



## Our immigrants and emigrants: there are people with their life stories behind the numbers<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The article encourages comparative perspectives on people who emigrate and immigrate. It draws attention to the knowledge of the history of migrations: most European countries faced emigration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they witness immigration that exceeds emigration. The most common reason for immigration in Slovenia is employment. Work permits are issued to people who come to work here, because they are needed. Yet, it is people who come, not workforce, and these people have families. Consequently, the second most common reason for immigration is family reunification. When discussing immigration, we underrate the role of bilateral agreements, yet they pave the way for greater economic migration between the signatories. Knowing the migrations of past and present, including official statistical data and the emigration-immigration perspective, it is extremely important to understand that there are people behind these numbers. The article comprises a recommendation to publish texts that include not only numbers, but also people with their life stories, immigrants and emigrants in the same publication. To develop intercultural education, it is essential that migrations and diversity are a part of the curriculum and teaching materials.

**Keywords:** immigration, emigration, Slovenia, statistical data, life stories

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## Introduction

Migrations are not particular to the 21<sup>st</sup> century – they have been a constant throughout the human history. If one studies the history of most European countries in the last century, one will find that it is strongly marked by economic and forced migrations (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2007; Castles and Miller, 2009; Scheffer, 2011). In addition to both World Wars, in which most European countries were involved, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also marked by a number of local wars and their consequences, e.g. the Balkan Wars, Spanish Civil War at its beginning and the war in the disintegrating Yugoslavia at its end. Every new war means new refugees. In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century people seeking refuge from violence, slaughter, persecution come to Europe mostly from Syria and Eritrea, still from Afghanistan, and some new countries created after the collapse of the Soviet Union, once again from Turkey, etc. (Sedmak et al., 2015; Žagar, Kogovšek Šalamon and Lukšič Hacin, 2018). There is always a war raging somewhere from which people flee to save their life, to work and provide for their families, to send their children to school. There are always people who migrate to another country to find a job, to earn higher salary, to make a career. Although the economic and forced migrations are a historic constant, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century they still surprise: people still debate inclusion, encounter prejudice and increasing intolerance.

Official statistical data about modern migration in Europe testify that many European countries are both, countries of origin and countries of destination in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Slovenia is one of them. Migrants are emigrants in their country of origin and immigrants in their countries of destination. This emigrant-immigrant perspective is exceptionally important to understand that there are people with their life stories behind the numbers. It is important to be aware of emigration and immigration in the past and present, to recognize the official migration policies (Lukšič Hacin, 2016; Solano and Huddleston, 2020) and to know the official statistical data to be able to fight prejudice and misinformation, e.g. the “news” that only highly skilled emigrate and the low-skilled immigrate. It is important to know how complex migration phenomena are, so it can be understood from where and why people come today as economic migrants or as asylum seekers. It is important that migrations and their history, as well as modern situation and diversity, are a part of curricula and teaching materials. In this way, teachers can present migrations and coexistence in a multicultural society (Vižintin,

2016, 2018). Teachers “should be able to educate pupils from different family, cultural and linguistic settings” (Cabanová, 2019, p. 132), since they have significant impact on inclusion and are crucial in the development of intercultural education (Layne, Trémion and Dervin, 2015; Portera and Grant, 2017).

### **Developing intercultural education: the power and powerlessness of teachers, the role of universities**

Studies from different countries show that curricula and teaching materials are Eurocentric and nationalist, and do not reflect the actual diversity of the society. Curricula and teaching materials usually only present the achievements of the majority population, while the (acknowledged) minorities and immigrant communities are invisible (Allemann-Ghionda, 2011; Šabec, 2016).

Primary and secondary schools’ teachers should be familiar with the principles of integration, inclusion, intercultural education and should have at least basic understanding of the history of emigration and immigration in their own country. During their university study, students (future teachers) should be confronted with the complexity of identity that could also be hyphenated or mixed (Sedmak, 2018) and of culture, since:

*cultures are not “given by nature”, they are not static, they are internally heterogeneous (not homogenous) and have been forever in flux. They are not absolute. Cultures are processes which change and come into contact with each other. It follows from this that cultural difference is relative; it is a process and an interaction. This is also how we must think of culture: as a dynamic, constant process of interaction (Lukšič Hacin, 2016, p. 89).*

All teachers should gain this knowledge in the course of their studies. To be taught in schools, migration topics must be included in the curriculum and teaching materials, otherwise only the teachers who themselves have developed intercultural competence and strive to develop intercultural education will include them. Likewise, teachers need theoretical and practical knowledge on adjusted testing and grading (Ermenc, Štefanc and Mažgon, 2020). They should be acquainted with the details on how to, in their schools, organise intensive language courses and structure the years-long process of integration, and with what is the role of an individual in all that.

*Aproprate intercultural training should be introduced for future professionals and teachers who are expected to work in the field of migrant*

*children's education as well as for teachers already working in schools. In this respect, as already mentioned, several national projects were launched to organise training for schools and teachers who expressed interest (Dežan and Sedmak, 2020, p. 564).*

Instead of numerous projects that last a couple of years, some solutions are needed that are systemic, long-term and set in legislation (on state and local level, in every school). Universities should train future teachers how to teach in multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious classes: "The education and further training programs for teachers, school counsellors and psychologists are most in need of change, as, until now, they have marginalised the issues of culturally diverse children" (Błęszyńska, 2017, p. 165). The teachers are needed who are aware that every single person is responsible for inclusion. Inclusion of migrant children should not be left only to the devices of individual active teachers with developed intercultural competence that search for information by themselves. Science has an important role in that process, too, as it is not merely a silent bystander and chronicler of the situation. With its research, findings and publications, it influences the development and transfer of knowledge in the society. According to Micheline Reyvon Allmen (2011, p. 38), it should contribute to "an objective and scientific description of the dynamic and changing reality."

### **Bilateral agreements as catalysts of economic migrations**

Large numbers of economic migrants are often a consequence of signed bilateral agreements and mutual benefits: on the one side the need for workforce, on the other, the offer. This is an essential and often overlooked fact that explains many large migration currents from a country and into it. Let me explain this with the case of Yugoslavia, of which Slovenia was a part until its independence in 1991, and Germany. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germany signed bilateral agreements with many European countries, and mass economic immigration into Germany followed:

*Immigration was, however, not only a deliberate move by west German employers and business, but one implemented by state on an active and persistent basis, at all times on the illusory grounds of a requirement for a "rotating" supply of unqualified workers, mainly for the building, mining and processing industries and in the catering trade. The first recruitment agreement with Italy was concluded in December 1955. Agreements with Greece (1960), Spain (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco*

(1963), *Portugal, Tunisia (1965) and Yugoslavia (1968) followed in quick succession* (Leggewie, 2017, p. 242).

The agreement with Yugoslavia entered into force in 1969. Yugoslavia signed bilateral agreements on employment and protection of workers as well: with France (1950), Luxemburg, Belgium (1965), Netherlands (1956), Czechoslovakia (1957), Hungary, Bulgaria (1958), Great Britain (1959), Poland (1959), Italy (1961), Switzerland (1964), Austria (1966), Sweden (1979), Germany (1969), East Germany (1975), Norway (1976), Denmark (1979) etc. (Svetek, 1985, p. 21–31). These bilateral agreements not only legalised economic migration, but also encouraged it. Slovenia inherited the majority of Yugoslavia's agreements and contracts. Additionally, it has signed new bilateral agreements that encourage economic migration flows into Slovenia: the employment agreement with Bosnia-Herzegovina was signed in 2012 and entered into force in 2013; in 2018, an agreement was signed with Serbia and entered into force in 2019, but migration was largely curtailed by the Covid-19 epidemic.

Who comes to work to our countries depends not just on the people, but also on the work permits issued (for those coming from the countries not members of the EU/EAA), the work conditions offered, housing policy, (tax) breaks, etc. If people are invited from other countries to come and work, because they are needed, they must be also provided with a decent standard of living and integration support. People arrive, not workforce, as Max Frisch stated back in 1965. Family members miss each other and want to live together, so the second most frequent reason for migration is family reunification. For example, 68% of foreign citizens moved to Slovenia in 2019 because of work, 25% for family reunification (Razpotnik, 2020).

## **A country of immigration and emigration**

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Slovenia was a country of emigration (Trebše Štolfa and Klemenčič, 2001; Kalc, Milharčič Hladnik and Žitnik Serafin, 2020). In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is a country of emigration and immigration, with the immigration being higher. The same takes place in Germany (or Sweden), which are mostly known as countries of immigration. Germany is exposed as a country of emigration and immigration in the German emigration center: “In the past 300 years, Germany was always both – and often an immigration and emigration country at the same time.

Today, approximately 100 000 Germans emigrate every year,” (Eick, 2017, p. 6) – mostly to Switzerland, Scandinavia, Austria, to the United States and Australia.

In the period 2010–2017 Slovenia had similar numbers of emigrants and immigrants every year, in 2017 for example 17 555 people emigrated while 18 808 arrived. Even more surprising are the data on the similarities between emigrants’ and immigrants’ education: more than 50% of people, older than 15 years, had secondary education, and just under a quarter completed tertiary education, and a little more than a quarter completed primary education (Razpotnik, 2018). In 2018 and 2019 the situation changed and the numbers came close to those before the financial crisis (2008, 2009). In 2019 there were almost twice as many immigrants as there were emigrants: 31 319 people moved to Slovenia and 15 106 persons left it; in 2019, 160 of the immigrants had a doctor’s degree and 130 among the emigrants. Slovenian economic migrants chose most often Austria and Germany to go to work to, while most economic immigrants come to Slovenia from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, half of them from Bosnia-Herzegovina (Razpotnik, 2020).

Knowing the history of immigration and emigration, as well as official statistical data are important arguments in the battle against prejudice towards migrants. In Slovenia, efforts are made to share information during a 5-year national programme “Le z drugimi smo [Only (with) others we are]”, that is financed by the European Social Fund and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, so it is free for educators. The project aims to train educators in the field of inclusion of migrant children, the development of intercultural dialogue and respectful communication, zero tolerance to violence, intercultural relationships. Between 2016 and 2020, 8 600 educators participated in one of the five 16-hour seminars offered. These seminars enable one direct contact with educators in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. During the seminars, it turns out that the majority of educators do not know the data. Likewise, they know very little about Slovenians and their organisations around the world; the findings that themes linked to Slovenian emigration are hardly present in the Slovenian curriculum and teaching materials confirm this fact (Milharčič Hladnik et al., 2019).

### **Life stories of immigrants and emigrants in the same publication?**

When it comes to economic migrations, the role of bilateral agreements is underrated, although they pave the path for the greater numbers of moves

between the two signatory countries. The data on the numbers of emigrants and immigrants, as well as their education levels, are also not known enough. Thus, because there are people behind these numbers, people should be present alongside the numbers with their life stories, including both men and women (Lukšič Hacin and Mlekuž, 2019).

*Just as in the last few decades the research of subjective experiences of migration processes based on narration, testimonies, correspondences and other personal material has become one of the key conceptual and methodological directions in the research of female migration and women migrants conducted at various institutions (Milharčič Hladnik, 2018, p. 82).*

Most often, collections of life stories only present one perspective, either of emigrants or immigrants. My suggestion is that emigrant and immigrant life stories should be collected and published in one publication. For example, in the same book (or an online collection) ten life stories of economic migrants (and/or their children) to Slovenia between 2000 and 2020, and ten life stories of economic migrants (and/or their children) from Slovenia could be listed. Would that help to overcome the prejudices? Would it be understood that these people are all economic migrants?

Would it contribute to overcoming prejudice against refugees in Slovenia if the same book included life stories of Slovenian refugees from both world wars, life stories of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, and stories of Syrian refugees today? Would it be clear that these people are all refugees?

Would it help the inclusion of immigrant children (either the children of economic migrants or refugees) if teachers in schools created similar collections with their students about their emigrant relatives or friends, and the new neighbours and classmates in the local environment? We can try.

## **Conclusion**

Migrants are people on the move. Their moves and lives are influenced by social and economic situation in the country of origin and the country of destination, the migrant policies, personal decisions. This article encourages a comparative perspective on people who immigrate or emigrate. Knowing history matters, because most European countries were the countries of emigration a hundred years ago, while today they are countries of emigration and



immigration. Migrations are also numbers, so the selected cases of Slovenia present the importance of knowing statistical data, and how they can help us fight prejudice: the most common reasons for moving are employment and family reunification. The role of bilateral agreements is highlighted, as they not only legalise migrations, but also encourage them, for example, most immigrants to Slovenia come from Bosnia-Herzegovina, with whom Slovenia has an agreement since 2012.

Migration processes, the history of emigration and immigration, contemporary immigration and diversity of society should be a part of the curriculum and teaching materials. In this case all teachers could include that knowledge into their lessons, and thus contribute to overcoming prejudice against newcomers, their inclusion and the development of intercultural education. The collections of life stories usually only present one perspective, either of emigrants or immigrants. This article recommends merging and presenting both aspects. In collections of life stories, migrations get a human face.

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