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

Executive Summary

Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Bosnia and Herzegovina's migration tradition is characterised by both voluntary, economically driven migration and forced migration during and after the war of 1992–1995. Whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has a long tradition of migration, the most significant migration flows have occurred in the last two decades. The first of these, a result of the 1992–1995 war, involved the massive displacement of an estimated 2 million people or nearly one-half of the country's entire population. Forced migration both within the country and abroad significantly changed its demographic structure. The second wave of migration immediately after the conflict involved the massive numbers of returning refugees from abroad (repatriation) and significant numbers of returning internally displaced persons (IDPs). At the same time, Bosnian refugees emigrated from their host countries to third countries, primarily the United States, Canada and Australia. The third period (beginning in 2000) has been characterised by voluntary migration, which is predominantly labour driven. Neighbouring countries such as Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro have become increasingly important as destination countries. Since 2000, an average 15,000 to 20,000 Bosnians have emigrated every year to the EU. In terms of internal migration, economically driven rural-urban migration amounts to less than 1% of the country's population a year.

The labour market in BiH is characterised by a very low activity rate, which is about half of the EU average, and a rather high LFS-based unemployment rate of 27.6%. Unemployment shows both gender and age disparities (29.9% among women compared to 25.6% among men; 57.5% among 15-24 year-olds). Despite such high unemployment rates, skills shortages are recorded in different sectors and regions. Migration, in particular the high rate of emigration among the tertiary educated (28.6%) and students, exacerbates problems associated with skills shortages. Low workforce mobility within the country is also a factor in this regard as it compels people to seek employment abroad rather than within BiH, which slows domestic labour market adjustments.

High levels of remittances to Bosnia are a positive effect of migration. Accounting for 18% of GDP in 2007, and despite have fallen to a post-crisis level of 12% of GDP in 2010, remittances nonetheless represent a sum six times larger than incoming foreign direct investments (FDI) and three times larger than development assistance to the country. Remittance inflows are a significant source of income for a large portion of the BiH population (nearly 33% of BiH households). Most of these funds are used for consumption or children's education (22.3%), and only 4%–6% is invested in business.

Whereas all regions in Bosnia suffered considerable population losses during and after the war, some regions in border areas (e.g., Una-Sana Canton, Canton 10, Foca) are affected by above-average outmigration flows involving permanent migration to western Europe and the United States and seasonal migration to neighbouring countries. These regions show declining population numbers, low fertility rates and demographic changes (ageing), as well as high unemployment and poverty rates. The rate of return to these regions is low and dominated by the elderly.

The social impact of migration on Bosnian society is visible and multi-dimensional. The war and post-war transition left many groups vulnerable to economic, political and shocks brought about by changes in demography, the labour market and social welfare. Returnees and IDPs in BiH are the most vulnerable to migration, though other vulnerable groups include women and children (particularly women and children IDPs and refugees), the elderly and national minorities (particularly Roma). Data on these vulnerable groups suggest they each face various forms of social exclusion, including poverty, lack of access to social services and rights, discrimination, difficulties in finding employment, etc. Returnees, specifically those returning to pre-war settlements in which they now represent a national minority, face particular hardship in accessing social services, employment and economic opportunities as they struggle with

discrimination by local governments and the ethnic majority. A social security system undermined by inconsistent legislation poses significant challenges to the population as a whole as well as migrants and returnees because health claims cannot be transferred from one entity or canton to another. Child returnees struggle with discrimination and segregation in education, and a closed educational system poses problems for diploma recognition, which is a critical factor influencing efforts targeting sustainable return.

Female-headed households and women face considerable obstacles to securing livelihoods for their families as a result of issues linked to the lack of education, access to labour markets and the generally limited access to social services. However, Roma populations face the most difficulty with high levels of deprivation and social exclusion, which are linked to issues associated with government discrimination, the lack of personal documents, as well as the lack of access to education, employment opportunities and social services.

Post-war reconstruction efforts supported by domestic and international actors have made significant gains in improving the institutional and legal framework for protecting vulnerable groups. Many displaced groups have been able to return to their pre-war settlements and/or receive their property. Nevertheless, much still needs to be done to mitigate migration's negative social impact and utilise its potential for social development. Key policy areas and fields of action include:

- Development in BiH is stalled by the absence of a coherent and comprehensive national development strategy that incorporates social inclusion. This framework should include extensive human-rights driven reforms that adequately target social welfare and inclusion. The adoption and full implementation of such a strategy would facilitate inclusive socio-economic growth in the country.
- In addition to implementing relevant overarching strategies, BiH governments at all levels should continuously invest in active labour market measures, particularly those targeting groups vulnerable to migration. Such measures should include strategies specific to women and Roma. Institutions and policies targeting migrants should be developed. These institutions and policies should focus on realizing the development potential of diaspora communities (i.e., remittances, skills, investments) and channelling this potential into the country's economic development. They should also provide incentives for highly skilled Bosnians to return and remove obstacles in their way.
- These institutions should also develop policies to improve cooperation with institutions in the EU and other destination countries in order to promote legal and circular migration, improve the social welfare of migrants and the transferability of social benefits. Such efforts will help migrants, as well as source and destination countries benefit from migration flows.
- Improving migration statistics and investing more in research on topics related to migration and its social impact are required to develop policies that properly targeting migrants and their families.