

The case study

MIGRATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM KOSOVO

A Study of the class 2020



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Migration of young people from Kosovo – A Study of the class of 2020.

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Introduction

The case study before you is the result of an in-depth analysis of the problem of youth migration, which is seen as a considerable problem for the Serbian community in Kosovo. Sporadic migrations of young people can be seen in every generation, but the difference in this case, an alarming difference at that, is the fact that more than 60% of students attending Secondary School in North Mitrovica chose to **migrate** from Kosovo. Out of the total of 40 students from Generation 2020 (21 from the Sciences department, 19 from the Humanities department), 25 left Kosovo (17 from the Sciences, 8 from the Humanities). The proportions of this phenomenon can best be seen in the case of Class IV/1 from the Sciences department, the peculiarity of which has motivated this research. In this class, 17 out of 21 students left Kosovo. Alongside understanding the negative consequences of migrations, these numbers were the initial motivation to show the case of Generation 2020 in this case study.

Even though the opportunities for gaining a better education in Serbia were the initial driver of this migration, various factors that have a cumulative effect on the departure of young people from North Kosovo have been recognised. A series of factors that have an impact on the reduction of opportunities for young people to acquire economic independence (hiring through nepotism, corruption, the hostile labour market for the young), political factors (safety, security, politically unstable situation), as well as sociological factors (quality of education, everyday life) played a part in their decision to leave. By identifying these reasons, we were able to have a closer look at the complexity of migration patterns and how they affect the Serbian community in Kosovo. Furthermore, we gained a deeper understanding of the factors affecting young people's decision to leave and were able to detect the main issues young people are facing. The study also sheds light on the negative impact of this migration on the Serbian community through phenomena like brain drain and the snowball effect¹.

The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that young people from Generation 2020 had an opportunity to express their views, opinions and evaluations through interviews, which helped this case study to develop into an authentic and organic testimony of young people about the problems causing them to leave North Kosovo, despite the positive sentiments tying them to their land.

This study aims to **contribute to the current discussion concerning youth migration and its impact on the survival and developmental potential of the Serbian community in Kosovo**. In the forthcoming chapters, you will have a closer look at the main and secondary causes of youth migration from North Kosovo and the socioeconomic and political situation that is the catalyst of these migrations. All the mentioned causes – social, economic, political and personal – should be looked at as interconnected parts of a whole, hence we need to observe them more thoroughly to adequately understand the migration of young people from North Kosovo.

¹ A phrase indicating the trend of acceleration/growth of a phenomenon. In this context, the authors attribute it to the unstoppable trend of youth migration.

Research Methodology

Basic information about the study:

- Research method: explanatory case study method
- Research instrument: individual in-depth interview, content analysis
- Data sources for the case: interviews, publications, media
- Research period: January 16 – April 7, 2023
- Research location: North Mitrovica, Belgrade, Novi Sad
- Number of interviewees: 12
- Number of interviewees from Generation 2020: 8
- Number of interviewees who stayed in Kosovo: 1
- Number of interviewed parents: 3

A combination of two qualitative methods for data collection have been used in this study – individual in-depth interviews and content analysis of relevant publications about youth migrations. Three different questionnaires for data collection were made: one for Generation 2020, one for the parents whose children left Kosovo and one for young people who stayed in Kosovo upon graduating. The interviews were carried out in the period from January 27 to March 1, in person or via video platforms, which means their realisation was adjusted to the circumstances at that moment. Desk research implied the analysis of relevant literature dealing with the problem of youth migration.

For the analysis of the acquired data, we used a coding system by which the most important causes of youth migrations were recognised. To process relevant theoretical and empirical material on youth migrations, we used the methods of analysis and synthesis. Codes, which in this case are social, political, economic and personal factors, are analytical units that have clear and distinctive characteristics based on which the interview data were put into categories. The point of

this process was to reduce the statements and put them into categories that would be the basis of further analysis. This analysis was the fundamental document that was further upgraded with data obtained during desk research and then shaped into a case study.

Sociopolitical context

The nature of migratory movements within a community is determined by the social context, i.e. sociological, political, economic, cultural and other circumstances. Emigrations from Kosovo can also be interpreted in this way and they are, by its very nature, a reflection of the current situation in Kosovo, which is profoundly marked by the war in Kosovo and bombing in 1999, as well as by the ethnic conflict that sparked the war. Concerning the consequences these events have had on the current state of affairs in Kosovo, they are its essential determinants, so everyday life can still be observed through the prism of ethnic conflict.

By crossing various available data², it has been estimated that approximately 200,000 Serbs left Kosovo after the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, and in 2004 – during and after the March Pogrom – around 3,000 Serbs left Kosovo. These forced mass migrations of the population were motivated by the consequences of the war, as well as by the population's fear of their life. After these stages, there came a period of stabilisation that lasted several years during which there were no mass migrations of Serbs from Kosovo.

In the last ten years, after the change of government in Serbia in 2012, Belgrade has changed its policy towards Kosovo. The main characteristic of this new approach is the policy of concessions towards Pristina and the international community: the abolition of institutions that worked according to the administrative-legal system of the Republic of Serbia and the expansion of the legal jurisdiction of Pristina to the north of Kosovo. At the same time, there was no reciprocity in the concessions in favour of the Serbian community, in connection with the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities, which should have been formed according to the principles agreed upon in the Brussels Agreement. It brought with it all the negative effects of prolonged

ethnic conflict, including impaired security and a negative environment for achieving economic development. In addition, the creation of a new political elite, namely the Serb List, which monopolized the political space, created a significant democratic deficit in the Serbian community in Kosovo. The cumulative effect of these factors is the acceleration of the silent migration, the sporadic but continuous departure of the population, primarily young people. The case of Generation 2020 is an integral part of that phenomenon and it shows the effects of social deficits on demographic trends.

Mass migrations are most commonly caused by great turmoil, i.e. events that have large destructive potentials, such as war and natural disasters. However, silent migrations are different in nature, more difficult to detect and the reasons behind them are more complex. More than two decades after the war, and 15 years after the declaration of independence by the authorities in Pristina, the climate in Kosovo is extremely discouraging for young people. A great number of studies show that their dissatisfaction is caused by the high level of unemployment, overall economic and political instability, security issues, as well as by an inadequate state of the education system. Viewed in this way, the issue of migration becomes a political one. If we accept the idea from the beginning, that the nature of migration is determined by the social context, core changes in North Kosovo could have a volte-face effect on the migratory trends of young people, i.e. to reverse the existing trends. However, the possibilities and potential for change are not the topic of this study. In this study, the focus is on the migratory patterns of young people from Kosovo.

² Further details about the forced mass migrations of Serbs from Kosovo: <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/eur700042007en.pdf>
<https://www.unhcr.org/3ba0bbeb4.pdf>

Summary

- 1. The state of education** in North Kosovo is the main reason why Generation 2020 decided to leave Kosovo upon finishing secondary school. Young people rate academic education at Mitrovica University as insufficiently high-quality, insufficiently diligent and insufficiently compatible with the demands of the labour market.
- Political factors that influenced their decision to leave are **political instability and ethnic conflict**. Young people use euphemisms like tension and problems to describe **political instability** and do not show much interest in political events in their community. **Ethnic conflict** remains the burning issue for Generation 2020 showing us that ethnic distancing is profound and that the reconciliation processes undertaken in the last 20 years have not had the desired effect.
- Lack of opportunities for the economic affirmation of young people has also been identified as one of the most prominent factors in deciding to leave. Economic factors that influenced the departure of young people are the hostile youth market and economic crime. **The labour market** in North Kosovo, according to Generation 2020, does not offer jobs they are planning to do upon graduating and is hostile towards them. Furthermore, they see **corruption** and **nepotism** as insurmountable obstacles when talking about the prospects of hiring young people in the North.
- Personal factors that influenced their decision to leave are **parental and peer support**. Parents support their children to leave believing they are protecting them and helping them to be successful in their respective fields. The support of friends is so significant that it can be found in the centre of the snowball effect, which is a phenomenon characteristic of migratory trends of young people from Kosovo.
- 5. Not one member of Generation 2020 is planning to come back to Kosovo upon graduating³.**

³ No interviewee would return unconditionally. Two would return provided the labour market conditions improve, although they don't think that will happen. The rest do not consider the possibility of return.

Education

- MEMBERS OF GENERATION 2020 CITE THE NEED FOR BETTER EDUCATION AS THE PRIMARY REASON FOR LEAVING KOSOVO
- THEY SEE EDUCATION AS AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE THAT WILL ENABLE THEM TO FIND BETTER JOBS AND A BETTER FUTURE
- FACULTIES THEY ENROLLED IN: FACULTY OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING, FACULTY OF ORGANISATIONAL SCIENCES, FACULTY OF MATHEMATICS, FACULTY OF LAW

Higher education in the Serbian language in Kosovo is realised at Mitrovica University and is harmonised with the Serbian education system. The University offers over one hundred courses and 9,000 students attended it in 2021. This number was reduced by 25 students from the Secondary School in North Mitrovica, who decided to continue their education in Serbia.

Leaving Kosovo upon finishing high school can be seen as a pragmatic decision of goal-oriented young people: they aim to find a better position in the labour market, and they believe they will achieve this goal through quality education.

To understand their motives better, it is important to emphasise that they see a qualitative difference in the quality (and usability) of knowledge offered at Mitrovica University on the one hand and Serbian universities on the other. This difference is three-fold: the difference in the quality of study programs and opportunities for practical work; the difference in the offer of study programs which are, according to them, more versatile and comprehensive in Serbian universities, which gives them a wider set of options when choosing the school they want; and the difference in the reputation of these institutions.

The quality of studies at Mitrovica University is rated as insufficiently good. This rating is based on personal estimates, and indirect experiences, but also on prejudices linked to the work of the University. These prejudices are based on real events, e.g. the affair at the Faculty of Medicine in 2015, when the public

found out about the Dean's abuse of position⁴, after which he was named the University's provost⁵. Events like these, as well as the widespread story of corruption, have a direct impact on the young, discourage them from studying in Kosovo and motivate them to leave. If Generation 2020 formed its attitude about the quality of education in Kosovo because they were exposed to such narratives, studies carried out on this topic confirm their doubts. Studies show that every 10th person either paid money to pass an exam or knows someone who did and rated the quality of education in Kosovo as medium good (3, 5)⁶. In addition, the University of Mitrovica is not ranked either in the Shanghai list or in the Times Higher Education list – the most prestigious global university ranking lists – which reflects the quality of this institution.

Student 1, 21:

I think that the University down there doesn't have enough potential or the possibility to provide me with the knowledge and education I would like...

Student 2, 21:

My intention was, with all due respect, to perfect my knowledge, which was possible only in Belgrade because they really have the best faculty there.

⁴ <https://kossev.info/trade-grbic-ekskluzivno-o-aferi-koja-trese-medicinski-u-kosovskoj-mitrovici-moja-strana-PRICE/>
<https://www.vesti.rs/Kosovo/Presedan-na-Medicinskom-fakultetu-u-Kosovskoj-Mitrovici-Kao-u-Nusicevim-komedija-ma-3.html>

⁵ <http://www.nspm.rs/hronika/grupa-profesora-univerziteta-u-pristini-kosovska-mitrovica-postavila-radeta-grbica-za-rektora-univerziteta.html?alphabet=I>

⁶ <https://ngoaktiv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Kvalitet-obrazovanja-na-severu-Kosova.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.shanghairanking.com/rankings/arwu/2022>

https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking#/page/0/length/25/locations/SRB/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats

Behind such an understanding of the quality of higher education in Kosovo are sociological and political reasons. Education in Kosovo is seen as the pillar of the survival of the nation and intelligentsia in *Kosovo and Metohija*⁸, and by emphasising the political function, we are neglecting the most important one: educational. One gets the impression that the politicization of education in Kosovo is happening precisely at the expense of the quality of education offered to young people; by treating positions at the University as party loot, employing them along party lines, and suppressing the rebellious potential of students through the control of student bodies. All these manifestations of political influence in the education system have a far-reaching influence on the perceptions of young people, which are of crucial importance for the decision to study in some other educational centres. The perception of education is a relative matter, and the discrepancy between the attitudes of young people who went to study in Belgrade and those who stayed is large. Young people studying at the University of Mitrovica are satisfied with the quality of the program and the job opportunities that open up to them after completing their studies.

This disparity in attitudes about the quality of education offered at Mitrovica University points to the third level of differentiation of the universities, which is prestige. Belgrade University is an institution with a tradition of more than two centuries and a reputation in line with the tradition of the oldest higher education and scientific research institution. It is ranked in the Shanghai list, in the rankings of the Centre for World University Rankings, Times Higher Education, and it takes first place in the rankings in Serbia. Having that in mind, the University of Mitrovica is a less desirable option for young people.

Student 3, 21:

(about the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Belgrade): It has this reputation; it has a name in the world, that simply attracted me the most...

The thesis about prestige is supported by the fact that there are cases of young people who enrolled in faculties in Serbia, even though the same study programs were available to them in Kosovo, such as the Faculty of Technology or Law. Therefore, the prestige of the institution they will attend is, among other things, a very important factor for young people when choosing what school to go to. However, while they value institutions as such, they do not consider education/knowledge to be a value in itself. They value the useful value of knowledge, so it essentially represents a method of reaching a good and stable job. This kind of instrumentalisation of knowledge, if it were to become a trend, could lead to a loss of interest among young people in social sciences and humanities. Those diplomas, in the current social context of glorification of socially useful knowledge, are becoming less and less useful. Still, the percentage of students who enrol in natural sciences is lower than those who enrol in social sciences, so this does not represent an immediate threat⁹. However, in the Serbian education system, professions like sociology and psychology teachers are already in short supply, as well as mathematics and informatics teachers, because young people who study natural sciences are increasingly choosing to work in the private sector¹⁰. The same tendency was shown by young people from Kosovo, who do not plan to work in the public, but in the private sector, and consider that their studies in Belgrade are an excellent prelude to that goal.

From all of the above, it can be concluded that the functionality of institutions, such as institutions of higher education in Kosovo, is one of the preconditions for the survival of Serbs. The number of students at the University of Mitrovica, minus the number of young people who go to study in Serbia every year, is filled with students coming from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, so the University itself is not under threat of significant losses. However, there is no doubt that this kind of brain drain, especially if it is permanent, can have incalculable consequences for the wider community, but also the University. When the most successful students of the most successful high school in Kosovo go to Serbia in large

⁸ <https://www.kim.gov.rs/v4301.php>

⁹ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Distribution_of_tertiary_education_graduates_by_broad_field_of_education_2017_\(%25\)_ET19.png#filelinks](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Distribution_of_tertiary_education_graduates_by_broad_field_of_education_2017_(%25)_ET19.png#filelinks)
<https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/1104020402?languageCode=sr-Latn>

¹⁰ <https://insajder.net teme/secerov-dekan-geografskog-fakulteta-u-markeru-plate-nastavnika-u-svetu-20-do-30-o-dsto-lznad-prosecnih-u-srbiji-nize-od-proseka-video>

numbers to study, with the plan to get a job there, we get a manifoldly destructive impact on the entire Serbian community, in terms of the irreversible loss of important human resources and potential.

Economy

- ALONG WITH EDUCATION, THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN KOSOVO IS THE MAIN REASON WHY GENERATION 2020 IS GOING TO SERBIA
- ECONOMIC FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THEIR DECISION TO LEAVE ARE ECONOMIC CRIME AND A HOSTILE LABOUR MARKET

If we accept as a fact that young people from Generation 2020 regard education as an instrument by which to improve their position in the labour market, we can conclude two things. Education is the main factor that causes young people to leave¹¹. However, it is, by its very nature, inseparable from economic factors. If we look at education as *spiritus agens*, whereas the ultimate goal is to find a job, the issue of education and the issue of employment have to be seen as connected.

Just like young people concluded that the best education can be found in Serbian universities, they also concluded that the best job opportunities are also there. Broadly speaking, education enables them to plan their future, and in a more narrow sense, to position themselves better in the labour market and escape unemployment, which they see as a significant issue young people in Kosovo are facing¹². The high rate of youth unemployment, combined with low wages when a job is found, at a time when the cost of living is rising, does not offer young people in Kosovo an attractive perspective.

Generation 2020 takes their plans for the future quite seriously and this is precisely why they choose prestigious faculties with the most promising study programmes, most commonly programmes dealing with new technologies, which are connected to the occupations that are in short supply, thus hoping it would be easier to find a job upon completing the studies. They believe that Kosovo cannot meet their needs: the number of IT companies is insignificant, the labour market is hostile to young people, the state sector dominates the private sector, and employment practices based on party loyalty rather than competence are widespread. With that in mind, leaving Kosovo is a rational

choice for many young people.

Although the developmental potential of the IT sector has been recognized in Kosovo¹³, the situation is quite different in the municipalities in the North. The number of IT companies is negligible to the extent that even young people who want to engage in these jobs have never even heard of them, nor do they believe that the North can open up to this type of innovation. They found the causes of these problems, among other things, in the nature of the small environment, in which the private sector is underdeveloped, dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises that are not inclined to digitize their business. The closed and traditional north of Kosovo does not have the economic capacity to meet their needs: they believe that there is no room for innovation, even in lucrative sectors such as hospitality. In such circumstances, young people feel trapped and naturally gravitate towards environments that can provide them with what they need: they gravitate towards Belgrade and Novi Sad.

Student 4, 21:

“There are IT companies in big cities that offer good employment, there are more job opportunities... and I don't always know how to put myself in the best light, so when there are more opportunities, I'm more likely to grab one... And young people get stuck down there, there are fewer opportunities for jobs and progress.”

¹¹ All the interviewed young people had the same opinion.

¹² Precise statistical data on youth unemployment in Kosovo do not exist, therefore data from comparable countries are used to illustrate that, in 2020, the unemployment rate for young people under the age of 24 was 26.6% in Serbia, 36.0% in Montenegro, and 35.7% in North Macedonia. Available at:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tepsr_vc170/default/table?lang=en

¹³ <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/videos/2022/5/4/it-sektor-razvojna-sansa-za-mlade-na-kosovu>

The culmination of young people's dissatisfaction with the economic situation can be seen in the way they see the labour market in the north of Kosovo: they see it as limited and under the domination of the Republic of Serbia, as the main employer. Their assessment of the economic situation is not incorrect because, in the north of Kosovo, the public sector dominates the structure of employees, regardless of whether the employer is the Republic of Serbia or the Pristina institutions. The monopoly of the state sector is a problem for young people, primarily because access to state jobs is not open to everyone, but to get a state job you need a connection, i.e. a party card or a bribe, and not the knowledge and skills acquired at university. The public sector does not operate according to meritocratic principles – and for young people, this is an extremely delicate issue, since they highly value the diplomas they will acquire. Their perception is that government jobs are reserved for the privileged, not necessarily the most deserving. Such a state of the labour market in the North further motivated them to move away, hoping that their potential would be noticed in Serbia in time.

Female student 1, 21:

“

All in all, everyone is chasing a state job... and there is always someone with connections, someone who will have things sorted out for them (at a job interview), someone who will pay to get a job because we pay for jobs too, unfortunately.

”

Female student 2, 21:

“

There will always be jobs you're not schooled for. But if you have an education, the idea is not to do jobs like this, but to do what you have been schooled for, so that all that education would be worthwhile, so that you could see what the point of all that learning was.

”

Labour market problems identified by Generation 2020 are not new in social life in Kosovo. As such, they cannot be solved without a systemic change, however, the level of optimism for such a change is decreasing among young people and they cannot see how they could use their potential in that domain. This kind of defeatism is based on their conviction that the community in Kosovo has no understanding of the young and does not understand their potential for development.

Politics

- POLITICS IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MIGRATION OF GENERATION 2020
- THE MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED THEIR DECISION WERE POLITICAL INSTABILITY, THE ISSUE OF SAFETY AND SECURITY AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

Economic and educational factors, therefore, represent the two major reasons why youth migrations are on the rise¹⁴. In the case of Generation 2020, they are just part of the problem. If we accept the premise that the dominant group of factors influencing youth migrations in Kosovo is closely connected with the level of the home community's socioeconomic development, we conclude that the already explained factors are necessarily supplemented by political factors. The notion of politics, in this context, refers to the system and practices of running a society, to the way people make political decisions with a direct impact on the lives of people and to other social manifestations that are a consequence of the government's actions or inactions.

The case of Generation 2020 would not be different from youth migration in the Western Balkans and in general if only the quality of education and the economy crystallized as reasons for leaving. The aspect that makes youth migration from Kosovo unique is exactly the matter of political processes, i.e. the issue of safety and security in everyday life, as well as the overall atmosphere of political instability in the community they live.

It seems that the young do not fully understand how politics affects their everyday life, but in a broader sense, they still recognise that the situation in Kosovo is unstable, thereby using euphemisms (e.g. tensions, problems) to describe it. The normalisation of insecurity, lack of safety and instability, a process which young people went through growing up in Kosovo, is common to post-conflict societies¹⁵. In our case, it resulted in young people having a unique way of understanding the notion of safety, if we think of safety as a certainty of exercising liberties and rights. A simple example of this idiosyncrasy in their thinking

is the way young people from North Mitrovica understand freedom of movement: they paradoxically believe that they have complete freedom of movement, in their town, and their community, despite never moving beyond the bridge that divides the north and the south of Kosovo.

Peculiarities in young people's thinking about politics do not end there. The results of the normalisation of instability are also manifested in the way young people perceive events around them. They see only those complex political events, such as the event with the barricades from 2022, as a direct danger, while the situation before and after it is considered normal. This is partly the effect of the parental protective role, but also of general social desensitization.

Another illogicality in the attitudes of Generation 2020, which is very important for this issue, is their perception of security as opposed to the security of others. While, on the one hand, they explicitly claim that they feel safe always and everywhere¹⁶, they admit that others can feel threatened, especially girls. Such paradoxical attitudes could be attributed to emotions rather than to a rational understanding of one's position.

Finally, the very issue of safety and security cannot be fully understood without the dimension of gender. Namely, ethnically motivated harassment and attacks represent a negative trend in Kosovo¹⁷. . By their very nature, they represent a difficult problem to overcome, and when a gender dimension is added to them and harassment acquires a sexual connotation, we come to the point where young girls in Kosovo feel doubly threatened: because they are Serbs and because they are women. In such an atmosphere, young girls are additionally motivated to leave.

¹⁴(PDF) Emigracioni potencijal mladih u Srbiji / Emigration Potential of Youth in Serbia (researchgate.net)

¹⁵ <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/149521>

¹⁶ This is the attitude of the male interviewees, who, when they were directly asked about the feeling of security in Kosovo, as a rule, gave a positive answer, however, during further conversation, many nuances regarding this issue were observed.

¹⁷ <https://www.kosovo-online.com/vesti/politika/hovosti-od-marta-prosle-godine-zabelezeno-214-napada-na-srbe-na-kosovu-20-8-2022>

<https://www.kim.gov.rs/lat/incidenti-kim.php>

Female student 1, 21:

In Mitrovica, there was a lot of concern...about my safety...my parents didn't let me go into the woods alone, up on a hill alone. They were afraid...in many occasions Albanians would be there, shouting things to girls, it's not nothing, it's sexual harassment... In a way, I was also a victim of that, right there on the promenade in Mitrovica, in the north section. They say it's safe, but in the end, it's not. I think Albanians do not respect us. We have never been treated equally!

The political dimension of the reasons why young people leave puts youth migration from the north of Kosovo in a different perspective compared to the standard youth migration flows. Generation 2020 discovered that, beneath education and the economy, as the most important factors, there is a much more complex set of reasons and motivations for leaving Kosovo. We were shown that growing up in an environment where political instability, nepotism and corruption are normalized, a value system adopted in the family and within which knowledge and achievement are valued is a valuable motivation to leave. In addition, this case showed us how one generation of young people sees politics. They believe that the solution to crucial problems in Kosovo can be achieved most successfully through political changes. Paradoxically, politics is a dirty word for them, and practical politics has a distinctly negative connotation and is associated with unethical practices. Research on political pluralism in the north of Kosovo conducted in 2022 confirms that the wider community also shares this opinion: politics is associated with manipulations, interests and abuses of power¹⁸. Such attitudes of young people are the result of the long-term degradation of political life, in which it seems that political elites do not take turns in power but only circulate, with the same ideas and patterns of political behaviour.

¹⁸ https://ngocasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Gradjani-u-politici_SRB.pdf

Family and friends

- SUPPORT FROM THE FAMILY IS THE MOST CRUCIAL PRECONDITION FOR YOUTH MIGRATION
- FAMILIES GIVE SUPPORT BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT THE POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE IN KOSOVO IS NEGATIVE AND DISCOURAGES YOUNG PEOPLE
- SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS HAS A TENDENCY TO CAUSE A SNOWBALL EFFECT IN YOUTH MIGRATION PATTERNS

Generation 2020 agrees that the main reason for their departure is the acquisition of quality education, but the sameness in their thinking can also be seen when it comes to the role of the family. The encouragement they received from their family was for them a key moment in forming the decision to leave. We must consider this kind of support as a necessary condition for their departure: young people rely on their parents both materially and emotionally, so the absence of parental support would also mean the end of their plans to leave Kosovo. Young people are focused on education, which implies that their parents provide them with material conditions in which they can devote themselves to their student duties.

The family, as a bio-psycho-social community, has several roles, which are not exhausted only through the provision of material and emotional resources. One gets the impression that in the case of young people from Kosovo, the protective role is also strongly emphasized: parents try in every way to protect their children from the reality of life in Kosovo. If young people do not understand, or cannot articulate their views on the matter, parents can, and they classify their reasons for supporting their children in leaving Kosovo as economic, political and social factors.

Parents recognize that nepotism and corruption are the main phenomena that represent obstacles to the normal life of young people. They create a negative socio-economic atmosphere in which the potential of young people cannot be used properly. Neither parents nor young people have confidence that political representatives of Serbs in Kosovo, i.e. representatives of the

Serb List, can take care of their interests, and this should be their priority because the young population is a significant resource for the survival and development of the Serb community in Kosovo.

“

Parent 1:

The authorities should bear the most responsibility, I think. Everything starts with them. We all know what's right and what's wrong, it's only a matter of will. Will somebody do it or not, or nobody cares... It's like they do quite the opposite. I work at the Student Centre and you can feel how that population...it's evident there are fewer students in town, in our line of work that's quite clear.

”

While young people have a more paradoxical understanding of the issue of safety in Kosovo, which was mentioned in the previous chapter, parents put this problem at the forefront quite explicitly. Parents see safety as physical safety, safety from crime and safety from future ethnic conflict. Even Serbia, where young people go, is not devoid of these problems¹⁹, however, parents are satisfied that in Belgrade or Novi Sad, if a problem does occur – it will not be ethnically motivated, which is a relief for them. Such attitudes speak of a high level of ethnic and social distance between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, where the basic prerequisites for the functioning of a multi-ethnic and multicultural society have not been met.

¹⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/16806ef3a2>
<https://www.danas.rs/vesti/drustvo/srbija-pala-na-93-mesto-na-rang-listi-reportera-bez-granica/>

Parent 2:

I feel less worried, in a way... But not like they have escaped from the clutches of crime, it's just there isn't that international problem, that component is missing...

The ultimate consequence of such a protective parental role is best seen in their supporting them to leave Kosovo, but also in encouraging them not to come back upon finishing their studies. Corruption, nepotism, and the issue of safety and security are the main reasons for it, but, on the other hand, one reason for staying in Kosovo is crystal clear, and that is maintaining close connections with the family. As a rule, not only in Kosovo, the family is considered to be the highest value, and youth migrations have a negative impact on it. They lead to the separation of generations in the family, which is a novelty to which all family members need to adapt, while it remains for young people to reconsider the meaning of family ties and belonging. Generation 2020 is a product of its environment: they accept traditional values and plan their own families, which is an additional reason for them to stay in Serbia since they can plan their future there.

Parent 3:

***(About their child returning upon finishing his studies):
No, he knows there's no reason to come back here, only if he fails, then I'll buy him a job here, so we can say he's working. Only if he makes it in life, but I doubt it. In his head, Kosovo and Metohija don't exist anymore.***

In every generation, there is a certain number of students who decide to study outside of Kosovo. Education-motivated migration is neither new nor rare. However, Generation 2020 showed that there is one specific phenomenon in the migration flows of young people, labelled as the snowball effect. The snowball effect explains the phenomenon when young people who have already gone

to study motivate their friends to follow their example. It points to the phenomenon that going to educational and economic centres outside of Kosovo has become a social norm and the first option in planning the future among the young. They help each other by exchanging the necessary information about studies, which, in the first place, makes it easier for them to choose a study program, and then also to find their way into new everyday life. Peer support facilitates their transition from North Mitrovica to Belgrade or Novi Sad and has the potential to become a trend. It is extremely important for adolescents²⁰ to satisfy their need for belonging, and they do so through peer groups. They are conformist in nature, so it can be concluded that young people are susceptible to developing similar attitudes and opinions in a group and making similar decisions. As the number of young people leaving Kosovo increases every year, this effect has the potential to become a trend in the migration movements of young people, which will have a devastating effect on the human potential of the Serbian community in Kosovo.

²⁰ About the conformist potential of young people: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/197674011.pdf>

Conclusion

The case of Generation 2020 is not completely different from the migration movements of young people in post-transition societies. Young people, motivated by better education and better chances in the labour market, leave their home communities after finishing high school, with the idea of not returning. However, the case of the analysed generation has its specifics concerning the existing trends: they were additionally motivated to leave by political instability, a sense of insecurity, lack of safety and the possibility of ethnic conflict. The political atmosphere in which youth migration from Kosovo takes place is a sufficient reason to draw attention to this phenomenon and to analyse it in depth, to form potential solutions for this problem on that basis. This study may be just one step in that direction.

The case study as a method does not offer the possibility of generalisation, nor can it be used as a basis to offer any purposeful prediction of the migration trends of young people from Kosovo, but regularities in these movements can be observed and the mechanisms that operate within them can be further clarified.

This study enabled us to shed light on two important things:

1. To determine the influence of the political factor as a factor that is characteristic of youth migration from Kosovo, but not of the usual youth migration flows.
2. To shed light on the *snowball effect*, which, if it turns into a trend, can have a devastating impact on the Serbian community in Kosovo by accelerating and complicating youth migration flows.

This raises an important question:

Why is this problematic?

Generation 2020 showed us that youth migration, which in earlier generations manifested itself in the form of sporadic departures within each generation, has the potential to become a trend now. The snowball effect recognized in the migration flows of Generation 2020 indicates that.

On the other hand, the migration of young people qualitatively and quantitatively affects the north of Kosovo, as the community from which they leave. Assuming that the smartest and most gifted students leave first, and then use their potential to improve the community they went to, the north of Kosovo thus loses potential that could be used to improve life in Kosovo. The north of Kosovo needs educated and smart people for its survival and potential development, and this is a resource that the community is left without at the moment.

In a quantitative sense, the permanent departure of young people reduces the potential of the mother community, i.e. the north of Kosovo, for reproduction: the population ages and naturally moves towards ever greater levels of depopulation. In the last 10 years, approximately 40,000 Serbs have left Kosovo, and this departure affects those who remain in many ways. As young people leave in increasing numbers and the older the population gets, the less is invested in the community, so the quality of life declines, which negatively affects the lives of those who stay, including young people who remained in the home community. This further leads to the fact that young people, feeling under pressure, continue to leave Kosovo since they no longer see a perspective there, so we come to a vicious circle of migrations, which in the long term may endanger the stay of Serbs in Kosovo. Such migration trends represent a threat to the survival of the Serbian community, which is left without valuable human potential and has no natural ability to renew itself.

The example of Generation 2020 shows in what ways the north of Kosovo is losing its most valuable resource – young people with the potential to significantly improve their community. By identifying their reasons for leaving, we get instructions and signals about what society can do to make life in Kosovo better for young people. However, Generation 2020 is planning its future in Serbia or abroad and shows no motivation or faith in the possibility that the situation in Kosovo can change qualitatively and become a desirable place to live in and plan a family. Thus, the case of Generation 2020 becomes a case of irreparable loss of human potential in Kosovo.

Graffiti on the wall of a school in North Mitrovica, 2022



