Characteristics of Serbian-Hungarian International Migration Before Schengen

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It is important to know what kind of features and spatial impacts characterise the international migration between Serbia and Hungary for two reasons. On the one hand, there has been significant population movement between these two countries since the Yugoslav wars, and from 19 December 2009 citizens of Serbia can travel to the Schengen area without a visa. On the other hand, one of the most considerable groups of foreign citizens in Hungary is the Serbs. In the study the authors examine the migration process from Serbia to Hungary. The analysis shows that there are two separate and considerable geographical motives, which mostly determine the spatial distribution of the location of foreigners in Hungary, namely, the effects of centres and borders. The first one means both a dynamic centre of immigration to Hungary and of emigration from Serbia. The second is proximity to the border, which is not a barrier but rather a contact zone. The authors describe migration between these two countries before Serbia joined the Schengen zone and analyse the period between 2001 and 2008 with the aim to show the effect Serbian citizens’ emigration has on the Serbian and Hungarian societies and economies, as well as the role of Vojvodina as a region.

KEYWORDS:
International migration.
Regional disparities.
Serbian citizens may travel to the Schengen area without a visa since 19 December 2009. This fact may further increase the volume of migration from Serbia to Hungary which has been extensive anyway since the beginning of the Yugoslav civilian wars.

Serbian citizens make one of the largest foreign populations in Hungary. Therefore, it is important to examine the characteristics of these people, what regional effects their presence has in Hungary, as well as the impact of their absence from Serbia. We try to point out the specific relations between emigration and the target regions, for example the connection of the kinds of migrants from different parts of Serbia settling in various regions of Hungary. The study presents the spatial characteristics of this migration network.

During the analysis we primarily examine data from the period 2001–2008 but also consider the Serbian migration flows of the twentieth century as well as the current migration position of Vojvodina. We are convinced that it is important to understand the processes and the effects of the preceding events on the observed period, as well as to explore the socio-economic background of migration from Serbia towards Hungary.

1. Review of the international migration literature

According to the Hungarian statistical interpretation, international migration means leaving the country of the original place of living with the aim to find a new place of residence in another country for settling down or for performing earning activities (HCSO [2007]). This definition was completed by Mária Rédei, who introduced the term of educational migration (Rédei [2007]) for learning and by Sándor Illés with elderly migration (Illés [2006]) with the purpose of better utilising the purchasing power of pensions or searching for better living conditions. The Serbian definition of international migration is the permanent or temporary leaving of the territory of a nation-state for another by a great number of inhabitants. (Others like Grečić mean only the permanent settlement and movement of population by this term (Grečić [2001])). Legally it was considered as a neutral phenomenon: an activity that cannot be punished (Szalma [2001]). However, this Serbian approach has dramatically changed by 2009: in accordance with the European migration policy, illegal migration has become a criminal category that must be punished (Đorđević [2009]).
To summarise, international migrants change their place of residence at their own choice, which is influenced by external and internal factors, attractive and repulsive effects. This way migrants actively take part in the rapid transformation of the demographic and economic structure of the world, thus international migration is a visible form of numerous economic and demographic force fields.

In our opinion, besides the regional differences in wages (Hatton–Williamson [2005]), the geographical position of the target regions also has an important effect on the spatial distribution of migrants. Geographic and economic centres and peripheries play an important role in choosing the place of living. According to our hypothesis, an important factor in the spatial distribution of Serbian migrants in Hungary is the capital, Budapest, an economic hub which is a typical dynamic reception centre of international migration as well. Compared to the national average of settlements, Budapest is quite over-represented concerning the number of foreigners and their proportion per 1 000 inhabitants, being in tune with international trends, since the main target territories of migration are capitals. It offers numerous occupations and there are representatives of a wide range of sending countries in this place. Another significant factor is the proximity of borders, which presents additional values for many migrants. We can mention, for example, the better and easier contacts with family members who remained at home. These phenomena can be also recognised in the sending country, that is, migrants from Serbia who lived near the border would more probably settle down close to the Hungarian frontier than others. Serbian migrants, who mostly come from Vojvodina, prefer to live either in Budapest or not far from the common border.

Border regions were traditionally considered as disadvantageous territories according to location theories because of the barriers in international trade and the threats of military invasions (Anderson–O’Down [1999]). National borders negatively affected regional economies because they increased transactional costs. Taxes, different languages, cultures, and business practices made obstacles for cross-border trade in general, which reduced the willingness of national and foreign companies to locate in these regions (Hansen [1977]).

The alteration of this unfavourable image could generate “a new increase” in border regions through greater international economic integration – with lower trade barriers. Now these regions have several characteristics based on which they can be defined as active contact zones (Nijkamp [1988], Van Geenhuizen–Ratti [2001]).

Between 1988 and 1999, 3 982 Yugoslav investments were realised in Hungary (reaching the peak in 1993 with about one thousand enterprises), which made 16 percent of all foreign investments. Seventy percent of them were in the Southern Great Plain region, while only 20 percent in Budapest (Szónoky–Áncsin [2001]). Nad [2006] characterises this period as the time of the leaving of intellectuals, the founding of companies and the escaping of capital. Concerning Hungarians in Vojvodina, Gábrity Molnár [2008] reports on migration losses of ethnic character.
Grečić [2001] considers Hungary and Poland as transit countries for migrants, resulting from the stricter migration policy of the EU in the 1990s (Grečić [2001]). Nad considers these countries as a springboard (Nad [2006]). However, the difficulty of entering the target country often made these people remain here (Grečić [2001]).

The study of migration in Serbia cannot be considered as continuous because of the lack of adequate data. The events of the period of 1991–2002 can hardly be backed up with exact numbers, and the Serbian literature after 2000 is based on estimates. We could find only few migration statistics in the 2002 census data compared to the previous ones, partly because of the modified methodology. For this reason, our main results are based on the statistical database of the countries of destination. However, even so, region-specific studies are difficult since receptive countries marked former Yugoslavia as the country of origin of migrants until 1998. The relevant Hungarian migration databases contain the settlements of the countries of origin (databases of the Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office). This allowed us to identify the settlements one by one and to analyse the spatial distribution in detail.

In our study we consider foreign citizens living in Hungary who have valid living, immigration or settlement permits on 1st January of a given year (so tourists, diplomats and those who stay in Hungary for less than a year are not examined).

After presenting the migration situation in Serbia, we examine the migration processes in the 2001–2008 period based on the original (Serbian) and current (Hungarian) places of living, as well as the age group, occupation, qualification and proportion of taxpayers. The observed regional level is NUTS 3. Moreover, where it is relevant, we also give detailed data (at settlement level). We distinguished three (primary (ISCED 1–2), secondary (ISCED 3–4) and tertiary (ISCED 5–7)) educational levels, while the classification of occupations is based on the ISCO-88 structure.

2. Serbian citizens in Hungary

Hungary has had a surplus in international migration since the demolition of the Iron Curtain. Namely, more foreigners arrive in the country than the number of Hungarian citizens leaving it. On 1 January 2008 there were 174 697 foreign citizens staying permanently in Hungary, which was 1.7 percent of the population. This means that almost two in 100 people living in Hungary are foreigners. The proportion of immigrants has increased by 61 percent in eight years after the millennium.

Direct and indirect effects of international migration are undoubtedly determining factors of the demographic situation in Hungary. This can be stated based on the
processes of the past two decades and those expected in the future. Direct effects are observed in the increase of the number of (active) population. Indirect effects together with the rejuvenating effect are those phenomena which are connected to the age structure and occur in the country of destination, for example births, deaths, marriages, studentification, and changes in real estate and labour markets.

Ten percent of foreigners staying in Hungary on 1 January 2008 were Serbian citizens. This rate has grown during the past three years but the proportion of foreigners in Hungary coming from other neighbouring countries is also on the increase. On 1 January 2008 about 17,186 Serbian citizens stayed in Hungary, while an additional 12 556 people have become Hungarian citizens since 1993 (97 percent of them have Hungarian as mother tongue). Therefore, according to official statistics, about 30 000 Serbian citizens have moved to and settled down in Hungary for 15 years. This is about half of the natural decrease of population (the difference between live births and deaths) in Hungary per year.

As Figure 1 shows, the proportion of the active population of foreigners in Hungary is significantly higher than that of native Hungarians, who are over-represented in the 0–14 and 50–X age groups. The share of people aged 15–24 years is higher among Serbian citizens than among foreigners and in the whole population. Those aged 25–59 from Serbia also have higher proportion than Hungarians do, even though the high percentage of foreigners aged 25–49 years is not characteristic of them.

Due to the greater share of the active population, the proportion of taxpayers is also higher among foreigners. However, the distribution of foreign taxpayers across counties is not proportional; it is higher where taxable income per capita is higher, like in Budapest, where more than 4 percent of taxpayers are foreigners. This trend is less characteristic of Serbian citizens. Budapest and Pest County account for 62 per-
cent of foreign taxpayers, compared with less than 40 percent of Serbians. Nearly the same number of them pays taxes in Csongrád County as in the capital.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Number of taxpayers</th>
<th>Taxable income per capita (HUF)</th>
<th>Foreign taxpayers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Serbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budapest</td>
<td>759 360</td>
<td>638 083</td>
<td>1 109</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baranya</td>
<td>169 041</td>
<td>289 332</td>
<td>131</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bács-Kiskun</td>
<td>227 188</td>
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<td>339</td>
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<td>Békés</td>
<td>161 601</td>
<td>237 811</td>
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<tr>
<td>Borsod-Abauj-Zemplén</td>
<td>277 197</td>
<td>288 442</td>
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<tr>
<td>Csongrád</td>
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<td>Fejér</td>
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<td>151 416</td>
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<td>Pest</td>
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<td>421 507</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Veszprém</td>
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<td>Zala</td>
<td>138 475</td>
<td>279 140</td>
<td>76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abroad*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4 378 606</td>
<td>373 033</td>
<td>3 679</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Foreign citizens living abroad and pay tax in Hungary.

Source: Tax register of the Tax and Financial Control Administration.

3. Regional study in Serbia and Hungary

There are traditionally strong migration relations between Serbia and Hungary. Migration concerns all Serbian and Hungarian regions, that is, there are migrants in
every Hungarian county from each part of Serbia. However, this process involves only 5.3 percent of Serbian and 24 percent of Hungarian settlements, thus strong regional effects can be observed.

Subotica (3,365 people), Senta (1,951), Novi Sad (1,020), Bačka Topola (705), Kanjiža (694), Bečej (524) and Zrenjanin (508) are the Serbian settlements, while North Bačka (5,869), North Banat (4,661), South Bačka (2,429) and West Bačka (1,005) are the regions that are particularly involved in immigration to Hungary. About 88 percent of emigrants from Serbia arrive from Vojvodina. On the other hand, among settlements in Hungary as a target area the most preferred ones are Szeged (4,481), Budapest (3,896), Kecskemét (499), and Baja (336); concerning counties these are Csongrád (6,270), Budapest (3,896), Bács-Kiskun (2,522), and Pest (945). Eighty percent of immigrants live in the foregoing regions. It is important to point out that Serbian citizens are characterised by convergence to their original and divergence to their current place of living.

Figure 2. Serbian citizens living in Hungary by settlement of origin, 1 January 2001 and 2008

Note. The maps are made by Zsolt Bottlik, Researcher of the Geographical Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Our aim is to find a relationship between the original Serbian districts and the current Hungarian counties, that is, to analyse the Serbian migrants concerning this characteristic. According to a “from where–to where” migration matrix we can divide the regions of the original (Serbian) places of living into three groups. In the first group there are places near the border (North Bačka, North Banat, and West Bačka), in the second are South Bačka, South Banat, Central Banat, and Srem, while the third is the group of other regions. We distinguish three groups in Hungary, too,
for characterising the observed migration system. These are counties near the border (Csongrád, Bács-Kiskun), migration centres (Budapest and Pest County), and other counties.

It is important to note that there is a strong and concentrated flow of people from North Vojvodina to Csongrád or Bács-Kiskun counties, numbering 6,532, who represent 40 percent of all Serbian migrants. Besides a significant regional concentration, migration also shows a close relation between the proportion of Hungarian speakers (in an ethnic sense) and the willingness to emigrate from Serbian settlements. Serbian citizens who now live near the border (on the Hungarian side) mainly arrived from areas next to the border (78%), while many Serbian migrants from other parts of Serbia (49.4%) settled in the Hungarian migration centre. Migrants from other countries also prefer Budapest and Pest County irrespective of their original place of residence.

We further examined the Serbian migrants based on their qualifications, occupation, and age group. We found that people with higher educational attainment were attracted to the migration centre even from larger distance. Migrants who completed their secondary and tertiary education live principally in this area. Although the average educational level of Serbian citizens near the Hungarian border is lower than in other places, there are also a considerable number of migrants with higher education there, too. According to the data, qualifications depend more on the current place of living in Hungary than on the original one in Serbia.

*Figure 5. Serbian citizens (aged 18 and over) staying in Hungary by spatial group and educational attainment, 1 January 2008 (percent)*
The analysis of age groups (see Figure 5) shows a considerably different spatial distribution. The majority of Serbian citizens living in Central Hungary are in the active age group, but the proportion of older people is also relatively high. The share of older people who migrated from Vojvodina is much higher than of those from other parts of Serbia, irrespective of their current place of living in Hungary. More young people live near the border than in other parts of the country; there is also a high proportion of people aged between 19 and 24 there, so we could assume that they intend to obtain their higher qualifications in Hungarian colleges or universities. The distributions by age groups depend on both the original Serbian place of residence and the current settlement in Hungary.

Figure 6. Serbian citizens staying in Hungary by spatial group and age group, 1 January 2008 (percent)

Concerning the occupation of Serbian citizens aged above 18 years living in Hungary, we can see the following proportions: professionals (12%), technicians and associate professionals (10.7%), other jobs with higher or secondary qualifications (7.4%), service and craft workers (7.4%), clerks (5.4%), elementary occupations (5.1%), legislators, senior officials and managers (3.5%), plant and machine operators and assemblers (2.4%), and skilled agricultural and fishery workers (2%). Furthermore, the proportion of the unemployed, pensioners, housekeepers and personal care workers is 28.6 percent, while pupils and students account for 15.5 percent. The proportion of students among Serb migrants is the highest in Central Hungary (20%). As for the original place of residence, more than 16 percent of people above 18 years of age from North Vojvodina, 14 percent from South Vojvodina and 10.8 percent from other parts of Serbia are students. In Central Hungary the shares of profession-
als (16.5 percent of Serbian citizens aged above 18 living there) and legislators, senior officials and managers (5%) whereas near the border those of clerks (8.3%), skilled agricultural and fishery workers (2.5%) and elementary occupations (6.3%) are higher than the national average.

4. Conclusion

In our research we examined the migration of Serbian citizens to Hungary in the period between 2001 and 2008. The results show that the number of Serbian citizens staying in Hungary gradually increased after 2001. The ending of the ten-year period of Yugoslav wars does not mean decreased emigration willingness in Serbia. In reality, the consequences of events in Kosovo in 2008 may also have further political motives for emigration.

The analysis of spatial distribution of Serbian migrants in Hungary after the millennium shows that the Serbian and Hungarian (migration) centres and the (geographical) peripheries considerably influence the trends in international migration. Budapest and Pest County are the general dynamic migration centres of Hungary, while Vojvodina is the central territory of emigration. The proximity of the border is an important geographical motive, which is not a barrier but a contact zone from the aspect of migration flows.

In our opinion, the fundamental reasons for migration from Serbia/Vojvodina (to Hungary) after the millennium are the following:

- transformation of the economic structure, unsuccessful privatisation, unemployment, regional disparities, additional uncertainty (economic migration);
- dual enterprises, doing business both in Hungary and Serbia, capital investments (economic migration, commuting);
- (temporary or permanent) migration or commuting of new generations for educational purposes (educational migration);
- particular ethnocentric migration in the case of Vojvodina Hungarians (contact zone); and
- transit migration towards Western Europe (for political and economic motives).

We found that most of the Serbian citizens (78%) living near the border in Hungary had arrived from the frontier territory of Vojvodina. Therefore the border can be
considered as a contact zone rather than a barrier. Budapest and Pest County are also the favourite places for settling irrespective of the migrants’ original place of living. Here we can find migrants with various occupations and qualifications, but the intensity of migration flow is lower than near the border.

We can assume that the structure of migration is defined by the location of the original Serbian and current Hungarian counties, the demographic and economic attributes of the migrants, and their acquaintances.

Migration benefits/losses on the two sides of the border are human and material. Summarising the results, there is a strong relation in the Serbian-Hungarian migration: about 17 186 Serbian citizens live in Hungary, and almost the same number (12 556) have become Hungarian citizens since 1993 (97 percent of them have Hungarian as mother tongue). So, in total about 30 000 Serbian citizens immigrated to Hungary during the past 15 years.

With 19 December 2009, a new era began in Serbian migration. The difficulties of the 1990s seem to lessen since Serbian citizens got international legitimacy for free movement. In the study we presented and analysed continuous and intensifying migration of Serbian citizens to Hungary in the past two decades until 2008. Instead of making assumptions on future trends, we want to call attention to the presented tendencies, data and statistics which would be greatly influenced by the new Schengen rules.

References


