Report on emigration trend in Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Introduction**

The trend of emigration of inhabitants, especially youth from Bosnia and Herzegovina is becoming more and more emphasized. Overall globalization as well as transnational character of European Union followed by visa-free regime which is on force for Bosnia and Herzegovina inhabitants since 2011 have enabled this trend, so that migrations, looking for opportunities for better life are easier and more expressed than ever. Main reasons for leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina are poor economy reflecting mainly in inability to find decent or any permanent job, very bad political situation, corruption and overall uncertainty. Last but not least, nepotism and endemic corruption practices best serve the interests of the current status quo, and push those outside of these networks to leave. On the other hand we have growing need of EU countries for labor. For example Germany had signed an accord with several Balkan countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, authorizing the employment of up to 250,000 people from the region in its health sector by 2020. According to the information based on the research conducted by Union for sustainable return the main reasons that more than 150.000 persons have permanently left Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2013 have economic and political nature because significant number of young persons and highly educated do not see perspective nor security. This all is mainly due to the fact that political environment and nationalistic ideologies that have marked past decades in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have tendency to get changed during following decades or even more. One individual from Bosnia and Herzegovina clearly stated that they do not plan on returning to Bosnia and Herzegovina after having recently emigrated, as corruption ‘is taking over’ and they do not see a future for themselves in the current system. The local Transparency International (TI) office in Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that this opinion is shared by Bosnians at a much larger scale. Citizens here consider corruption as one of the main problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a strong emphasis on corruption in the employment sector. Overall, corruption in employment in the public sector accounts for more than half of the official reports.

**Current status**

Massive emigration from Bosnia and Herzegovina is a problem for long time now, since the fact now is that whole families are leaving. Perhaps not coincidentally, 2016 marks the year that the German Embassy in Sarajevo has reached one of the highest numbers of visa applications in the world. Considering the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a small country, with only 3.8 million registered residents, it represents an extremely large volume of applications. The embassy has reported that it has 50 appointments for work visas every day, each booked 14 weeks in advance. Young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina can also apply to undertake vocational training in Germany, which allows them to legally work at the same time as they earn a qualification. This opens doors to more people, as university is not the sole option to gain relevant skills for a visa. According to the official data, elaborate in Information on emigration status done by Ministry of human rights and refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina 23,9 percent of recent emigrants are highly educated and 11,1 are doctors which puts this country on the first place in Europe and world. According to this document, 1.671.177 persons born in Bosnia and Herzegovina already live outside of the country, primarily due to the war and post war migrations. Percentage of emigration from Bosnia and Herzegovina compared to total number of inhabitants in the country is 44. This puts Bosnia and Herzegovina in the group of countries with the highest number of emigration compared to number of inhabitants. New wave of emigration taking places now is certainly worsening overall situation. Emphasizing statistic data in the country and abroad, researchers conducted by experts in the field, data provided by UNDP, UNHCR and World bank, , this Ministry stresses that the most concerning is continuity of emigration process. The main actors in this process are mainly young and educated persons with average age of 40, what makes this the biggest demographical problem in this country. Nowadays, Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing much higher emigration of inhabitants compared to other countries in the region. According to the newest data provided by World bank Bosnia and Herzegovina , with the percentage of emigration of 44,5% is way ahead of Serbia (18%) and Croatia (20.9%), and even Albania (43,6%) which for years has been leading country in Europe based on percentage of emigration compared to total number of inhabitants in the country.

The fact that more and more people are permanently leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina proves that emigration is certainly becoming trend in this country. To understand this more clearly, one has to have in mind that in past few years this all started by emigration of inhabitants of Bosnian Croat nationality living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Having double citizenship enabled them to first move to Croatia which offered them better job opportunities. As the inhabitants of Croatia got visa-free regime for entering European Union countries, this at the same time enabled citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina with Bosnian Croat nationality to seek better future in EU. Furthermore, having Croatia become member of European Union, opened the possibility for Croats living in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to easier get permanent jobs in any EU country. The fact that a lot of people from Croatia are leaving their country and getting employed in Western Europe countries, also has reflection on situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, since due to above mentioned more and more persons started to seek employment opportunities in this country. Due to worsening of economic situation young people are leaving Croatia more and more. Some estimates predict that within ten years Croatia will have to receive at least 100.000 labor from abroad, in order to fix consequences of bed demographical and economical politics.

What is also important to mention here is the fact that during 1960s and 1970s a lot of people from this region, mainly men, left their homes and families and got employment in Western Europe, primarily Germany. The reason why this fact is mentioned here is because now those people are often raw models for the ones leaving now, because their work abroad enabled them to have better retirements and thus living conditions for themselves and their families. This also stands for the people that were forced to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina during the war and renewed their lives in other European countries. As those people still have strong connections with their country of origin and their visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina show that the overall living and income situation abroad is much better. Furthermore, as a consequence of large forced migration outflows during the war period in 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina is among the leading countries in terms of receiving remittances as a share of GDP. These remittance inflows are significant source of income for a large proportion of Bosnia and Herzegovina population. There is limited evidence on the use of remittances in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The evidence generally suggests that majority of remittances are being used for consumption. The most important purpose of remittances is to support parents and other family members.

The absence of progressive reforms and the bad ranking in the political management index is in part due to a lack of consensus within Bosnia’s institutional structures. In the current power sharing agreement, it is common that as one party pushes forward a reform, another vetoes it.

There is a visible lack of political will in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it occasionally still takes international intervention to initiate change processes. For example, it took an initiative from the British and German governments to move the Bosnian government from a state of stagnation, having repeatedly failed to agree on and to implement key terms required in the EU integration process. This included finding a compromise on some required reforms; notably, the implementation of the Sejdic and Finci vs BiH judgment, which would have abolished the institutional discrimination of minorities running for government office. The compromises, and push forward with the EU integration process, however, rested on the renewed promise of creating reforms. So far, these promises are yet to be fulfilled. In a recent interview, Christian Hellbach, German Ambassador to BiH, expressed his criticism and disappointment with the Bosnian political elite, regretting the fact that they put their nationalistic interests above those of their citizens, who want to see progress and reforms. The political deadlock which results from  ethnic-based party interests, poses a major barrier to finalizing agreements, which means reforms don’t get passed and seem to constantly be delayed. One solid example of this is one of the main requirements for BiH to achieve candidate status: a coordination mechanism, which seeks to ensure that the country as a whole can negotiate with EU. The governing parties of BiH, are yet to agree on this basic mechanism. The ambassador further stated that by institutionalizing nationalism instead of fighting it, BiH’s political elite have nothing of real importance to give to their own people. This current state of affairs only deepens the social and economic crisis.

**Impact on overall situation**

According to the projection of population movements in Europe, based on statistics from several influential American and international institutions, following decades are announcing troublesome demographical trends in this part of the world. The estimates based on the data provided by CIA, US chamber of commerce, US Biro of census and International data base, by 2050 the countries of European south and southeast will become emptier, while the counties of European northwest more crowded with people. According to this information by 2050 Bosnia and Herzegovina will have approximately eight percent less inhabitants than now. On the other hand Sweden will have growth of two million inhabitants, Norway and Belgium one million, Italy two, while France and United Kingdom will have four to five million inhabitants more than today.

In all this, the most concerning fact is continuing trend of expatriation, while the main actors are mainly young and educated persons, with the average 40 years of age, which currently is the biggest demographical problem in the country.

The main driving forces behind this trend are poor economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, bad politics, corruption and uncertainty. Even though more than twenty years have passed since the war conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the overall situation has not improved primarily looking at living condition and economic growth. The fact is that there are no major security problems is not in the first place among the inhabitants as they are now facing the problems related to inability to find any not to mention well paid job, or are facing problems with huge administration preventing normal development of good business ideas. Young people after finishing their education mainly are unable to find job and are not able to predict any future or plan normal living. Persons with families and children are scared about the future of their children and all this has huge influence on one’s decision to move and start living in EU countries.

As reported previously, the stock of emigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina is as large as a half of the population residing in the country, which is a substantial loss of the labor force. This had a severe impact on the demographic trends in the country, including the lowest fertility rate in the world, and ageing of population. The main characteristic of the labor market figures are a very low activity rate, which is about half of the EU average, and very high registered unemployment rates. Unemployment affects especially vulnerable and marginalized groups. That is one of the most significant policy issues in the field of economic development and labor that BiH is facing now. Unfortunately, the analysis of the active labor market programs reveals that there is no clear link between the vulnerable groups identified and groups targeted by these policies. According to the study of de Zwager and Gressmann (2010) on Bosnian emigrants, majority of migrants regularized their status in the countries of destination, which includes obtaining work permit. The main sectors of employment of these migrants in destination countries are construction, tourism and manufacturing. Large number of them had a job secured in the destination county prior to migration. (42% of migrants to the ex-Yugoslav countries, and 60% of migrants to the EU). The fact that they managed to secure a job prior to migration was mainly a result of strong migrant networks.

Skill mismatch is primarily created as a result of delayed reforms of the educational system, which does not yet take into account today’s labor market needs. Additional skills shortages are created as a consequence of the post-war ethnic and administrative division of the country that causes increased insecurity, ethnic discrimination of workers, and difficulties of transfer of social benefits between administrative territories. This results in very low mobility of labor force within the country. According to the available data from the BiH Labor and Employment Agency, the main number of work permits issued to foreigners in terms of their qualifications is to tertiary educated, such as university teachers, engineers, pharmacists, and IT programmers. A study by GEA (2011) has shown that one of the consequences of emigration is evidence of shortage of specific skills in the construction industry, as people with these skilles were attracted by opportunities in other countries.

Post conflict environments characterized by massive destruction of economy and disintegration of social threads, as experienced in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are featured with poverty and extreme social exclusion. Social exclusion and poverty are strongly correlated with actual and potential migration in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So far, no substantial study on the effects of migration on poverty and social exclusion has been conducted in the country, but the statistics on different vulnerable groups indicate that these groups are most prone to social exclusion and poverty and potentially most willing to migrate within and outside of the country.

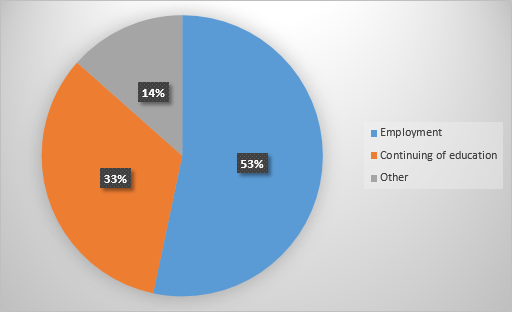
**Emigration of youth**

As in any future oriented and development country, special attention should be given to youth. Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina are persons between the age of 15 and 30. The number of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina is 777 000 (which is 315,000 less than in 1991 when it was 1.091.775).

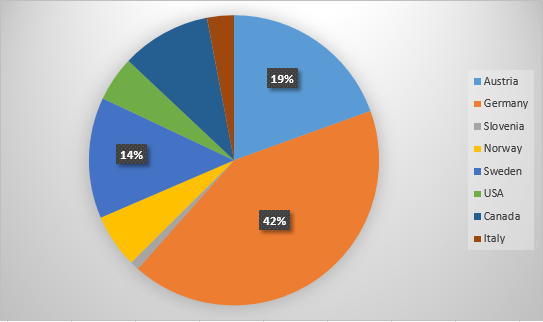
Following data is from the Study “Mass emigration of youth from BiH: looking for employment or escape from reality” made through cooperation of Center for election studies (CIS) and Foundation „Heinrich Böll“which aim was to emphasize and define problems related to mass emigration of youth from Bosnia and Herzegovina, trying to find out real reasons and causes forcing youth to leave looking for better and safer life.

Several methods were used during making of this study, including anonymous survey done among 140 persons within the age of 18 to 35, throughout the country that have left BiH or are planning to do so. Furthermore, in order to find out real reasons for emigration of youth from BIH, several focus group meetings were held with 10 voluntary participants from the same category.

*What are the reasons why you are planning to leave BiH?*



*In which country you are planning to go to?*



After huge migration changes caused by the war in BiH 1992-1995, number of emigrations from BiH during 2016 and 2017 is much bigger than during past years.

According to the age, unemployment is mostly characteristic among youngsters (62,3%). Based on Migration profile, most of inhabitants of BiH are not satisfied with living conditions in the country, and 50% of inhabitants would leave BiH and work abroad, what is at the same time the highest percentage compared to other Southeast Europe countries. What is also concerning is the fact that there is no institution in charged to deal with the reasons behind the fact that young people are leaving BiH.

Above mentioned survey conducted during making of the mentioned Study included eleven questions related to reasons why young persons are leaving from BIH, desired destination, problems with unemployment and existence or nonexistence of youth engagement in try to improve situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The survey showed that the main reason for emigration of young people is unemployment, but that overall social and economic environment, health care, state instability and other problems reported in media on daily basis, are one of the reasons why young people leave. Many of them (34%) have realized that educational system in BiH cannot guarantee secure employment, nor economic stability and therefore are planning to continue their education in other, developed countries.

In order to prevent this trend, nowadays we can see more and more non-governmental organizations trying to influence government to take measures and create framework and policies that will stop or reduce expatriation. As with everything in this country, their work is facing many obstacles and is very slow.

People are not leaving and are not ready to leave all of the sudden, and have put years of effort in try to get employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Survey conducted among young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina also shows that more than 50% of them have volunteered, were involved in activism and politics. Furthermore, a huge percent of them (79%) have voted regularly. Having this in mind it is obvious that by emigration of this population, Bosnia and Herzegovina is losing educated, politically aware young population, and that decision makers are not doing anything to try to keep them in the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina does not have any institution that is working on making of strategy to prevent emigration of young people. One of huge deficiencies in BiH, and one of the reasons of unemployment is poor connection between the education system with labor and employment sector and labor market. Therefore, education system as such educates labor that cannot find its place on labor market.

In order to decrease brain drain, particularly of youth, BiH should develop policies targeting this group. The specific policies targeting youth may include active labor market measures for youth, subsidies for purchase of apartments by young couples (which existed before the war), and other measures.

**Legal framework and recommendations**

Bosnia is predominantly a country of emigration. Despite that, the country does not have clearly defined policy regarding emigration of its nationals, neither policies aiming at attraction of return or other types of involvement of its diaspora in development of the country. Furthermore, policy-making processes in the country are highly influenced by the EU and international community’s support and push. Nevertheless, the adopted policies and legislation are largely not implemented due to lack of funds or motivation of the government to ensure quality implementation.

In order to create long term solution to this problem, a lot of work and effort is needed. But what is possible to do in near future is to try to raise awareness on importance of those problems and influence decision makers to foster reform of educational system and making of strategy for stopping the trend of emigration of young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

BiH should improve migration statistics, including both flow and stock data. International community, and EU in particular, could help countries in the region by providing them national level data on immigration besides the ones available through EUROSTAT, which could lead to establishment of consular registers of these countries in the main destination countries of their emigrants (mainly EU countries).

Once the statistical data are improved, support to research on the migration topics should be provided. BiH lacks research activities and capacities in general. High rates of emigration of PhD graduates combined with the fact that the R&D expenditures dropped from 1.6% before the war to 0.08% today make it necessary that the state government, with support of international donors, including the EU, should invest in research and capacity building, with key topics of research clearly identified (e.g. research of circular migration, mapping of diaspora in order to understand its potential, research of the use of remittances, or virtual return of highly educated emigrants). Cooperation between BiH and destination countries can also include activities that would improve cooperation of local higher education institutions and diaspora, by promoting joint research activities by Bosnians at home and abroad.

BiH does not yet have a migration policy developed. The current strategy of migration does not clearly present the state policy, and deals with immigration only, although the country is predominantly experiencing emigration. Additionally, besides having a number of different institutions dealing with different aspects of migration established, BiH still needs to create a coordination mechanism that would implement its migration policy

Policies related to increasing positive impact of emigration, targeting emigrants while they are still abroad, should focus on activities aiming at increasing links between diaspora and the home country. These activities are expected to result in the increased remittances inflows and stronger ties between the emigrant groups and the country. The coordination of the activities by different actors should be led by the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, or by the Ministry of Diaspora that needs to be established

Activities that would attract larger inflows and support channeling of remittances in productive investments, such as development of mutual funds between diaspora’s home country associations and local communities in the home country; establishment of diaspora development agency that would operate at the regional level and provide assistance to potential investors of the diaspora for starting businesses and investing in the home country while abroad;

There should also be policies aiming at promoting circular migration and attracting return of these emigrants. Current policies in place, such as complicated procedure of validation of formal qualifications gained abroad and lack of any support at return act rather as obstacles for return of Bosnian emigrants. The newly established state-level agency for higher education should take its role in removing this obstacle for return of highly skilled workforce. The BiH government could provide loans scheme with low interest rate for business start-ups by returnees. This could be supported by governments of destination countries as well

The EU also can take its role, particularly in terms of promotion of circular migration and return of migrants. EU member states should introduce labor market arrangements that would facilitate circular migration, through bilateral labor and social security agreements, such as the one signed between Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, allowing accumulation of periods of contributions for social security in different countries (EU and countries of origin of migrants), and allowing portability of pensions and other social benefits to circular migrants and returnees.

Finally, the government should focus on development of regions particularly severely hit by high rates of emigration and migration to other areas within BiH. Also, rural development and agricultural policies should be promoted in order to retain people in these areas. Incentives for highly skilled people to go to rural areas (particularly staff to work in local hospitals, school, businesses that generate large employment in these areas, and public administration) through active labor market policies should be provided.

**Consequences**

Bosnia’s brain drain and high emigration trends will not only affect its internal labor market, but will also have a negative impact on demographics and future political change. It is predicted that by 2030, BiH’s population will shrink by 5% due to a combination of factors, including negative net migration.

In long term, this trend is very specific, with dangerous consequences, since with losing of most productive and most educated population, the society is stagnating, motivation is getting weaker and for the countries that are not under any broader integrations this makes the ethnical divisions even stronger.

Consequently, as above mentioned, in years to come, Bosnia and Herzegovina will not only face decrease in number of inhabitants, but will soon become country of old people. The Balkans seem to be caught in a vicious circle: While young educated professionals are driven to leave by poor economic prospects, their departure further harms the struggling economies of their homelands.

Jasminka Džumhur, Ombudsman for Human Rights in BiH, recently quoted a Red Cross study which reveals that in 35 years, Bosnia’s population will be the oldest in the Balkans**.** Statistics are but a number, however, if the young leave, and the trend is not reversed, Bosnia could be left with the enormous task of supporting a population with an even smaller, tax playing labour force, and a large number of old, retired citizens. Such outcomes for states are unsustainable, and governments in Europe, particularly in Scandinavia, are already trying to reverse these trends. The German Ambassador to BiH is also of the opinion that the current migration trends, especially concerning young people, could lead to a demographic disaster. Moving towards a more productive governance system, which will seek to secure a better future for the country, requires great political change, but who will lead this? In general, a good number of people intending to leave are often employed, skilled, and have relative economic security, so their motivation to leave is further influenced by political factors, such as instability, corruption, lack of progress, and disillusionment with the state of democracy in Bosnia. The chance of much needed change diminishes when people who have an alternative vision for BiH’s future leave the country, whilst people comfortable with and privileged by the status quo remain, isolating the increasingly small minority of politically progressive Bosnians.

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