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Emerging issues, including new methods to estimate and project migration

Return migration of recent Slovenian emigrants

Note by Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia *

Abstract

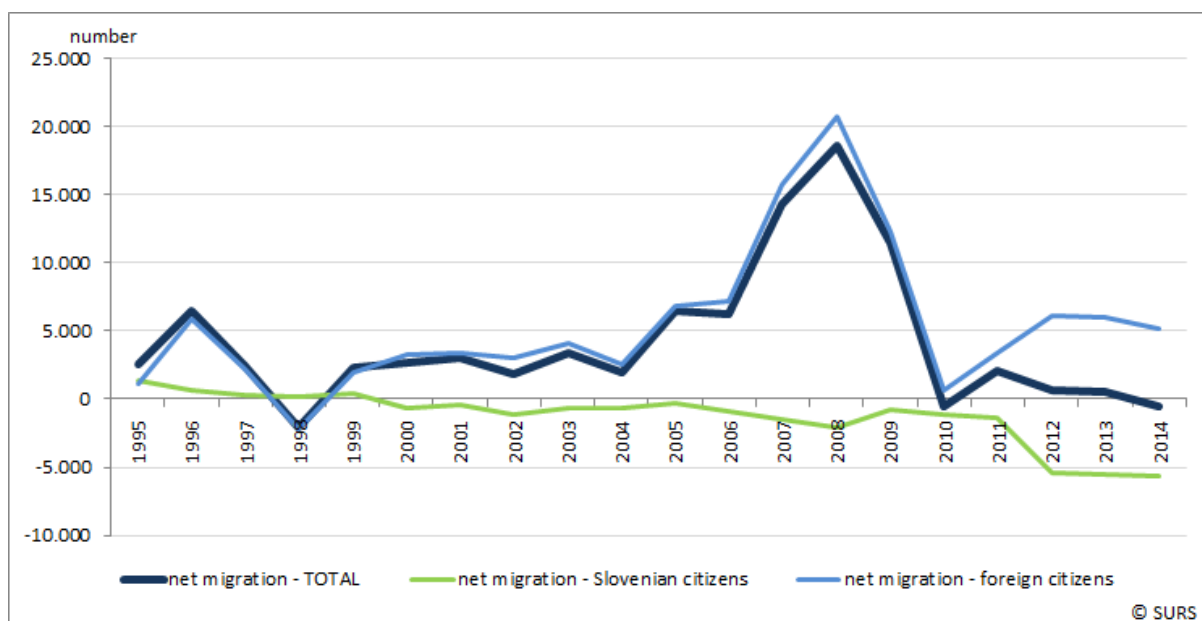
The number of Slovenian citizens emigrating each year from Slovenia increased from 4,800 in 2008 to 8,100 in 2014. The number of highly educated among them has been increasing as well, causing concern in the media and the general public, even though our analyses show that the highly educated are no more likely to emigrate than others. The time series for which we have comparable data on educational attainment of international migrants is quite short (2011-2014), while a comparable time series on international migrants is somewhat longer (from 2008 on). By linking annual migration databases (and annual usually resident population databases), we try to determine how many emigrants tend to return (and possibly emigrate again) in the short period our time series covers, and their characteristics (including educational attainment when available).

I. Introduction

1. Annual net migration of Slovenian nationals has been negative in Slovenia since 2000, but has become more pronounced in the last three years (2012 and on), when emigrants outnumbered immigrants by more than 5,000 each year.

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Graph 1: Net migration, Slovenia



Source: SURS

2. The number of Slovenian emigrants with tertiary education has been increasing along with the total number of Slovenian emigrants, causing concern in the media and the general public. The so-called brain drain is the number one topic in Slovenian media when talking about international migration, often linking emigration with the economic crisis. While the absolute number of highly educated emigrants is undeniable, experts on the topic see no cause for alarm: modern international migration of the highly educated is absolutely necessary for further professional advancement, especially in fields like the academia. As long as these emigrants return in some years, their emigration is seen as furthering their education (even if not formally), i.e. enriching the initial state-funded investment into their education.

3. The aim of this paper is to show that the educational structure among Slovenian emigrants does not significantly differ from that among residents with Slovenian citizenship. We will present the reasons for the increasing number of highly educated emigrants, and also show whether highly educated emigrants are more or less likely to return within the first few years after emigration than other emigrants.

4. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia prepares and publishes data on all international migrants in Slovenia, regardless of citizenship. Unless otherwise stated, for the purpose of this paper, the terms emigrant, immigrants, emigration and immigration in this paper refer to Slovenian nationals only.

II. Data sources

5. The main source for all demographic statistics in Slovenia is the Central Population Register, kept by the Ministry of the Interior. Data on migration are derived from data on events (registrations and de-registrations of residence) and combined with data on usually resident population (which is derived from data on stock).¹ We have used this methodology since 2008, when we adopted the usual residence concept in all demographic statistics. So our comparable time series on international migration is from 2008 on.

6. For the purpose of this paper, we linked all the comparable annual migration databases (2008-2014) among themselves, and linked that with annual usually resident population databases.

7. Each year, we link the final annual migration databases with data on education and activity status of population which are also produced annually and derive data from other administrative and statistical sources (e.g. employment register, annual survey on enrolled tertiary students etc.). This way we get data on socio-economic characteristics of international migrants. The comparable time series on this topic is available from 2011 on.

III. Who is leaving, who is staying?

8. Obviously the education structure of emigrants is different from that of the population that stays in the country. That is also true if we only look at Slovenian emigrants and residents with Slovenian citizenship. One reason for this is in the different education structures among different generations: the elderly are usually not as educated as the younger generations, and the elderly are in general less likely to emigrate than working-age population.

9. To get proper insight into who is in fact emigrating, we should look at age-specific education structures of emigrants and usually resident population. However, once disaggregated by age and educational attainment, the number of emigrants fluctuates quite a lot from year to year so a direct comparison would make little sense. Therefore, to get more stable data for the purpose of this exercise, we summed up emigrants of two consecutive years.

¹ Please see

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.10/2014/mtg1/WP_15_Slovenia.pdf for some more detailed information.

Table 1: Educational attainment of emigrants (2013-2014) and usually resident Slovenian nationals (2014) by age, Slovenia

Age	Emigrants 2013-2014			Population 2014		
	Educational attainment (ISCED 2011) (%)					
	level 0, 1, 2	level 3, 4	level 5, 6, 7, 8	level 0, 1, 2	level 3, 4	level 5, 6, 7, 8
Total	22.8	51.1	26.1	26.3	52.5	21.2
15-19	93.8	6.3	0.0	83.8	16.2	0.0
20-24	31.6	59.1	9.3	9.6	77.9	12.5
25-29	14.2	52.8	33.0	6.8	58.9	34.4
30-34	9.0	50.3	40.7	6.6	55.2	38.2
35-39	11.6	51.4	37.0	8.6	56.0	35.3
40-44	16.4	54.2	29.4	14.2	55.6	30.3
45-49	20.0	60.6	19.4	16.8	59.1	24.1
50-54	24.3	56.9	18.8	20.5	58.1	21.4
55-59	29.8	51.4	18.8	28.3	54.6	17.1
60-64	35.2	48.2	16.6	32.9	51.6	15.4
65+	40.1	46.3	13.6	45.3	43.2	11.6

Source: SURS

10. Table 1 shows that the most significant deviations occur among those with basic or lower education: the proportion of emigrants aged 20-29 with basic or lower education is much higher than among the population of this age. Other differences are much less pronounced: among 25-34-year olds, who are the most numerous age group of emigrants and in many respects perhaps the most mobile (entering the labour market, no or young children), the share of those with tertiary education is very similar to this share among the population.

11. We prepared similar calculations for the whole 2011-2014 period. The results were quite similar to those presented in Table 1, the only difference being that the share of tertiary-educated population is increasing over time, as is the share of tertiary-educated emigrants. There is no denying that Slovenian citizens with tertiary education are emigrating. They are, however, emigrating at about the same rate as others if we look at the same age groups.

IV. Why are more young and well-educated people leaving?

12. After the Bologna reform of tertiary education in Slovenia, young people attain tertiary education younger than before. The new 1st Bologna cycle takes usually 3-4 years to complete, whereas in the previous system university-level education usually took approximately 5 years or more. This change was gradual (different institutions switched to the Bologna system at different times), but 1st Bologna cycle graduates outnumbered old-system graduates in 2012 (graduates of one calendar year).

13. In 2011, 60% of graduates of (pre-Bologna) professional and academic higher education programmes were aged 25-29, while in 2014 nearly 50 % of graduates were under 25. Since the Bologna system has only in the very recent years been applied across all university-level education institutions, it is natural that 1st cycle graduates right now are younger than the old system graduates of the same year, so we can expect in the future to see some older 1st cycle graduates too. The mean age of graduates, however, will remain lower than in the old system, simply due to the programmes being shorter on average.

14. This means that in the past, few emigrants under 25 were tertiary-educated, while now there are more highly educated residents (and emigrants) in that age group. Additionally, the new system encourages international mobility of young people, where initial reasons for migration (education) quickly turn into longer stays abroad for work or family reasons.

V. Who is coming back and when?

15. To determine how many Slovenian emigrants are eventually returning, we combined seven annual migration databases, so for the entire 2008-2014 period for which we have comparable data. We filtered out the inconsistencies that occur between calendar years, and only excluded migrants with foreign citizenship.

16. Between 2008 and 2014, 8,000 Slovenian citizens immigrated to Slovenia exactly once. For a little under 1,400 of them, we have information that they emigrated from Slovenia at least once in the 2000-2007 period, but since the methodology was very different then, we cannot use it as proper comparison. We also have no individual data on migration prior to 2000.

17. About 8,100 emigrants who left in 2014 (6,900 of whom only had one migration event since 2008) could not have returned yet in the same year. So for the purpose of this paper, we will only be looking at people who emigrated in the 2008-2013 period, but immigrations until 2014 will be observed.

18. According to our combined migration database, 30,100 Slovenian citizens emigrated from Slovenia at least once in the 2008-2013 period. Of these, 22,700 migrated exactly once, meaning they have not (yet) returned (670 of them died as emigrants). The remaining 7,400 were international migrants at least twice. More than a half, about 4,100 of these were eventual immigrants, i.e. their sequence of migration events ended in immigration in the observed period. This could be through a simple emigration-immigration sequence or a repetition of such sequences, or a variation of immigration-emigration-immigration pattern.

19.

Table 2: Emigrants by year of last emigration and return, Slovenia

	Emigrants ¹⁾	Died ²⁾	Potential return migrants	Year of return						Returned (%)	
				Total	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013		2014
Year of emigr.	30,114	668	29,446	4,084	80	317	481	772	868	1,566	13.9
2008	4,336	130	4,206	392	80	67	119	39	31	56	9.3
2009	2,781	156	2,625	568	-	250	113	76	49	80	21.6
2010	3,191	134	3,057	627	-	-	249	220	79	79	20.5
2011	4,155	121	4,034	754	-	-	-	437	149	168	18.7
2012	7,862	76	7,786	872	-	-	-	-	560	312	11.2
2013	7,789	51	7,738	871	-	-	-	-	-	871	11.3

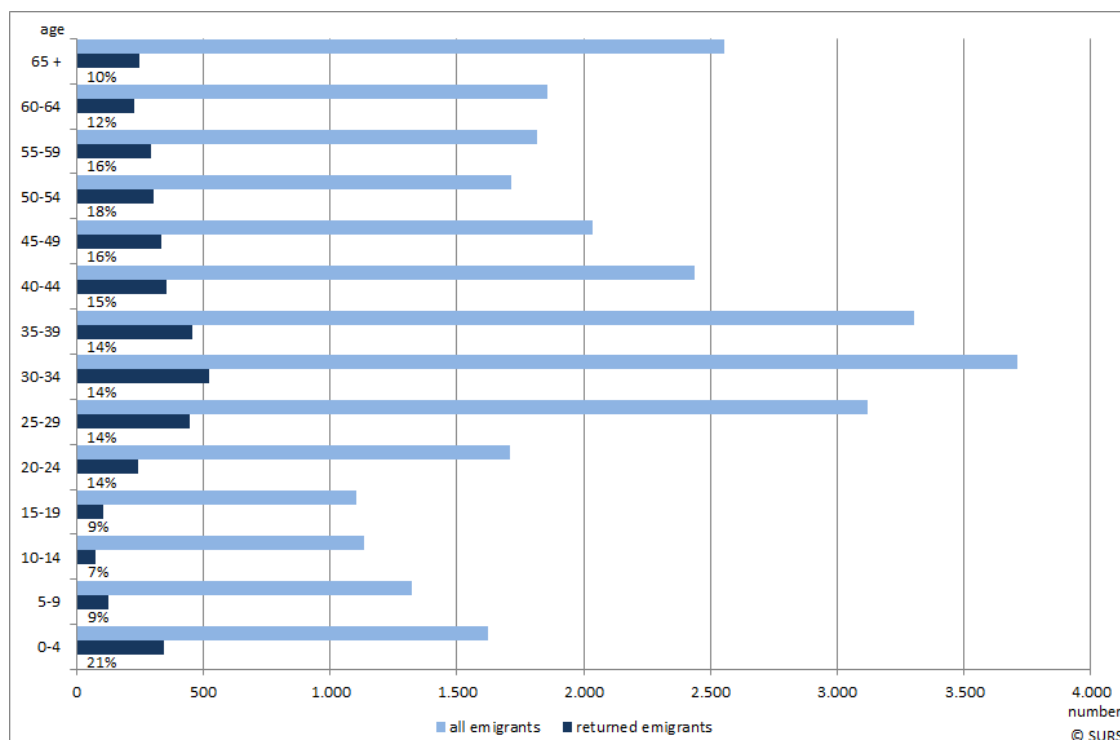
1) The number of emigrants in a given year is lower than the officially published figures based on annual databases: the table only refers to an emigrant's last emigration, whereas annually published data refer to all emigrants of a given year. (E.g. an emigrant from 2009 can be an emigrant again in 2012: in annual data they are counted in both 2009 and 2012, while in the combined database they last are shown as emigrated in 2012.)

2) Emigrants who died after emigrating (having never returned) are excluded from calculations.

Source: SURS

20. In total, out of the 29,400 emigrants who last emigrated from Slovenia in the 2008-2013 period and were still alive on 1 January 2015, 4,100 (14%) returned to the country by the end of 2014. As Table 2 indicates, the return rate appears to be the highest in the first two or three years after emigration.

Graph 2: Emigrants (2008-2013) and returned emigrants (by 1 January 2015) by age at emigration, Slovenia



Source: SURS

21. Out of all emigrants, those aged 0-4 are the most likely to return in a few years after emigration than other emigrants. The medium-term return rate also starts increasing after 40, but drops again after 55. School-aged children are the least likely to return soon after leaving.

22. To get a more detailed insight into who is actually returning, we looked at data on educational attainment of population and international migrants. Because data on education are available from 2011 on, we only looked at emigrants (aged 15+) who left between 2011 and 2013 and who could return between 2012 and 2014. Age structures were taken into account as well, where age was calculated as completed years of age at time of last emigration to ensure comparison between the same subpopulations. Since the time period covered is quite short, this should not affect overall findings.

Table 3: Educational attainment¹⁾ of emigrants and returned emigrants (by 1 January 2015) by age²⁾, Slovenia

Age	All emigrants 2011-2013 ³⁾⁴⁾				Returned 2012-2014 (%) ⁵⁾			
	Total	level 0, 1, 2	level 3, 4	level 5, 6, 7, 8	Total	level 0, 1, 2	level 3, 4	level 5, 6, 7, 8
Total	16,829	4,455	8,494	3,880	13.1	12.1	14.4	11.3
15-19	735	706	29	n/a	8.7	8.4	17.2	n/a
20-24	1,160	445	668	47	14.0	11.5	15.6	14.9
25-29	2,099	340	1,148	611	12.8	18.2	12.6	10.0
30-34	2,535	294	1,266	975	12.3	13.6	12.9	11.3
35-39	2,242	314	1,166	762	12.4	13.1	14.5	8.8
40-44	1,635	321	883	431	12.6	12.5	12.8	12.3
45-49	1,392	320	808	264	14.7	14.4	15.7	12.1
50-54	1,134	295	634	205	18.2	14.6	19.9	18.0
55-59	1,078	341	555	182	17.4	16.4	20.9	8.8
60-64	1,195	436	582	177	12.7	9.9	14.3	14.7
65 +	1,624	643	755	226	10.2	9.3	10.1	12.8

1) ISCED 2011.

2) Age refers to completed years of age at time of last emigration.

3) Those who died as emigrants are excluded.

4) The number of all emigrants in a given year is lower than the officially published figures based on annual databases: the table only refers to an emigrant's last emigration, whereas annually published data refer to all events of a given year. (E.g. an emigrant from 2011 can be an emigrant again in 2013: in annual data they are counted in 2011 and in 2013, while in the combined database they last emigrated in 2013.)

5) Presented as percentage of those originally emigrated.

Source: SURS

23. We can see that in the short time period that Table 3 covers that emigrants with tertiary education in all age groups between 24 and 59 are less likely to return within the first few years than other emigrants. Only those aged 20-24 and 60+ are more likely to return than the average.

24. It is difficult to determine why older tertiary-educated emigrants are more likely to return than their less educated counterparts. One possible explanation could be that they are returning close to retirement (or to retire). This would also be consistent with emigrants with ISCED 2011 levels of education 3-4 (who mostly enter and exit the labour market younger) tending to return somewhat younger. Younger emigrants (20-24-year olds) might be returning after finishing studies abroad.

25. The most common countries of next residence for emigrants with Slovenian citizenship are German-speaking countries (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland) and countries of former Yugoslavia. German-speaking countries are a traditional destination of Slovenian emigrants, while a lot of people emigrating to countries of former Yugoslavia often have family ties there (themselves or their parents having been born there) as Slovenia had very high immigration from other parts of the then-common country in the 1970's and 1980's.

26. As table 4 indicates, those who emigrate from Slovenia to the UK and Ireland have the highest return rate in the few years our analysis covers. Emigrants going to the UK and Ireland are generally the youngest (58% under 35), and more than a quarter of those aged 25-29 at emigration return in a few years.

Table 4: Emigrants (2008-2013) and returned emigrants (by 1 January 2015) by country of next residence, Slovenia

Country of next residence ¹⁾	Emigrants	Returned emigrants	Returned (%)
Total	29,446	4,084	13.9
Austria, Germany, Switzerland	13,831	1,409	10.2
United Kingdom, Ireland	1,125	233	20.7
Belgium, Luxembourg	1,042	163	15.6
other EU-27	3,809	725	19.0
Former Yugoslavia	5,668	1,002	17.7
other Europe	399	53	13.3
other continents	3,572	499	14.0

1) Country of next residence is based on this information at time of emigration. It is not necessarily the same as the country of previous residence for a returned emigrant.

Source: SURS

27. The return rate for those who emigrated to Austria, Germany and Switzerland is the lowest. These emigrants are somewhat older with a more even age structure, possibly indicating that entire families emigrate. This absence of close family ties at home and a rather strong community/network in the traditional receiving country could be the reason for fewer emigrants returning. Additionally, these countries are geographically close to Slovenia so keeping in touch with “home” is easier without actually returning.

28. Return rates by country of next residence in relation to educational attainment do not seem to present a clear picture. The most likely to return are emigrants with upper secondary education who migrated to Belgium and Luxembourg or “other” EU countries. Among tertiary-educated emigrants, those who left for “other” EU countries are most likely to return.

VI. Conclusions

29. When comparing the same age groups, education structure of emigrants is about the same as of those who stay behind. Up to approximately 20% of emigrants return in the first four years after emigration, but some re-emigrate; this paper only covers every emigrants’ last emigration (and return migration if applicable).

30. The time series available on education structure of (returned) emigrants is probably too short for any serious conclusions, but it does appear that tertiary-educated emigrants are less likely to return than others, even after excluding the age factor in the calculations. Finding explanations for this is mostly speculation.

31. Taking country of next residence into account is very tricky, especially in combination with educational attainment and age as the disaggregation of already small numbers makes for unreliable results.

32. Much more detailed and advanced analyses on a longer time series would be needed to see if there are in fact correlations between return rates, age, country of next residence and educational attainment. The analysis presented in this paper really only scratches the surface while completely bypassing some known issues, such as circular migration (which should be considered separately), non- or late registration of emigration etc.