



On behalf of the  
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# ***Social Impact of Emigration and Rural-Urban Migration in Central and Eastern Europe***

## **Executive Summary**

### **The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

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Over the last two decades, emigration and rural-urban migration patterns in the FYR Macedonia have shown considerable change in terms of scope and intensity, as well as in migrants' demographic and socio-economic characteristics. However, long-term social consequences derive from migratory movements that predate the democratic transition as well as from these contemporary patterns.

The FYR Macedonia has a long history of emigration. Approximately 545,000 Macedonian citizens live abroad today, the equivalent of 26% of the country's total population. The changes in the scope and nature of emigration from 1945 to the present correspond to various stages in the country's social and economic development, as well as to shifts in host countries' migration policies. However, the most significant wave of emigration, numbering about 200,000 individuals to date, began in 1990 and has continued to the present time. Much of this has been driven by individuals seeking to escape the country's deep economic distress, as poverty rates have climbed sharply since the transition, and unemployment rates have remained persistently above 30%. Emigration has taken three primary forms: permanent family emigration or family reunification, temporary and circular emigration for economic reasons, and illegal or refugee-motivated migration. Within this latter, comparatively small category, the number of asylum-seekers shot up dramatically following the 2010 liberalisation of European Union visa rules, with a particular rise in applications by Roma and Albanians.

With respect to internal population flows, rural-urban migration was dominant in the 1950-1990 period. Within the internal migration, Skopje region was primary destination. However, these movements in combination with intensive emigration abroad led to depopulation and a correspondingly diminished migration potential in rural areas, resulting in comparatively lower internal migration levels during the last two decades.

Internal movements were also caused following the 2001 armed conflict between Macedonian security forces and Albanian separatists. FYR Macedonia had to deal with around 76,000 internally displaced persons from the crisis regions (Skopje, Kumanovo and Tetovo) who fled their homes seeking protection throughout the country. Dealing with this vulnerable population group was regarded successful because of the fast return of the displaced facilitated through a line of governmental measures.

Rising emigration rates and changes in emigrant characteristics, particularly in the last two decades, have negatively impacted the country's population growth, demographic and socio-economic structure. As a large majority of emigrants are young persons, the outflow has accelerated the ageing of the population. However, rising unemployment rates overall show that emigration alone cannot solve - or even significantly ameliorate - the domestic unemployment problem. The share of women in the migrant population has risen somewhat, partly due to family reunification. A "brain drain" among the educated has become a serious problem, as the share of migrants with tertiary education has risen sharply since 1990 and the emigration rate exceeded 29%. Labour shortages have emerged among industrial workers and highly skilled professions that are represented among emigrants. The remittances inflow in the country in the 1990s corresponds with the emigration intensity and changes in the migratory structure. This has large social and economic implications at the macro level and on the family members left behind.

Population flows have significantly undermined regional cohesion, devastating some particularly vulnerable areas. Rural areas have in some cases lost as much as three-quarters of their active labour force, as was the case in the rural areas of Pelagonia region. Gender imbalances in rural villages are severe, and social exclusion among older people left behind is high. Devastated rural areas as a consequence of migratory movements lack infrastructural, social, health and education facilities. By contrast, the flow of working-age individuals to the Skopje region has led to higher unemployment rates and decreases in the employment rate there, along with a significant informal economy.

Migration also influences the social situation, as well as gender roles and family cohesion in migrants' households. Family members left behind - most often women, children and other

dependents such as older people - are particularly vulnerable in this respect. Migrants' children frequently grow up under the care of a single parent (usually their mothers) or other relatives, and frequently suffer from broken family structures. Gender roles in migrants' families also shift, as the emigration of male household heads strengthens the family role of women left behind, while forcing them to shoulder a higher share of informal family care and responsibilities. In cases when both parents emigrate, family cohesion and child welfare are often undermined. Older people left behind are often vulnerable and isolated, particularly in rural areas that lack social services able to provide care in the absence of family members.

Viewed from an ethnic perspective, migration among Roma and Albanians is most specific. The emigration of both ethnic groups intensified in the years following the 1990s. Roma people constitute 2.66% of the total population and are particularly vulnerable, with high poverty and unemployment. They are inclined either towards emigration abroad in search for better life opportunities or towards circular (mostly seasonal) internal migration. Return of Roma is often through forced deportation by the host country, and few systematic measures for reintegrating these individuals into the labour market exist. The Albanian population (25.17% of the total population) is also traditionally emigration oriented. The emigration is most typical for Albanians from the Polog region where they represent the majority of the population.

Official policy towards migration and internal regional development has been underdeveloped until recently, and present-day policy responses remain modest. A Resolution and Action Plan on Migration Policy for the period 2009-2014 were adopted in 2009, but their implementation is in initial phase. Institutionalised arrangements regulating temporary and seasonal employment abroad are insufficient. FYR Macedonia and the European Community have signed an Agreement for Readmission of Illegal Migrants, entering into force in 2008. A Programme for Reintegration of the Returnees under the Readmission Agreements was adopted in 2010, but its implementation has been slow. The government adopted a Strategy for Regional Development for the period 2009-2019, which is expected to improve demographic, economic, social and spatial cohesion between and within the country's regions. However, measures specifically aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of migration on vulnerable groups remain insufficient. Vulnerable groups affected by migration benefit primarily from existing general social inclusion policies.

If the above-cited strategic documents are to be implemented in full, budget planning and revenue-raising efforts must be improved. This can take place only if central coordination is strengthened. The creation of a statistical database on migration flows and the provision of support to researchers studying vulnerable population groups' problems and needs would facilitate and inform policymaking, and help improve targeting of groups affected by migration. The development potential of the Macedonian Diaspora should be tapped as much as possible, by encouraging the use of official channels for remittances, as well as their investment within the country. New emphasis should be placed on creating social welfare programmes targeting vulnerable groups affected by migration. Although the process of fiscal decentralization is not completed in all municipalities, municipal involvement in achieving these objectives should be promoted.