

THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY?

YOUNG CROATIANS' IDENTITIES AND PERCEPTIONS AS DRIVERS OF MIGRATION DESIRE

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ABSTRACT

Taking up the Croatian case and the gap in the literature concerning non-economic, micro-level drivers of migration, this paper explores young peoples' identity, and the perceptions of their country and the European Union. Survey data is analysed by means of hierarchical linear regression, aiming to answer the question to what extent the selected non-economic variables play a role in youth migration desire. Overall, the results show that these drivers do play a certain role. While perception of the EU seems to be irrelevant for young people's migration desire, perception of Croatia is associated with it. Likewise, a stronger national identity acts as an inhibiting force. When comparing the EU and Croatia, young people do not demonstrate a defined vision of the EU, seeing it as a place where almost everything is better. In contrast, their opinion on Croatia is more nuanced, which makes variables connected to their local context more relevant.

KEYWORDS: youth, migration, identity, perceptions, European Union, Croatia

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS: AVENUES TO BE EXPLORED IN MIGRATION RESEARCH

It has become almost cliché to say that our contemporary world is deeply marked by migration. In the context of the European Union (EU) and the Schengen Area, where borders all but cease to exist and where spatial mobility has never been more within reach, migration keeps getting more relevant (Doherty et al., 2010). Yet in the context of the Union, not everyone is equally driven towards migration - and some parts are seen as more desirable than others. Cultural migration literature has long stressed the centre-periphery dynamics embedded in migrant trajectories (Hooghe et al. 2008: 477). This distinction is still very much applicable to the Union - new member states are, more often than not, the departure points, while older member states are the receiving countries (World Bank 2019). In this paper, we explore the case of Croatia, a country on the 'periphery' whose citizens are primarily (and in large numbers) migrating towards the 'centre' of the European Union¹.

Furthermore, not all age groups exhibit the same migration patterns. Studies have confirmed numerous times that young people are more likely to be on the move (Global Migration Group 2014; Solutions for Youth Employment 2016; Sonzogno et al. 2021: 7). In a recent paper, Milasi (2020) notes that global estimates on migrants' net inflows show that between 2010 and 2015, net inflows of young migrants were five times higher than those of adults. Considering these two facts, the case of the Croatian youth we explore in this paper represents a fruitful investigative material as this group has a twofold potential for leaving: they tend to migrate not only due to their stage of life, but also because their move is shaped by the centre-periphery dynamics. The specific problem we tackle in this research are the shapers of youth migration desires in the wider context of the EU and Croatia.

¹ According to the data of the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2021a), a somewhat similar pattern of migration destinations is observable from 2010 to 2019, with Germany and Austria as leading destinations and with Ireland gaining popularity from 2014 (Rajković Iveta & Horvatin 2017:254).

From the 19th century, migration theories have focused on factors that influence migration, with the overall hypothesis that it is the differences and inequalities between places that are the key drivers, and that people migrate from less developed to more developed places (Fratsea 2019: 25). Migration theory mainly focuses on macro, mezzo and micro levels of migration drivers (Hagen-Zanker 2008). The mentioned differences and inequalities are referred to as a macro level driver, and are shaped by political circumstances, economics or demographics. Research on migration also focuses on mezzo and micro level drivers. They include drivers such as migration networks (Massey et al. 1998, cf. Lapshyna & Düvell 2018: 663) and factors that concern individual perceptions, respectively. The latter, however, remain insufficiently studied (Lapshyna & Düvell 2018: 663), despite several authors pointing to their relevance when researching migration (Lee 1966: 51; Carling 2002; Lapshyna & Düvell 2015; cf. Lapshyna & Düvell 2018). One criticism of migration theory is that most of it has been developed to provide explanations for migrations observed in the past (Arango, 2000, cf. Massey, 2019). In contrast, the research here involves participants who have expressed a desire to move for a period of six months or more, so it does not deal with explanations after the fact, but with a specific moment when young people form a desire that then potentially leads to a decision to move. It is in this gap, the reality that individual perceptions remain an understudied aspect of migration, together with the fact that here we look at desire to move, as opposed to motivation for moving after the move already happened, as well as taking a look at non-economic factors, when research mostly focuses on economic aspects of mobility motivation that we see our contribution to the field. Moreover, there is specifically a lack of knowledge about this regarding Croatian youth.

The paper is grounded in the assumption that migration does not occur by the mere weighing of the costs and benefits of different places, but rather that identities and individual perceptions, i.e., social actors' constructions of social reality, play a role in the decision-making process as well. Therefore, its aim is to explore the relevance of these two relatively under-researched aspects in migratory decision-making on the specific case of Croatia, with the purpose of better understanding the entire phenomenon of people who wish to move.

Nevertheless, the question is which aspects of identity and which of individual perceptions matter? Our main argument is that one of the drivers of the desire to leave is the way the young perceive themselves in relation to their country and Europe, and the way they see the spaces they wish to migrate from and to².

In order to answer this research question, we analyse survey data from the 'Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2018' dataset that focuses on young people aged 14 to 29 years old.³ By using linear regression divided into different blocks, an effort is made to answer to what extent migration desire relates to identity and the perceptions of the Union and Croatia.

The paper first explores theoretical guidelines and clarifies the concepts used in the research. Afterwards in the second section we seek to summarise existing knowledge about Croatia and young people migrating. In the third, methodological section, we describe the sample, variables used, hypotheses generated and how the analysis was conducted. In the fourth section covering the results, we first provide crucial descriptive data, followed by the results of the regression analysis that seeks to answer our research problem. Discussing the results, as well as presenting the conclusions of the research, makes up the fifth and final section of the paper.

² Focusing on these aspects does not imply that we do not recognise other factors as highly influential; economic factors remain the main reported drivers for young people and the migration desires in the data we analysed.

³ Originally, FES research aimed for the age group from 12 to 27 years old, but the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (ISRZ) team that was in charge of conducting the research argued to keep it closer to what is defined as young people in Croatia, which is 15 to 30 years of age.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: FROM GENERAL GUIDELINES TO RESEARCHING CROATIAN YOUTH

Why *young people* migrate has been researched through and through. Some research focuses on economic factors, mainly connected to motivation for education and job opportunities, painting a picture of young people that seek their fortune in a globally wide ocean of opportunities. In Croatia, specifically, potential migration was researched as a ‘brain drain’ phenomenon, with a focus on economic losses of the country that young people leave (Golub 1992; Adamović & Mežnarić 2003; Golub 2003, cf. Adamović & Potočnik, 2022). When considering migration, authors use different concepts to untangle it – ‘desires’, ‘aspirations’, ‘drivers’, ‘motivations’, ‘expectations’, ‘action’ or ‘intentions’.

In this paper, we focus on drivers, and analyse them through expressed desire to move, connected to identity and individual perceptions. Migration is often seen through a deterministic lens, with drivers seen as “factors that propel people on set paths” (Van Hear et al. 2018: 2). We find this view to be too simplistic to be applied to complex realities of people's lives, and instead wish to look into a fraction of influences that are relevant for a specific place, people and time. We therefore see drivers as Van Hear et al. (2018) define them, as shapers of context in which people make decisions for themselves.

Terminology used in research considering future migrations is inconsistent (Williams et al. 2017). ‘Desire’ is just one of the many terms used, while other include ‘aspirations’ (the most commonly used one (Carling & Collins 2018)), ‘wishes’, or ‘plans’. Even though the question of causality between migration desire and actual behaviour is far from answered (Williams, 2017), a number of authors recognise a strong link between the intended and actual decision. Šakaja and Mesarić (2001) connect desired migrations and realised migrations, noting that while they are not the same thing, cognitive spaces can be used to predict migration patterns. Other authors suggest that factors triggering migration intentions do not differ from ones that can lead to actual migratory behaviour (Van Mol 2016: 1305; Van Dalen and Henkens 2012). Here, we use ‘desire’

as a term and treat it as a measure of migration behaviour *potential*, which is how Bjarnason and Thorlindsson⁴ (2006) treat it as well. We opt to use ‘desire’ since ‘intentions’ put emphasis on an individual capacity to act, while ‘aspirations’ can overlook non-cognitive dimensions (Carling & Collins 2018). Furthermore, this term seemed more appropriate due to the fact that it is used in the survey we analyse.

Individual perceptions can be defined as “processes by which individuals organise and interpret their impressions of reality in order to give meaning to their environment” (Robbins and Judge 2008:166, cf. Lapshyna and Düvell 2018: 664). From a constructivist point of view, context internalised as cognitive schemes, emotions and identity reflect greatly on how people behave (Ivanova et al., 2014). With this in mind, the paper before you is an exploratory foray into some aspects of the cognitive (that we see as inseparable from emotional) and identity backgrounds of the participants’ expressed desire to move. When exploring the perception of one’s own country and other countries, we keep in mind the ideal type opposition between the national and the transnational. This dichotomy is much more complex in reality, as we have to consider the existence of multiple identities⁵. The question of national identity is highly salient in Croatian society, given that (particularly) during the 1990s it was constructed in a more closed than open manner (Baranović 2002). The ethnic conception of national identity, which stresses ancestry over citizenship, prevailed over the civic one. While it has been emphasised by previous studies that national identity can hamper integration in the host country (Berry 2001; Constant et al. 2009; Constant and Zimmermann 2008, cf. Van Dalen and Henkens 2012), the way it affects the decision to leave has not been sufficiently explored. However, we do expect that a stronger national identity will inhibit the desire to migrate (Van Dalen & Henkens 2012). On the other hand, Croatia as a whole has been undergoing a process of Europeanisation after the year 2000 (Blanuša and Šiber 2007: 120), which could also influence things. When it comes to European identity, it is important to note that identifying with Europe and identifying with the EU are two

⁴ Even though they use the term ‘intentions’.

⁵ This was also confirmed in our sample of young people, where the correlation between Croatian and European identity was moderate: $r = .485$ ($p < .01$).

different things, as one need not entail the other. The European Union in its present state is but one of the possible pathways towards European integration and as such may not be the preferred vision by all who harbour a European identity.

The Croatian case: the persistence of emigration

When taking a look at the latest available data on migrations from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2021a)⁶, two important facts stand out. The first is the fact that it is mostly the younger, working age population that departs. Secondly, it is evident⁷ that the 2010s represented a critical decade, when the number of people leaving the country vastly outnumbered those moving in. The latest census data (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2021b) from 2021 showed a loss of almost 400,000 people compared to 2011, which can be partly attributed to migration, and which solidifies the importance of the topic. The tradition of emigration has existed in Croatia even prior to the last decade (Jurić 2017), yet the interplay of the economic crisis and the accession to the EU paved the way for a growing desire to seek fortune elsewhere. In the context of Southeast European (SEE) countries, in data from 2018 Croatian young people seemed to have among the lowest levels of migration desire, together with Romania and Bulgaria. All three of these cases had around 65-70% young people with no intention of moving, whereas this number was significantly lower in all the other SEE cases (27-42%), as seen in Adamović & Potočnik (2022: 416). But even though Croatia and Slovenia exhibited the lowest desire to emigrate due to improvement of standard of living, the aforementioned research states that economic reasons

⁶ It should be pointed out that Jerić (2019: 25-26) noticed that emigration of Croatian citizens cannot be entirely accurately ascertained by the data available from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, given that the data from receiving countries show that these numbers are 62% higher on average. Taking this into account, the question of migration from Croatia becomes even more pertinent.

⁷ For instance, the peak of negative net migration happened in 2017, when the number of people who moved abroad surpassed those that came to Croatia by 31,799.

such as higher salaries and better opportunities for employment were nonetheless the main reasons for young people from Croatia and Kosovo.

Existing literature concerning migration in the Croatian context mostly touches on economic drivers of moving (Potočnik & Spajić-Vrkaš 2017; Lajić et al. 2018). Researchers focus on 'brain drain' as well (Adamović & Mežnarić 2003), or on mapping migrant experiences by asking not just why they left, but probing details such as how they got the information, how they prepared for moving and what administrative procedures they had to undertake (Rajković Iveta & Horvatin 2017). Some papers take a closer look at other factors, such as (the perception of) corruption when studying migration trends (Jurić 2017), or connect labour and education drivers to attachments to their countryside and family (Dilić 2002). Potočnik and Adamović (2018) focus on factors for leaving (education, influence of friends, employment, political factors and general dissatisfaction with Croatia) and staying (high quality of life in Croatia, attachment to one's family, (local)patriotism, perceived difficulties of moving and civic responsibility). One recent publication by Adamović and Potočnik (2022), addresses various determinants of Croatian youth's migration desire, pointing out age, education, settlement type, planning of extramarital relationship, political beliefs, as well as the perception of the future of the society. Despite these contributions, the topic of migration drivers has not been researched in a systematic way, and a clear picture of young Croatian migrants is missing.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

In this paper, we use survey data from ‘Youth Study Croatia 2018/2019’, financed by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)⁸. The survey was conducted in 2018, and the sample in Croatia consisted of 1,500 respondents, aged between 14 and 29 years, as chosen by FES and ISRZ. The sample is of a probabilistic national type, aiming to appropriately represent gender, regions in Croatia, settlement type and educational level. As a correction for respondent selection in the sample, when doing analyses, we used the supplied weight variable.

Variables

The variable measuring the strength of the desire to leave is used as a dependent variable. In the survey, the question stated: “How strong is your desire to move to another country for more than six months (emigrate)?”, with possible answers: 1 - I do not intend to emigrate, 2 - weak, 3 - moderate, 4 - strong, 5 - very strong.

Independent variables were selected with the criteria of encompassing various micro level non-economic factors that we presupposed should relate to the dependent variable.-

Table 1. *List of independent variables and regression blocks*

Block	Variables	Scale
Identity	European identity	1 - not at all; 5 - completely
	Croatian identity	1 - not at all; 5 - completely

⁸ “FES Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2018/2019” is an “international youth research project carried out simultaneously in ten countries in Southeast Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia” (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2023).

Perception of the European Union	Trust in the European Union	1 - not at all; 5 - fully
Perception of Croatia	Perception of corruption (the need to have connections with people in power for finding a job)	1 - not important at all; 5 - very important
	Interests of young people represented in National politics?	1 - not at all; 5 - very well
	Trust in the National Government	1 - not at all; 5 - fully
Comparison between Croatia and the EU	Difference in perception of the status of non-economic values	factor scores
Control variables		
Economic factors	Financial situation in the household	<p>1 - we do not have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating...) and food;</p> <p>2 - we have enough money for basic bills and food, but not for clothes and shoes;</p> <p>3 - we have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV set, etc.);</p> <p>4 - we can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car or a flat, for instance;</p> <p>5 - we can afford to buy whatever we need for a good living standard</p>
	Professionalisation phase	<p>1 - pupil</p> <p>2 - university student</p>

		3 - NEET 4 - insecure employment 5 - full-time employment
Transnational experiences	Have you ever been away from your native country for more than six months?	0 - yes; 1 - no
Sociodemographic variables	Gender	0 - female; 1 - male
	Age	min: 14; max: 29
	Importance of God	1 - not at all important; 10 - very important

An important note should be made about how we treated the variable comparing the status of non-economic values in the EU and Croatia. Originally, these were all single variables, each covering one value (democracy, rule of law, human rights, equality, security, individual freedom). The dataset included questions related to economic aspects (professionalisation phase, economic welfare of citizens) in Croatia and the EU, which we did not include. Moreover, the status was measured separately for the EU and Croatia. We then initially created a composite variable that recorded a sum difference in the perception between the two. After this step, by means of factor analysis, we discovered that the new variables formed a unidimensional construct. This is why in the regression we only included the single variable (that was produced as factor scores of the factor solution) generated by including the differences in perception according to the aforementioned six values. Otherwise, had we included all of the variables, we would have run into the problem of multicollinearity.

Furthermore, we computed variables about the age of completing formal education, variable on education level, and an employment status variable to get a new one we called ‘professionalisation phase’, with categories shown in Table 1. We decided to do this due to the age range of the participants involved, considering that a number of people did not yet finish their education, so it made little sense to gauge their desire to move based on their highest

education level. The same argument is relevant for the employment status of participants, since it is an altogether a different matter if one is not employed while still in education or not.

Aside from all of the listed relevant variables, the fifth block of predictors consists of control variables. We included seven of them altogether. Transnational experiences are expected to strengthen the desire for future migration (Sonzogno et al. 2021). In general, it is to be expected that younger people would be more enthusiastic about leaving (Van Mol 2016: 1306). Querying the importance of God for respondents was presupposed to be relevant in the context of Croatian society due to linkages between Catholicism and national identity (Bellamy 2003; Gvozdanović & Kovačić 2020: 250), although this variable can only loosely be considered to be related to the issue of ethnonationalism⁹. Gender was also included since it has been recorded that it plays a specific role in migration movements (Van Mol 2016). Moreover, we included two economic variables (professionalisation phase and household financial situation) due to “the primacy of economic rationality that has long held an almost sacred place in theories of migration” (Carling & Collins 2018: 913).

Hypotheses

The main hypothesis (H0) of this paper is that the young peoples’ desire to leave is connected to non-economic factors. Specific hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Desire to leave is negatively correlated with a stronger national identity

H2: Desire to leave is positively correlated with a stronger European identity

⁹ The ideal variable would be the one that measures the importance of being Catholic for being a Croat.

H3: Desire to leave is positively correlated with a better perception of the EU

H4: Desire to leave is positively correlated with a more negative perception of Croatia

H5: Desire to leave is positively correlated with a more positive perception of non-economic values of the EU in comparison to those in Croatia

Analysis

Methods used for the description of data were univariate analyses - percentages and means. The multivariate statistical analysis used in order to adequately answer our research questions was hierarchical multiple regression, with a number of variables that were treated as categorical, as shown later in the text in Table 3. When doing the regression, we took precaution to avoid the issue of multicollinearity¹⁰. The programme used for analysis was Jamovi, version 2.3.28.

RESULTS: WHAT DOES THE DATA TELL US ABOUT YOUNG CROATIANS' DESIRE TO MOVE?

The results section is divided into the part concerning a description of emigration tendencies and the comparison between Croatia and the EU. The second part deals with statistical analysis of drivers of migration tendencies.

¹⁰ The highest recorded VIF value was 1.63, which does not go over the suggested 2.5 value (by Johnston et al. 2018). However, the only variable with this level is 'age', which is understandable due to how it correlates with the variable that records professionalisation phase.

Migration desires and motivations

The results on the dependent variable that examined the intensity of the desire to leave show that there are more young people that have no desire to leave than those that do (62.5% vs. 32.5%), while only a smaller number do not know (4.4%) or did not respond (0.6%). Of all the young people who want to emigrate, the majority have only a moderate desire to do so; making up almost 38% of the group. It is interesting to note that compared to the same FES research from 2012, the desire for migrating has been reduced by 24% (Gvozdanović et al. 2019). This decrease towards the end of the decade has been recorded across most Southeast European countries (Lavrič 2019).

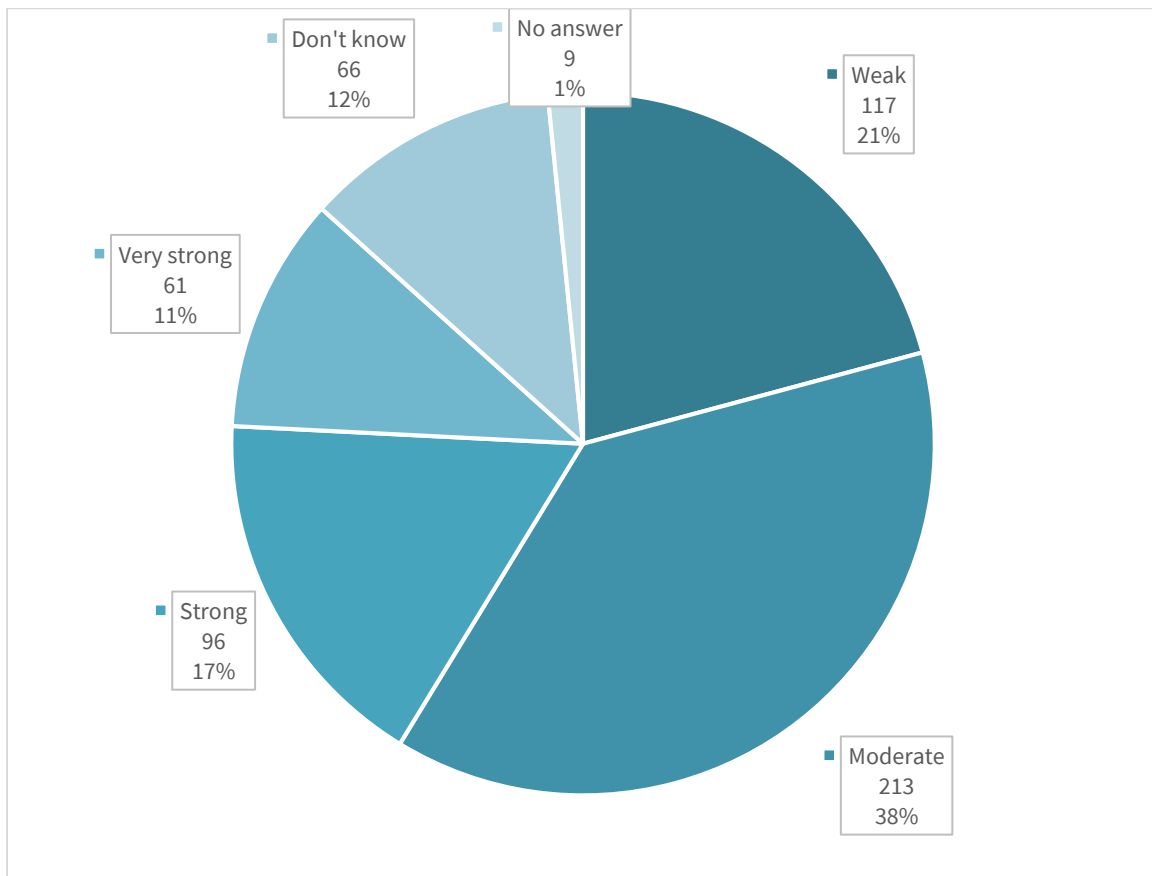


Figure 1. Declared strength of migration desire (only those that expressed the desire of leaving)

When asked how long they would like to stay for, the largest percentage are those that do not know (42%). Almost 11% estimate that they would leave and not come back, while others see themselves as staying for some time. Among those that do intend to leave, most of them (14.2%) see themselves staying for 1 to 5 years, which could partly correspond to reasons connected to education.

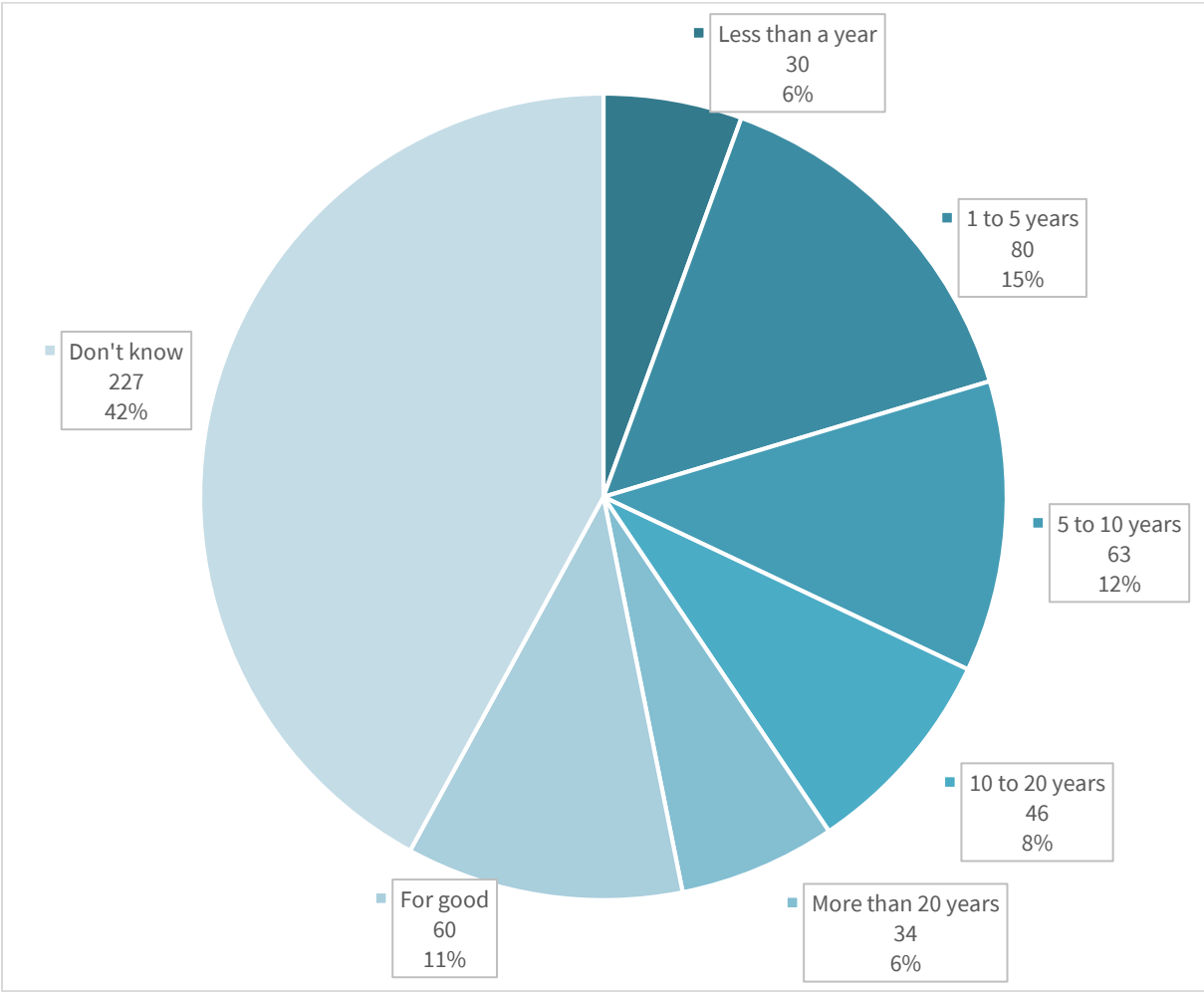


Figure 2. Estimated stay abroad

As seen in Figure 3, their selected¹¹ reasons for emigrating vary. The most frequent one (29%) is the improvement of the living standard. Better employment possibilities (24.1%) and higher salaries (20.5%) follow suit. The main reasons seem to be connected to income, employment and living standard, which are all connected to economic factors that shape the lives of young people. Other reasons include the escape from an unfavourable situation (8.3%), better education (6.9%), social and political stability of the country (4.2%), better opportunities for starting a business (2.3%), experience of a different culture (2.1%), being close to the people they care for (1.6%) and higher cultural diversity (1.1%).

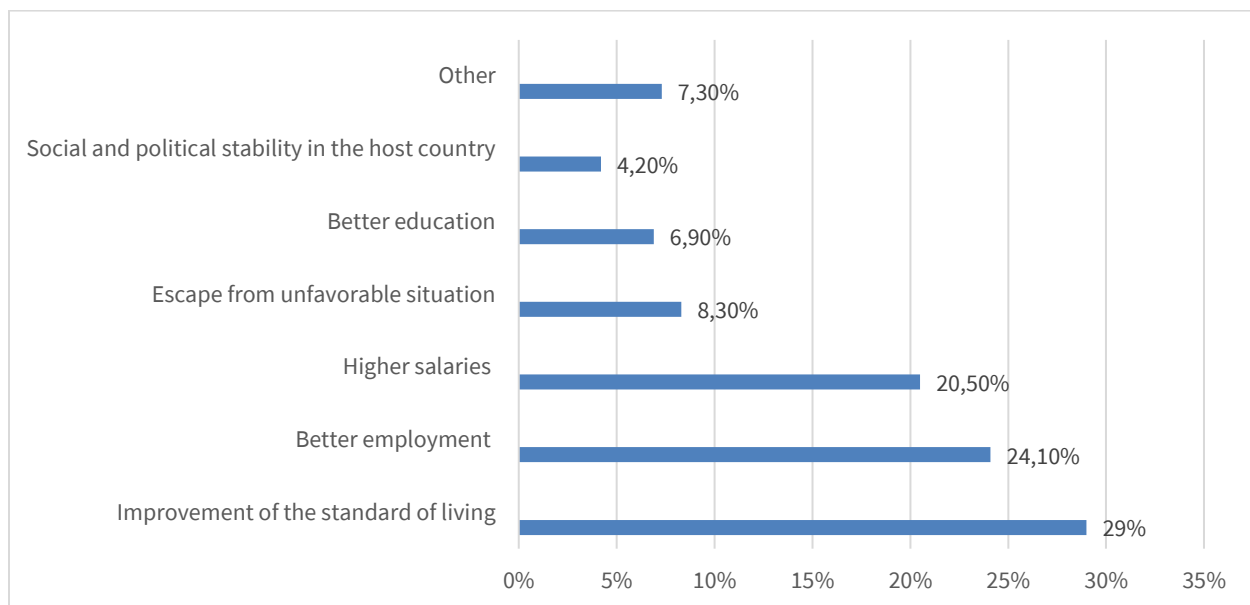


Figure 3. *Reported main reasons for migration*

The reason why this paper contrasts Croatia with the context of Europe is that young Croatians would primarily emigrate to countries within the EU. As seen in Figure 4, Germany

¹¹ The question was not open-ended.

seems to be the perceived land of milk and honey. This comes as no surprise, given that it has been one of the main destinations within the context of East-West migrations (Fassman & Münz, 1994; cf. Adamović & Potočnik, 2022). The questionnaire also contained options to pick their second and third preferred choices, but the situation did not change all that much - EU countries remain the preferred choice.

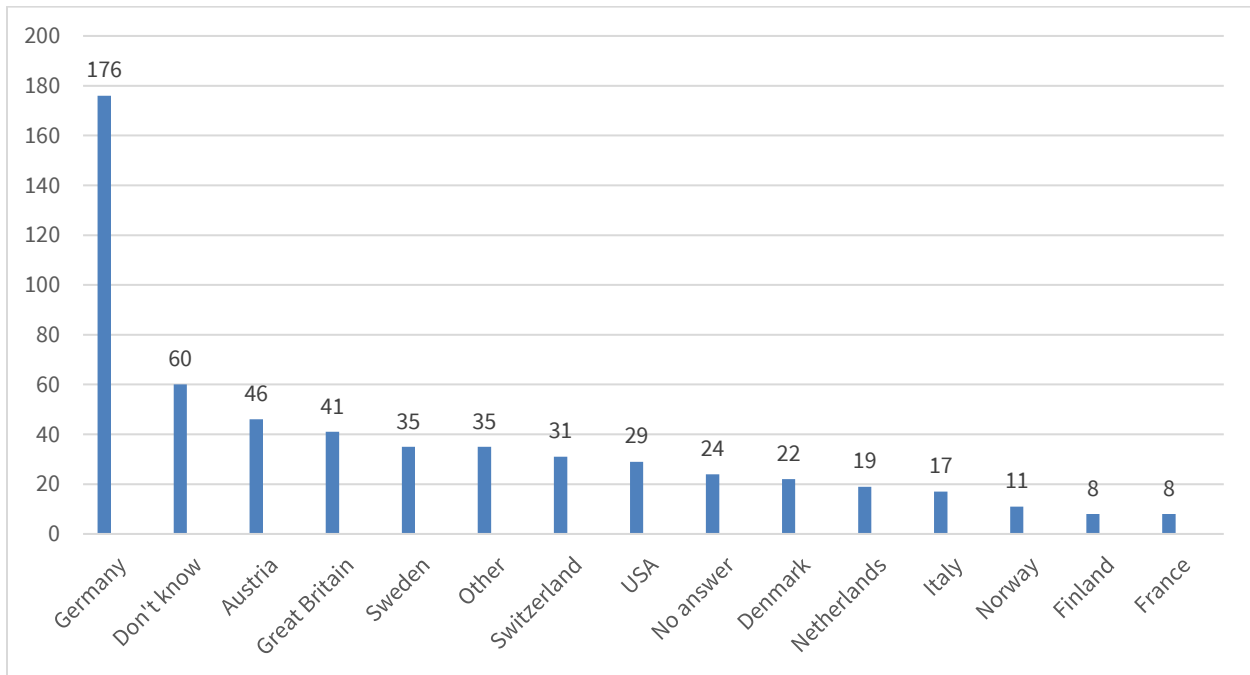


Figure 4. First choice of migration destination

Furthermore, since we used these variables in the regression shown later on, we wanted to see how the respondents assessed the status of non-economic values in Croatia and in the EU. The values were democracy, rule of law, human rights, equality, security and individual freedom. The respondents could choose options from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good). As can be seen in Table 2, young people feel like all the values except security are better in the EU than in Croatia. The difference is not a big one, however. Standard deviations show that there are bigger

differences between respondents' answers when asked about Croatia. The reason behind this might be that young people have a more nuanced understanding of the Croatian context, while their assessments for the EU seem to be more generalised (and overall positive).

Table 2. *Assessment of the state of values in Croatia and the EU*

	Croatia		EU	
	M	SD	M	SD
Democracy	2.95	1.102	3.65	.940
Rule of law	2.87	1.068	3.57	.964
Human rights	3.15	1.102	3.68	.920
Equality	3.04	1.102	3.60	.907
Security	3.50	1.070	3.28	1.026
Individual freedom	3.40	1.030	3.69	.889

Non-economic drivers of migration desire

Table 3 depicts a hierarchical multiple regression that is used to determine how different non-economic groups of variables shape migratory desires. The final model is statistically significant ($F= 15.921$, $p < .001$) and overall explains 16.3% of the variance (Adj. R^2).

Table 3. Hierarchical regression model

<i>Dependent variable: migration desire strength</i>	β				
	I	II	III	IV	V
CONTROL VARIABLES					
Sex:					
Male - Female	.125*	.121*	.121*	.101	.098
Age	-.098*	-.101*	-.104*	-.106*	-.106*
Importance of God in life	-.180***	-.166***	-.157***	-.148***	-.131***
Better household financial situation	-.072*	-.079**	-.081**	-.089**	-.083**
Professionalisation phase:					
Student - Pupil	.090	.088	.098	.057	.053
NEET - Pupil	.291*	.294*	.289*	.194	.177
Insecure employment - Pupil	.092	.103	.101	.056	.053
Full-time employment - Pupil	-.038	-.007	-.011	-.053	-.074
Transnational experience					
No -Yes	-.902***	-.870***	-.868***	-.749***	-.728***
IDENTIFICATION					
Croatian identity		-.095**	-.096**	-.122***	-.115***
European identity		.077*	.085*	.056	.062

PERCEPTION OF THE EU					
Trust in the EU			-.051	.037	.028
PERCEPTION OF CROATIA					
Importance of connections for employment				.051	.040
Interests of young people represented in politics				-.137***	-.105***
Trust in national government				-.139***	-.129***
COMPARISON BETWEEN THE EU AND CROATIA					
Non-economic factors					.102**
Adjusted R2	.102	.108	.110	.155	.163
F change	13.90***	4.49*	2.74	19.12***	9.93**

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05

Out of five altogether, two of the selected control variables are not connected with our dependent variable. Since the descriptive data show that young people mostly choose reasons for leaving that are connected to employment opportunities, and considering the fact that existing research done in this context points to economic reasons as main drivers for migrations, we wanted to include variables that cover this dimension as well. The intention was to check if they would take away the predictive power of non-economic drivers, but this is not quite the case. Financial situation in the respondent's households is connected significantly, supporting the existing notion that financial reasons cannot be left out when talking about migrations. In this case, those that are in more unfavourable financial circumstances are more likely to think about moving. The professionalisation phase, which differentiated respondents based on

education and employment status, on the other hand, did not show any predictive power. Existing experience with being abroad for more than 6 months proves to be an especially decent predictor¹². Gender is shown to have an impact, with males slightly more likely to express the desire. Younger respondents do show a greater desire to leave Croatia, so age was also singled out as a significant predictor¹³. The importance of God in one's life is likewise linked to wanting to leave - the respondents who placed a greater importance on God were less likely to want to move.

Looking at the second block concerning the questions of identity, it is evident that feeling more Croatian plays a significant role in inhibiting the strength of the migration desire. European identity, on the other hand, was only linked with a greater desire to leave in Steps two and three, but not in the final model.

Even though the EU is almost inseparable from the concept of Europe and most young people wish to emigrate towards EU countries, the perception of the EU in the form of trust in the EU has not proven to be significantly related to the migration desire. Moreover, this is the only step where there is no significant increase in the model's R^2 , with F Change equalling 2.74 ($p > .05$).

Whereas the previous block contributed poorly to the model, the fourth block is a complete opposite, with the highest R^2 change recorded with the introduction of variables representing the perception of Croatia. In particular, it is the distrust in the national government and the feeling that the interests of young people are not represented in national politics that affect the desire to leave. Interestingly, the belief that connections with people in power are necessary for acquiring a job - which should be a good indicator of corruption - is not a significant predictor in any of the steps.

¹² Has the highest β value in the final model

¹³ If broken down into age groups, a strong or very strong desire to leave was shared by 11.7% of those in the 14-19 group, 11.5% of those in the group between 20-24, and 9.2% of those in the 25-29 group.

And finally, when juxtaposing the perception of the state of certain non-economic values in the European Union with the state in Croatia, we find this to be a significant predictor, showing that perceptions of values do correlate with young peoples' desire of moving.

DISCUSSING THE FINDINGS: ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES DO NOT SOLELY SHAPE THE DESIRE TO LEAVE

When looking at different levels of analysis in the paper, one question stands apart. Why are self-reported reasons for leaving not entirely in congruence with the results from the regression? Even though the regression did not show a significant linkage of employment status¹⁴ with the desire to leave, it was the second most frequently reported answer on why young people from the sample wish to emigrate (right after 'Improvement of the standard of living', which is arguably connected to employment). It is plausible to assume that this is partly because the self-reporting question and our model are altogether different methods of querying migration desire. People may not necessarily be aware of all of the attitudes that shape their desires, and further to the point, the question was not open-ended.

In line with a recent finding that sociodemographic factors are one of the most important drivers of migration desire (Adamović and Potočnik, 2022), our research can also attest to their relevance. More specifically, control variables we introduced show evidence of a connection between age and migration desire. We did expect older respondents to have more personal ties that make moving more difficult. Furthermore, since education and job seeking seem to be the reason to migrate for a portion of this population, it makes sense that age plays a role. Gender, on the other hand, initially seemed to have ties to migration desire in this sample, but the connection is lost in the fourth step of regression. Van Mol (2016) touches on gender and migration in his work by showing different scenarios - one where women are less likely to leave due to the caring responsibilities attached to female gender roles, and a second one where

¹⁴ Measured as part of the professionalisation phase variable.

females are generally more likely to study abroad. More to the point, data do show that Croatian women are overrepresented as Erasmus students (Böttcher et al. 2016). Still, while women are more represented when talking about education related migrations, we can see that in this sample this fact does not play such a role to still be statistically significant. We wanted to include economic variables into the model as control variables due to the previous findings of its importance in migration decisions. While they did not take all the credit in the model, household financial situations did show to be linked. Interestingly, the professionalisation phase was not significant. Previous experience with staying abroad for longer than 6 months was, on the other hand, notably and positively linked with the strength of migration desire, which is in line with previous research.

Another finding is that identity matters – feeling Croatian inhibits migration desire, as opposed to feeling European, which does not seem to be connected. European identity showed some predictive strength until step 3, when we introduced perception of Croatia. The data does not allow us to explain exactly what the interrelation between European identity and the perception of Croatia is, but it would appear that variables about the perception of Croatia inhibit the predictive strength of the variable of European identity. Furthermore, taking into account that Croatian and European identities are moderately interrelated ($r = .485$), the relation between the national and the transnational seems a rather complex matter. Understanding the context of how Croatian identity has been constructed after the dissolution of socialist Yugoslavia helps to explain the relevance it still has in inhibiting migratory tendencies. Gvozdanić and Kovačić (2020) stress the process of retraditionalisation and explain that the context of the 1990s in Croatia still has an effect on young people today. Namely, the 1990s context brought about heightened nationalism and its linkage with Catholicism. Ilišin (2008: 225) also points out the existence of a polarisation between the modernist and traditionalist oriented youth in Croatia. The control variable - belief in God - can be seen as being linked to Croatian identity in the sense that those with a more ethnonational variant of identity would be more likely to also incorporate being Catholic (and by that token valuing God more) as the ‘essence’ of being Croatian.

Blocks on perception of the EU and Croatia both include variables on trust. However, it is important to note that young people in Croatia have a long tradition of low trust in the government (Ilišin 2005; Čulig et al. 2013; Gvozdanović 2014). Also, the correlation between the trust in the national government and trust in the EU is not negligible¹⁵. It seems that there exists a general distrust in the political sphere, but it is more pronounced when talking about the national context. Here we see again that, when talking about perceptions, those factors that are closer to young people, both spatially and in the sense of experience, play a larger role. In light of this context, it seems this finding is something that warrants further investigation on how precisely young peoples' perception of the government and their satisfaction with the way they are represented by it shapes migratory desires. The political sphere does seem relevant for migratory desire, which can also be backed by a finding from another research that links it with general (dis)satisfaction with the state of democracy in the country (Adamović & Potočnik, 2022).

The variable that was not found to be a predictor is the importance of connections to people in power for employment. Corruption was linked to migration tendencies in the research by Jurić (2017) and Galić (2019), who studied reasons for leaving on samples of people who have already moved abroad. Jurić (2017: 362) in particular claims that economic reasons are secondary to social ones, with the main incentive for leaving Croatia being corruption. Galić conversely concluded that economic explanations take precedence, but with the second most frequent answer being the prevalence of corruption in society. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, the perceived level of corruption¹⁶ in Croatia in 2018 was 48/100. Combining this score and the attention the topic has received in Croatian media throughout the years, the reality of corruption might be even worse in the minds of Croatians. Nevertheless, the question of why these findings are not replicated by our data remains. It may be that the difference in samples plays a role; ours is a sample of people still in Croatia, while the previous authors deal with people who have already left. Recreating the

¹⁵ The Pearson coefficient is: $r = .433$ ($p < .01$).

¹⁶ With 0 meaning highly corrupt and 100 meaning very clean.

reasons for leaving is perhaps not a similar thought process as reflecting on them while forming the desire. Moreover, our sample consists of the young population, which could mean that some portion of our respondents (while definitely aware of corruption in society) have not experienced it themselves, especially when looking for a job. Galić (2019) also has a sample consisting of more highly educated people (66%), which could be a factor¹⁷. Thirdly, we did not operationalise corruption in a direct way, but used the need for connections with people in power for getting a job as a proxy. Fourthly, there is a difference in the way questions are phrased in the aforementioned research. In Galić and Jurić, corruption is already listed as a reason for leaving, while we had to search for correlations using the regression model. Furthermore, our dependent variable included people that intend to leave and stay in the new place, but also people that perhaps plan to come back, since the question entails leaving for more than six months. All of this said, the proxy variable for corruption did show a correlation to the dependent variable when directly correlated¹⁸.

Finally, concerning the difference between perception of certain values in the EU and Croatia, we found young people perceive the EU as being better in general. Connecting this to migration, young Croatians may simply be focused on specific European countries as places they see as desirable, without particularly framing them within the context of the EU. The very fact that we could create a single-factor solution from variables assessing the state of various values in the European Union and Croatia could be a testament to the fact that young peoples' perception of their primary migration destination is likely unrefined. That their perception of the EU is not nuanced is not a new discovery (Blanuša & Šiber 2007; Ilišin et al. 2013). However, it is interesting to note that when thinking about moving abroad, where in this case countries of

¹⁷ Although this variable was not used in the regression, group means were compared based on highest achieved education level, but we found that the perception of corruption as measured by the variable used in our model did not differ much between them. ANOVA did show a general difference between groups, but post-hoc tests did not single out any specific relation between groups.

¹⁸ The Pearson coefficient is small, but significant: $r = .090$ ($p < .01$).

the EU are the most desired destination, it seems that what we expected to be a relevant context of the Union is not relevant enough to young people for this dimension to be significant.

In the sample, we see the perpetuation of choosing the host countries that are traditional destinations for Croatians. This could, among other possible explanations, point to the relevance of existing social networks that make it easier to move away. However, the data in this research do not provide us with an opportunity to look into this hypothesis further¹⁹. Previous research does suggest that having friends and relatives abroad can shape migration aspirations (Božić & Burić 2005). On the other hand, domestic partnership (as opposed to a married life) was shown to be significant in young people's intention to move away, showing the importance of mezzo-level drivers nestled in their own country (Adamović & Potočnik, 2022). Adamović and Potočnik, interestingly, suggest that this might reflect whether a young person is traditional or not, which links to identity matters discussed in this paper. A qualitative approach to this messy web of influences would be useful to untangle concepts and perspectives further, as well as show the interplay of different level drivers, that no doubt creates a complex picture of interaction of different influences that have an impact on people's lives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: A SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, what sort of image of the Croatian youth do these data paint? Most of them do not express a desire to leave, but the percentage of those that do is appreciably high. Moreover, most of those that have the desire to leave characterise it as moderate, with a vague image of the

¹⁹ Respondents that expressed a desire to leave were, however, asked if they have done any things to actually facilitate moving abroad. Among the possibilities such as contacting the embassy, potential employers or universities/schools or securing a scholarship, contacting friends/relatives was in fact the most represented answer. Among 531 respondents who expressed the desire to leave, 141 (26.5%) of them said they have done this.

duration of their stay abroad²⁰. In the paper based on the same dataset from Adamović & Potočnik (2022), the reasons and migration desire intensity varied across SEE countries, showing that these countries have their own specific contexts that make their migration related patterns unique. In the last section of the paper, we presented results from the regression model concerning some micro factors of migration desire. To summarise, the biggest influence is divided between the perception of Croatia and selected control variables.

At a first look at the regression model, it is clear that variables directly connected to Europe and the EU have a much smaller (to statistically non-significant) effect on young peoples' migration desire than other tested variables. European identity showed a significant connection to desire of leaving in the second and third steps, until variables about the perception of Croatia were introduced in the model. The perception of the European Union was not found to be a predictor of the desire to leave in either of the steps. Whereas European identity ultimately did not remain a significant predictor, Croatian identity was linked to participants' migration desire. According to the regression analysis, it is primarily feelings and attitudes toward Croatia that explain why some have migratory tendencies. In other words, our final model hints that push factors seem to be dominant here. The variable about the difference between the state of certain values in the EU and Croatia does play a role, however. Given the whole model, we conclude that it is the perception of Croatia that is adding to this variable's predictive power.

Along with control variables, the block covering the perception of Croatia showed the highest predictory strength, and a negative one at that. More specifically, variables on trust in the national government and how well the interests of young people are represented in national politics are negatively connected with the desire to leave. Contrary to existing research, the influence of corruption measured through the proxy of importance of connection for

²⁰ The desired duration differs between age groups. According to the ANOVA test and the Bonferroni post-hoc test, there is a statistically significant difference between the 14-19 and the 25-29 group ($F= 3.376, p < 0.01$). The older group has a preference to stay abroad longer than the younger group, possibly reflecting the latter's interest in educational or vocational programs.

employment was not linked to migration desire. In any case, this data suggest that when young people are not satisfied with their national government and do not feel like their needs are met in the context of national politics, they will be more likely to leave.

Everything being said, it is not *our* desire to underestimate the role of social structures, nor do we want to downplay the agency of individuals. We aim to point out some micro level drivers that shape our specific sample. If there is a point to be made here, it is that deterministic explanations that give precedence to a single set of factors are not enough to fully understand the complexities of migration patterns and realities. Here, we took a closer look at perceptions and identities as drivers, while considering the Croatian context that sets the scene further. To conclude, in this sample we noticed an interplay of how identities of young people are shaped in a historical context and how perceptions of their home country can explain a part of respondents' desire to move. Returning to the gap in the literature posited in the beginning of the article, our research provides a contribution in the sense that it allows for a closer look into some factors that are not traditionally in the focus of (Croatian) young people. The latter suggests that even in the sample where economic reasons are reported as the most important ones, identity and perceptions still play a non-negligible role. There may be objective measures of a difference in prosperity across different countries, but it is likewise important to try to see if people's perceptions are in line with them, or if they are perhaps swayed in one or the other direction by factors such as media portrayal. Further research might consider testing some of the presented aspects when trying to understand the interplay of all the different factors that shape migratory decisions.

We owe it to you to point out some limitations of the paper as well. Once more, we want to point out that we are dealing with only a part of what may drive people towards leaving their home countries. Economic reasons do seem to be the “overwhelming factor” in the case of Croatia (Lavrić 2019:2). Despite this, when controlling for the influence of selected economic factors, identity and perceptions did not lose their predictive value. Another thing we have already pointed out in the article is that we use two proxy variables, one for corruption and one

for ethnonationalism. Moreover, we started by saying that we are exploring a case of a country on the periphery of the EU. Since this is a single case study, we cannot generalise for the wider regions of Southeast Europe and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that Croatia belongs to. Williams et al. (2017) analyse migration desires in nine European countries and conclude that Central and Eastern Europe is not a homogeneous space in the sense of migrations. This is especially true for the case of interconnectedness between national identity and belief in God, which is not a universal occurrence. However, there are other cases where national identity acts as an inhibitor to migration aspirations (Lapshyna & Düvell 2018). Looking at other papers dealing with migration in the context of CEE countries, the importance of macroeconomic factors remains significant, especially in combination with life satisfaction for participants from CEE countries, when compared to non-CEE countries, as previously acknowledged here as well. Micro level and non-economic factors, on the other hand, continue to be recognised as generally important too, specifically gender, age, urban-rural opposition, education and previous mobility experience (Williams, 2017).

Overall, migration incentives of people that have not left their primary country of residence is important for a full-scale policy perspective (Gubert and Senne, 2016; Fouarge and Ester, 2007, cf. Milasi, 2020). With that in mind, the implications that arise from this paper are to both include young peoples' interests reflected in the policy level, as well as inform young people on the scope of youth policy in the country. Including young people in the decision-making process and overall strengthening of young peoples' political and civic participation would make them feel a (co)ownership of policy documents and decisions, as well as strengthen their trust in the policy sphere. To further strengthen these points, a paper from Milasi (2020) shows that having a negative perception of the economic and labour outlook of their country was shown to strengthen peoples' desire to migrate. The same is true for the perception of the quality of local infrastructure, public services, education system, as well as the level of confidence in the national government.

Not all migration is considered unwelcome from the perspective of the sending countries. People gaining education abroad and returning to their homeland is seen in a positive light from a policy perspective (Central State Office for Demography and Youth, 2023). Since transnational experiences have been shown in this paper as having a strong influence, policy makers should consider making short-term mobility accessible, while making systematic, big scope changes in the employment, housing and other areas of interest to young people (preferably utilising an evidence-based approach). This would target both real economic aspects, as well as the perception of the country as a whole, possibly creating a space that young people would wish to come back to.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available on the Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung website at:

<https://www.fes.de/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=39771&token=76ce4f8329b0a5fe54140c8f1d59a52ff8296e30>

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²¹ Own translation.

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