

Labour migrants between the Balkans and Slovenia: creating transnational social spaces

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Introduction

Slovenia attracts a lot of immigrants from the Balkans, making it thus not only affected by the emigration of Slovenian citizens but also by the immigration of citizens from Balkan countries. In the last 18 years, more foreigners have arrived in Slovenia than departed, while at the same time more Slovenian citizens have left the country than returned (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURŠ)). From the 1960s onwards, Slovenia was a magnet for workers from other parts of Yugoslavia and, even after disintegration of the former state, it continues to do so. Such labour migrants come mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina (40% of all migrants), Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Croatia (SURŠ).

The breakup of Yugoslavia resulted in new national borders, new social spaces and politics of belonging. The internal migration of Yugoslavia turned into international migration and migrants were faced with new politics of citizenship and state-building. As argued by Božić and Kuti (2016) due to methodological nationalism the research on migration neglected the social networks between migrants that had been developed before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, moreover the transnational turn in migration research in the West adopted an approach that overlooks migrant social spaces across and especially within internal borders before the emergence of new nation-states.

Literature on labour migration in the Slovenian academic arena is scarce. Not many authors have focused on labour migrants who come mainly from the Balkans. Two comprehensive

studies were published in the past 40 years: *Bosanci: A kuda idu Slovenci nedeljom* [Bosnians: And where do Slovenians go on Sunday] (Mežnarič 1986) and *Učinki priseljevanja v Slovenijo po drugi svetovni vojni* [Impacts of migration to Slovenia after the Second World War] (Josipovič 2006). A few shorter analyses have been made by scholars on integration policies for migrants (Pajnik 2007) and model of circular migration (Medica 2014). In recent years, authors (e.g. Kogovšek and Bajt 2016; Kogovšek Šalamon 2017; Pajnik 2017; Pušnik 2017) have mainly concentrated on refugees from the Middle East and been problematising the concept of illegal immigration, the perception of migrants and refugees in the public sphere, and the securitisation of migrations.

In the last three decades, labour migrants from former Yugoslavia were studied especially with regard to their legal status and citizenship due to a step taken by the Slovenian state after the country's independence when the Ministry of Interior 'erased' approximately 25,000 people from the register of permanent residents, then moving them to the register of foreigners (Mandelc and Učakar 2011)¹. Ješe Perkovič and Učakar (2017) wrote about how labour migrants were perceived by Slovenian citizens during the latest economic crisis (2008–2015), with the perception changing from negative to positive due to public revelations of abuses of immigrant workers by their local employers. Other literature focuses on emigration more than immigration to Slovenia, in particular researching the Slovenian diaspora. Yet, labour migration is clearly vital to the Slovenian state and its economic development. Labour migrants have contributed substantially to the country's economic success over the past 50 years, therefore making it important to address labour migration scientifically and in state policies.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the connection between the social networks and spaces created before the independence of Slovenia and the fact that Slovenia is a receiving country

¹ After the proclamation of Slovenia's independence in 1991 there was a 6-month window for lodging an application to become a citizen. Those people, mainly from other Yugoslav republics, who did not become Slovenian citizens, either because they did not apply for citizenship or their applications were rejected, were on the basis of the Law on Foreigners removed ('erased') from the Register of Permanent Residents and moved to the Register of Foreigners in February 1992. This act was done in an unconstitutional and illegal way because there should be an appropriate administrative procedure and these people should have been notified about it. The number of 'erased' persons was around 28,000 according to data from the Ministry of the Interior, of whom 10,000 left Slovenia and denounced their permanent residence, approximately 7,000 managed to acquire citizenship later on and 5,800 received a permit for permanent or temporary residence, while 4,200 persons did not manage to arrange any kind of status. Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, http://www.mnz.gov.si/si/novinarsko_sredisce/novica/6233/, last viewed 27/11/2018.

in the Balkans. We argue that the growth of migrants from the Western Balkans to Slovenia in the past thirty years is due to the legacy of internal migration in former Yugoslavia where social networks and social spaces were created and preserved even after the breakup of the common state. Moreover, a circular migration pattern helps maintain these transnational social spaces as it reinforces connections with the country of origin. The paper draws from primary and secondary documentation and 14 semi-structured interviews with first and second generation of migrants and their descendants from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Slovenia.

Circular Migration

The term circular migration has become a buzzword within European and international policy and academic circles since 2007, when the European Commission issued a Communication on mobility partnerships and circular migration. In this Communication, the Commission emphasized the advantages and challenges of circular migration, and it put forward specific policy ideas on how to implement it (see European Commission, 2007).

Circular migration is defined as “a repetition of legal migration by the same person between two or more countries” with examples given in the “Commission Communication on circular migration and mobility partnerships between the European Union and third countries” (ibid.). Circularity is not a unique characteristic of east-to-west migration in Europe, nor of contemporary times. If we come to define circularity as repetitive and temporary migrations, we see that such circuits of movement are at play in various parts of the world. (Triandafyllidou and Marchetti 2013, 342)

When talking about new, contemporary migration movements, we must keep in mind the new technological development, especially in telecommunications and transport, different lifestyles and consequently shrinking of the world due to globalisation processes. Mobility is increasing and job markets are expanding. Economic development in some countries is creating circumstances whereby domestic workers are unable to fill the domestic demand for work and foreign workers are needed, who come for a shorter or longer period of time from different parts of the world. In this setting, when economic development and competitiveness

dictate the pace of the globalised world, the concepts of population and migration are becoming very relative.

Circular migration is generally understood to be a top-down model imposed from international institutions onto individual migrants (ibid.). However, the case of Bosnian migrants to Slovenia shows how some mobility patterns are in fact spontaneously initiated by migrants themselves and not by policy makers. In these cases, migration policies may facilitate migrants' choices—or at any rate not discourage them. We look for the reasons for spontaneous circular migration in transnational social spaces.

The legacy of Yugoslav internal migrations

Migrations in the Balkans are closely linked to the political and socio-economic situation through history. Political entities in the Balkans have united and divided people, the borders have been frequently altered, thus the status of “inhabitant” has transformed to “immigrant” very quickly. Moreover, the different political entities entailed in the Habsburg Empire through to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Socialist Yugoslavia have led to different perspectives, needs and opportunities for migration within these entities.

The most important political and economic change that enabled the emergence of migrant transnationalism and later transnational social spaces took place in the 1960s. At the beginning of the 1960s when the Yugoslav state opened its borders and signed various agreements with different European countries to regulate the employment of Yugoslav workers (Stare 1977: 11-12), economic migration grew substantially and a special term was created: “temporary work abroad” (Stare 1977: 60). The migration model that developed involved circular migration, meaning that migrants intended to return home, as their families stayed in the country of origin. Germany established the “Gastarbeiter”² system in the 1960s, when workers were recruited and sent back on the employer's demand. This model is defined by partial social inclusion and citizenship exclusion (Medica 2014: 40). The model's main characteristic is that migrant workers are included in certain spheres of social life (especially the job market), but have no access to other spheres (citizenship, political participation, etc.).

² English: guest worker

Migration is perceived as a temporary phenomenon that should end with the migrants returning to their country of origin (ibid.).

However, Germany could not prevent the reunion of workers with their family members in the host country. Foreign work started to lose its mobile character and the state could not avoid the social costs, especially for health and education (ibid.). As Medica (ibid.: 41) points out, it became evident that the *Gastarbeiter* concept in Germany had been outlived and was thus socially and ethically unacceptable. According to the syntagma of the German sociologist Max Fischer: *Man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kommen Menschen* (A workforce was called, but people came), new practices that focused on integrating migrant workers and their families came to the fore. These practices encourage a two-way adaptation process: adapting the migrant community on one hand and the host society on the other. The image of guest worker was replaced with the image of a worker who stays permanently, creates a family, children are born and raised in the new environment, while ties with their home town are maintained. The promotion of this image became a response to the challenges posed by the need for different cultures to cohabit in society (ibid.).

Economic development had an immense impact on both internal and external migration as well as the composition of pluri-local social spaces within and beyond Yugoslav borders (Božić and Kuti 2016, 412). The migration of workers from Yugoslavia to other European countries triggered bigger internal migration within Yugoslavia. Migration flows within Yugoslavia were intensive as the state enabled the free movement of workers who were directed to different parts of the country, depending on the development level of each republic (Malačić 2008: 46). Workers from Slovenia who had migrated e.g. to Germany left empty work places behind while Slovenia's heavy industrialisation meant it needed a new workforce that came largely from the less developed rural areas across Yugoslavia. The migration flow to Slovenia was mainly a consequence of the industrial economic development most intensively occurring in the 1970s and 1980s (Kržišnik Bukić 2010: 502). Yet, migrant workers were also employed outside of the industrial sector. The country's labour needs principally dictated male migration, which was followed by family members (ibid.). The most numerous were workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina whereas the biggest ethnic groups were Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats (ibid.). The administrative borders between the republics of Yugoslavia did not pose "a barrier for the development of multiple and inter-locking social ties and pluri-local networks"

(Božić and Kuti 2016, 412). The communist party encouraged ties between different ethnic groups and facilitated social ties among the youth in all republics using the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” (ibid.). Social spaces across the borders of the republics developed particularly among members of the same ethnic group (ibid.). They were and partially still are enduring networks of exchange and support regardless of state boundaries (ibid.).

As Mandelc (2011: 146-147) analysed, between 1960 and 1980 over 115,000 people from other Yugoslav republics moved to Slovenia in a period when this was categorised as “internal migration” and was welcomed by Slovenians³. Bosniak migrants in Slovenia developed extensive networks with migrants and non-migrants, mainly wider family members as well as with members of local communities from which they emigrated (Božić and Kuti 2016, 414). The members of these networks exchanged resources, sent considerable remittances, facilitated migration, built houses in Bosnia, supported local communities and generally felt loyal towards family and community members wherever they resided. The intensity of exchange and transformation was short of contemporary interlocking migrant workers’ development only because of the missing advanced communication technologies, which would enable them to coordinate activities more frequently and participate in daily routines in several localities. Albanian migrant communities developed in a similar way. They became even more mobile and interconnected than Bosniaks because of the structure of their entrepreneurial activities and families. (ibid.)

Re-organisation of transnational social spaces

With the emergence of globalisation studies, the theory of transnational migration, which introduces the concept of transnational social spaces, has developed based on the theory of network migration and systemic migration theory, and importantly influences understanding of how migration affects the source and receiving countries (Kurekova 2010: 5-6). For a long time, the main assumption in the theory was that staying in touch with one’s community in one’s country of origin was an obstacle to migrants’ opportunities in the country of

³ It was at the end of the 1980s, when Yugoslavia was in a deep economic and political crisis, that public opinion polls in Slovenia detected intolerance and a nationalistic discourse aimed at these migrants. (Mandelc 2011: 146-147). This negative attitude continued through the transition in the 1990s when the Slovenian state engaged in a politics of exclusion (the case of the Erased).

immigration by supposedly hindering integration into the immigrant society. At that time, patterns of migration were seen as immigration – accommodation – integration, as merely a movement from one stable community to another (Morokvasić, 2008, 8). Yet, a new perspective began to form in theories of transnationalism, one that views these ties as invaluable because they construct a space for exchanges, social innovation, and transformation (Morokvasić, 2008). Today, most research on migration draws attention to the importance of the continuity of the migration experience. Individuals establish certain capital, knowledge and friendships, and become experienced in migration, which then becomes part of their lives. The focus on immigration as a permanent settlement shifted to cross-border practices and the transnational lives of those who fall into the “permanently settled” category (Morokvasić, 2008).

The disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991 put internal migrants in a new position; they became transnational migrants and were no longer citizens of the country they resided in. Their social spaces changed although they did not physically move – they became transnational social spaces due to the new international borders on the territory of former Yugoslavia. Accordingly, transnationalism is a process in which migrants create and preserve multiple social relations that connect their society of origin and their new society. Transnational societies and transnational social spaces offer possibilities for creating survival strategies in new societies (Kralj 2008: 150–152).

New transnational migrants had to adjust their mental maps to the politics of belonging and a fact that they were not living in their home country anymore. Suddenly, these migrants became more visible as aliens. This new reality led to a terrible violation of human rights: if they did not apply for the Slovene citizenship, they were erased from the permanent residence register by Slovenian state. However, the first generation of migrants from the 1970s, have not perceived themselves as migrants, because they moved within their own country, Yugoslavia. They have also integrated very well into the Slovene society as did their children. They preserve certain customs, especially with regards to religion, although most of them are not very religious, but they feel that Slovenia is their home.

In addition, Slovenia faced a heavy influx of war refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which increased the size and visibility of migrant population in the new nation-

state. Unlike in Croatia, where Bosniaks and Albanians gained a political status as an “autochthonous national minority”, which gave them the right to be represented in the Parliament (Božić and Kuti 2016, 418), in Slovenia all ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia have had no special political status. The only form of officially organized community has been the religious one. Bosniaks and Serbs registered their religious communities, Muslim and Orthodox respectively, in which they organize themselves as a community, keep their transnational ties with homeland and migrant communities around the world and get financial support from Slovenian state, but have no political influence. These communities are not homogenous, but rather very heterogenous within themselves and therefore have problems in organizing themselves in a more active political group.

In the 21st century Slovenia’s new political reality of EU membership and the Schengen zone not only transformed the former fellow citizens of other republics of former Yugoslavia into third-country foreigners, but also made their access to the job market much harder with a new visa regime (Malačič 2010: 91). Moreover, the inadequate integration policies in Slovenia or the lack of them saw immigrant workers and their families facing exclusion, discrimination and intolerance based on their nationality and culture (Mandelc 2011: 147). However, during the last economic crisis (2008–2015) the perception of labour migrants in Slovenia partially changed. The economic crisis and collapse of the construction sector in Slovenia left many workers without a job and many irregularities engaged in by employers were revealed. Employers had not been paying the social security and health insurance of their workers, their wages were several months late, with such wrongdoings not only affecting migrant workers but also Slovenian citizens (Ješe Perković and Učakar 2017). The media images of abused (migrant) workers and bankrupt companies that were once national icons also influenced the public’s attitude to these workers, especially those from former Yugoslavia. Hence, the public strongly reacted to these wrongdoings and sympathised with the workers (ibid.).

The characteristics of transnational patterns of mobility were already created during the internal migrations in Yugoslavia, although back then they could not be called transnational. With new physical borders, the terminology changed but the patterns have remained similar. The transnational character of families from the previous migrant generations continues in the present even more explicitly due to the new communication technologies, which enables

them to communicate with their home community and other transnational communities of their ethnic group on a daily basis. They utilise their social capital in order to give or receive any form of support in their country of immigration and in their homeland (Božić and Kuti 2016, 417). Moreover, even second or third generation of immigration families are still active in maintaining social and family ties in their homeland community.

New migrants from the Western Balkans use the wide social network created by their families, friends and also associations who help them arrive and accommodate in Slovenia. They too create transnational social space by often going back to their homeland. Especially workers in construction sector, who are mainly men from Bosnia and Herzegovina, have families in their home country and return home on a weekly or biweekly basis.⁴ For Bosnian migrants a strong connection with the country of origin has been enabled by the circular migration pattern, which has been encouraged by a bilateral agreement between Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2012.

Transnational social spaces between the Western Balkans and Slovenia have been created since Yugoslavia and have continued to exist as new labour migrants arrive to Slovenia and as migrant descendants preserve the connections with their country of origin. These social spaces have been shaped by the changing of borders and by new citizenship politics, however they have been constantly reinvented.

Immigration and Integration in Slovenian Legislation

In 1999, the Slovenian National Assembly adopted a resolution on immigration policy. The pluralistic model of integration advocated by this resolution was reconfirmed in a resolution on migration policy from 2002. This resolution relies on a pluralistic (multicultural) model of Slovenian integration policy, which provides for migrants' equal inclusion in Slovenian society while preserving their cultural identity. This model seems a logical choice since it takes account of the multicultural society in Slovenia and builds on the principles of equality, freedom and mutual cooperation (Medica 2014: 46). Further, the rights to freedom of expression of one's ethnicity, culture and use of one's mother tongue are guaranteed to migrants. The prohibition on discrimination and equality before the law are already

⁴ With all the constraints of the covid-19 measures this migration has been heavily obstructed in the past year.

guaranteed in Slovenia by the Constitution, although there are currently no programmes in place for the active prevention of discrimination of migrants in different areas of social life in Slovenia (ibid.: 47).

Before September 2015, the Slovenian legislation prescribed three different types of work permit of which only one actually gave a foreign worker the chance to become an immigrant; namely the 'permanent work permit' which was associated with a permanent residence permit (Malačič 2010: 92). The other two were actually more strongly connected to circular migration: employment permit and permit for seasonal work, which was simply called 'work permit'. Both were limited to one year and had to be renewed.

On 1 September 2015 the Employment, Self-employment and Work of Foreigners Act came into force and introduced a 'single permit'. The single permit allows foreign nationals from third countries to enter Slovenia and find a residence, employment and work in Slovenia. Applicants for the permit are now able to take advantage of a simpler procedure at the administrative unit according to the one-stop-shop principle. Foreign nationals coming to Slovenia with the aim of finding employment, self-employment or work thus no longer need two separate permits. The single permit joins and replaces the residence permit issued by administrative units and the work permit which was issued by the Employment Service of Slovenia.

Non-EU citizens can only find employment in Slovenia if they previously obtained a single residence and work permit at a consular or diplomatic office in their home country. The single permit procedure is managed by administrative units but requires the Employment Service of Slovenia's approval, which is granted – provided the legal requirements for that particular approval are met.⁵ Medica (ibid.: 42) states that migrant workers are poorly informed about their rights in Slovenia, which are equivalent to the rights held by Slovenian citizens. The state has no regulation on living conditions for migrant workers in place, hence this is an area where we can find the most inhumane conditions.

Due to past experiences and needs of the Slovenian economy, migrant workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina are given special treatment under a bilateral agreement signed by Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012. The agreement has been in force since 1 March 2013

⁵ Employment Service of Slovenia,
http://english.ess.gov.si/the_info_point_for_foreigners/working_in_slovenia

and reflects ethical recruitment and a reduction of brain drain and envisions the elimination of administrative barriers when employing citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also protects the rights of migrant workers while stressing the need for migrant workers to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina after the expiry of their work permit (Uradni list RS).

When Slovenia experienced the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016, the National Assembly adopted a new version of the Law on Aliens⁶ in line with EU directives in January 2017. For the purpose of our discussion, we highlight that part of the law which considers mobile workers and implements two EU directives 2014/36/EU and 2014/66/EU (MNZ 2017: 16). The latter directive sets out the EU's objectives of enabling multinational companies to make the best use of their human resources and to make it easier to transfer their workers within affiliated companies. Directive 2014/66 / EU provides the conditions for a single permit to be granted to persons transferred within a related company established in a third country, the Republic of Slovenia or another EU member state. One key innovation is the introduction of a mobility system within the EU whereby the holder of a valid single authorisation issued by one member state, who is transferred within a multinational company, can enter and work in another or several EU countries. In so doing, we distinguish short-term mobility, i.e. relocation within a corporation lasting up to 90 days, and long-lasting mobility, i.e. a transfer that lasts longer (over 90 days) (MNZ 2017: 16-17).

Integrational policies in Slovenia

The integration of foreigners into Slovenian society is governed by the *Law on Aliens* but it is the *Regulation on the methods and extent of the provision of assistance programmes in the integration of foreigners who are not nationals of the European Union* that defines the ways and extent of the provision of the assistance programmes. With the intention of supporting foreigners' integration into Slovenian society, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) finances the programme "Initial integration of immigrants" – a Slovenian language learning programme that includes contents on Slovenian history, culture and constitutional arrangements. Third-country nationals are enabled to take the first exam in the Slovenian language at the

⁶ In public debates, the new version of the Law on Aliens was perceived as highly controversial by being out of step with human rights principles. The new law enables the quick and effective treatment of foreigners who do not meet the conditions to enter the Republic of Slovenia or who illegally entered the country.

elementary level for free. Participation in the Slovenian language course is voluntary. Employers hiring third-country nationals for heavy physical work do not require workers to possess knowledge of the Slovenian language since these foreign workers often come from linguistically and historically related countries. Moreover, since the majority works in the construction sector where the deadlines are very tight, they do not have time for integration and a language course. This means that migrant workers from the Western Balkans usually do not attend the language course or rely on any other integrational assistance the state offers. Hence, the integration strategy remains confined to paper and is not being translated into practice. The Ministry of Labour regards as a crucial challenge the use of Slovenian language when foreigners work in a sector where they come into contact with customers (European Migration Network 2018: 2), usually in tourism, and due to the job market circumstances foreigners without basic knowledge of the Slovenian language are being hired.

There is a wide gap between the state's *Strategy of economic migrations 2010-2020* that emphasises the desire to attract a highly qualified workforce with added value and the reality of mostly foreign workers with a vocational and secondary education being employed. Slovenia should therefore design an integration policy and a policy on circular migration that support these migrant workers in working and living in Slovenia and also think how to attract more qualified workers. In the *Report on inclusion of third-country nationals into the job market of EU member states (National report for Slovenia)* prepared by the European Migration Network (ibid.), the Ministry of Labour emphasises that the majority of workers who arrive in Slovenia come for a shorter period of time with no intention of staying permanently. The Ministry of Labour and the Employment Service of Slovenia explain that no measures are in place to facilitate or encourage the employment of third-country nationals – except for the “Initial Integration of Immigrants” programme, which aims not only to support third-country nationals’ integration into the labour market, but generally their inclusion in society (ibid., 22). Integrational measures are only taken when foreigners have already arrived in Slovenia, while no pre-integrational measures have been established so far. The Ministry also emphasises that migrant workers lack knowledge of the work legislation, their rights and duties, but also basic, functional competencies such as opening a bank account, access to healthcare, etc. (ibid.). The Ministry of Labour states the country needs a separate strategy paper for the integration of third-country nationals into the labour market (ibid.). A

comprehensive strategy in the field of integration should go beyond the measures that apply when a foreigner is already in the country, while the introduction of pre-integrational measures and integration measures should be designed to encompass more than simply learning the Slovenian language.

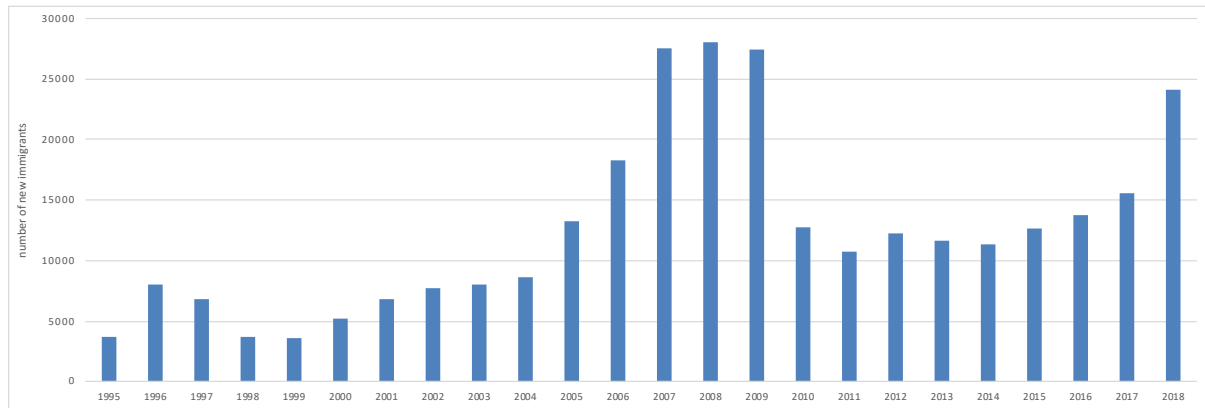
According to the analysed documents and statistics, we conclude that Slovenia inclines to the circular migration model for the workers from the Western Balkans. However, for those migrant workers who wish to stay in the country permanently it offers poor integrational tools, such as free language course. Even though circular migration is encouraged by the EU institutions through the adoption of appropriate legislation in the EU member states, more attention should be paid to migrant workers and their integration into the host country, even if they are staying for a shorter time. The aim of the integration policies should be to facilitate the stay of permanent or temporary migrants in Slovenia and to give them the opportunity to contribute to the development of a host country and at the same time for the migrants to benefit the most from working abroad, gain knowledge and experiences that one can use when returning home. A continued connection to one's country of origin does not mean that migrant workers cannot integrate into the society of the host country. On the contrary, staying in touch with the home country while simultaneously integrating into the new society can bring advantages. The ties between the two societies are invaluable as they construct a space for exchanges, social innovation, and transformation. In order not to repeat the German Gastarbeiter model from 50 years ago and its mistakes, more studies should be conducted on the impact of circular migration on all stakeholders (migrant workers, home countries and receiving countries).

Statistical data on migration: from the Balkans to Slovenia and back

In this chapter, we look at the official statistical data on labour migration from two sources: the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURSTAT) and the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia (MNZ). We chose the time span of 10 years from 2008 to 2018. The start of this period actually coincides with the beginning of the economic crisis in Slovenia and Europe in 2008 and ends when Slovenia (and Europe) experienced substantial economic growth. Some analyses made by SURSTAT do not cover this exact period but still provide a good picture of the situation in Slovenia, while the Office for Migration has been collecting data

since 2007 when it was established, although some data are missing for the initial years. These numbers cover the new migrants and not ethnic communities from former Yugoslavia that already reside in Slovenia and have also Slovene citizenship. However, these numbers show that migration from the Western Balkans to Slovenia is strong and does not slow down.

Chart 1: Number of new immigrants in Slovenia per year, 1995–2018

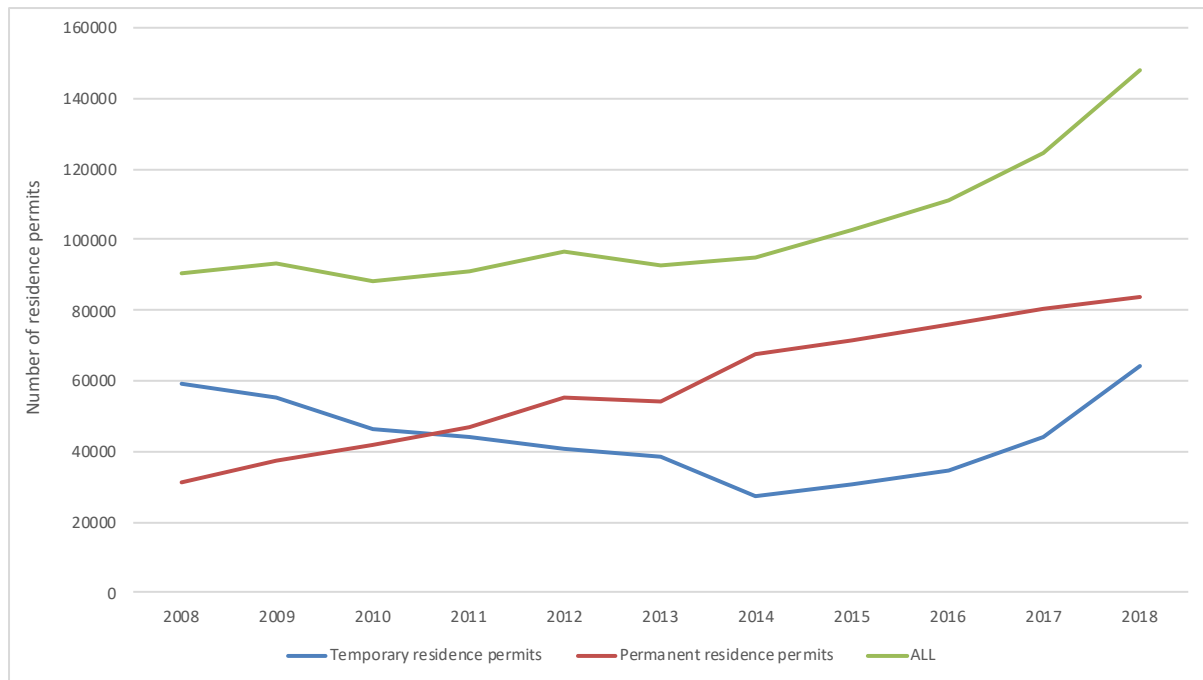


Source: SURS

Slovenia has been a receiving country since it gained independence. Chart 1 shows the number of new immigrants was rising from 1995⁷ until 2009. When the economic crisis hit Slovenian companies, the number of new immigrants dropped, but has again been rising in recent years.

Chart 2: Number of permanent and temporary residence permits in Slovenia, 2008–2018

⁷ SURS does not provide any data on this topic before 1995.

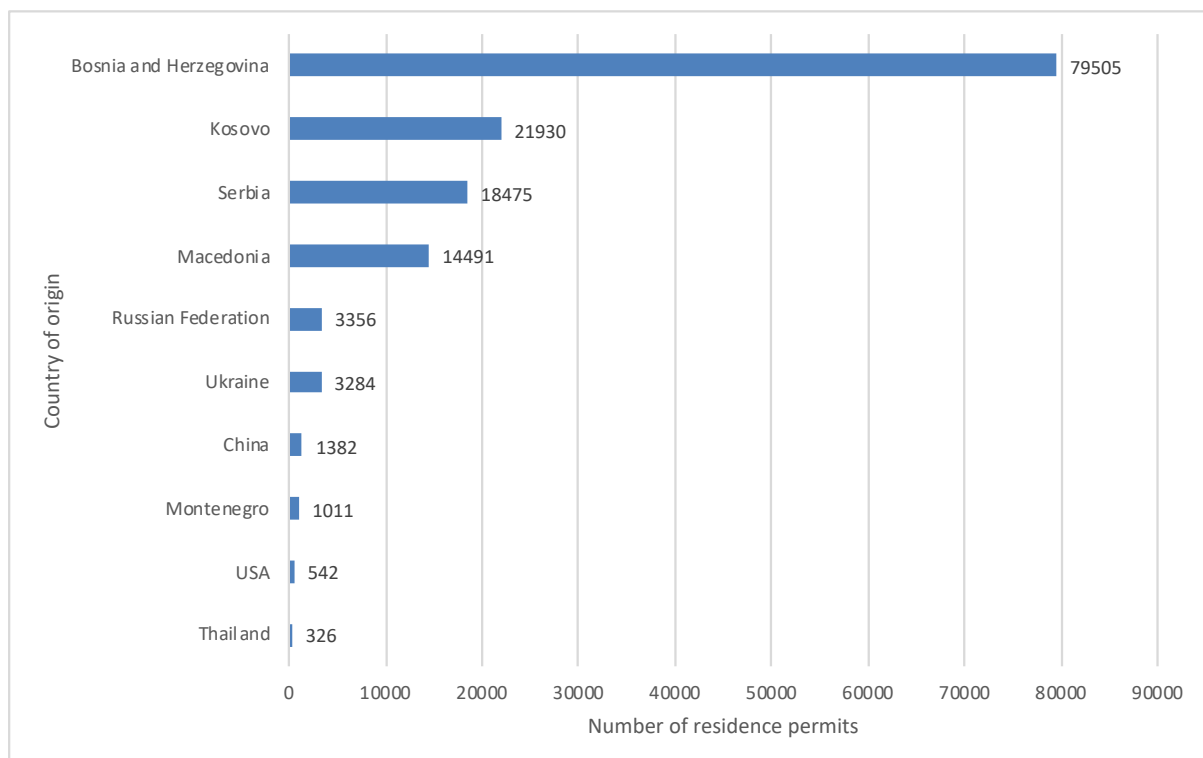


Source: MNZ

In Chart 2 we can see that during the economic crisis the issuing of temporary residence permits dropped by half. In 2008 the state issued 59.174 temporary residence permits and in 2014 only 27.103. In addition to the uncertain economic situation in the labour market, the issuing of a first residence permit for the purpose of employment or work was influenced also by the new Regulation on Restrictions and Prohibitions on Employment and Work of Aliens in 2011. Still, the overall number of all residence permits issued has been growing in recent years. Another factor contributed to the rise in residence permits. In 2013, a visa-liberalisation regime was put into force by the EU for some Western Balkan countries (Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania) and we can notice a steady increase in permanent residence permits since 2013, followed by an increase in temporary residence permits. The visa-liberalisation regime enabled citizens of Western Balkan countries to be more mobile and flexible in searching for better job opportunities in the EU and also in returning to their home country, thereby encouraging circular migration. Geographical proximity enables migrants from the Western Balkans to frequent mobility and visitation facilitating strong family ties. Transnational social spaces in the form of Bosniak kinship groups are maintained through social mechanisms such as familial obligations, reciprocity and focused solidarity (cf. Faist 2000 in Božić and Kuti 2016, 419).

Approximately 20,000 migrants left Slovenia in those 10 years, 60% of them in the first two years (SURs). The longer migrants live in Slovenia, the lower the chance of them leaving. When Yugoslavia disintegrated in 1991, the majority of migrants came from the republics of former Yugoslavia and this is still the case today. Their numbers are the highest and still growing. There is a continuity in communication and they are the closest geographically, making it is easy to bring them to Slovenia but also to send them back when not needed anymore (Medica 2010: 41). Pluri-local referential frames created in Yugoslavia contribute to the migration flow from Western Balkans. As already mentioned, workers from the area of former Yugoslavia are the most common migrant workers in Slovenia, with workers from Bosnia and Herzegovina being the most numerous group (Chart 3)⁸. According to Medica’s (2010) research, employers in different sectors believe that workers from former Yugoslavia are very good, if not the best workers in terms of quality and diligence.

Chart 3: Ten countries whose citizens held the biggest number of residence permits in Slovenia on 31 December 2018

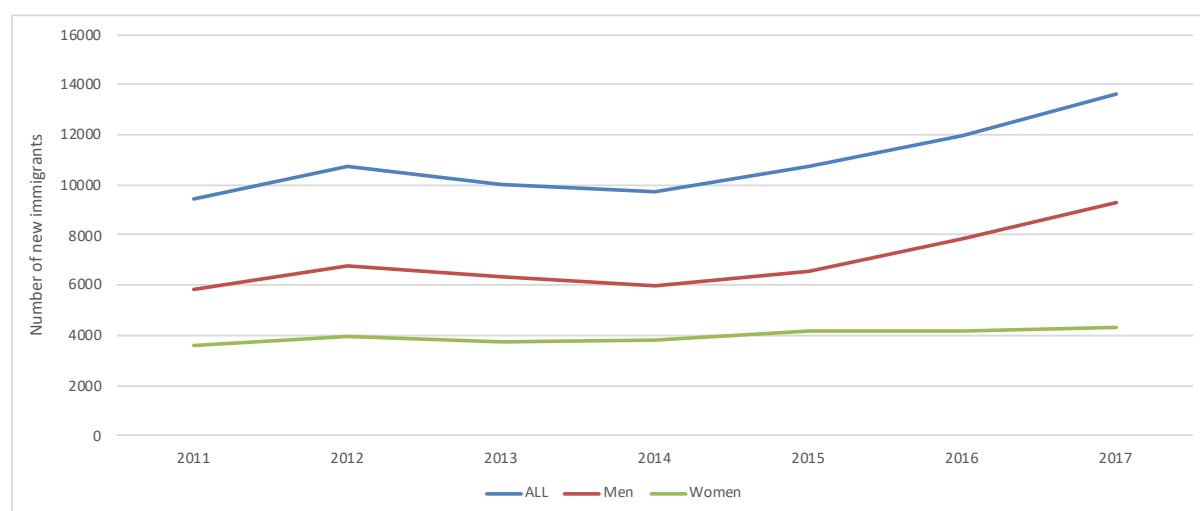


Source: MNZ

⁸ Croatia is not included in these statistics, since it joined EU in 2013 and its citizens are part of the EU common market and not considered migrants anymore.

On average, migrants are a little younger than the overall population of Slovenia, the majority of migrants are men, they have a somewhat lower education level and have a higher employment rate than the overall population. SURS (2017) defined a typical migrant worker who came to Slovenia for the first time in 2008 and 2009 and was still living in Slovenia in 2017: a man, lives alone (12,400), has permanent residence (84%) in a city municipality (53%) and citizenship of one of the countries in the territory of former Yugoslavia (95%), is employed (81%), has a vocational education (62%) and is between 30 and 39 years old (35%). This description shows we cannot say that only men are immigrating to Slovenia. Around 60% of all incoming migrants are men and 40% are women (Chart 4). Approximately 30% of all female immigrants are active⁹, while 77% of male immigrants are active. In 2017, 43,950 temporary residence permits were issued, 25,687 for the purpose of residence and work, 10,086 for family reunification, 2,444 for studying and 5,733 for other reasons (Office for Migration 2017: 30).

Chart 4: All new immigrants to Slovenia per year, men and women, 15 years of age or more, 2011–2017



Source: SURS

In general, migrants are more labour active than the general population. If we look at labour activity longitudinally from 2011 to 2016 and consider persons older than 15 years, we can

⁹ The category “active population” is the sum of employed and unemployed population, excluding children, pupils, students and retired people.

draw the following conclusion: almost half of these persons were employed for the whole time of their residence in Slovenia, one-third of these persons were employed for at least 3 years (SURS 2016). Only 8% of them were unemployed for the whole period. We must bear in mind that SURS only monitors official forms of employment and not illegal work. When taking the black labour market into consideration, we may assume that migrants have even higher labour activity.

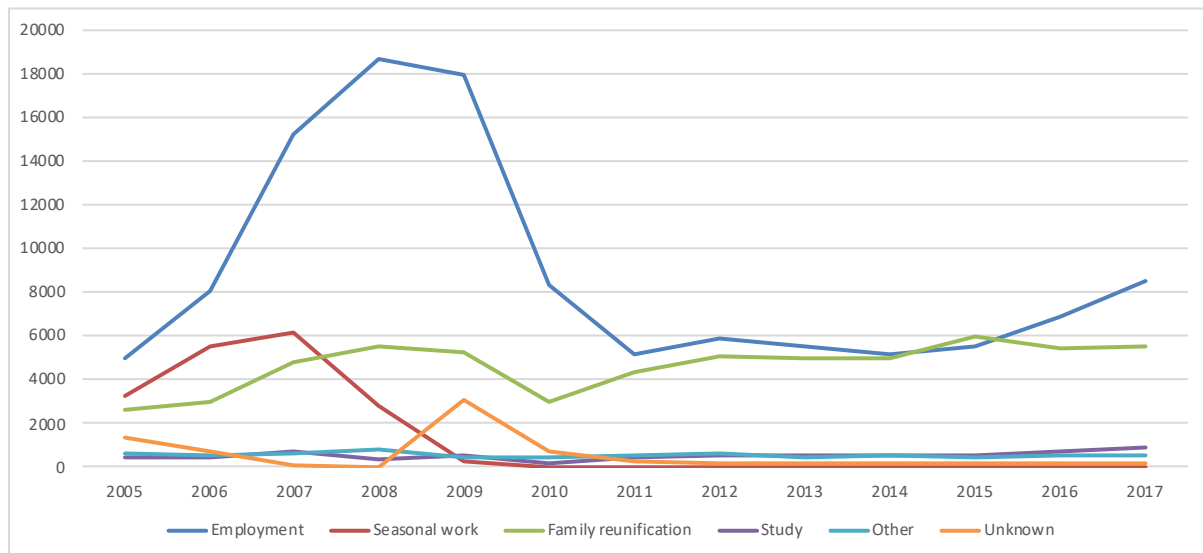
However, it is somewhat paradoxical that once the Slovenian economy was starting to recover from the crisis, the socio-economic situation of the migrant workers worsened, as shown by the increase in registered unemployment among migrant workers. In January 2011, unemployment rate for migrant workers was 6.2% which was 6.1 percentage points lower than the level of registered unemployment for the whole of Slovenia; in January 2016, the unemployment rate of migrant workers was 14.7%, which was a little higher than the Slovenian average (12.9%). The increment in migration brought by foreign citizens in Slovenia has been rising since 1996 (SURS 2017).

Like all migration, immigration to Slovenia is also influenced by push and pull factors. Push factors are connected to poor economic circumstances and complicated political situations in the countries that emerged from Yugoslavia. Yet, these factors are insufficient to attract people to immigrate to Slovenia. The unbalanced supply and demand of jobs in certain sectors in Slovenia create the pull factors. Most immigrants from former Yugoslavia have difficult and underpaid jobs in poor working conditions. A migration chain has been established that supplies the Slovenian job market with unqualified and trained workers (Malačič 2010: 86). Besides the economic and political factors, the cultural proximity and historical legacy also offer pull factors for these workers. The language of communication is 'Serbo-Croatian', employers speak Serbo-Croatian, workers also understand Slovenian or quickly learn the basics in the language. However, the three biggest ethnic groups that come to Slovenia have different religions: Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim¹⁰, although this does not pose any obstacle to migration and integration. Despite the recent wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, these three

¹⁰ Muslim can be regarded as a religious or ethnic identity if a person comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 1990s, this identity was renamed Bošnjak. Still, a Muslim can also mean cultural identity as Zalta (2018: 45) writes: »The 'Muslim identity' therefore defines the specific characteristics of Muslim societies that distinguish these societies from other nations, the understanding that Muslims have about their religion, motives of action and behaviour, the way to participate in various public areas, etc.«.

ethnic groups cooperate and live together in Slovenia peacefully. The shared history of Yugoslavia gives employees and employers common grounds to build from.

Chart 5: Number of new immigrants per year and purpose of immigration, 2005–2017



Source: SURS

Many people have relatives and friends living in Slovenia, giving them a security net and a starting point, hence the transnational social spaces contribute to the migration flow to Slovenia. As Chart 5 shows, in recent years the most frequent purposes of immigrating to Slovenia were employment and family reunification. Since 2010 there are no data with respect to seasonal work.

The statistical data reveal that migrant workers are mainly men who either have their families with them in Slovenia (a high number of migrants immigrated for family reunification purposes) or probably in their country of origin to which where they send their remittances. As already discussed in the previous chapter, they are active in transnational spaces, connecting their homeland community with the country of residence and also with other migration communities across the world by a wide-spread use of new communication technologies which enables them the strengthening and widening of long-distance, pluri-local interlocking networks across international borders (Božić and Kuti 2016, 417).

Conclusion

Slovenia has been receiving workers since the 1960s, first internally within Yugoslavia and then after independence as external migrants. Traditionally, people from Bosnia and Herzegovina have migrated to Slovenia in the highest numbers. There are different reasons for this: relatively good Slovenian economy, lack of unqualified workers in the Slovenian job market, poor economic and political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider Balkans and geographical, cultural and language proximity.

In the paper we argue that the social spaces created during the internal migration in Yugoslavia continued to exist even after the breakup of Yugoslavia and managed to overcome the obstacles of new physical borders and new citizenship politics. They became transnational social spaces which have been maintained by second and third generation of migrant descendants and also by circular migration pattern which is in place by new labour migrants. Circular migration is encouraged by EU and Slovenian state, however, also migrants themselves perpetuate this pattern, which has been in practice since 1970s.

The case of Bosnian migrants to Slovenia shows how some mobility patterns are spontaneously initiated by migrants themselves and not by policy makers. Circular migration for Bosnian workers represents an option of keeping their families at home where living costs are lower and working in a country that is close to their homeland and where they can find a job and earn higher income than at home. In these cases, migration policies may facilitate migrants' choices or at least not discourage them. The legacy of social spaces created in former Yugoslavia continues into the new transnational social spaces, where communication is facilitated by new technologies and circularity enables the migrants to be connected with various transnational spaces.

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