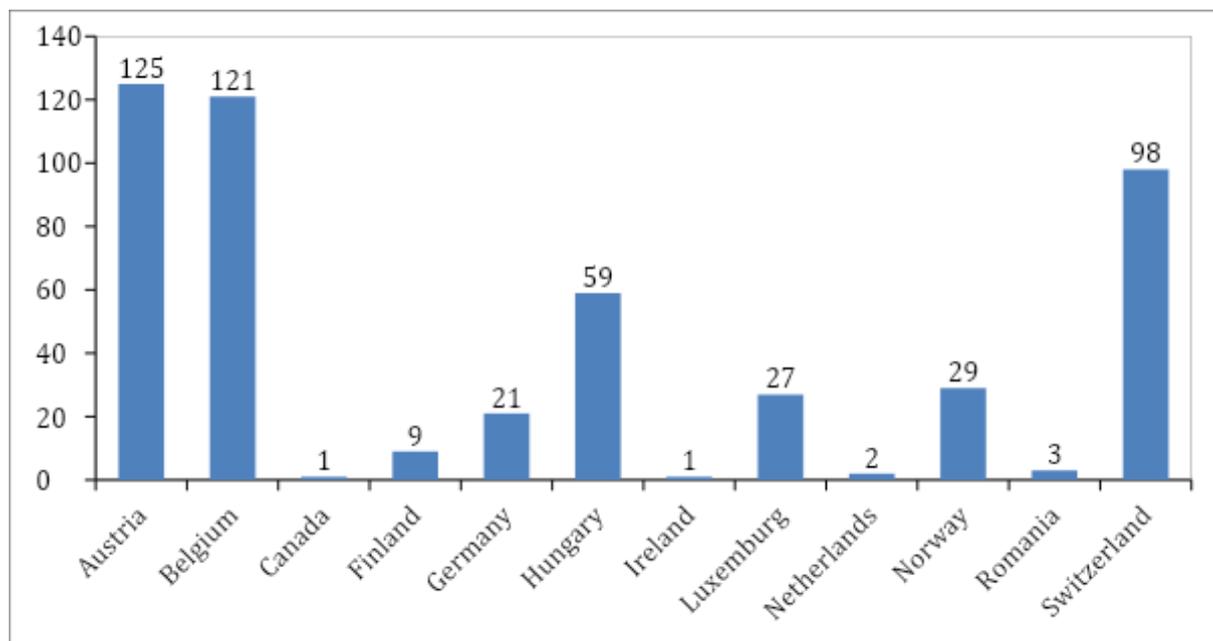


Figure 7. *Voluntary Returnees by Sending Country (2013).*

In their report about involuntary return migration, Möllers and colleagues (2017) came to three conclusions regarding this topic. Firstly, return migrants are more economically vulnerable after returning home; secondly, they show a significant lack of education and experience in the work field, with 50% of the sample having completed only nine years of schooling; thirdly the failed migration experience and the need to return caused the migrants to report a lower life satisfaction and a prevalence of mental stress. This was also seen in the

prevalence of symptoms of depression with more than one-third of returnees showing symptoms that are normally only found in the 84th percentile or higher for average Western European adults, and 15 percent reported severe symptoms that are usually only found in 2 percent of this comparison group; lastly, the vast majority of returnees showed an overall low level of willingness to stay in Kosovo and to reintegrate back into society.

Discussion: Migration Effects on Individuals and Society

Migration is a complex phenomenon caused by different factors that lead to positive and negative outcomes for the individual, society, and their home country. As discussed in the above section individuals who migrate can find jobs a meet their economic needs, they can also access the necessary medical care that may not be available in their home country, and finally, they can reunite with their families or even create a new one. At the societal level, migration helps with globalization and diversity, regarding race, culture, religion, etc. Whereas at the country level, migration can aid the state's economy with remittances and pensions sent from abroad, reducing the burden on the state budget. Around 5% of the population or 92,317 citizens rely on these remittances to make a living. Even though this number may not seem significant, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics and the United Nations Development Program (2012) reported that in 2012, the total amount of remittances sent is estimated to be 457 million Euros, or 9.3% of Gross Domestic Product in Kosovo (KAS and UNDP, 2013). Whereas, the world bank estimated the received remittances make up 15-20% of the total GDP from 2008 to 2020 (World Bank, 2020)

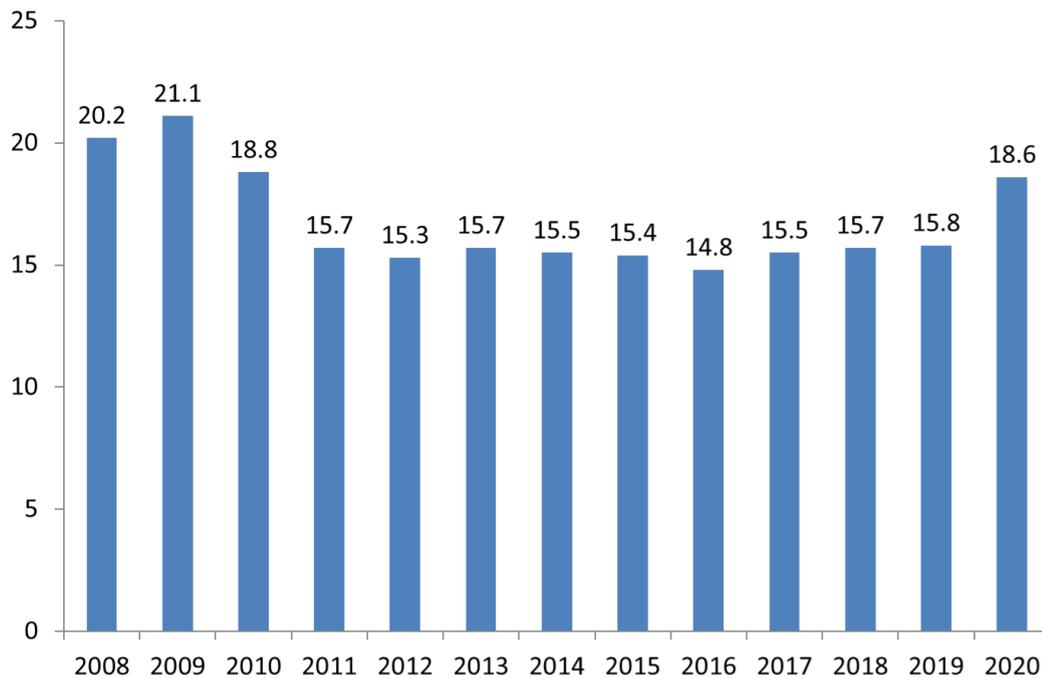


Figure 8. Personal remittances received (% of GDP).

These remittances help to alleviate the economic burden of households that have fewer members due to migration as well as the state because it lowers the number of families that need social and economical assistance (CBK, 2013). This occurrence was documented by the United Nations Development Programme (2010), which reported that around 20% of the total population receives remittances whereas only 13% of the population receives social assistance; even the amount of sent resources was higher in the recipient households compared to social protection programs. This can be seen in the rural areas of Kosovo where poverty is more prevalent, nevertheless, several rural families that accept remittances enjoy a higher economic average compared to some urban areas (World Bank, 2007)

Migration to another state can also have negative implications for the individual, society, and the state. For individuals, migration causes them to separate from friends and family. This separation can lead to the delay of marriages or late marriages, a reduction of the birth rate, the number of divorces increase, etc. As a result of this, about 30% of households in Kosovo are deserted and many others are only inhabited by elders or pensioners (KAS, 2011). Based on studies conducted in Kosovo, the cause of 13% of divorced couples is emigration (Gollopini, 2010). Migration can also create gender imbalances in society because, as mentioned previously, males make up the larger part of migrants. This would

mean that more developed countries will have a higher rate of men since these countries are the primary destination for migrants. While at the state level, the effect of migration can be seen in the reduction of the population, specifically individuals in their 20s and 30s, seeing that these age groups are the most inclined to find better opportunities in host countries. This will lead to a higher distribution of citizens (children and elders) who are unable to contribute to the economy, researchers have coined this phenomenon as “brain drain” (Taylor, 2006).

Return migration also affects individuals and society. Return migration does not only change the residence of individuals back to their home country nor does it return everything to before the migration, sometimes it helps the return migrants and other times it poses challenges to them. On an individual level, return migration has been shown to cause mental health problems such as anxiety as well as the need to re-establish life before migration but with fewer resources (Möllers et al., 2017). Nevertheless, if the reintegration into their home country is successful, return migrants can bring experience and knowledge obtained abroad (Kuschminder & Jessica, 2012). Return migrants can also facilitate the economic development of their home country by investing in their returns (Piracha and Vadean, 2010).

Recommendations

- There is a need to shift the focus of the political strategy into cycling migration and brain gain. Thus, the focus should be on governmental interventions that can create a safe environment for investments from the diaspora and the return of experts that can contribute to their home country.
- There is a need to develop a program that can help to return migrants, especially involuntary returning migrants, to be reintegrated back into society. This program can minimize the negative effects experienced by returning migrants.
- There is a need to design evidence-based programs in other institutions to develop specific activities and methodologies, which can help with reintegration.
- There is a need for increased focus on the mental health of returning migrants, especially children, and adolescents. That is because these categories can be the most affected.
- There is a need for programs that will aid and guide returning migrants for possible re-migration.

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