

CHALLENGES FACED BY SERBIAN MIGRANTS CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ^a

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Abstract

This paper studies the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different groups of migrants from Serbia. The paper aims to identify and analyse difficulties and the most migration-related stressful issues that international migrants from Serbia coped with due to the societal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We explored how they perceive those migration-related stressors and how they act in the context of limitations and opportunities in countries of origin and destination out of necessity to counter these challenges. We also highlighted the migration plans in accordance with the migration motives before the pandemic, and the possibilities for their realisation after the pandemic. The paper is based on qualitative research conducted using semi-structured in-depth telephone interviews with 34 participants.

As major migration-related stressors that were singled out are those associated with professional and financial hardship, their return, legal status, stigma, health and family. The results indicate the importance of the migration context for understanding the ability of individuals to cope with numerous and sudden challenges in crisis situations.

Key words: COVID-19 pandemic, international migration, migrant workers, migration-related stressors, Serbia.

ПРОБЛЕМИ МИГРАНАТА ИЗ СРБИЈЕ ПРОУЗРОКОВАНИ ПАНДЕМИЈОМ КОВИДА 19

Апстракт

Овај рад проучава утицај пандемије ковида-19 на различите групе миграната из Србије. Главни циљ рада је да идентификује и анализира потешкоће и нај-

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стресније ситуације са којима су се међународни мигранти из Србије суочили услед друштвених последица пандемије ковида-19. Такође истражујемо како они доживљавају те миграционе стресоре и како поступају у контексту ограничења и могућности у земљама порекла и одредишта, из потребе да се суоче са тим изазовима. Истакнути су и планови у вези будућих миграционих подухвата, а у складу са миграционим мотивима пре пандемије, те могућности за њихово остварење након пандемије. Рад је заснован на квалитативном истраживању спроведеном коришћењем полуструктурираних дубинских телефонских интервјуа са 34 испитаника.

Као главни миграциони стресори издвојили су се они повезани са пословним и финансијским тешкоћама, повратком, правним статусом, стигмом, здрављем и породицом. Резултати указују на значај миграционог контекста за разумевање способности појединаца да се суоче са бројним и изненадним изазовима у кризним ситуацијама.

Кључне речи: Пандемија ковида 19, миграциони стресори, међународне миграције, радни мигранти, Србија.

INTRODUCTION

Serbia has been facing numerous and diverse challenges of international migration for decades. One of the largest is the pronounced emigration of the local population, among which economic migration is the most common. Although most emigrants from Serbia are labour migrants who usually remain permanently in host countries, in the last ten years there was a visible increase in the share of temporary and circular migration (Arandarenko, 2020), and transnational migration practices have become more prevalent ever since. Migration flows are particularly intense towards EU countries, which are geographically close and well-connected by traffic. These countries have traditionally been the most important destination countries for our citizens, and the migration ties with them are well-established (Predojević-Despić and Penev, 2016). Social and material costs of migration have been considerably reduced thanks to innovations in communication and information technologies, which significantly affects the change of migration patterns, that is, the increasing prevalence of temporary migration and new destination countries (Predojević-Despić and Penev, 2016; Arandarenko, 2020). Among them are new EU members, and non-European countries, as well as China and the Gulf countries where temporary visas are practically the only option for work-related residence (Czaika and Villares Varela, 2012).

Labour migration is known to represent a significant livelihood strategy undertaken by individuals and households in countries with low and medium levels of development and high unemployment (Mak, Zimmerman and Roberts, 2021). Such a strategy also implies various potential benefits. Opportunities to enter the labour market, as well as job availability and higher salaries, career development and gaining international experience are strong pull factors (Khoo et al., 2007) and signifi-

cantly affect the choice of destination country (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2018) and future migration plans. Analyses also show that in the last few years, the reasons for the significant increase in migration flows from Serbia to the EU have been more on the side of demand factors in destination countries, rather than on increased supply due to unfavourable trends in the Serbian labour market (Arandarenko, 2020).

The survival of dependent family members at home considerably depends on sending remittances from family members working abroad (Chowdhury and Chakraborty, 2021). The high inflow of remittances also shows the strong connection between migrants and their (larger) families in the country of origin. The role of social networks, of family, but also friends and agents (including smugglers) is very important because they mediate between migrants and communities and influence the context in which migration decisions are made (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2018: 21) especially at the beginning of the migration process. Migration policies that allow migrants to return home unhindered, that is, circulate for economic reasons, or to have access to various migration services and integration programmes also provide significant benefits for migrants and their families.

However, livelihood strategies bring different challenges. Migrants may experience life stressors common to all individuals (health or family-related issues), although within these categories the individual problems faced by non-migrants and migrants may differ considerably. They also face stressful issues that affect only migrants, which relate to the attitudes of the receiving community, such as the lack of ties with the ethnic and host communities, but also racism, stereotyping, and stigma (Dow, 2011). The irregular legal status also negatively influences the process of adjustment to a new country (Arionan, 1993). Wong and Song (2008) single out financial and material difficulties as the most stressful issues for migrant workers. Dow (2011) indicates that unemployment and underemployment not only frustrates ambition, but also jeopardises mental health. Mak, Roberts and Zimmerman (2021) identify five areas of migration-related stressors: job, irregular legal status, stigma, family and health. According to the adapted elements of the existing workplace stress framework (Luthans, 2002) and acculturative frameworks (Berry et al., 1987) Mak, Zimmerman and Roberts (2021) formulated the migration-related stressor categories, which are usually intertwined and have a combined effect. Of these, *workplace / employer group* of stressors are the most present (for example, job insecurity, poor working conditions, wage theft, occupational hazards, and restriction of movement), followed by *family* - extended absences contributing to the deterioration of relationships with close family members; *recruitment agent/agency* - job-seeking and application process, fees, etc.; *environment* - housing, non-work-related conflicts, discrimination etc.; *legal* - negative experience with the authorities

or due to migrants' status; *socio-cultural* - political, economic, social, linguistic and religious issues both in the country of origin and destination; and *health* - migrants' health condition, no access to healthcare, etc. (Mak, Zimmerman and Roberts, 2021). At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic upsurge, the migrant population faced numerous challenges which also led to a significant reduction in the magnitude of international migration flows (OECD, 2020). In that sense, several studies emphasise that migrant workers were especially vulnerable at the beginning of the pandemic, but also during several waves of lockdowns. The results show that in immigration overseas countries, as well as in the EU, and especially in Western Europe (Fasani and Mazza 2020), migrants do most of the work belonging to the group of cleaners, helpers and labourers in mining and construction. Additionally, migrants are at potentially higher risk of infection, including COVID-19, because compared to the domicile population they are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, often do not have access to basic sanitation, while health insurance coverage is significantly lower (Guadagno, 2020). Exposure to stigma and discrimination is also common, due to attitudes that the migrant population largely transmits viral infection (Kluge et al., 2020; Guadagno, 2020). One study (Garrote-Sanchez et al., 2020) also shows that migrants originating from non-EU countries are particularly prevalent in occupations most exposed to job loss after the pandemic outbreak in the EU. It is also stated that similar conclusions can be drawn for other high-income countries, and that the consequences in lower-income countries are even much greater. Often, these challenges remain complex upon their return to the country of origin (Moroz et al. 2020; Guadagno, 2020).

The first months of COVID-19 showed that quite a large number of Serbian citizens was abroad, both migrants and non-migrants. Serbia organised special flights or otherwise helped their citizens to return home during the lockdown. Data from the border police in Serbia shows that in March and April 2020, more than 400,000 of its citizens entered the country, regardless of their legal status. In addition, a significant part of them remained in the receiving countries and started returning home at the end of June, when favourable conditions were created¹.

As far as the authors know, only one qualitative study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants has so far been conducted in Serbia (Mirkov, Poleti-Ćosić, 2020; Pešić, 2020; Vesković Andjelković, 2021). The results of this online survey provide some information about the challenges that our citizens faced during and after their return to Serbia. Psychological and social challenges stand out, but

¹ The data on passenger traffic to / from the Republic of Serbia were obtained from the Border Police Administration, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, at the request sent in July 2020.

also economic problems, primarily housing and material resources, which also lead to existential insecurity. However, the survey focused on all Serbian citizens who found themselves abroad at the beginning of the pandemic, while the migrant population made up slightly less than half of the respondents. It is also stated that the online method of data collection caused the sample skewness, with a clear dominance of active internet users, so that the majority are highly educated and respondents from Belgrade (Mirkov, Poleti-Ćosić, 2020).

The physical and mental health of the immigrants is at greater risk due to the amount of stress they undergo during the migration process (Dow, 2011), especially in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Benjamin et al. 2021). Our approach is based on previous studies (Mak, Zimmerman and Roberts, 2021; Mak, Roberts and Zimmerman, 2021; Bhandri et al. 2021; Dow, 2011) that were focused on migration-related stressors and coping strategies migrants used to respond to migration-related stressors, which were additionally emphasised by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper aims to deepen the understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different groups of migrants from Serbia. Building on the literature on migration-related stressors, our aim is to explore their presence, i.e. to identify and analyse major migration-related stressful issues that international migrants from Serbia coped with due to the societal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve this, we explored their migration experiences, motives, and plans at destination and on return. However, this paper, similar to the ones we refer to, does not assess the participants' mental health, nor were the psychological consequences of migration-related stressors and coping in the focus of the study.

METHODS

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, as a frequently used research method in social sciences. This approach was selected considering its ability to collect open-ended data and present respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions regarding researched issues (Barriball and While, 1994).

The questionnaires were divided into subsections, where the questions were guided by the aim of understanding difficulties and the most stressful issues faced by migrants from Serbia as a result of the societal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews were conducted by phone (Viber call). This method encouraged the respondents' participation and provided long verbal responses to open-ended questions in a close dialogue between researchers and respondents (McGuirk and O'Neill, 2016). The research was conducted from May to December 2020. The participants were called twice (at the beginning and at the end

of this period), which provided a perspective on the changing migration experience, migration strategies and plans over time. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes. In the search for 'information-rich cases' (Baxter and Eyles, 1997), the snowball technique was used. Recruitment occurred until saturation appeared, and we reached the point of no new themes and data.

The data was collected by the method of note-keeping with verbatim noting selected spoken words. ID numbers were added to the material, and content analysis and thematic analysis were used for data analysis, where key themes were marked prior to the conclusion. Quotations about central issues were selected to explain and better understand participants' thoughts, feelings and beliefs about particular topics.

The research included 17 male and 17 female migrants from Serbia aged between 20 and 59 who lived abroad (8), who worked abroad on a temporary basis (23), and daily border-crossers who make the smallest group of the sample (3). The majority of the participants are at peak working age (30-49 years), married and have children. In terms of education, two-thirds of the respondents have secondary education, and others have higher education. The respondents are employed in various sectors of the economy, mainly in service-based sectors (9), construction (7), and transportation (5). Out of destination countries of migrant workers, European countries were most represented (28, of which 23 in the EU), but there were also those who worked in the USA, South Korea, Canada, Australia, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates (6 in total). For those who worked abroad on a temporary basis, the last country in which they worked and resided is listed. The length of their migrant experience varies according to the type of migration (from two, three or five months to one, three, five, seven, ten and twenty-five years).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Job and financial hardship

Previous research indicates that most of the stressors that migrants face are job related (Mak, Roberts and Zimmerman 2021). COVID-19 caused job and financial hardship for migrants and their families abroad or in their countries of origin. The types of jobs they held had extra constraints relative to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the literature on the position of immigrants in the labour market (Fasani and Mazza, 2020; Moroz et al. 2020; Guadagno, 2020) indicates that they take jobs they are overqualified for, work in the informal sector, with low and uncertain incomes, temporary contracts, and unregulated employment. There is an evident concentration of immigrants in certain labour market sectors that have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, such as agriculture, industry, the service sector (especially accommodation and

food) or homecare services (Guadagno, 2020; Fasani and Mazza, 2020; OECD, 2020). Migrant hospitality workers were among the first to lose their jobs, with the attendant consequences of financial stress, inability to pay for bills, housing, or medications (Hospo Voice, 2020).

Most respondents from Serbia worked in sectors that were initially affected by the pandemic, putting their workers at high risk of unemployment. A respondent employed in the UAE aviation industry says about this experience:

“For me, it was very stressful when the big layoffs in my company started. You don't know how to survive here, and you still can't leave the country, or the border of your country is not open.” (3F)

According to Vesković-Andelković (2021), for almost a third of returnees to Serbia after the outbreak of the pandemic, the motive for return was their precarious work conditions and financial problems, whether they were left without income, without a job, sent on forced leave, with reduced income, or uncertain employment status.

The findings from our interviews confirm that those with temporary or some forms of extended employment were the first to lose their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Most of them returned to Serbia when the conditions for the return were met.

“I thought I would be able to go through the layoff much easier, but I see that it has negatively affected my determination to look for a job. I don't know if I will look for it here (Germany, author's note) because the job offer has dropped dramatically, or in Belgrade.” (24F)

The differences in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic-induced job and financial hardship crisis on the lives of migrants depending on the type of migration, are noticed by the respondents themselves.

“I have a work visa through my wife, so I'm not too affected. However, those who come for a couple of months would be very wrong if they were stuck in the middle of the pandemic here. Everything is very expensive.” (31M)

Besides job losses, the respondents point to income reduction as a stressful issue that shaped their experiences. In the event of reduced income, employing another household member, as well as reducing consumption, seemed important as a support system and coping response.

“When the pandemics started, the boss told us to choose either a social program and to unregister us or to stay registered but with 80% salary. Yes, it was a loss of 20%, but we reduced our home expenses and did not spend on going out.” (32M)

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, some respondents mentioned that their contracts had been terminated before they expired,

which resulted in unpaid wages that their families in the country of origin were counting on. Job insecurity, i.e., temporary work stoppages or termination of informal engagement, were also mentioned as important stressful issues.

“I clean flats... I haven't worked for two months at all ... People are afraid of coronavirus ... I have a couple of families who didn't even call me to come back to work for them ... it all made my financial situation worse.” (6F)

Challenges of migrant return, legal status, and stigma

The legal status of the respondents proved to be very important when considering risk exposure during their stay abroad (Kluge et al., 2020; Arionan, 1993). Stigma and border crossing are specific migration-related stressors that have been studied (Mak, Zimmerman and Roberts, 2021). As a result of travel restrictions and border closures following the COVID-19 outbreak, Serbian migrants surveyed experienced different uncertainties in their desire to continue their journey or return to the country of origin. In this context, the most common challenges that emerged depended on the stages of migration, the specifics of their legal or employment status, on whether of the respondents were in irregular legal status or were illegally employed, and had entered foreign countries with tourist visas or in some other way and did not further regulate their work status. Additionally, barriers to staying in the destination country were also caused by restrictive laws of the destination country in relation to certain migrant categories, such as temporary migrants and daily border-crossers.

A few Serbian migrant workers surveyed who travelled to countries of destination or were working on cruise ships during the COVID-19 outbreak spoke about the experience of being stuck in transit or onboard for days or even months.

“I crossed the border, entered Croatia, but I couldn't go any further. Waiting, there was uncertainty, customs officers were angry, no one gives you explanations... We waited in a hall for 4-5 days to be returned to Serbia. Then I returned to Serbia, and I had to be quarantined.” (16F)

Upon the COVID-19 outbreak, some respondents did not want to go back to Serbia for fear of infecting household members in the country of origin, given their occupation.

“How do I know I didn't get infected working in different houses so I wouldn't pass the virus on to my child if I came back.” (7F)

The respondents who wanted to return to Serbia upon the COVID-19 outbreak specifically emphasised they were feeling helpless in trying

to return home immediately, because the borders were closed and travel opportunities were limited. Similar to other findings (OECD, 2020), most migrants from Serbia pointed out that during their return they faced some kind of uncertainty or problems in finding transportation to their country of origin after the borders were closed. One of the problems was the lack of support from public services in destination countries and the fact that diplomatic missions of the country of origin were not well organised in informing citizens and coordinating the return home. This was particularly true of circular migrants, many of whom were in irregular status.

“Nobody there (Germany, author’s note) says anything, our consulate says one thing now, another thing tomorrow... and plane tickets were resold at three times the price. I would have paid that much, but flights were full.” (14M)

The unfavourable public opinion about returnees was also pointed out by respondents, who were further stigmatised by negative media reporting as irresponsible instigators of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Pešić (2020), in the midst of the pandemic crisis, the returnees were recognised by the authorities as the importers of the infection and the main culprits for its spread in Serbia. Anti-migrant narratives and stigmatising attitudes towards different types of migrants, including return migrants, have been observed in many other countries triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic (Guadagno, 2020).

“Here, upon return, we were greeted as if we all had the virus.” (8F)

In the countries where temporary visas are practically the only option for work-related residence, such as the Gulf countries (Czaika and Villares Varela, 2012), labour migrants from Serbia were especially affected by economic uncertainties and border closures.

“They do not allow you to be unemployed here and to stay in the country (UAE, author’s note), When you stop working, you have a month to find another job, or you are deported to your country of origin.” (13M)

Respondents who belong to the group of transnational migrants, i.e. living in two or more countries at the same time are also vulnerable to disruptive global changes (Järv et al. 2021). However, the challenges they face are rather different from other migrant groups. Due to legal obligations, a respondent had to find a way to travel to the USA during the first lockdown. He closed his restaurant in Belgrade and found a job in the USA to earn money for himself and his family living in Serbia. While economic stressors are similar to those for other groups of migrants, the ones related to health circumstances and coping with repeated self-isolation in several countries stand out.

“I have been to three countries (Hungary, Serbia, and Taiwan) and in three quarantines. I'm used to mobile life, and I adapt quickly, but it is definitely not easy to adjust to the time in quarantine, because our brains need to move in order to maintain mental health.” (27F)

Health and family concerns as stressful issues

The sudden outbreak of the pandemic caused health reasons to be high on the list of stressors that migrants encountered (Kluge et al., 2020). The research shows that most of the respondents, regardless of whether they worked abroad for a longer or shorter period of time, had some kind of health insurance in the destination country before the outbreak of the pandemic. On the other hand, only a third of respondents had social protection through a company abroad. However, with the loss of a job abroad, almost all respondents lost their social and health care.

Most respondents had health insurance under employment contracts, or through insurance companies. The respondents who often repeated shorter work stays abroad and did not have work, but only tourist visas, paid for travel health insurance, usually only at the beginning of the work stay.

“I was told at the German consulate that it was good for me to pay for health insurance. I did that in the beginning, then I thought they would pay for my insurance from home if I needed it. Who would expect such a catastrophe to take place?” (28M)

The respondents who exercised their right to health insurance through an international agreement on the transfer of insurance from one country to another pointed to complicated bureaucratic procedures as the main reason why many families failed to exercise this right.

“I waited almost a year for my insurance to be transferred... and nothing happened until I did everything myself... You have to be persistent... I understand why 99% of people don't ask for it even though it belongs to them.” (22F)

In addition, caring for family members at home was a reason for additional stress, as well as looking for ways to return home quickly, especially among temporary migrants. The uncertainty related to the health situation of their families in Serbia was one of the most important stressors, along with the impossibility to send remittances in the usual way, which before the pandemic often involved informal channels.

“The mother of a colleague I came with got sick, he was desperate, so we all came back together even though the job wasn't finished.” (26M)

Reflections on strategies and future plans

For most respondents, the migration motive was economic in nature (higher earnings or employment prospects), although there are those who moved for family reasons (family reunification). Upon the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, migrants mostly used coping strategies to respond to migration-related stressors.

In response to the effect of legal status stressors and job-related stressors, those who worked abroad on a temporary basis, who were in an irregular situation or illegally employed, affected by job loss or reduced workload and income, mainly choose the problem-solving strategy and return migration as a strategy response (Mak, Roberts and Zimmerman, 2021). The re-talk with one migrant showed that due to their changed socio-economic situation, she returned to Serbia with the spouse who was neither of Serbian nor of the destination country origin.

The respondents who lived abroad with their families used a strategy of reduced consumption. Daily border-crossers, affected by border crossing as one of the specific migration-related stressors, overcame this problem by starting to work from home in agreement with the employer. When our respondents lost their jobs, social and/or health insurance, the vast majority opted for the problem-solving strategy (Mak, Roberts and Zimmerman, 2021), i.e. they tried to return to their country of origin at all costs. The loss of health and social insurance in most respondents created an additional negative impact on the feeling of insecurity in the country of destination, which in other studies also proved to be an important motive for returning to the country of origin (Vesković Andjelković, 2021).

In the period of uncertainty after losing a job and/or trying to return to Serbia, almost all respondents emphasise the importance of their private contacts, relatives and friends, i.e. their initial support system, as the most important in coping with new stressors (Mak, Zimmerman and Roberts, 2021), such as organising stay in the destination country after the pandemic started, finding transportation home, but sometimes also finding employment at home after a sudden job loss in the destination country.

“Until I got to my cousin in Cologne, it was difficult... the hostels didn't work either... everything was closed. Fortunately, some acquaintances found me a place to sleep, on a mattress in a closed beauty studio, without a bathroom, without a window... terrible, but even that is good when you have nothing.” (14M)

The vast majority of the respondents who were in the country of origin at the time of the research doubt that they will be able to get a job abroad in the near future due to the uncertainty of the pandemic and the speed of economic recovery afterwards. This attitude is especially present among workers in accommodation and food service activities and

transport, as well as among those with unregulated work status. Such an attitude was confirmed by the re-talk at the end of 2020.

“I think a lot has changed globally and every country will rather hire its own worker first...” (4F)

If the opportunity arises, almost all respondents would rather not change their livelihood strategies. This also applies to many respondents who do not have a regulated status in the country of destination. Potential countries of emigration for most of the respondents who have returned to Serbia are precisely those in which they lived before the pandemic, mostly the EU. At the same time, they believe that these countries have the most people from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which significantly helps them find employment and accommodation. Respondents stated that it is very important for them that these countries are relatively close, which allows them to visit their family in the country of origin more often and return home quickly and cheaply.

CONCLUSION

There are some limitations to this study. The research is small in scale and was mostly conducted among migrants who returned to the country of origin (both temporarily and permanently) after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it captures a wide diversity of experiences, its conclusions cannot be generalised. However, it is one of the first studies in Serbia to provide a deeper insight into understanding the impact of migration-related stressors on different groups of migrants from Serbia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The understanding of these stressful migration-related issues can help develop a faster and better policy response to protect the migrants' rights, particularly in crisis situations. The authors also emphasise that although the paper discusses the various migration-related stressors faced by respondents after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological consequences they cause are not considered. In addition, research is based solely on the attitudes of research participants. While such a perspective is very important, further evidence is needed to formulate meaningful policy options.

The research findings show that at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the respondents suddenly became exposed to a number of stressors. Most stressors that migrants from Serbia were exposed to since the pandemic were job related. The results indicate that stressful issues also depended on the legal status of migrants abroad. Temporary migrants who frequently repeated their stay abroad, including undocumented labour migrants, as well as daily border-crossers, were exposed to the greatest insecurity. Most of them were the first to get laid off, before the employment contract expired. Moreover, almost all were left without so-

cial and health care, which proved to be a particularly stressful issue. One of the reasons for the sudden change in employment and social status is that temporary migrants mostly work in sectors initially affected by the pandemic. Migrants with temporary work visas who had stayed in destination countries for a long time also faced sudden stressors. In countries where temporary labour status dominates for labour migrants, such as the Gulf countries, during the crisis, labour migrants from Serbia were especially affected by economic uncertainties and border closures. However, respondents with a permanent work permit or citizenship of the destination country, who were employed at the time of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, were in a slightly better position. Although they also faced workload reduction, lower earnings, or layoffs, they were provided with social support measures in the destination countries.

The presented differences between migrant groups also somewhat contributed to different coping strategies migrants mostly used to respond to migration-related stressors during the first months of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents with permanent visas who stayed with their families abroad mostly decided to stay in the destination country using the strategy of reduced consumption. Those who did not have a permanent visa overcame the challenges and the sense of existential insecurity in the destination countries through problem-solving strategies, by finding ways to return home in the conditions of severe travel restrictions. In this regard, they were greatly helped by the initial support networks, mostly family, friends, and acquaintances. It also came about that environmental stressors were pronounced, especially negative attitudes of the public opinion and stigma. The vast majority of respondents who have returned to Serbia, despite the experienced problems after the outbreak of the pandemic, wish to go abroad again. However, they believe that due to the uncertainty of the duration of the pandemic and economic recovery, they will not have the opportunity to (legally) get a job abroad in the foreseeable future.

Migration-related COVID-19 problems and its long-term consequences may negatively affect migrants' wellbeing. Therefore, future research should continue to investigate not only migration-related stressors, but also the physical and mental health of migrants in crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ability of different types of migrants to cope with numerous and sudden migration-related stressors in such situations.

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ПРОБЛЕМИ МИГРАНАТА ИЗ СРБИЈЕ ПРОУЗРОКОВАНИ ПАНДЕМИЈОМ КОВИДА-19

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Резиме

Један од највећих изазова међународних миграција са којима се суочава Србија је наглашена радна емиграција. Током последње деценије долази до значајног увећавања привремених и циркуларних миграционих облика. Отуда се у кратком периоду по избијању ковид-19 пандемије у Србију вратио велики број

њених грађана. У исто време, они су се суочили са бројним изазовима, а многи од њих су били својствени углавном за мигрантско становништво.

Стога, у раду се истражује утицај пандемије ковида-19 на различите групе миграната из Србије. Главни циљ рада је да идентификује и анализира потешкоће са којима су се међународни мигранти из Србије суочили услед друштвених последица пандемије ковида-19. Такође, истражује се како они доживљавају те миграционе стресоре и како поступају у контексту ограничења и могућности у земљама порекла и одређишта, из потребе да се суоче са тим изазовима. Истакнути су и миграциони планови у складу са миграционим мотивима пре пандемије, те могућности за њихово остварење након пандемије. Рад је заснован на квалитативном истраживању спроведеном коришћењем полуструктурираних дубинских интервјуа – телефонски, са 34 испитаника.

Резултати показују да су по избијању пандемије ковида-19 сви испитаници нагло постали изложени бројним изазивачима стреса својственим углавном за мигрантску популацију. Преовладавале су потешкоће везане за посао и финансијско стање, повратак, правни статус, стигму, здравље и породицу. Показало се да врста и интензитет изазова и изазивача стреса зависе и од правног статуса миграната у иностранству. Разлике у правном статусу су у извесној мери допринеле и различитим стратегијама сналажења миграната током првих месеци суочавања са пандемијом. Једна од стратегија сналажења је и повратак у земљу порекла. Резултати такође показују да је велика већина испитаника који су се вратили у Србију, упркос комплексним проблемима са којима су се суочили, као и сумњи да ће бити поново у прилици да добије посао у иностранству, исказала жељу да поново емигрира. Мигранти су се током тражења решења значајно ослањали на иницијалне миграционе мреже, односно породицу и пријатеље. Са друге стране, наглашава се изостанак подршке институција земаља дестинације, првенствено и у погледу доступности социјалне и здравствене заштите, што се нарочито односи на привремене мигранте. Такође, упркос изостанку добре координације током организовања повратка у земљу порекла, истиче се важност подршке земље порекла.

Иако је ово истраживање малог обима и његови закључци се не могу генерализовати, оно представља једно од првих истраживања у Србији које даје дубљи увид у разумевање утицаја миграционих стресора на различите групе миграната из Србије у време пандемије ковида-19. Целовитије сагледавање проблематике миграционих стресора релевантних за међународне миграције, може допринети бржем и бољем политичком одговору у заштити права миграната, нарочито у кризним ситуацијама.