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Transitions of young women from education to employment in Croatia:

Social reproduction at work

Abstract

As a post-socialist country, which underwent the War of Independence¹, Croatia is still on the verge of social transformations. Croatian society is characterized by a relatively low degree of intergenerational mobility, which hinders the realisation of aspirations. In light of this, this paper aims at: 1) a comparison of the social status² and aspirations of young women and men and 2) an analysis of variations in young women's social status and aspirations in regard to their socio-demographic characteristics.

Keywords: young women; education; aspirations; social status; intergenerational mobility; employment

Challenges of transitions in unstable socio-economic conditions

Young women are experiencing many challenges that accompany their way to adulthood and the process of taking on permanent social roles, which is primarily influenced by socially conditioned circumstances. These circumstances are often the ones that determine the pace and quality of joining the world of adults; individual life choices take place within the framework of an existing social structure and socioeconomic as well as sociocultural defaults, which determine the opportunities and resources available to young people (Jarvis 2009; Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš 2017). In the past few decades, the youth in Europe are at a greater and greater rate facing drifting from the transition that had previously often been considered as ‘standard’ – a linear transition from school to work and family formation (Stone et al. 2014; Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Mills and Blossfeld 2005). The former type of transition is being replaced by de-standardised and prolonged transitions that are increasingly becoming diversified (Gaio Alves and Korhonen 2016; Walther and Pohl 2005). The women’s transitions from education to work are marked with intersections and disjunctions, which makes it untenable to use the traditional meaning of the transitions (Wyn et al. 2017). This framework is in line with the results to be presented in this chapter as the young women, despite their better educational attainment, still face more difficulties in the labour market than young men do (Kupfer 2014).

The most important transitions underwent by young women – from education to work, into partnership and residential independence, and to parenthood – are becoming “late, protracted and complex” (Billari and Liefbroer 2010: 60). This is especially evident in the South-Mediterranean and East European countries, where people often stay with their parents beyond the age of 30. Young people in Croatia are severely struck by ‘de-standardisation’ of life trajectories due to the economic crisis that has persisted for more than a decade, which is accompanied by socio-political instability. The burden of transitions is additionally weighted

by economic uncertainty that affects the process of becoming an adult (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Mills and Blossfeld 2005). Recent findings of youth research in Croatia (Gvozdanović et al. 2019; Ilišin et al. 2013; Ilišin and Spajić Vrkaš 2017) indicate an overall decline in the social position of young people in comparison to the position of generations that were growing up after the War of Independence.

Emerged social diversification has led to a very sharp social stratification with an almost vanished middle social stratum and a very narrow stratum of the new elite (Sekulić and Šporer 2000). The consequences are an unequal approach to education and unequal chances in the labour market, with a prolonged situation of social instability. This situation increases the risk of youth becoming not a social resource and a link in a successfully functioning system of intergenerational solidarity³, but a social problem, which would have long-term and serious effects on the development and growth of Croatian society and economy (Potočnik 2012). The youth status was shown to be especially vulnerable in this respect; “[...] after the 2008 recession put an additional strain on the management of most citizens’ family resources, cutting back on basic life expenses went against female labour, which can contribute to or save family resources in various ways during such times of crises” (Gvozdanović et al. 2019: 13). Due to scarce family resources and sometimes limited opportunities for advancement in education and finding a stable job, young women’s vulnerability extends into their adult life when they face difficulties in reconciling work and family life. This is especially the case in countries where there is a lack of supporting structures for young women, like the state subsidies for raising children and taking care of the elderly members of the family.⁴

As if it wasn’t hard enough for a young woman to accomplish self-actualisation and reach a desired social position in Croatia, recently the public space has repeatedly been contaminated by attacks on civil rights, especially on the family and reproductive rights, and the rights of women to actively express their attitudes and aspirations that are not in line with the

conservative social and political agenda. “In line with the value- and ideology-related turmoil in Croatian society, a value polarisation has been identified between traditional and modernist orientations among youth” (Gvozdanović et al. 2019: 3). This shall be kept in mind while analysing status, aspirations, and prospects of young women in Croatia, as some authors consider that the attitudes structure of young people in Croatia may be more inclined to egalitarian gender roles (Galić 2011; Kamenov 2011; Bovan and Širinić 2016), while their everyday behaviour is heavily determined by gender-discrimination (Kamenov, Huić and Jugović 2011). Value orientations are strongly influenced by the social background of young people, namely by their residence, gender, level of education and the educational degree of their parents. These result with more young people, specifically young men, of lower social background and coming from rural areas who are prone to having traditional value orientations (Gvozdanović et al. 2019).

Social scientists have recognised that education might be a helpful tool in fostering socialisation that will make young people more inclined towards embracing open-minded ways of reasoning (Hyman and Wright 1979; Inglehart 1997). The OECD report from 2018 suggests that the readiness of women for self-actualisation, autonomy and building better career prospects increases with the accomplishment of higher education degrees. Moreover, embracing further education is frequently accompanied by a lesser acceptance of the patriarchal social norms by the higher educated women. The beneficial influence of a better educational structure of the Croatian population on the social status of young women also arises from the fact that starting from the 1980s, young women show a tendency of having slightly better educational outcomes than young men.⁵ Taking these into account, the aim of the paper is: 1) a comparison of the social status and aspirations of young women and men and 2) an analysis of variations in young women’s social status, educational aspirations and confidence in finding a job in regard to their socio-demographic characteristics.

Methodological considerations

The results that are to be presented are part of the international project *FES Youth in East Europe Studies*, and this chapter will be dedicated to the nationally representative survey conducted in Croatia in 2018 (N=1.500, age 14-29). The chapter will present the results based on the subsample of the youth aged 20-29 (N=977). The analyses that will be presented focus only on the youth aged 20-29, in order to ensure as much as possible, the completion of the pre-university education.⁶ The subsample of young women comprised 499 of the respondents while the young men comprised 478 of the respondents. The survey sample was nationally representative and included all 21 Croatian counties.⁷ In order to ensure data clarity for a wider international public, this chapter will not deal with specifics of regional division. Instead, I employed division by residence, separating Zagreb (as the capital and the largest regional centre), large towns, small towns, and villages⁸.

The data analysis includes descriptive and univariate (chi-square) analyses of some factors of the young women's transitions to their adulthood in regard to obtaining an educational degree and finding a job. The data for young men will be presented only on a descriptive level, showing the main differences between young women and young men in some educational and employment indicators. These will demonstrate that young women in Croatia on average possess higher educational credentials than their male peers, which do not guarantee a better labour market position of the young women. Analyses on the subsample of young women will display variations among young women of different social status, thus adding to the previously noted trend of social reproduction in Croatia (Potočnik 2014; Doolan et al. 2017).

Interpretation only took into account differences of statistical significance at the level of probability equal to or less than 0.05 ($p \leq 0.05$). There are two main hypotheses: I) young

women are a heterogeneous social group in terms of their social status, aspirations and professional trajectories; II) the major determinants shaping young women's social status and prospects for professional accomplishment lie in their social background. In line with these two hypotheses, the chapter seeks the answer to four questions: 1) what is the educational structure of the youth and their parents and accompanying intergenerational social mobility; 2) whether the young women's age, residence and parental educational degree present statistically significant predictors of the young women's educational aspirations; 3) what is the relationship between the young women's employment status and their age, educational degree, residence and parental educational degree 4) whether the young women's age, residence and parental educational degree present statistically significant predictors of young women's confidence in successful employment.

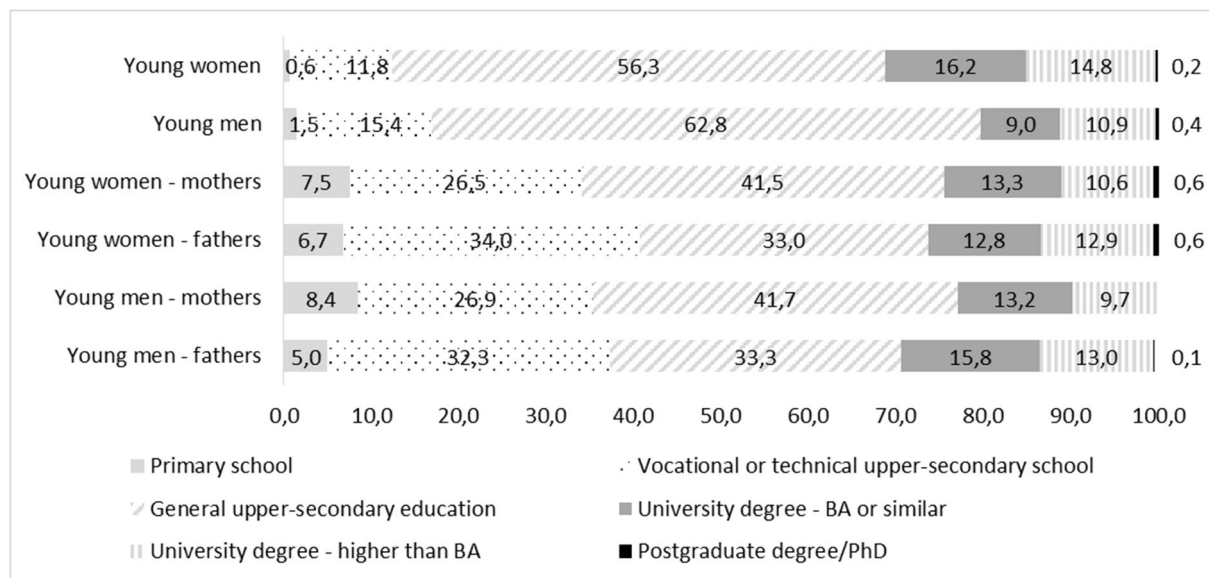
Social status and educational aspirations of the young women in Croatia

In Croatia, partly in response to a heightened need for qualifications to compete in the job market in the economic recession period, and partly due to a trend of studying at higher education institutions as a means of social protection,⁹ enrolment in higher education has increased during the last two decades (Gvozdanović et al. 2019). A major increase in the probability of higher education enrolment success for children of higher-educated parents, accompanied by a drastic decrease in the probability of higher education enrolment for children whose parents had lower levels of education was registered by social scientists (Gvozdanović et al. 2019). These findings are supported by the similar results of the Eurostudent IV (Farnell 2011) and Eurostudent V surveys (Šćukanec and Sinković 2016). The Eurostudent surveys indicate a significant correlation between higher education levels of parents and higher

educational aspirations of their offspring. Equally important, children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds more frequently complete upper-secondary general schools, whereas children of parents with upper-secondary vocational schools or only a primary education also fit into a pattern of social reproduction.

FES youth research results on the Croatian sample show the families' educational structure of the youth aged 20-29 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Educational attainment of young women and men and their parents (%)



It can be noticed there are more highly educated young women than young men, whereas fathers generally have a higher educational degree than mothers do. Mothers of young women are slightly better educated than their fathers, while young men's fathers are better educated than their mothers are. It is in line with the previously registered trends in the educational structure of the youth and their parents (Ilišin et al. 2013; Gvozdanović et al. 2019; Potočnik 2011; Potočnik 2014).

The statistically significant predictors of the young women's level of education were age (two cohorts between the age of 20 and 29) and the educational level of their parents (Table 1).

Table 1: Educational attainment of young women by their sociodemographic characteristics (%)

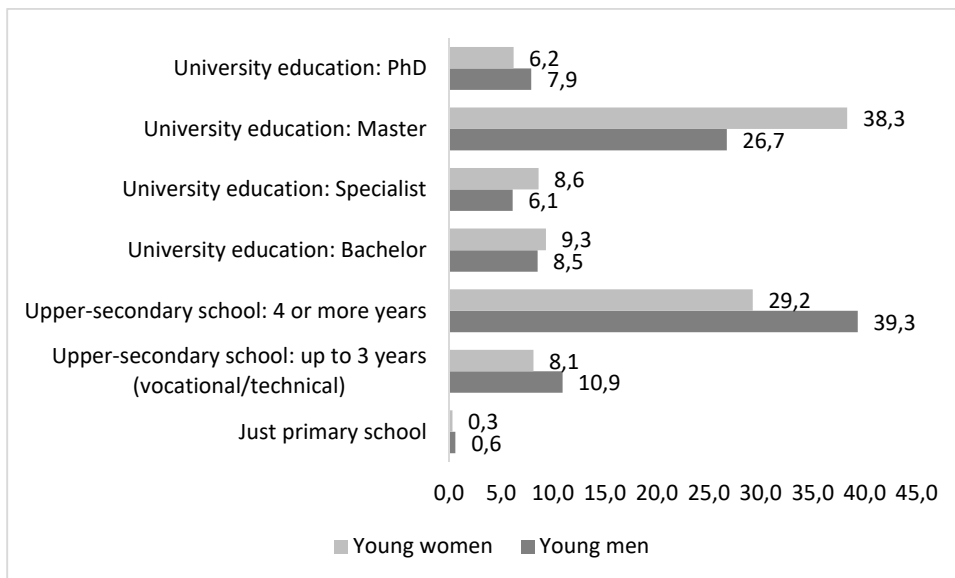
Sociodemographic variables	Educational attainment			
	Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	General upper-secondary education	University degree – BA or similar	University degree – higher than BA
Age	$\chi^2 = 41,62; df = 3; p = .000$			
20-24	7,7	77,2	16,6	5,5
25-29	15,8	44,6	16,2	23,5
Educational attainment – mother	$\chi^2 = 84,53; df = 9; p = .000$			
Primary school	35,3	47,1	2,9	14,7
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	26,5	50,8	12,9	9,8
General upper-secondary school	4,9	66,3	16,1	12,7
University degree – BA or higher	1,6	49,2	24,6	24,6
Educational attainment – father	$\chi^2 = 59,85; df = 9; p = .000$			
Primary school	38,7	48,4	9,7	3,2
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	18,8	56,4	13,3	11,5
General upper-secondary school	7,4	64,4	16,0	12,3
University degree – BA or higher	3,1	48,1	23,3	25,6
Total	11,9	56,8	16,4	14,9

Regarding the age, there are two major findings: 1) educational attainment increases with age and 2) the proportion of young women with vocational or technical upper-secondary school education decreases with age, which is in line with the data on reduced numbers of new enrolments in the upper-secondary vocational or technical schools¹⁰. The educational degree of young women is statistically significantly related to the parental educational attainment, showing disproportionate educational chances of women coming from different social backgrounds. The most striking difference – the one between fraternal educational attainment and educational degree of the female respondents – registered only 3,2 percent of young women with a higher than BA degree descending from fathers with only a primary education vs 25,6 percent of young women with the highest degree whose fathers had a corresponding education. The analyses showed that young men's educational attainment was also influenced by the

sociodemographic variables presented in Table 1, so there is no significant difference between young women and young men in this regard. These findings are supported by the previous studies on social mobility in Croatia (Matković 2011; Potočnik 2011, 2014; Hodžić 2014; Baranović 2015).

Potential for higher educational attainment is also indicated by educational aspirations (Figure 2), which in the case of Croatian youth aged 20-29 show that young women on average have higher educational aspirations than their male peers.

Figure 2: Educational aspirations of young women and men – age 20-29 (%)



The results on educational aspirations are only partially consistent with previously noted trends in the educational structure of Croatian young population, meaning there is a significant discrepancy between the share of obtained degrees higher than BA (Master and PhD) and declared aspirations. Concretely, 15,0 percent of young women and 11,3 percent of young men hold a degree higher than BA, while such aspirations were registered in 44,5 percent of young women and 34,6 percent of young men.

Social reproduction, especially in times of economic uncertainties, has a tendency to negatively affect educational aspirations. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents influence their educational aspirations (Table 2).

Table 2: Educational aspirations of young women by their sociodemographic characteristics (%)

Sociodemographic variables	Educational aspirations					
	Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	General upper-secondary education	University education – BA	University education – Specialist	University education – MA	Postgraduate degree/PhD
Age	$\chi^2 = 13,59; df = 5; p = .020$					
20-24	5,1	27,3	6,9	10,6	42,6	7,4
25-29	11,2	31,4	11,7	6,7	34,1	4,9
Residence	$\chi^2 = 29,99; df = 15; p = .012$					
Zagreb	6,1	21,2	6,1	12,1	45,4	9,1
Macro-regional centres	5,6	11,1	11,1	19,4	52,8	0,0
Other towns	9,9	28,4	13,0	7,4	37,0	4,3
Village	8,0	36,8	6,9	6,3	33,9	8,0
Educational attainment	$\chi^2 = 504,75; df = 15; p = .000$					
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	76,6	14,9	2,1	0,0	6,4	0,0
General upper-secondary school	0,0	48,4	7,6	8,4	31,6	4,0
University degree – BA or similar	0,0	0,0	26,9	21,8	43,6	7,7
University degree – higher than BA	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	81,2	18,8
Educational attainment – mother	$\chi^2 = 77,42; df = 15; p = .000$					
Primary school	25,9	33,3	11,1	0,0	25,9	3,7
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	19,0	34,5	8,6	4,3	31,9	1,7
General upper-secondary school	3,3	33,9	10,0	10,0	37,8	5,0
University degree – BA or higher	1,6	24,2	14,5	16,1	38,7	4,8
Educational attainment – father	$\chi^2 = 71,43; df = 15; p = .000$					
Primary school	30,4	17,4	21,7	0,0	26,1	4,3
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	15,0	35,4	10,2	6,8	30,6	2,0
General upper-secondary school	3,5	34,0	6,9	10,4	38,2	6,9
University degree – BA or higher	0,0	9,4	3,1	9,4	57,8	20,3
Total	8,2	29,4	9,3	8,7	38,3	6,2

Based on the data presented in table 2, it can be concluded that young women show a high level of heterogeneity in regard to the predictors of their educational aspirations. At the same time, it has to be noted that the educational aspirations of young men are influenced by the same predictors, and the nature of their relation is the same as in the case of their female peers.

It is evident that the older cohort of young women show lower educational aspirations than the young women aged 20-24, which can be explained by the fact that a part of the older cohort has already fulfilled their educational goals. However, it should not be neglected that a share of these young women has already faced hard life reality, coping with financial insecurity, the difficult transition from education to work and hurdles in reconciling their work and family life. Young women from macro-regional centres and Zagreb showed greater aspirations in striving towards a university education in comparison to the respondents from a rural setting. In addition, young women whose mothers and fathers had an upper-secondary general or university degree had significantly greater prospects of striving towards a university education in comparison to those whose mother had only completed a primary education or less, which, again indicates social reproduction. In this respect, it should be added that the father's educational attainment indicates a stronger influence towards the highest aspirations than the mother's degree. Only 4,8 percent of young women whose mother holds a PhD wish to earn the same degree, in comparison to 20,3% of young women whose father holds a PhD.

Another facet of educational aspirations is confidence in the realisation of the set goals. According to the survey data, 84,8 percent of young women aged 20-29 are convinced they will easily obtain a desired educational degree, compared to 80,7 percent of young men. The percentage of indecisive young women and men (10,7 percent vs 14,6 percent) differs slightly more than in the previous case, while there is almost no difference between young women and men who are unsure whether they will complete their desired education (4,6 percent vs 4,7 percent).

Below, Table 3 helps in demonstrating how is the confidence in realisation of young women's educational aspirations in Croatia formed.

Table 3: Young women's confidence about obtaining the level of desired education by the father's education – age 20-29 (%)

Educational attainment – father	Unsure	Indecisive	Sure
	$\chi^2 = 13,68; df = 6; p = .033$		
Primary school	9,1	13,6	77,3
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	9,0	9,0	82,0
General upper-secondary school	2,3	12,9	84,8
University degree – BA or higher	0,9	9,6	89,5
Total	4,5	10,7	84,8

The only statistically significant predictor of the level of confidence that young women's educational aspirations will be realised was the father's level of education. Connections between confidence in realisation of the desired educational degree of the young women and their fathers' educational attainment reveal expected results; the higher educational attainment of their fathers, the higher their confidence is. The presented results stipulate that young women from more a modest social background, who are already in a disadvantaged position compared to their peers with better-educated parents, face further deterioration or keeping a status quo concerning their educational and career aspirations. Young men are not in a better position than young women; their confidence in realisation of their educational aspirations is not confined only by their father's educational attainment but also by their own level of education as well as by their mother's educational attainment.

Labour market status of the young women in Croatia: Precarity in the making

Uncertainty of life prospects, especially in relation to the educational and employment outcomes, influences all aspects of young people's lives, from health and wellbeing to leisure time and political and cultural participation. For the youth in Croatia, the end of the second decade of the 21st century is marked by the persistence of unfavourable economic prospects, which forces an increasing number of young people to leave the country in search of better education and employment opportunities. On the EU level, Croatia ranks fourth last in terms of its youth employment, standing at merely a third of the population between 15 and 29 years of age in employment, compared to almost three-quarters in the Netherlands and two-thirds in Austria.¹¹ Moreover, Croatia ranks at the infamous European top in terms of registered unemployment (over 30 percent unemployed among the 15-29 age population), together with Greece, Spain, and Italy. The most vulnerable youth subgroup is the so-called NEET (youth not in employment, education, or training), which makes up as much as one-fourth of Croatian youth between 20 and 24 years of age.¹² Although the rates of both young women and men in NEET status have been on a constant decline since 2010, among young women of this age we have registered 18,3 percent of NEET status, in comparison to 16,3 percent of their male peers. As already noted, youth vulnerability is even more pronounced due to their precarious position on the labour market. According to the *FES Youth Study*, 39,5 percent of youth in Croatia work more than the average 40 hours a week and the overtime work is most often not paid. Instead, young people often invest additional working hours in the hope of (often not realised) professional advancement. The precarity of the youth labour market status in Croatia is also evident from data on only 7,5 percent of employed youth in Croatia who have a salary equal or above the national net average of 870 euro. In other words, the majority of young people in Croatia do not earn enough to meet their needs and accomplish independent lives. Moreover,

professional 'decay' is a phenomenon that has seized a large number of young people; 36,9 percent work in their profession and 25,5 percent work on a job that is close to their profession, while more than one-third of young people do not have significant opportunity to employ their skills and knowledge acquired during formal education. When it comes to the young people aged 20-29, young women are in a slightly better position; 41,0 percent of young women and 34,0 percent of young men work in a job within their profession. Such results indicate a possible better placement of young women in the labour market. However, our data will show that women still lag behind men when it comes to employment rate and job stability. Young men are in a better position when concerning the stability of a job; almost 9 percent more young men than women have a permanent contract for a full-time job (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Employment status of young women and men – age 20-29 (%)



The fragility of the female labour market position also stems from the fact that the number of young women searching for a job was greater, meaning there are more young women facing difficulties in reaching a desired labour market position.

The statistically significant predictors of young women's employment status were their age, level of education and educational attainment of their parents (Table 4).

Table 4: Employment status of young women by their sociodemographic characteristics (%)

Sociodemographic variables	Employment status				
	Have a permanent contract	Have a temporary contract	Other (occasional jobs, self-employed or in occupational training)	They have no job, but they are actively looking for a job	They have no job and they are currently not looking for a job
Age	$\chi^2 = 69,15; df = 4; p = .000$				
20-24	16,5	20,5	7,6	17,0	38,4
25-29	41,8	25,8	3,9	18,0	10,5
Educational attainment	$\chi^2 = 33,78; df = 12; p = .001$				
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	37,3	27,1	3,4	20,3	11,9
General upper-secondary school	29,0	20,6	4,4	17,3	28,7
University degree – BA or similar	18,9	28,4	9,5	13,5	29,7
University degree – higher than BA	42,9	27,1	7,1	18,6	4,3
Educational attainment – mother	$\chi^2 = 31,84; df = 12; p = .001$				
Primary school	27,0	40,5	0,0	18,9	13,5
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	42,1	20,6	4,0	15,9	17,4
General upper-secondary school	27,0	25,6	7,5	15,6	24,2
University degree – BA or higher	22,4	16,4	5,2	22,4	33,6
Educational attainment – father	$\chi^2 = 25,44; df = 12; p = .013$				
Primary school	38,2	29,4	0,0	14,7	17,6
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	39,2	20,9	5,1	17,7	17,1
General upper-secondary school	28,7	23,5	6,4	12,1	29,3
University degree – BA or higher	19,2	23,2	7,2	24,0	26,4
Total	30,0	23,3	5,6	17,5	23,5

Employment prospects grew with the age and educational degree of young women, whereas the best prospects for stable employment were related to the offspring of the parents who have

completed vocational or technical upper-secondary education. It is interesting to note that in the case of young men, beside the predictors listed in the table, the type of settlement where they lived was also shown to be a statistically significant predictor; living in Zagreb was increasing young men's chances of having a stable job.

A very concrete moment of transition from education to the labour market – finding a job – seems to concern somehow less than a third of young people aged 20-29; 30,1 percent of young women and 31,0 percent of young men regard they will face difficulties while looking for a job after completing formal education. The percentage of young women and men who are not sure whether they will easily find a job after completing their education is exactly the same (45,3 percent), similar to the 15,9 percent of young women and 16,0 percent of young men who think they will face no difficulties while searching for a job. Gender differences in the group of young people who have already found a job are also not pronounced as 8,6 percent of young women and 7,6 percent of young men have found a job before completing formal education.

Analysis of the confidence in finding a job after graduation (Table 5) suggests that young women tend to be more confident in this respect at an earlier age, which can be explained with less labour market experience and a higher level of illusions about situating on the labour market.

Table 5: Perceived easiness of finding a job by sociodemographic characteristics of young women (%)

Sociodemographic variables	Difficult	Easy	They have already found a job
Age	$\chi^2 = 13,38; df = 2; p = .001$		
20-24	28,2	67,5	4,3
25-29	34,7	44,9	20,4
Educational attainment	$\chi^2 = 21,48; df = 6; p = .002$		
Vocational or technical upper-secondary school	25,0	25,0	50,0
General upper-secondary school	29,7	65,8	4,5
University degree – BA or similar	30,0	60,0	10,0
University degree – higher than BA	27,3	36,4	36,4
Total	29,5	61,4	9,0

To a certain extent, data shows a correlation between the educational attainment and perceived easiness of finding a job; the higher the educational level, the more pronounced perceived easiness of finding a job. There is an ostensible deviation in the case of young women with an education higher than BA, which gets explained by the 36,4 percent of them who have already found a job. In other words, the higher the education, the easier it is to find a labour market position.

Perceived easiness of finding a job after completing education is the observed area where the largest diversification between young women and men aged 20-29 was registered. Young men seem to be more aware of or have a more pessimistic attitude towards difficulties in finding a job. Contrary to the young women, young men do not display heterogeneity concerning their age, but do so in connection with their type of settlement. Type of settlement is especially interesting in this regard as there are statistically significant differences in the subsample of the young men ($\chi^2 = 12,87; df = 6; p = .045$), while such differences were not registered in the case of young women ($\chi^2 = 6,80; df = 6; p = .339$). More concretely, young men aged 20-29 residing in Zagreb are in 34,8 percent sure they will find the job easily (vs 48,5 percent of young women), compared to 50,0 percent of their male peers from macro-regional centres (vs 57,9%

of young women), 78,6 percent of young men from small towns (vs 70,5 percent of young women) and 61,7 percent of young men from villages (vs 58,7 percent of young women).

Conclusions

Young people nowadays in Croatia, especially young women, live in times of uncertainty and rising challenges that affect their everyday lives and future prospects. In the past three decades, Croatia has undergone profound changes; war and transition have brought about an altered socio-political context, changes of the social structure and an unfavourable economic situation. Gendered logic offers different frameworks of transition to women and men, putting more obstacles in front of young women. Unfavourable social background and the restraining social context are adding difficulty to the already limited prospects of young women for realising educational and employment aspirations. Those still, to a significant extent and especially in rural settings, prevent young women from expressing their educational and career aspirations and accomplishing their life goals. There is a significant difference among young women's confidence in the realisation of their educational aspirations, with the greater rate of confidence related to the higher educational attainment of the fathers. As anticipated, the level of education increases with age and educational attainment of the parents. The link between parental levels of education and those of their offspring is most clearly seen in the social reproduction of the more highly educated strata of the population, and in the reduced mobility of children whose parents have lower or upper-secondary vocational education. In other words, social reproduction is still a trait of Croatian society, especially for the daughters of lower and vocationally educated parents. Such findings can be extrapolated, to a certain extent, to the area of employment. Higher educational degrees of the young women and their parents were also related to the a more pronounced perceived easiness of finding a job. The employment prospects

grew with the age and educational degree of the young women, however, the best prospects for stable employment were related to the daughters of the parents who have completed vocational or technical upper-secondary education.

Croatia isn't solitary in having bleak conclusions on the social status of young people; the 2018 *FES Youth Study* results indicate that the adverse social circumstances influence social positions and aspirations of youth across both the Western Balkan and some new EU-Member countries (Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania). Slovenia is the most prominent country among the East European countries in providing young people social conditions and opportunities to foster social mobility, advancement in education and finding a stable job. The data suggests higher education is a desirable goal across the majority of observed countries; the enrolment rates are high in Slovenia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania, but also in non-EU countries – Serbia, Albania and Montenegro. However, desires are sometimes very different from reality.

The analyses suggest there is a sharp disbalance between rates of university enrolment by young people with higher educated parents and those whose parents have finished upper-secondary education. The highest difference was registered in Bulgaria, where the offspring of highly educated parents have ten times higher chances to enrol into university. These chances are six times higher in Romania, five times in Albania, four times in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia, three times higher in Montenegro and two times higher in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The employment status of youth in the ten analysed countries displays to a certain extent less heterogeneity than the educational status. In most countries of Southeast Europe, young people have difficulties in finding a stable job, while precarious labour market positions represent young people's reality. Similarly to the young people in Croatia, youth in the entire Southeast Europe struggle to find a job that corresponds to their level of education and provides them prospects for career advancement.

Gender continues to play a crucial role in shaping many aspects of the transition pathways and young women in Croatia are more frequently less successful in their striving towards a stable and fulfilling job than young men. Young women are more likely to be in full-time education than young men, while young men are more likely to be in full-time employment than young women. Additionally, young men do not have to fight disadvantages that are incorporated in traditional value settings and the patriarchal system. Traditional social settings, which are a characteristic of Croatian post-Homeland War society, additionally enforce unfavourable conditions faced by many young women. Social reproduction is adding to the adverse long-term effects both on the individual and societal level. There is a grim chance for improvement of employment prospects for young women in the current Croatian socio-economic and political context. It deeply affects the quality of life, potentially opening up a vicious circle of social marginalisation and poverty for a significant share of Croatia's young women.

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Notes

¹ The Croatian War of Independence was fought from 1991 to 1995.

² The chapter examines only two components of the social status: educational attainment and employment status.

³ On the level of society intergenerational solidarity can be understood as a mutually beneficial investment maintained by taxes. Generations of previous employees and employers contributed to investments in infrastructure, environmental protection and innovation, whereas people currently active in the labour market contribute to the pension funds and the system of care for the retirees.

⁴ In Croatia, only 75 percent of children under the age of seven [Eurostat, educ_uoe_enra10] take part in pre-school education and there is a permanent problem with a lack of homes for elderly people.

⁵ The last Census data (2011) shows that 16,7 percent of women and 16,0 percent of men hold a university degree.

⁶ Primary education in Croatia is obligatory, starting at the of age six or seven and lasting for eight years. Upper-secondary education (starting at the age of 14 or 15) is not obligatory and children can choose among upper-secondary three or four-year vocational schools, or upper-secondary general education (grammar schools). Only graduates of upper-secondary four-year schools are eligible to enroll in higher education (polytechnic or university).

⁷ A county designates the largest unit of local government in the political division of Croatia. Croatia is divided into 21 counties.

⁸ „Large towns“ encompass macro-regional centres: Osijek, Rijeka, and Split. Small towns include all settlements smaller than Zagreb and macro-regional centres and inhabited with more than 2.000 people, whereas villages represent territorial units inhabited with less than 2.000 people.

⁹ University students in Croatia have access to certain social rights and services that exclude unemployed or employed youth (e.g. public transport subvention, subsidised meals, accommodation in student dormitories, working through 'student contracts', free supplemental health insurance). Therefore, many young people in Croatia opt for enrolling in university education and accessing these 'students' rights, while working part-time or without a contract.

¹⁰ Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics.

¹¹ Source: Eurostat [yth_empl_010].

¹² Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_20].