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The Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Political Determinants of Migration Aspirations Among Young People in Kosovo

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Abstract

The current study aims to examine the impact of demographic, socioeconomic, and political determinants on young people's intention to migrate aged 14 to 29, drawing from a secondary analysis of the survey conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) of Kosovo youth, which has been carried out from 2018-2019. The findings showed that being unmarried and unemployed were a significant predictor of migration aspiration. In contrast, gender, age, and residency were not significant. National pride was one of the strongest predictors of lower migration aspiration. The results of this study didn't show a significant relationship between a lack of trust in the national government and a higher wish to migrate. Voting intentions were negatively correlated with higher migration aspirations. Lastly, higher pessimism about the country's future significantly predicted higher migration aspirations. The findings of this study can advance understanding of the impact of demographic, socioeconomic, and political factors on migration aspiration and inform strategies to prevent uncontrolled mass migration among youth.

Keywords: migration aspirations, young people, Kosovo.

1. INTRODUCTION

T Kosovo has a long history of migration that dates to 1960 (Vathi & Black, 2007). The large waves of forced migration in 1999 due to war atrocities are the most widely cited by authors (IOM, 2005; Bergouignan, Blayo, Llopart, Okobo, 2000). Migration for economic reasons has been a livelihood strategy for decades among Kosovo Albanians (Vathi & Black, 2007; Koser, 2000), and this has had profound implications for the country's development, which are also positive.

Data from 2017-2019 show that Kosovo continues to have a high emigration rate, with an annual average of 24,779 persons or 1.4 percent of the population (Government Authority on Migration, 2019). The latest data from the Statistical Agency of Kosovo (Social Statistics, 2019; 2020; 2021) show that in 2021, the number of Kosovar immigrants is estimated to be 42,728 inhabitants; in 2020, 8,724 inhabitants, and in 2019, 34,911 inhabitants. The intentions to migrate continue, especially among young people aged 14 to 29 (FES, 2020).

A recent UNDP study (Youth Challenges and Perspectives in Kosovo, 2021) showed that the top three reasons for emigration among young people aged 18-35 years old were lack

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of job opportunities, followed by lack of personal perspective, and inferable economic situation, and that aspirations to migrate were still a widespread phenomenon in 2020 in Kosovo, with 53 percent of young people who declared to either consider migration or who were likely to consider migration. Similarly, a UNDP Public Pulse Analysis (2018) showed that 60 percent of young people anticipate that they would consider leaving the country in the next three years, while another study found that 45 percent of respondents would like to permanently live in any EU country (Loxha, & Elshani, 2015). A youth study from Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in 2019 showed that 50 percent expressed a moderate to very strong desire to migrate. Although in-depth research on migration factors is lacking, several studies have highlighted this matter. Similarly, another study on migration in Kosovo in 2015 found that people migrated abroad for three main reasons: (a) migration for family reunification, (b) legal migration for education and temporary work arrangements, and (c) illegal immigration driven by widespread poverty, corruption, and high unemployment, especially among young people (Dobruna, Ejupi, Holla, 20015). Another study with university students found that approximately 74 percent of respondents would migrate for economic reasons (Hoxha, 2021).

Moreover, dissatisfaction with the political situation, lack of quality education and proper health care are among the most reported reasons for migration aspirations cited in this report (UNDP, 2018). Considering the research gaps on the factors that influence migration aspirations among young people, the current study examined the demographic, socioeconomic, and political determinants of migration aspirations among young people aged 14-29 in Kosovo.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The general purpose of the study was to understand the demographic, socioeconomic, and political determinants of migration aspirations among young people. This conceptual model adapts the literature on migration aspirations and behavior to the specific economic, political and migration context of Kosovo.

The research questions and hypotheses were the following:

RQ1: Which demographic determinants predict higher migration aspirations?

With respect to demographic determinants it was hypothesized that young people aged 14-23 years old (age group), young men and boys (gender), marital status (unmarried youth, regardless of gender) and rural youth will report higher aspirations to migrate.

RQ2: Which socio-economic determinants predict higher migration aspirations?

With respect to socio-economic determinants, it was hypothesized that young people who are unemployed and who come from low socio-economic status will report higher aspirations to migrate.

RQ3. Which political determinants predict higher migration aspirations?

With respect to political determinants, it was hypothesized that lack of trust in government, higher concern on societal issues, higher concerns on unemployment, social injustice and corruption, those who are more pessimist about their personal and country's future, young people with lower national pride, and lower intention to vote in the next national elections will report higher aspirations to migrate.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is no single migration theory that explains migration, given that it is a complex phenomenon. Although there are different assumptions, each approach provides valuable insight regarding the reasons behind people's migration (Cassarino, 2004).

A theory that stands apart from the models of rational choice is the dual labor market theory, which argues that international migration is a product of labor demands of modern developed countries rather than supply (Piore, 1979). As such, international migration is not caused by push factors in sending countries (e.g., high unemployment and low wages) but by pull factors in receiving countries (e.g., a need for foreign workers). Another important theory that incorporates expectations as a major component in the decision-making framework is the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1988), which proposes that intentions to move are the primary determinants of migration behavior. Similarly, another perspective states that aspirations play a role in two interconnected ways. As such, people's aspirations in life can be important factors that affect migration, and the term "migration aspirations" is used to describe the conviction that migration is desirable (Carling, 2014), concluding that migration aspirations are essential, particularly in societies where a large proportion of the population wishes to be elsewhere (p.5).

The push and pull theory of migration (Lee, 1966) is another theory of international migration. According to this theory, migrants are pushed to move from their country of origin and pulled to their destination. The author has defined the factors associated with the decision to migrate and the process of migration into the following four categories: factors that are related to the area of origin, those associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. Push factors at the country of origin act to motivate migration, such as a lack of economic opportunities, education, etc. In contrast, pull factors at the destination country attract migrants, such as work opportunities and availability of jobs. According to this theory, personal factors are crucial, because, instead of the actual factors associated with the place of origin, the individual's perception of these factors has been found to influence the actual act of migration. Although the hypotheses derived from each theory are not necessarily contradictory, they carry different policy implications. Drawing on these theoretical perspectives, we may argue that the prospect of employment and better life outcomes in a destination country is one of the major factors in young people's aspirations to migrate.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is well-known that migration is not caused by a group of interacting effects related to demographic, social, and economic factors (Hansen, 2003). Empirical studies have examined factors associated with young people's migration aspirations. In view of that, the literature suggests a variety of reasons underpinning the migration intentions of youth. Examining the push and pull factors, migration research has relied on migration aspirations as a guiding indicator of migration. In this respect, an interdisciplinary approach addressing both the societal and individual levels with the implementation of migration models (Tabor & Milfont, 2014) is a comprehensive approach to understanding migration aspirations and decisions. The forces of migration were traditionally divided into two categories: push out of the place of residence, which means negative forces at the country of origin, and pull factors, which means pull factors that attract potential migrants and constitute positive factors at the destination (Bogue, 1977). Understanding the reasons behind young people's aspiration for migration is crucial to address individual factors influencing the migration process. Individual characteristics such as age, sex, social status, and educational background are some of the factors that influence migration aspirations.

Demographic Determinants

Studies have shown differences in migration aspirations among individuals with various demographic characteristics. Gender remains a fundamental social relation that impacts migration aspirations and patterns, including labor migration (Sotelo, 2013). For example, a study on migration aspiration among young people in Egypt found that migration aspiration among young people aged 15-29 years was found to decrease as age increased.

Young men were more likely to consider migration than young women (Elbadawy, 2010), whereas other studies have also found that unmarried youth were more likely to aspire to migrate compared to married youth (Etling, Backeberg, & Tholen, 2018; Czaika, & Vothknecht, 2014). Another study analyzing the motivations and intentions of Senegalese youth found that migration was highly prevalent among young men, and poverty was also a strong driving force (Cross, 2009), whereas contrary to other research findings, this study found that Senegalese married men were more likely to consider migration.

On the other hand, age is a relevant factor for the intention of youth to migrate. Several studies examining the migration aspirations among young people aged 15-29 indicate that the younger a person is, the higher the possibility to aspire migration (Roman & Vasilescu, 2016; Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014). Similarly, a study in Albania found that the intention to migrate is more notable among the younger generation under 40 (Gedeshi & King, 2018), and it is the highest among those aged 27–30 years. Another study found prevailing gender relations to influence reasons for migration so that young men aspire to go abroad for better employment opportunities and standard livelihood. In contrast, young women tend to do so for personal security. Residency is another important factor in migration aspirations among youth. A longitudinal study comparing changes in migration expectations among youth in rural communities in Iceland (Seyfrit et al., 2010) found that rural youth increasingly desired to move to urban areas or abroad, regardless of employment opportunities in their communities. Another study found differences in the mobility type among Western European and Eastern European youth, with the former preferring mobility for work-related reasons (Dabasi-Halász, Lipták, Kiss, Manafi, Marinescu, Roman, Lorenzo-Rodriguez, 2019).

Socioeconomic Determinants

According to Canache et al. (2013), the economic, demographic, and sociological factors are the most essential dimensions in most approaches that study migration aspirations. People tend to be influenced by economic factors and make their decisions considering the socio-economic and educational conditions of the country. Being unemployed, in vulnerable employment, or dissatisfied with the prevailing economic conditions significantly increases the wish to migrate (Etling et al., 2018), and it involves planning followed by a process of evaluations of the costs of staying with the benefits of migrating (Neumayer, 2005). The high unemployment rate among young people in the country of residence serves as a push factor to migration aspirations (Haug, 2008; Singh, Salunkhe, Patil, 2021). A study examining the economic and cultural determinants of migration showed that the migration of young people is typically connected with the problematic transition to adulthood in situations where jobs are insecure and difficult to obtain in the primary labor market segment (Horvath, 2008). Another study found that highly educated youth are more affected by the favorable economic conditions in the host countries, whereas the push economic factors influence those less educated in their home countries (Globermaa & Shapiro, 2008).

Moreover, the negative perceptions of personal living conditions significantly increase migration aspirations (Van Dalen & Hankens, 2008). A qualitative study in Ghana exploring the intentions for migration among final-year university students revealed that improved standard of living, employment opportunities, and the prospects for further education featured prominently in participants' discourses about intended migration (Dako-Gyeke, 2015). Moreover, worrying about the prospects was generally a push factor for migration aspirations among youth (Elbadawy, 2011).

Political Determinants

Discontent experienced in the home country concerning economic and political developments is cited as a strong push factor in migration (Pinger, 2010), and discontent with public institutions along with the services provided by the government is a significant driver of migration (Van Dalen, & Hankens, 2008). A qualitative study by

Bygnes and Filipo (2017) showed that political factors highly impact the migration intentions and decisions among young people, whereas a case study of the determinants of migration from Ukraine identified high perceived corruption as a significant driving force of migration among youth (Lapshyna, 2014). Similarly, another study examining the political dimensions of young people’s migration intentions in the Arab Mediterranean region found that young people who think corruption is a problem in their country tend to have higher migration intentions (Etling et al., 2018). In examining the influence of corruption on migration, longitudinal studies between 1985 and 2000 in 111 countries demonstrated that corruption is among the main push factors of migration among youth, especially fueling skilled migration (Dimant, Krieger, & Meierrieiks, 2013).

4. METHODS

Participants and Procedure

The current study aims to examine the impact of demographic, socioeconomic, and political determinants on young people’s intention to migrate aged 14 to 29, using a secondary data analysis of the survey conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) of Kosovo youth, which has been conducted from 2018-2019, with 1200 participants. This study is part of an international youth research project carried out simultaneously in ten countries in Southeast Europe, including Kosovo. The study aims to present the perceptions and perspectives of young people between the ages of 14 and 29 concerning lifestyle, family values, political participation, education, employment, mobility, and relations with neighboring countries from the youth perspective.

Measures

The dependent variable in the subsequent analysis is the individual’s response to the question: how strong is your desire to move to another country for more than six months (emigrate)? The answer options were: (a) I do not intend to migrate, (b) weak, (c) moderate, (d) strong, and (e) very strong. The study used different indicators to examine their impact on migration aspirations. Table 1 presents the summary statistics of the variables included in the descriptive.

Table 1 Summary statistics of the variables

Variable	Freq.	Mean (SD)	Interpretation
Wish to migrate	1172	2.60 (1.56)	How strong is your desire to move to another country for more than six months (emigrate)? 1 = I do not intend to migrate, 2=Weak, 3=Moderate, 4=Strong, 5=Very strong.
Age groups	1200	2.10 (.77)	Age groups: 1 = under 17, 2=18-23, 3=24-29.
Gender	1200	1.53 (.50)	Equal to 1 if respondent is female.
Residency	1200	1.41 (.50)	Equal to 1 if respondent lives in rural areas.
Marital status	1198	0.14 (.35)	Equal to 0 if respondent is not married.
Employment status	1174	7.43 (2.51)	Answers range from 1 = I have a permanent contract for a full-time job, to 9 = I have no job and currently not looking for a job.
Perceived socioeconomic status	1181	3.11 (.69)	In comparison to people of your age in Kosovo: how much money do you have for your personal needs? Answers range from: 1 = Much below average to: 5= Much above average.
Government	1149	1.91 (1.08)	How far do you trust National Government? Answers range from 1 = Not at all, to 5 = Fully.

Variable	Freq.	Mean (SD)	Interpretation
Having no job	1159	2.10 (.81)	1 = Not at all, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = A lot.
Social injustice	1167	2.07 (.80)	1 = Not at all, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = A lot
Corruption	1168	2.37 (.76)	1 = Not at all, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = A lot
Personal future	1119	2.87 (.41)	How do you see your future in 10 years? 1 = Worse than now, 2= Same, 3 = Better than now.
Country's future	1084	2.57 (.69)	How do you see the future of Kosovo in general? 1 = Worse, 2 = Same, 3 = Better
National pride	1124	4.14 (1.26)	I am proud to be a citizen of Kosovo. Five Likert scale. Equal to 1 if disagree, and equal to 5 if agree.
Voting	1038	1.13 (.34)	If elections for the national parliament were to be held and you would be eligible to vote, would you go to vote? 1 = Yes, 2=No.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Results

Results of initial descriptive analyses showed that young people were on average 21.17 (SD = 4.41) years of age. Among all youth 14-29 years old, 50% of them expressed moderate (15.5%), strong (17.4%), and very strong desire to migrate (17.1%). A high percentage of young people wish to migrate for good (41.7%), whereas migrate for less than a year (21.9%) of them.

Male and female youth differed in their aspiration to migrate, in that 46.8% of females and 53.16% of male youth aspire migration. Moreover, male youth from urban areas are slightly more likely to aspire migration (55.2%) compared to those in rural areas (48.2%). The desire to migrate is highest among the group of unemployed youth (49.6%), and the economic reasons such as: (a) improved standards of living, and (b) better employment opportunities were reported as the main reasons for migration by 66.8% of young people. A remarkable 72.5% of migration aspiring youth reported that they would accept a job that is less desired by the local population, whereas, among young people who have a very strong aspiration to migrate, this is even higher (82.8%).

Linear Regression Results

A linear regression was run to predict aspiration to migrate (dependent variable) based on demographic, socioeconomic and political determinants, as shown in Table 2.

Demographic determinants. The findings related to respondents' age, gender, marital status, and residency yielded interesting results. With respect to age, there was no significant difference among participants in their aspiration to migrate ($p = .96$), whereas regression analysis showed that being a male was significant predictor of the wish to migrate, $\beta = .242$, $t = 2.64$, $p = .008$. With respect to marital status, regression analysis showed that being married was negatively correlated with the higher wish to migrate, $\beta = -.363$, $t = -2.83$, $p = .005$. Similarly, there was no significant difference among youth from rural and urban areas in their wish to migrate.

Socioeconomic determinants. The findings related to respondents' perceived socioeconomic status showed no significant difference among young people based on their perceived socioeconomic status, $\beta = -.027$, $t = -.914$, $p = .361$, meaning that it was not the poorest young people who were more likely to think about leaving the country. However, employment status was a significant predictor of young people's aspirations to

migrate, $\beta = .361$, $t = 17.63$, $p = .803$, meaning that those who were unemployed reported higher migration aspirations.

Political determinants. The results of this study did not show a strong point toward a relationship between political discontent and a higher wish to migrate. The lack of trust in the government was not a significant determinant of higher migration aspiration among young people, $\beta = -.064$, $t = 2.149$, $p = .032$. The findings indicated that being not concerned about having no job, $\beta = .164$, $t = 5.58$, $p < .005$, was a significant predictor of higher migration aspirations. Similarly, concern about corruption was a significant predictor of higher aspiration to migration, $\beta = .143$, $t = 4.88$, $p < .005$, and concern about social injustice was a significant predictor of higher aspiration to migrate, $\beta = .166$, $t = 5.675$, $p < .005$. Concerns and hopes about their personal future was not a significant predictor in migration aspirations among young people, $\beta = .039$, $t = 1.317$, $p = .18$. However, concerns and hopes about the country's future was a significant predictor in migration aspirations among young people, $\beta = -.140$, $t = 4.57$, $p < .005$. With respect to plans for voting in the next national elections, those who reported higher voting intentions in the future showed significantly lower migration aspirations, $\beta = .082$, $t = 2.63$, $p = .009$. Lastly, national pride was the strongest predictor of migration aspiration among youth, $\beta = -.158$, $t = 5.323$, $p < .005$, meaning that higher national pride is negatively correlated to higher aspirations to migrate.

Table 2 Results of linear regression

Linear regression results					
Variable	β	SE	Beta	t	p
Demographic determinants					
Respondent's age	.000	.010	.001	.047	.963
Respondent's sex	.242	.091	.077	2.647	.008
Residency	.087	.093	.027	.931	.352
Married	-.363	.128	-.083	-2.831	.005
Socioeconomic determinants					
Employment	-.039	.047	-.024	-.817	.414
Perceived socioeconomic status	-.061	.067	-.027	-.914	.361
Political determinants					
Trust in government	-.092	.043	-.064	-2.149	.032
Having no job	.316	.057	.164	5.587	.000
Social injustice	.327	.058	.166	5.675	.000
Corruption	.295	.060	.143	4.880	.000
Personal future	.093	.071	.039	1.317	.188
Country's future	-.325	.071	-.140	-4.596	.000
National pride	-.200	.038	-.158	-5.323	.000
Voting	.381	.145	.082	2.623	.009

Dependent Variable: How strong is your desire to move to another country for more than six months?

6. CONCLUSION

Migration aspirations among youth may be strong determinants of actual migration, and the unfulfilled aspirations are important and should be taken seriously into consideration, especially in a society where every second young person wants to migrate. The prediction of future migration behavior based on migration aspirations seems to be a useful construct, and studies have found that intentions can be a valuable predictor of actual migration (van Dalen, & Henkens, 2008). Although, the ability to completely predict migration is not possible, this study has provided valuable information about the

determinants of migration aspirations among young people in Kosovo. Kosovo has one of the largest percentage of people living abroad in the world in terms of the scale, and intensity of international migration. Migration continues and it's likely to do so in the future. This conclusion is supported by the limited statistics on ongoing flows, and by the existing potential migration surveys, that show migration intentions among young people to be as high as 50%. The findings of this study add to a growing body of research about determinants of migration aspirations among young people, especially those in developing countries and new democracies.

Demographic Determinants

This study demonstrated that every second young person in Kosovo aged 14-29 has a moderate to very strong desire to migrate, and approximately half of them want to leave for good, and illustrate the pervasiveness of this phenomenon. The age group of this study represents a new generation of Kosovo's population, and for those above the age of 20 it represents the first generation that came after the war. Migration aspirations of this new generation fueled by economic stagnation and lack of perspective are strong. The results showed that young men have higher aspirations to migrate, compared to young women, and supports the literature on migration aspiration that male youth typically are more likely to migrate (Roman, & Vasilescu, 2016; Ebadawy, 2010). These results also point to traditional gender roles in Kosovo, where men have historically been expected to be breadwinners, while the role of girls and women relates largely to the reproductive and care provider roles in the family. As expected, youth who are not married, showed significantly higher migration aspirations, and there was also no difference among young people living in rural and urban areas.

Socioeconomic Determinants

Being unemployed and actively looking for a job was significantly correlated with higher aspirations to migrate. This supports the research in examining the reasons behind youth migration, demonstrating that a quest for better economic opportunities was a significant motive among youth (Agadjanian, Nedoluzhko, & Kumskov, 2014). In general, there was no difference among youth migration aspiration and perceived economic status, pointing out that it is not the poorest young people who are more likely to migrate. However, being somewhat above average with respect to economic status was strongly associated with moderate aspirations to migrate. However, there was no difference among various perceived economic situations among youth in other levels of migration aspiration. These findings shed light not only for the reasons for migration, but also the characteristics of potential migrants. Thus, harsh economic conditions are not the only reason for wanting to leave. Instead, those who have a better economic background might have easier access to information related to migration opportunities and may also be more likely to realize their aspirations to migrate in the future.

Political Determinants

Contrary to what has been hypothesized, lack of trust in government was not significantly associated with higher aspirations to migrate. The hypothesis that weak national pride will be strongly associated with higher aspirations to migrate was supported, and thus supports previous research that demonstrated that young people who are proudest of their nationality are less likely to migrate (Bastianon, 2019; Bjarnasona, & Thorlindsson, 2006). As expected, young people who intend to vote in the next national elections had lower aspirations to migrate. This may be explained from a perspective that those who plan to stay in the home country are therefore more inclined to vote, have more trust that their voice will be heard by the decision-makers, and do not consider migration as a viable option.

The hypothesis that young people who are more concerned about having no job, social injustice and corruption will exhibit higher migration aspirations was not supported.

However, those who reported less concern about the above issues, also reported less aspiration to migrate. It is difficult to interpret the reasons behind these findings. However, one explanation may be that they do not consider them as issues at all, or they may feel apathetic towards these issues.

In general, young people in Kosovo tend to be generally positive about their personal future. Expectations about personal future was not a factor in migration aspirations, whereas low expectations about the positive development of the country significantly increased aspirations to migrate.

Limitations

The findings of this study must be seen in the light of several limitations. The data used for this research was part of a large youth study, where migration was one component of the study. The effect that previous questions may have had may have influenced how the respondents answered the questions on migration aspirations. The role of the family as an important push or pull factor in migration aspirations has been impossible to evaluate due to the lack of variables asking about this relationship. Given that young people in Kosovo go through a long and delayed process of transition to adulthood, the role of parents in their system of thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes on various social processes is vital, including their impact on migration aspirations.

Lastly, the results of this study add to the body of knowledge on the impact of various determinants in the migration aspiration process. Future studies should examine how social and economic factors correlate with migration aspirations and how the perceived hopelessness to meaningfully contribute to changing the country's situation impacts young people's higher aspirations to migrate.

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