

Emigration Intentions Among Hungarian Youth

Emigrációs szándékok a magyar fiatalok körében

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Abstract: In our study, we examine the demographic and social characteristics of young people in Hungary who have plans to move abroad based on the last dataset of the Hungarian youth sociology research project, the Hungarian large-sample youth survey. Over the course of the research, 8,000 young Hungarians between the ages of 15 and 29 were interviewed in 2020, and the questionnaire also included questions about moving abroad. The social and economic consequences of emigration are largely determined by the social and demographic composition of the emigrating population.

Keywords: youth, migration, Hungary, large-sample surveys

Összefoglaló: Tanulmányunkban külföldi tervekkel rendelkező magyarországi fiatalok demográfiai és társadalmi sajátosságait vizsgáljuk a magyarországi ifjúságszociológiai kutatási projekt, a nagymintás ifjúságkutatás utolsó adatállományának a felhasználásával. A kutatás során 8000 15–29 év közötti magyarországi fiatalot kérdeztek meg, s a kérdőívben külföldre költözéssel kapcsolatos kérdések is helyet kaptak. Az elvándorlás okozta társadalmi és gazdasági következményeket nagyban meghatározza az elvándorló népesség társadalmi és demográfiai összetétele.

Kulcsszavak: ifjúság, migráció, Magyarország, nagymintás ifjúságkutatás

1. Introduction

For the demographically aging Europe – including Hungary – the evolution of demographic change is vital from a social, economic, and geopolitical perspective. At the level of the nation-state, the age pyramid is also substantial, and in addition to the trends in fertility and mortality, international migration is significant in

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the development of natural population change. However, as a consequence of significant systematic developments in recent decades, in particular with regard to globalization and the rise of the Creative Age (Florida, 2002; Gertler et al., 2002), gaining experience abroad can be an advantage for individuals on the labor market due to language learning and familiarization with other cultures. As a result, the main question can already be better rephrased as how many people leave their birthplace and for what purpose and go abroad on a temporary or permanent basis.

Globalization and international migration, both processes driving systemic change, are closely linked. Globalization has brought about fundamental changes in economic, social, and cultural terms. The concept encompasses several phenomena, some of which can be interpreted as explanatory in relation to the structural factors shaping international migration. On the one hand, the term denotes the emergence of a market-based global economy in which financial and investment capital flows freely; on the other hand, it concerns the emergence of regional economic units within which capital and labor can move completely freely. The European Union is an illustrative example of the latter (Melegh, 2004).

In the second chapter of this paper, we present the theoretical and methodological challenges that make it difficult to measure emigration, analyze migration flows, and characterize emigration. Furthermore, we outline the theoretical approaches behind the migration decision and discuss the social and demographic factors determining the latter at the micro level, as well as their effects. The data used for the analysis are presented in the third chapter and the results of our analyses in the fourth and fifth chapters. In the fourth part, we present the socio-demographic background of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 in Hungary with plans to emigrate, and in the fifth, we present the reasons behind the decision to migrate, examining the explanatory power of the classic push-and-pull migration model. In the last part, we summarize the results we obtained.

Migration potential, i.e., the intention to migrate, refers to a future event, hence it can rather be considered an attitude. To understand and interpret the international mobility of young people, it is also necessary to explore the driving forces behind migration plans, as various motivations result in different social impacts. For example, young people may go abroad to gain experience or because they see this as an escape route. They often go abroad in order to gain experience, to lay a solid foundation for a secure financial future, or to broaden their horizons, and therefore expect a positive impact from their decision to migrate. At the same time, in the country of origin, the issue of youth emigration is receiving particular attention from social, demographic, and economic points of view, as it can have a decisive and even negative impact on these processes. In connection with the emigration of youth, we can observe a conflict of individual and social interests, although both can benefit from return migration.

Migratory processes include at least two components, which can be analyzed most generally by comparing the number of immigrant foreign citizens and emigrant domestic citizens based on national and international statistics (Gazsó, 2020:358). According to Mishra (1981: 227-228), migration can be defined as an inflow or outflow of population from a defined region to another region for permanent or semi-permanent settlement. In this paper, we focus on emigration in relation to this two-way process. Due to the intensification of the emigration process since the early 2010s, the main questions have focused not only on the insufficiency of the statistical system related to migration but also on the number of migrants, their socio-demographic background and the drivers of emigration (cf. Blaskó, 2012; Gödri, 2013; Hárs, 2012, 2013; Gödri et al., 2014; Gödri, 2015; Hárs, 2016; Kapitány-Rohr, 2014; Blaskó-Gödri, 2014; Hárs-Simon, 2016). At the same time, due to the intensification of the wave of refugee migration³ in the mid-2010s, the topic of immigration has again experienced a renaissance (cf. Bernát et al., 2015; Sik et al., 2016; Sik-Szeidl, 2016; Barna-Koltai, 2018; Bernát et al., 2019). However, it is important to underline that it has become increasingly relevant to examine other forms of migration, such as return migration or circulation,⁴ which can no longer be considered atypical. Circulation refers to a repetition of legal migration by the same person between two or more countries. It includes seasonal migration related to agricultural, construction, or mass tourism and commuter migration (resulting from cross-border labor movement), as well as leisure, vocational, or shopping tourism (Illés-Kincses, 2009:731-732).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. *Conceptual distinctions*

Migration has been present in public opinion and scientific thought for a long time. The Latin origin of the term “migration” suggests that the phenomenon was already known in antiquity (Hautzinger et al., 2014:5). The intensification of emigration to America from the second half of the 19th century onwards aroused the interest of European decision-makers and researchers, leading to the emergence of parallel and often competing research approaches (Szabó, 2006:65). Since then, a variety of theoretical models have emerged to explain the causal relationships involved in migration, often starting from different assumptions and using different concepts and frames of reference (Hautzinger et al., 2014:23).

Having begun in the 1990s, marking the end of the bipolar world order, migration research in Europe was stimulated by concerns about East-West migration. Besides regime changes in Central and Eastern European countries, cross-border mobility

3 As Ruff (2022) states, research on migration in Hungary from the late 1980s until the full opening of the EU labor market in 2011 focused primarily on immigration.

4 Research on this topic has been published in recent years (cf. Hegedűs-Lados, 2017; Siskáné-Halász, 2018; Kajdi et al., 2019; Gábriel-Horváth, 2020), although there remains a lack of empirical data, mainly of large-sample, representative surveys.

was also catalyzed by the expansion of the European Union and the free movement of labor, and migratory processes were further strengthened by economic and income differences between countries (Gödri, 2016; Ruff, 2022).

The intensity of the subsequent waves of emigration has been shaped not only by the expansion of the European Labour Market⁵ but also by factors such as the global economic crisis. This is because the decision to migrate is always the end result of a complex process, which, in addition to the individual life situation, is influenced by exogenous factors such as changes in the external political, social, and economic context. In recent decades, globalization, economic crises, epidemics, and wars have continuously altered and shaped the intensity of migration.

2.2. *Migration potential*

According to the generally accepted approach in migration research, migration is a process consisting of several stages (Rossi, 1955; Goldsmith–Beegle, 1962; Fawcett, 1985; Kley–Mulder, 2010; Kley, 2011; Gödri–Feledy, 2013). The process begins with the decision stage, consisting of two parts: migration consideration and migration planning.⁶ Consideration is influenced by individual preferences, goals, and external opportunities, while planning is determined by facilitating and inhibiting factors (Kley–Mulder, 2010).

The analysis of migration plans primarily reveals the beginning of the selection process but also the individual sociodemographic characteristics, attitudes, and expectations that influence the migration decision. However, migration intentions do not always lead to actual emigration, which is also strongly influenced by individual resources, such as lack of financial and relational capital or language skills, and by inhibiting factors, such as unexpected costs, legal obstacles, and other unforeseen events. Moreover, labor migration is also strongly impacted by demand in the destination country, which is, in many cases, a major factor in the failure of migration plans. There is also a selection process between the planning and implementation of migration, which requires a panel study to investigate. In order to understand why some migration plans can be realized while others remain dreams, it is also necessary to explore which factors determine the evolution of such plans and which factors determine the actual realization of migration. It can be assumed that these factors differ (Gödri–Feledy, 2013; Van Dalen–Henkens, 2008; Chort, 2012). Furthermore, to decide to what extent migration potential can be considered a suitable indicator for predicting migration processes, it is also necessary to analyze the relationship between migration plans and actual action, meaning migration itself (Gödri–Feledy, 2013).

5 Citizens of new member states, including Hungary, were allowed access to EU labor markets. For example, Germany and Austria opened their markets in 2011. These two countries rank highly as destinations for emigrants.

6 The terms 'intention' and 'plan' are often used synonymously when referring to migration potential, but the degree of migration potential is largely determined by the questioning technique used by researchers. In the Hungarian large-sample youth survey, the 'plan to' approach was used, which is one of the more restrictive questioning techniques (e.g., compared to 'Have you thought about it?' or the more permissive 'Would you like to go...?').

However, in analyzing the data of the Hungarian large-sample youth survey, only the first stage of selection can be explored because longitudinal panel studies would be necessary for following the selection process in its entirety, i.e., from the formation of intentions and plans to their realization, and revealing the factors actually influencing the latter. Conversely, the Hungarian large-sample youth survey, although repeated every four years, was targeted at young people aged 15–29 who were asked not only about their migration plans but also other issues. In migration research, the need for longitudinal studies to map migration as a selection process was pointed out earlier (Gardner et al., 1985; Coleman–Salt, 1992). In Hungarian migration research, studies focusing on migration potential have been conducted regularly; however, in most cases, they have not been accompanied by the monitoring of the realization of such plans (Gödri–Feleky, 2013; Nyíró, 2013).

In summary, the migration potential indicator measures the degree of the intention to emigrate and work abroad; at the same time, migration potential is mainly capable of reflecting the supply side of the labor market. However, in order to estimate migration flows actually taking place, it is also necessary to explore the demand side. Therefore, migration potential can be used for estimating expected migration flows to only a limited extent (Gödri–Feledy, 2013, Sik–Szeitl, 2016). Thus, migration potential cannot be considered a direct indicator of actual migration (Chort, 2012), and it is more accurate to say that it can be used primarily to understand the extent, and even more the composition, of the expected labor market supply. In the present study, we therefore look at the stage of the migration decision-making process without being able to foresee all factors that influence the actual realization of the intent to migrate (the activity itself) or that assist or even limit it while unforeseeable events influencing the actual realization of migration should also be taken into account. In conclusion, the present model is of limited use in predicting the likely trend and composition of migration.

2.3. Methodological challenges in migration research

There is no consensus in the literature regarding the conceptual definition of or theoretical approaches to migration, and as a result, the development of the sampling frame involves methodological difficulties (Várhalmi–Kováts, 2014:9–10). In addition to the diversity of conceptual and theoretical approaches to migration, the focus of the interpretations is on specific human behavior, i.e., migration (change of residence) (Hautzinger et al., 2014:18). Migration can be examined from different perspectives. For example, our examination can relate to the present (current residence abroad), the past (foreign experience, migration trends), and the future (migration potential, migration plans). For the different approaches, various statistical sources, databases, and research results can be used.

In identifying and analyzing the emigration process, we can rely on administrative records and empirical research. However, methodological difficulties can be identified in both cases. In the case of administrative records, data may come from domestic registers and foreign mirror statistics (e.g., Eurostat, Destatis,

Statistik Austria, etc.). Another difficulty in measuring emigration is that emigrants are not adequately represented in official statistics since the databases involve only emigrants who have reported their departure to the authorities. Therefore, registers covering the target population are fundamentally lacking (Várhalmi–Kováts, 2014; Ruff, 2013:152-153). The estimation of emigration is mainly based on statistics on administrative data sources such as health insurance registers, tax registers, population registers, registers of foreigners, registers of residence or work permits, empirical research, and labor force surveys, e.g., the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) (KSH: Migration of Hungarians according to statistics).⁷

Another complicating circumstance is that population surveys in the countries of origin do not reach persons who have moved abroad together with their entire household. The labor or immigration statistics of the countries of destination – i.e., mirror statistics – can provide a more accurate estimation of the size of the migrant population, so it is common practice to compare the emigration data of national migration statistics with these. However, apart from helping estimate the number of emigrants, they are inadequate for identifying the drivers behind migration decisions or providing information on the demographic background of emigrants. Nor do they help identify the purpose of their movement or the expected duration of time.

Analyzing migration based on statistical data can refer to the migratory process, i.e., the focus may be on the development of migration (trends), and the analysis based on migration flow data, such as the number of migrants entering or leaving a country during a specific period of time. Migration stock data, such as the number of migrants living in a country at a given point in time, are used to estimate the size of the emigrated population. What these two basic demographic concepts have in common is that they are mainly used for estimates, and we can only aim for the most accurate estimate. Thus, estimating the exact size of migration and analyzing the character of emigration is beset by a number of methodological difficulties (Várhalmi–Kováts, 2014).

3. The Hungarian context: The Hungarian large-sample youth survey 2000–2020

In our study, we examine the demographic and social characteristics of young people in Hungary who plan to move abroad using the last dataset of the Hungarian youth sociology research project, the Hungarian large-sample youth survey. Over the course of the research, 8,000 young Hungarians between the ages of 15 and 29 were interviewed in 2020; the questionnaire also included questions about moving abroad. The Hungarian large-sample youth survey started in 2000 and was repeated every four years thereafter. The target group of the survey was young people living in Hungary. Given the target group, the research lacks input from Hungarian young

7 https://www.ksh.hu/sajtoszoba_kozlemlenyek_tajekoztatok_2017_03_02

people who left the country for a shorter or longer time; that is, we cannot examine the actual reasons for migration abroad using this dataset.

However, in examining the details of the thematic structure of the questionnaires used in each wave and the weight of the individual topics covered in the questionnaires, it can be observed that the latter has changed a lot over the course of the research series. The topic of migration has always been present in the Hungarian large-sample youth survey, but with varying degrees of intensity; at the same time, it can be said that foreign travel, study, and migration plans were always considered to have less weight in terms of the number of questions (2000:0; 2004:5; 2008:7; 2012:8; 2016:9; 2020:10) (the analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software).

The first survey (2000) did not appear to address migration as an independent topic but mainly in questions related to work, where working abroad was one of the potential responses. In the second survey (2004), the possibility of migrating abroad was not only mentioned in the context of previous work and education experience but also directly addressed in the form of specific questions asking young people whether they had studied or worked abroad and whether they planned to study and work abroad for a period of time in the future. The Youth 2008 survey asked more questions about mobility abroad than formerly, with some questions similar to those asked in 2004. In 2012, only young people who answered a previous question by agreeing that they could not imagine their life abroad, but only in Hungary, were asked questions about their plans to work and study abroad. In the last two surveys, in 2016 and 2020, all respondents were asked these questions.

Future employment plans were addressed in different questions in each survey. In 2000, young people were asked the following question: “If you have had a job for at least three months [at some point] in your life, do you plan to work abroad?” In response to this question, 15% indicated a country in which they would go to work. Ten percent of young people not in education or employment planned to work abroad, and 24% of students planned to do the same. In 2004, researchers used this question: “Do you plan to go abroad to work for a time?” Thirty-six percent of young people said yes. In the first two surveys, another question was included: “Do you have any personal ideas that you would like to make a reality in the next five years?” In 2000, 3.6% of young people answered working abroad and 1.5% studying abroad. For the same question in 2004, 4.5% indicated working abroad and 2.2% studying abroad.

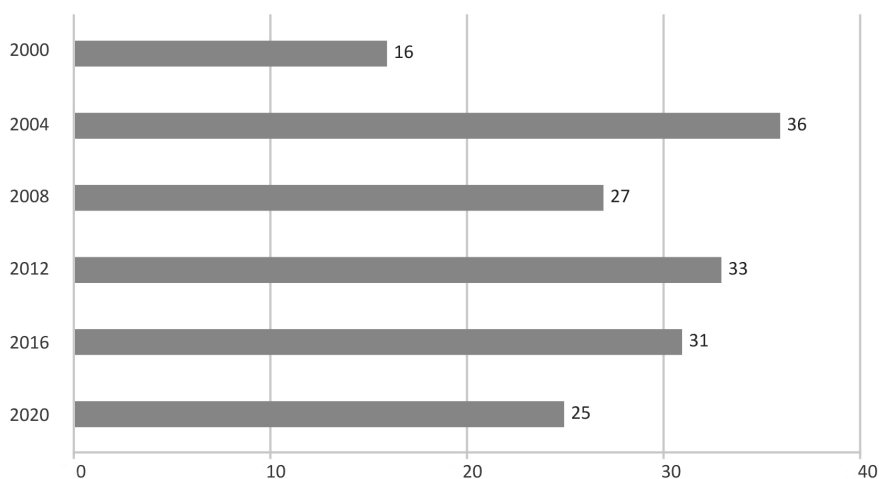
In 2008, the question on working abroad was slightly modified: “Do you ever plan to work abroad?” Twenty-seven percent of young people had such plans, 96% of whom planned to work abroad to the age of 30, two-thirds for up to two years, one-tenth for three years, and a further 10% for five years. In 2012, the same question was used as in 2008, when a third of 15-29-year-olds planned to work abroad (Figure

1). In the last two research questionnaires, the question was modified, asking participants separately about short-term and long-term migration plans.⁸

Due to the evolution of the questions over the course of the surveys, we cannot conduct a trend analysis by analyzing the data of the Hungarian large-sample youth survey in its entirety.

Figure 1. Plans to work abroad⁹ (in per cent)

($N_{2004} = 8000$, $N_{2008} = 8076$, $N_{2012} = 5290$, $N_{2016} = 8000$, $N_{2020} = 8000$)



3.1. Studying abroad

In the Hungarian large-sample youth survey, researchers have asked young people about their experiences with and plans for studying abroad since 2004. Generally speaking, the proportion of young Hungarians who have studied abroad is very small, ranging between 2 and 4% of 15-29-year-olds. Four percent of young people studied abroad in 2004 and 2% in 2008. Nearly 40% of the latter had attended a language course or a traineeship, and more than a quarter had gone to college or university. In subsequent surveys, the number of young people who had experience studying abroad did not exceed these proportions.

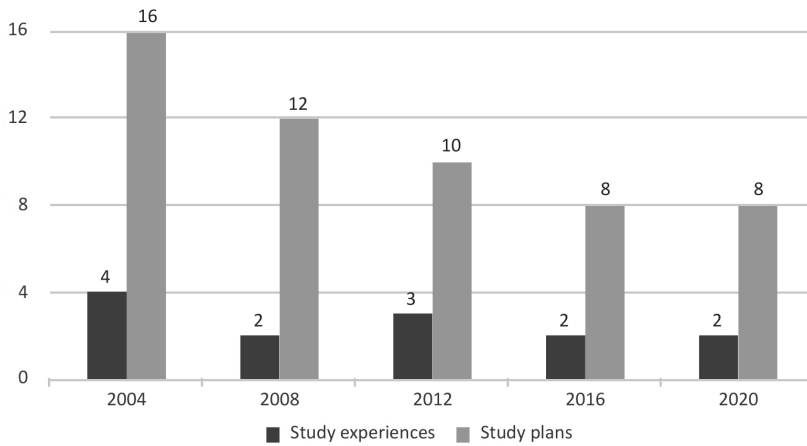
More young people are planning to study abroad in the future, but the proportion of young people who would like to continue their studies in another country for a time decreases from period to period (Figure 2). The same negative trend can be observed regarding young people's intention to continue their education, as the proportion is steadily decreasing.

8 "Do you plan to go abroad for a few weeks or months to work (including commuting)?"
"Are you planning to go abroad to work for a few years?"

9 In 2016 and 2020, we included those who had short-term or long-term employment plans. Those with both plans were included only once.

Figure 2. Study experiences and study plans abroad (in per cent)

($N_{2004} = 8000$, $N_{2008} = 8076$, $N_{2012} = 5290$, $N_{2016} = 8000$, $N_{2020} = 8000$)

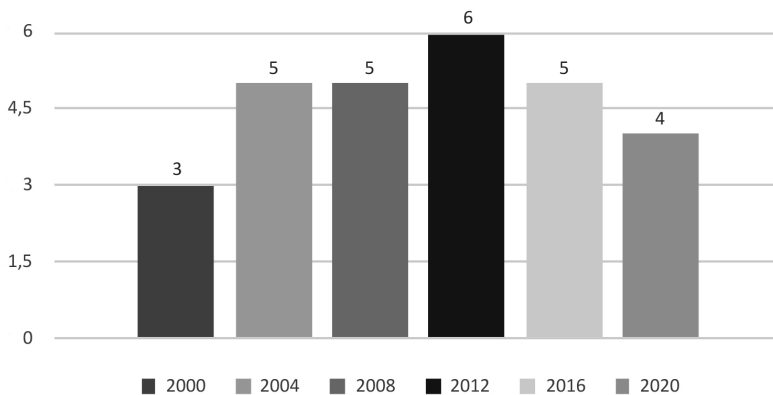


3.2. Working abroad

In general, not many young people aged 15-29 living in Hungary have taken up a job abroad. In the early 2000s, 3% of young people reported work experience abroad, rising to 6% in the first half of the 2010s, being the highest in the 2012 survey. In the last two surveys, the proportion of those who had worked abroad gradually decreased (Figure 3). When interpreting the data, it should be taken into account that the research lacks input from young Hungarian people who had left the country for a shorter or longer time.

Figure 3. International work experience (in per cent)

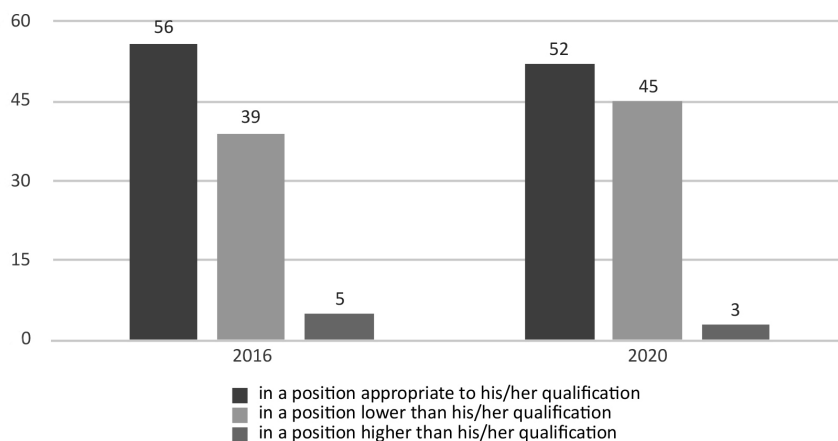
($N_{2000} = 4752$, $N_{2004} = 8000$, $N_{2008} = 8076$, $N_{2012} = 8000$, $N_{2016} = 8000$, $N_{2020} = 8000$)



In the latest survey, the majority of those with work experience abroad (52%) said they had worked a job in another country that corresponded to their qualification, although 4% more said the same in the previous survey. The proportion of those working in a lower-level job increased by 6% over four years, while the proportion working in a job above their level of education fell slightly to 3% (Figure 4).

Figure 4. *International work experience by qualification (in per cent)*

($N_{2016} = 389$, $N_{2020} = 272$)



The proportion of young people who plan to go abroad to work in the long term for a few years decreased from 27% in 2016 to 21% in 2020. The proportion planning to work for a few weeks or months stagnated, with 18% of young people in both years thinking about doing so.

3.3. *Intention to permanently settle abroad*

The Youth 2008 survey was the first to analyze the intention to settle permanently. It was included as a potential response in questions about study and work plans abroad and in a third question on moving away from the municipality where they currently live. Among those who planned to go abroad to study, the proportion of those who gave as a reason a desire to stay abroad for the long term or move out permanently was 1% of the total population. The same reason was identified by 4% of those planning to work abroad. When asked about moving from their place of residence, 1% said they would only move abroad from the municipality where they lived at the time of the survey. In 2012, 12% of young people said they would leave Hungary even for permanent settlement. In the last two surveys, researchers asked young people whether they planned to live abroad. In 2016, 15% of young people planned to live in another country, and 11% in 2020.

4. The social base of the migration potential of Hungarian youth

Long-term or permanent emigration has many demographic, social, and economic consequences for the country of origin, so it is important to examine which social groups have higher migration potential. It is also important to point out the limitations of this model because migration potential can be used to estimate expected migration flows only in limited terms. Thus, migration potential cannot be considered a direct indicator of actual migration, and it is more accurate to say that it can be used primarily to understand the extent and, even more, the composition of the expected labor market supply. So, the present model is of limited use in predicting the likely trend and composition of migration.

The migration decision is also influenced by individual factors – for example, the result of cost-benefit calculations – which, however, largely depend on the individual's socio-demographic and other characteristics. In the following, we examine the social basis of migration potential.

4.1. *Multivariate analysis of factors affecting migration potential*

In the following, multivariate logistic regression models are used to separately examine each type of migration potential, with the aim of identifying factors that explain the occurrence of migration plans with different time horizons. A value of '1' for the dichotomous dependent variables indicates the presence of a given type of migration intention (i.e., planning to go abroad to study, work for a longer or shorter period, or have plans to settle), while '0' indicates its absence. The impact of the explanatory variables is interpreted in terms of the odds ratios associated with each category, which indicate a higher or lower probability of intention to migrate relative to the chosen reference group. The model includes basic socio-demographic characteristics and labor market position variables. In the tables presenting the models, the significance level is indicated next to the odds ratios. In our first model, the dependent variable was the intention to study abroad; in the second, the intention to work in the short term; in the third, the intention to work in the long term; and in the fourth, the intention to settle. Socio-demographic variables (gender, age group, educational attainment, relationship status, place of residence), socio-economic variables (subjective economic status, social class position), and language skills were included as explanatory or control variables in all four models.

When examining results for 2020, it is important to note that the data was collected during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic had an impact on many aspects of life, some of which were implicit (for example, increased interest in public issues) and others more visible. The latter included the issue of mobility, as one of the first measures introduced was to restrict free movement (lockdowns and travel restrictions).

Findings suggest that men have higher mobility potential for both shorter and longer periods of employment and settlement. Across age groups, 15-19-year-olds are much more likely to go abroad, mainly to study, than 25-29-year-olds. Long-term employment is most likely to be desired by the highly qualified. Regarding the type of settlement, those living in

the capital and in cities with county status are the most likely to have plans to go abroad – in several cases, twice as likely as those living in municipalities. Foreign language proficiency is highly significant, with significantly more people who speak another language planning to go abroad in all four cases. Compared to the Central Hungary region, young people from the Southern Great Plain, Central Transdanubia, and Northern Great Plain stand out. In terms of marital status, it is mainly the unmarried and single people who would like to move to another country. In terms of subjective financial situation, those who get along well financially are the least likely to have plans to go abroad (Table 1).

Table 1. Odds ratios of logistic regression models examining the probability of migrating abroad among young Hungarians aged 15 to 29 in 2020

($N_{study\ abroad}=7561$, $N_{short-term\ employment}=7515$, $N_{long-term\ employment}=7403$, $N_{settling}=7360$)

| Category | Odds ratio | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | study abroad in the near future | go abroad to work for a few weeks or months (including commuting) | go abroad to work for a few years | live abroad |
| Gender (ref: Female) | Gender (ref: Female) | Gender (ref: Female) | Gender (ref: Female) | Gender (ref: Female) |
| Male | 0,904 | 1,27** | 1,395** | 1,24* |
| Age (ref: 25-29 years old) | | | | |
| 15-19 years old | 2,484** | 1,283* | 1,208* | 1,386* |
| 20-24 years old | 1,332* | 1,14 | 1,189* | 1,022 |
| Educational level (ref: college or university degree) | | | | |
| Primary education | 0,95 | 0,889 | 0,85 | 1,115 |
| Trade/High school degree | 1,171 | 0,879 | 0,773* | 1,072 |
| Residence (ref: Rural municipality) | | | | |
| Budapest | 2,238** | 1,284 | 1,46* | 2,107** |
| County seat | 1,54** | 1,711** | 2,107** | 1,533** |
| City | 1,115** | 1,461** | 1,469** | 1,213 |
| Knowledge of foreign languages (ref: None) | 1,922** | 1,387** | 1,608** | 1,457** |
| Region (ref: Central Hungary) | | | | |
| Southern Great Plain | 2,489** | 3,087** | 1,577** | 1,909** |
| Southern Transdanubia | 1,754* | 2,041** | 1,087 | 1,268 |
| Northern Great Plain | 2,217** | 2,869** | 1,871** | 1,523* |
| Northern Hungary | 1,065 | 0,785 | 0,795 | 0,694 |
| Central Transdanubia | 2,524** | 1,87** | 1,802** | 2,677** |
| Western Transdanubia | 1,091 | 0,995 | 0,931 | 1,133 |
| Marital status (ref: Lives with significant other) | | | | |
| Single | 1,34 | 1,655** | 1,645** | 1,349* |
| Married | 0,719 | 0,557** | 0,45** | 0,466** |
| Social status (ref: material deprivation) | | | | |
| No financial difficulties | 1,025 | 0,517* | 0,567 | 0,384* |
| Get along with budgeting | 0,61 | 0,507* | 0,589 | 0,335** |
| Barely make ends meet | 0,572 | 0,599 | 0,822 | 0,403* |
| Month-to-month financial problems | 0,719 | 0,861 | 1,108 | 0,716 |

* ($p \leq 0,05$) or ** ($p \leq 0,001$). Legend: Ref.: reference category

5. Motivations and barriers to the international migration of young Hungarian people

There are many factors that can drive mobility abroad, and it is important to understand these to get a clear picture of the reasons young people leave the country for longer or shorter periods. The analysis of incentives and disincentives first appeared in the Youth 2008 survey. In 2008, most people would go abroad to work to earn some money to save (18%), to gain experience (4%), to learn a language (3%) or because they could live better abroad (3%).

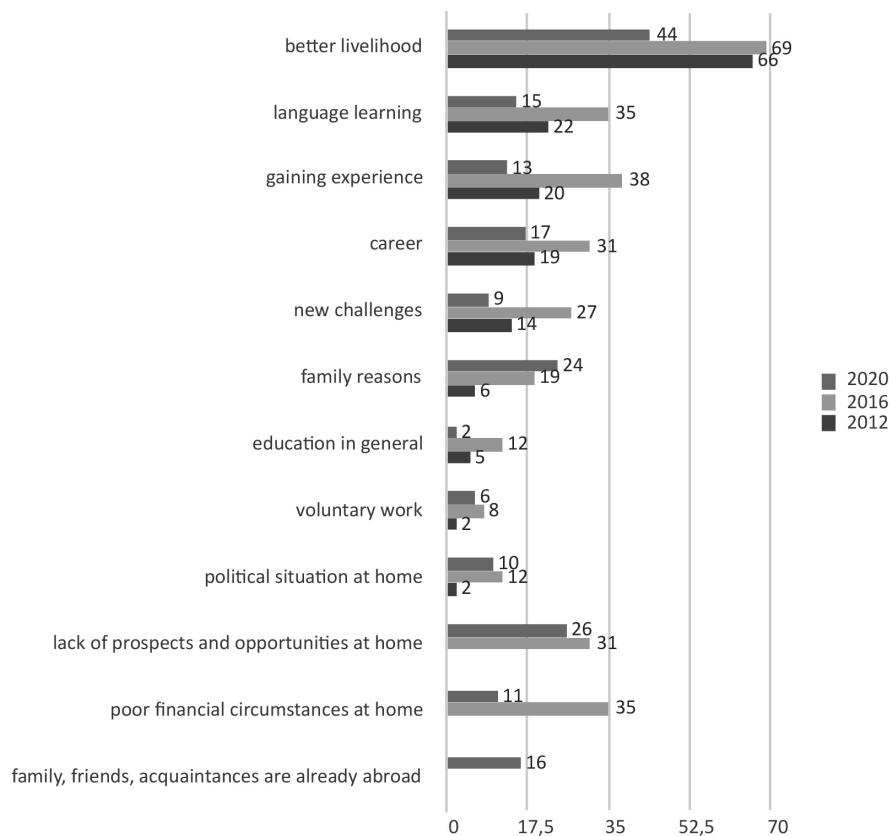
In the following three waves of data collection, most of the sources of motivation were asked in the same way so we can compare them.¹⁰ As in the previous two surveys, in 2020 the main reason given by young people for migrating was to earn a better living. Compared to the data from the previous two surveys, there is a marked difference in this respect. Previously, two-thirds of young Hungarians said they would leave the country to improve their standard of living, but this proportion had decreased to 44%. The proportion of young people who would go abroad to learn a language or to gain experience had also decreased, with a big change in these two areas compared to the previous survey in 2016. In 2020, career development was the fourth reason for mobility abroad, almost the same as in the research conducted eight years ago (Figure 5).

The proportion of emigrants seeking new challenges who face poor financial conditions at home had decreased significantly compared to four years ago, and fewer would leave for another country because of the lack of prospects and opportunities at home. The proportion of those who would leave the country for learning purposes only (for example, because there is no training in Hungary they are interested in, or they think there are more learning opportunities abroad) was the lowest in 2020 of the last three surveys. One-tenth of young people would leave the country because of the political situation, and 6% are interested in volunteering abroad. Compared to the drivers of emigration in previous years, only reasons for moving to another country related to family are better represented, as the proportion of young people who would move for such reasons increased. This change may also be explained by the fact that 16% of young people already have family members, friends, or acquaintances abroad.

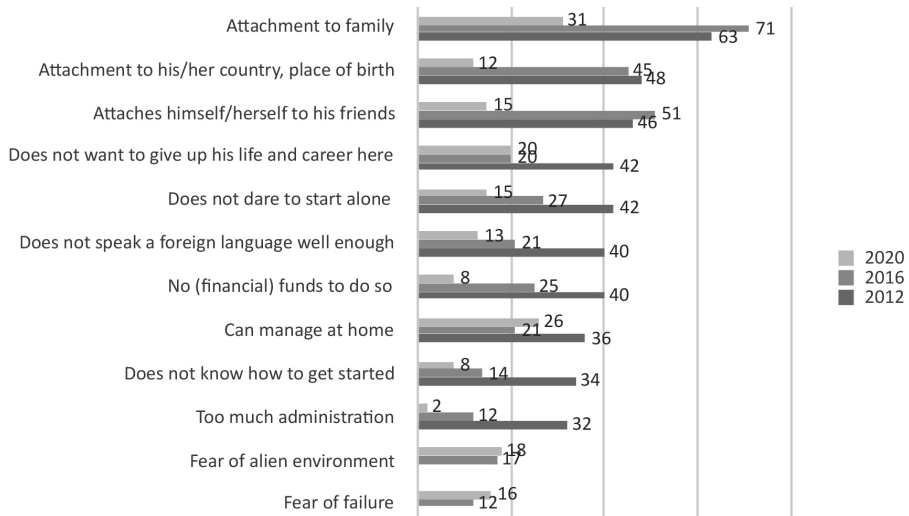
Overall, the order of motivations for mobility has changed, with the latest results showing that young people aged 15-29 would leave the country primarily for a better livelihood, second for family reasons, and third for career reasons. Learning a language and gaining experience were ranked lower, although they were ranked second and third in the two previous surveys.

¹⁰ For three answer options, we can only present data from 2016 and/or 2020.

Figure 5. Motivations for mobility abroad (in per cent)

 $(N_{2012}=8000, N_{2016}=1995, N_{2020}=2000)$ 

In addition to the factors that encourage mobility, it is also important to look at the reasons why today's young Hungarians choose not to leave the country for longer or shorter periods. In 2008, young people did not plan to go abroad to work mainly because they did not want to be separated from their family members, second, because there were jobs in Hungary, and third, because they did not know the language. Since 2012, the main reason given by young people in each survey has been attachment to family, but the other reasons have changed compared to the previous two surveys. Whereas previously, attachment to their homeland and friends played a very strong role in preventing young people from going abroad, in 2020, these aspects had been pushed to the back of the queue, replaced by factors related to satisfaction with what they have at home (i.e., they can manage at home, they don't want to give up their life and career here) and fear (fear of foreign surroundings, fear of failure, afraid to go it alone). The biggest decline is in attachment to family, home, and friends; however, lack of funds, not knowing how to get started, or excessive administrative procedures have also become less important barriers (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Barriers to outward mobility¹¹ (in per cent)*(N₂₀₁₂ = 8000, N₂₀₁₆ = 1843, N₂₀₂₀ = 1877)*

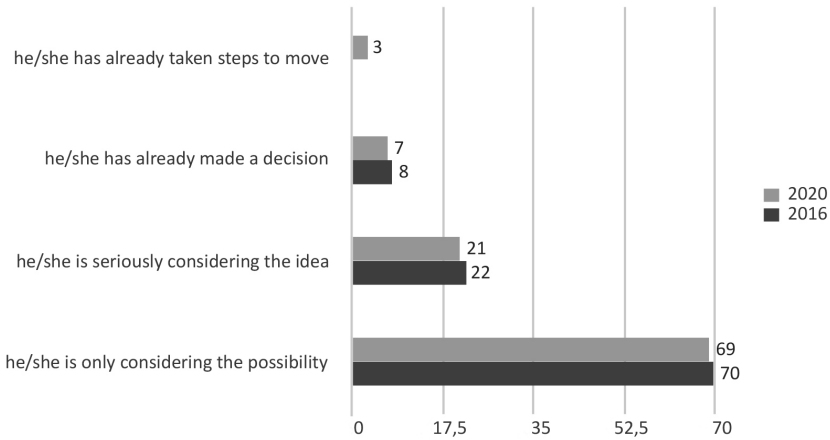
In addition to the above reasons, the Hungarian Youth 2020 survey also gave young people the opportunity to give their reasons for not going abroad in a free-response format. The main reasons given were that they were still at school, wanted to finish their studies in Hungary, wanted to get a profession or a degree, and might consider working abroad afterward.

For young people, going abroad is often seen as an option; many just play around with the idea, and although it is talked about a lot, it may not be followed up by concrete action. It is therefore interesting to examine at what stage in young people's minds their plans to move abroad are. Young people were asked about this in 2016 and 2020, and we can see that there has not been much change in this area. Nearly 70% of young people aged 15-29 in Hungary are only considering the possibility, while around one-fifth are already seriously considering moving abroad. Seven percent of young people have already made the decision to move out of Hungary, and 3% have already taken concrete steps to do so (Figure 7).

11 In 2012, the question was asked on a five-point scale, and for the 2012 data, the aggregate percentage of those responding "4" and "5" are shown ("5" means completely withheld). For the 2016 and 2020 data, the percentage of mentions is shown.

Figure 7. Strength of intention to move abroad (in per cent)

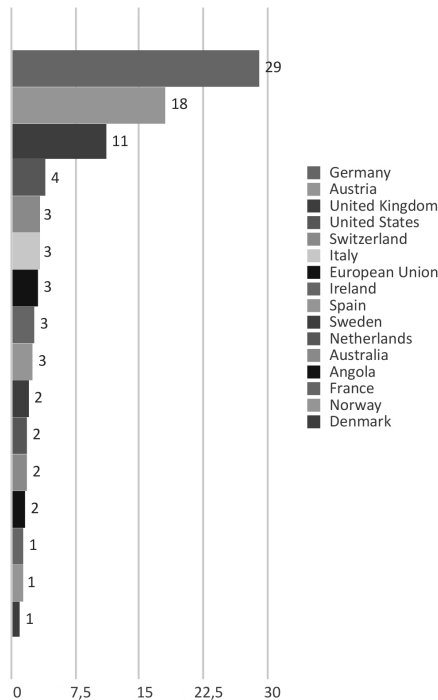
($N_{2016} = 533$, $N_{2020} = 518$)



The Hungarian Youth 2020 survey asked young people which country they would go to. The main destinations are those confirmed by other mobility surveys, with nearly 30% stating a desire to go to Germany, nearly one-fifth to Austria, and around one-tenth of young Hungarians indicating the United Kingdom as their destination. Four percent would go overseas and to other EU or non-EU countries, 1-3% at most (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Emigration destination countries (in per cent)

($N_{2020} = 463$)



Summary

Defining international youth migration can be difficult, since no universally accepted definition of “migrant” exists at the international level. According to Newman and Matzke (1984: 76), migration is not an analytically sharp concept. Definitions are largely situational depending on the investigator’s particular need and objectives.

The results of the Hungarian large-sample youth survey show that young Hungarians are also concerned about the issue of migration. As an important demographic process, it determines many things in the life of countries. There are many uncertainties in young people’s plans in general, and among these, the intention to move abroad is perhaps one of the most unpredictable, as it is always determined by the given conditions and circumstances. If these change rapidly and hectically, this can have a big impact on migration potential. Hungarians’ mobility potential was low before European Union accession, and it was generally expected to remain so after the country joined the EU. However, in the new conditions after accession, this also changed and more people have gone abroad to work or live than previously expected.

The hypotheses discussed in Subchapter 2.2 are confirmed by the multivariate analysis of the factors influencing migration potential discussed in Subchapter 4.1. Our results suggest that those with higher education are more open to emigration. The probability of emigrating decreases with age, as the time needed for emigration to pay off increases steadily, i.e., 15–19-year-olds are much more likely to go abroad, mainly for educational purposes, than 25–29-year-olds. Marital status is the main factor influencing the cost of emigration, as the cost of leaving home is highest in a cohabiting relationship, marriage, or when the whole family emigrates. On the basis of marital status, it is mainly the unmarried and single people who want to move to another country.

Conclusions

The target group of the Hungarian large-sample youth survey was young people living in Hungary. Given this target group, the research lacks input from Hungarian young people who have left the country for a shorter or longer time; that is, we cannot examine the actual reasons for migration abroad using this dataset.¹²

A further limitation of our study is that the researchers did not ask the questions in the same way in the different waves of data collection. The comparability of the data is limited due to the different questions. This was pointed out in regard to the individual questions. We would also like to call attention to the fact that the 2020

¹² International migration is a complex, contextual, and multidimensional process, several aspects of which have already been analyzed in Hungarian migration research, but there are questions that neither micro-level nor macro-level approaches can adequately answer. For example, how can we explain the fact that, despite similar economic, social, cultural, and political circumstances and similar socio-demographic backgrounds, some people decide to emigrate while others prefer to stay at home? These cases of migration can be analyzed based on migrant network theory. Migrant social capital differentially influences migration decisions depending on its level, diversity, and accessibility. But the data available in Hungarian large-sample youth survey are less suitable for this purpose (Kiss-Kozma, 2022).

wave of data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly changed young people's mobility plans and intentions.

The next Hungarian large-sample youth survey will take place in 2024, but we do not yet know whether the questions on migration will be asked in the same way. Furthermore, there is also a selection process between the planning and implementation of migration, which requires a panel study. In order to understand why some migration plans can be realized while others remain dreams, it is also necessary to explore which factors determine the evolution of migration plans and which determine the actual realization of migration.

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