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Social Impact of Emigration and Rural-Urban Migration in Central and Eastern Europe

Executive Summary

Slovenia

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Slovenia is a small country (located in Central-Southern Europe) with a two million population and a labour force of somewhat less than one million people. It gained its independence in 1991, became a member of the EU in 2004 and entered the Eurozone in 2007. Slovenia is a low fertility country but due to traditional immigration from the area of former Yugoslavia the population is relatively stable. Pronounced population increase especially after 2000 was reduced with the onset of the economic crisis. The recent crisis hit Slovenia strongly and has several delayed social consequences.

Generally, Slovenia is an immigration country not only since its independence but since 1960s. From 2004 on Slovenia witnessed also a pronounced emigration of Slovenian citizens averaging at 3,300 per year. Though not very significant in numbers compared to the whole population (1-1.5‰ per year), this emigration bears signs of important structural ruptures. Those among the Slovenian citizens who left Slovenia in the last five to ten years were usually above-averagely educated, trained, and skilled. It was estimated that per year about 300 to 400 highly educated professionals left Slovenia permanently.

In 2009, there were around 132,000 emigrants with Slovenian citizenship especially in Germany (33,000), Croatia (26,000), Austria (18,000), Canada (11,000) and France (11,000). Though the recent emigration trends also concentrate on the European countries (4,900 emigrants) like Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and the countries of former Yugoslavia (6,300 emigrants), many emigrate overseas to the USA, Canada, and Australia.

Strong daily commuting currents are oriented also across the borders mostly to Austria (North-Eastern Slovenia) and Italy (Western parts of Slovenia) for the same structural reason as for emigration: the lack of suitable jobs.

Though small, Slovenia is heavily centralized with the central government dominating over more than 210 small municipalities. Thus the growing numbers of emigrating citizens from all regions are increasingly worrying. In the period 2000-2009, the Pomurska region lost -7.2‰ and Podravska -8.1‰ of their total population due to emigration of citizens. When combining internal emigration and emigration of citizens the Pomurska region is the greatest loser of population, which was replaced by non-citizen immigration. Its position as peripheral, rural, agrarian, with little industry, with the highest level of unemployment (20%), and considerably lagging behind the most developed Osrednjeslovenska region weakens the possibilities of recovery. Thus, any form of regional governance and coordination is heavily needed.

The impact of emigration on labour market developments in Slovenia is weak, largely because of the structure of the Slovenian economy and employment which has been based on sectors with large concentration of low skilled and low wage jobs. Employers in the last decade have been constantly reporting that they have most problems in recruiting qualified workers in the area of construction and metal industry, qualified workers and engineers in mechanical and electrical areas, medical personnel (doctors and nurses) and qualified workers in catering. Despite of increased demand for highly qualified labour, the economy has not been able to absorb the increasing numbers of young graduates of tertiary education. The incidence of fixed-term jobs among young well-educated people is high and they often accept jobs that are below their level of education. One of the main reason for well-educated young and middle aged people to emigrate from Slovenia is not looking for a job in general, but looking for better, more demanding and challenging jobs than those available in Slovenia, including better pay and better working and living conditions. The overall at-risk-of-poverty rates in Slovenia have been relatively stable, but have increased since 2009 to 11.3% due to delayed consequences of the crises. The highest poverty risk is among households without active members, especially those with dependent children, single households (74.8% in 2010) and lone parent households (31.4% in 2010). There is no concrete evidence that would relate over-average poverty rates in certain groups to emigration nor can it be automatically concluded that emigrants from Slovenia leave behind the dependent family members.

In general, women in Slovenia cannot be considered as a vulnerable group affected by emigration. They are mostly employed (64.8% in 2011) or at least active on the labour

market and are very rarely dependent family members. There also exists good parental and children protection (allowances). The poverty rates and severe material deprivation of children is below the average. On the other hand, elderly people are more significantly affected by poverty and material deprivation, which is especially true for elderly women.

There are about 30 ethnic and 50 distinguished religious groups in Slovenia. Probably the most noticeably exposed to social exclusion or vulnerability are the so-called Erased – people from other SFRY states who lost their residence permit after Slovenia's independence – (26.000) and the Roma (10.000) population. Since majority of the Erased (and Roma among them) are still remaining with unsettled documents, they cannot enter the proper labour market, so they are directly exposed to precarious work and thus to poverty. Due to ethnic discrimination, especially pronounced in the areas of Romany localities, the Roma population is extremely vulnerable and children have low attainment rates of elementary school. Thus they are not able to participate at indiscriminative terms at the labour market and remain largely unemployed.

The institutional responses are generally weak though some steps were made in order to encourage the return of traditional overseas emigration. Based on the Act regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenians Abroad from 2006, the Office prepared three main documents: the Strategy of relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenians abroad, the Action plan on cooperation with the scientists and top experts of Slovenian origin living abroad, and the Action plan regarding cooperation and support to young Slovenians living in neighbouring countries and abroad. They lack systematic monitoring and systematic up-to-date databases.

Besides the governmental policies, there exist some civil associations like the Slovenian World Congress that aim at preserving the Slovene cultural heritage, cooperation and networking between Slovenes abroad and in Slovenia. The government should increase a networking among the emigrants in order to encourage and facilitate investments in poorer regions. A step into that direction was the preparation of the Regional development programme of Pomurska region for the period 2007-2013 coordinated by the regional development agency MURA and a special Act on development support to Pomurska region for the period 2010-2015.

The Academic and Scientific Union of Pomurska as a bottom-up initiative assembled a vivid network of highly educated scientists and scholars originating from the region in order to foster cooperation of the local companies and local communities and the transfer of knowledge. Such initiatives are very well informed about local conditions and should be increasingly financially supported by the central government in cooperation with other institutions (National employment office, Statistical office, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, etc.).

Another suggestion aims at establishing information or contact points for all those who would like to return to Slovenia from abroad. These "info-points" should be increasingly user-friendly and regularly advertised in various places, thus interested people would freely be able to choose for cooperation.

Official statistical data coverage should improve the range from basic statistical information on intentions of employment, education, duration of stay etc. to various socio-demographic data. There should be greater propensity for supporting and financing research studies on the scope, nature, and the factors of emigration, including brain drain, the duration of emigration, and the problems of returnees.