

# YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND MIGRATION



International  
Labour  
Office

## COUNTRY BRIEF: SERBIA



## Youth labour market overview

Serbia counts more than 800,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 – 52 per cent men and 48 per cent women – which is almost 18% of the overall working age population<sup>i</sup>. These young Serbians face great labour market challenges. The employment rate for youth aged 15-24, just above 15 per cent, is three times lower than for the working-age population (47 per cent). With an unemployment rate reaching 46 per cent, the young generation is also more than twice as likely to be unemployed as the overall working-age population, which faces an unemployment rate of 20 per cent.

The crisis has worsened the employment situation of youth in Serbia (Table 1). Youth unemployment rates showed a downward trend between 2005 and 2008 before rising again in 2009 and 2010. Similarly, employment rates peaked at 20 per cent in 2008 before falling off sharply in 2009 and 2010.

**Table 1. Activity, employment and unemployment rates of youth aged 15-24 in Serbia, 2005-2010**

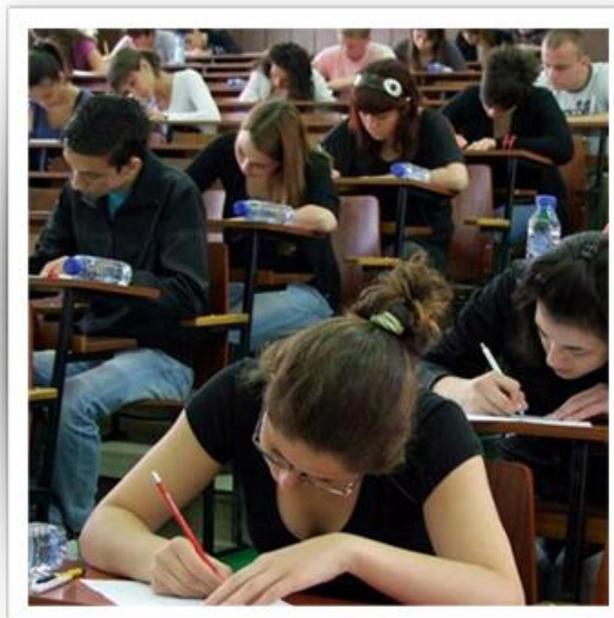
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Activity rate</b>	35.8	37.4	33.0	32.5	28.9	28.2
<b>Employment rate</b>	18.7	19.5	18.5	20.4	16.9	15.2
<b>Unemployment rate</b>	47.7	47.8	44.0	35.2	41.6	46.2

Source : Labour Force Survey 2010, Republic Statistical Office

The employment conditions of young workers make them particularly exposed during times of economic crisis. Whereas adult workers often enjoy full-time and open-ended contracts, most Serbian youth are engaged in the informal economy, holding flexible part-time and fixed-term contracts. They are thus often the first ones to be dismissed from employment. They also sometimes return to education and their labour force participation rate is reduced.

Low levels of social protection also characterise the working conditions of young Serbian workers. In 2009, 33 per cent of them worked

without having a written contract, and a further 21 per cent did not contribute to any form of pension scheme<sup>ii</sup>.



The educational structure of the Serbian young population is characterised by a large proportion of youth with elementary education and low numbers of youth continuing tertiary education. However, women are more likely to complete post-graduate and tertiary education. Half of young people in Serbia estimate that their education was of no benefit to their current jobs, blaming it on the lack of vocational education in schools and inadequate skills acquisition. This poor appraisal points to serious shortcomings in the educational system in Serbia, which is not adapted to labour market needs and has led to skills disparities, increased drop-out rates, youth unemployment, and inactivity.

There are significant differences between genders in labour market outcomes. In spite of their higher level of education, young women are less likely to be employed and are more likely to hold short-term jobs. Since young women tend to stay in school longer than young men, and in general have fewer employment prospects than men, they obtain less work experience, which further limits their labour market opportunities. However, their transition from school to work is often quicker and at a later stage, and they are slightly more likely to be employed within their field of expertise or for an indefinite period of time.

## Main features of youth migration

*Forty-four per cent of Serbian youth express an intention to migrate...*

In a 2009 survey on migration potential for Serbia, 44 per cent of Serbian youth indicated an intention to migrate, as compared to 19 per cent for respondents from all age groups<sup>iii</sup>. Responses are partly determined by gender, as 57 per cent of young men express such intentions compared to 43 per cent of young women. The majority of those with intentions to migrate have completed high school education (58 per cent) or elementary education (28 per cent), while a small 6 per cent of those having completed college or university consider leaving Serbia. The majority of potential youth migrants are still in education and have no income, and only 15 per cent are employed.

Primary drivers of migration are the poor economic situation in Serbia and better living and working conditions prospects in the country of destination, followed by the need to find a job and to a minor extent, education purposes.

The preferred destinations for potential youth migrants place the United States first, followed by Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Spain and France, and finally Australia, Canada and Greece. The two main reasons given for choosing these countries are good living standards and relatives or friends in that country. It is also remarkable that 80 per cent of young men and women that consider migrating have relatives or friends abroad, which points to the importance of networks and connections in host countries and the example that they set.

*... but only a small number of potential migrants realize their intentions*

Only 33 per cent of the potential young migrants have taken concrete steps to leave the country, and 12 per cent consider it very likely that they will leave Serbia. Actual figures show that only a small number of them will bring their migration project to completion.

There are several reasons for this finding. In Serbia, the youth aged 15 to 24 live mainly with their parents, due to economic but also cultural reasons, and are under their influence, i.e. they are neither economically or psychologically independent. Therefore, the migration of young people of that age is usually related to the migration of their parents. Moreover, many young people aged 15-24 are still studying. The difficult economic situation in Serbia is an additional factor that hinders migration since the youth lack the material resources required to migrate.

The actual number of youth that leave the country every year is unknown. According to OECD data, there are 131,175 foreign-born young people aged 15-24 from former Serbia and Montenegro in OECD countries – 54 per cent male and 46 per cent female<sup>iv</sup>. The countries hosting the largest numbers of Serbian nationals are Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Putting together the pieces of very modest research findings, literature and official data available, labour migration of youth from Serbia can be roughly divided into three types: low-skilled youth, high school students, and irregular migrants.



It seems that low-skilled migrants are dominant in the stock of immigrants in destination countries and that Serbian young people are mainly employed in elementary occupations. However, current migration policies in EU Member States encourage highly skilled migrants and restrict the number of low-skilled migrants to specific types of jobs, namely temporary and seasonal jobs.

This implies that young Serbians do not constitute a competitive workforce compared to their peers from EU countries that have education levels more in line with market needs, better language skills, and more simple emigration procedures to go through. Highly qualified migrants also mean, in the case of Serbia, population over 24 years of age. Nonetheless, highly skilled workers (or the potentially highly skilled) have been taking over priority in migration flows from Serbia. Besides, these restrictive migration policies and the poor economic situation in Serbia may sometimes lead young people to stay abroad after the legally approved period expires, often working in the informal economy in spite of the risk of severe fines for the employers.

Serbian youth labour migration is also characterized by its non-institutionalism. It takes place mostly outside the available institutional mechanisms through social networks of relatives and friends in the destination countries or private employment agencies because of the time-consuming procedures of the National Employment Services that lead a comprehensive investigation on the working conditions offered by the foreign employer. Using these non-governmental channels however cannot guarantee that migrants will find adequate working conditions and that their rights at work will be respected.

As a result of bilateral agreements, legal migrants in destination countries are now very often able to benefit from social security coverage. They can also enjoy access to language courses and other educational and vocational courses in the top five destination countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, and the United States). A number of initiatives have also been put in place to increase the recognition of foreign qualifications in Germany, or to provide provisional non-renewable residence permits in France to help young migrants look for employment in relation to their education level.

## Policies, programmes and institutional framework



In the framework of the European integration process, migration management has become increasingly important in Serbia. The country has thus started to address the lack of reliable data on migration stocks and flows, and prepared a *Strategy for Migration Management (2009)* as well as a *Strategy of Official Statistics Development in the Republic of Serbia in the period 2009 – 2012*.

Labour migration is regulated by the *Law on the Protection of Citizens of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia when Working Abroad* and the *Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment*. The Ministry of Economy and Regional Development and the National Employment Service (NES) are responsible for the employment of Serbian nationals abroad. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is responsible for the assignment of employed Serbian citizens abroad. There are also 53 licensed agencies that are authorized to mediate in employing Serbian workers abroad.



Serbian laws and policies regulating labour migration do not have specific provisions targeting youth. However, a *Draft Labour Migration Strategy* includes a component on youth migration and is meant to become an annex to the *National Employment Strategy*. Also, the Migration Service Centre (MSC), together with Youth Offices and the civil society organisation ASTRA provide services that help prepare youth for employment abroad. The MSC is established within the NES as an information centre on procedures and conditions of employment abroad. Six Youth Offices, falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, conduct information campaigns on the conditions of legal migration and warn potential migrants on the risks of irregular migration. ASTRA promotes migrant workers' rights by performing verification of employment agencies and employers abroad, as well as protecting victims of trafficking and labour exploitation.

<sup>i</sup> Republic Statistical Office, Labour Force Survey, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> ILO. *Country Report on youth and Migration – Serbia* (forthcoming)

<sup>iii</sup> Pavlov, T., 2009. *Migration potential of Serbia*, and complementary survey for the 15-24 population undertaken in the framework of the United Nations Joint Programme “Youth Employment and Migration” (see Box 1).

<sup>iv</sup> OECD, 2008. *A Profile of Immigrant Populations in the 21st Century*.

### Box 1. Policy recommendations as regards migration for Serbia and destination countries

The United Nations Joint Programme “Youth Employment and Migration” (YEM), funded by the Spanish Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDG-F) developed the following key policy recommendations towards Serbia and destination countries:

- Monitor youth labour migration, collecting data and ensure their transparent presentation;
- Create or improve supporting policies, strategies and legal frameworks for youth labour migration that respect international labour standards and the human rights of migrants;
- Create or improve programmes of support to young migrant workers in the country of origin to prepare them for departure, and in the country of destination to support their integration in the labour market, but also in all spheres of society;
- Empower key stakeholders in the field of youth labour migration to increase the coordination and cooperation between the country of origin and destination; including empowering trade unions, migrants' associations and NGOs in monitoring the realization of the labour and human rights of young migrant workers.



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