

Trends in Demography and Migration in Croatia

1. Introduction

The primary objective of this study is to outline the demographic and migration trends in Croatia, the country which in 2011 covered 0.54% of Europe, with 0.61% of the population of the continent, and only 0.06% of the world's population. On a global scale, this makes Croatia the 128th most populous country in the world. Out of the 45 European countries, in 2011 Croatia ranked 25th in size, and 28th in population size. The country's average population density is 75.71 people per km², which ranks 126th in the world. Croatia is slightly more densely populated than Europe as a whole, with 68.6 people per km².

In the Republic of Croatia political and economic transformations of the last 25–28 years have had a decisive impact on the demographic development of the population. The demographic picture of the Republic of Croatia has been characterised by: continuous natural depopulation (higher number of deaths than births), low birth rates, demographic ageing, imbalance in the population age structure, population concentration in the large cities, the spatial polarisation of the population, deepening of regional demographic differences, as well as higher rates of mortality, intensive external migration and increasing emigration. As a result, the country is suffering a deep demographic crisis.

2. Demographic trends

Croatia is facing considerable demographic changes, similarly to the European Union member states (KOUDELA 2011). Like many other countries in Europe, Croatia is experiencing a decline in its natural population and population ageing. Although the population of Croatia doubled in the last 150 years, nowadays one of the biggest problem is the continuous decline of the population. The first census of the total population of Croatia following modern principles of data collection was conducted in 1857. Since then there have been 15 surveys, the latest one took place between 1 and 28 April 2011, and the population of the country was 4,290,612. The 1961 census resumed the practice of the decennial one (MRĐEN 1998).

From the first census on, the population of Croatia has been increasing apart from the two world wars, although in the second half of the 20th century the process was slowed by the decrease in natural change, accompanied by emigration for “temporary work” abroad. In the period 1971–1981 the population growth rate was +4% and in the last intercensus period (1981–1991) it was +3.5%, which was the lowest population growth rate in the entire period from the mid-19th century. The number of the population has risen until

the dissolution of Yugoslavia, reaching its peak in 1991 with 4.78 million people. Since then Croatia's population has been declining, now reaching the same size as over 50 years ago. Since the eruption of the war in 1991, when the number of deaths was higher than the number of births, the natural population growth became negative and remained so more or less since that year. Positive natural population changes were recorded only between 1995 and 1997. It means that the natural decline became the constant element on the social agenda of the country. This has happened despite the fact that infant mortality has been reduced as a result of the developing Croatian health care system (KLEMENČIĆ et al. 2013).

The population density of 75.71 inhabitants per km² is quite under the EU 27 average, which amounts to about 115 inhabitants per km². Therefore, compared to other EU countries, Croatia is loosely populated.

Table 1
Population trends in Croatia (1857–2011)

Year	Population	Annual growth rate	Population density
1857	2,181,499	–	38.6
1869	2,398,292	0.87%	42.4
1880	2,506,228	0.37%	44.3
1890	2,854,558	1.31%	50.5
1900	3,161,456	1.03%	55.9
1910	3,460,584	0.91%	61.2
1921	3,443,375	–0.05%	60.9
1931	3,785,455	0.95%	67.0
1948	3,779,958	–0.01%	66.9
1953	3,936,022	0.81%	69.6
1961	4,159,696	0.69%	73.6
1971	4,426,221	0.62%	78.3
1981	4,601,469	0.39%	81.4
1991	4,784,265	0.39%	84.6
2001	4,437,460	–0.63%	79.4
2011	4,290,612	–0.08%	75.8

Source: Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a; Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2017a

Not only the natural decline but also each of the demographic indicators reflect the gradual decline of the Croatian population from independence to today. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the crude birth rates of the Croatian population were very high (about 40% per year). The total fertility rate [measured by the number of live-born children per woman in her reproductive age (15–49) was the highest in 1890 (6.04)]. Women born at the turn of the century (1899–1903) delivered an average of 3.3 live-born children, while those born in the period 1942–1946, less than two children (1.96). Croatia was the first European country to experience the fall of total fertility under the replacement level in 1968. The average number of live-born children per woman was the lowest in 1992 (1.44) as the consequence of the war in Croatia. The decline in fertility results from a considerable decrease of share of the women who delivered three, four or more children; their percentage

fell to 20% in 1991 (MRĐEN 1998). The number of women with one or two live-born children increased since then and now the country's fertility rate is just 1.5 children per woman, which is below the "replacement level", one of the lowest in the world. The crude birth rate is lower than the mortality rate.

The reduced birth rate is not a new phenomenon, it started after World War II as a result of several factors, such as the war losses of men, political and economic emigration, de-ruralisation and forced post-war industrialisation (ČIPIN et al. 2016). Nowadays, the decline originates in many negative social circumstances, e.g. the modern way of life, a reflection of several internal and external influences and events. Among the most cited reasons for low fertility in Croatia one can find the large number of selective abortions, people getting married at a relatively late age, increasing number of single people, fewer marriages, higher number of divorces, extended education, unemployment and job insecurity for young people under the age of 30, a lack of adequate income to leave the parental home and form one's own family, an increasing number of (mostly inadequately paid) jobs that require work in the so-called atypical working hours (MAGAŠ 2015; ČIPIN–ILIEVA 2017).

Besides these negative demographic trends, the Republic of Croatia has to face the approaching retirement of the so-called "baby boom generation" and its effects on the pension system. Such troubling trends will bring about changes in the population structure, that are population ageing, a reduced or inadequate labour supply, imbalance in the inflow and outflow of pensioners, increased need for health and social protection, etc. The long period of depopulation has resulted in many negative consequences, such as the reduction of the core population producing new generations, the reduction of the young and active working population, and increasing percentage of the older population. Croatia – following all the demographic trends of the European Union – is facing the problem of significant population ageing. This is accompanied with the greatly reduced mortality rates, therefore, a longer life expectancy, which was 77.2 according to the 2011 Census. Life expectancy at birth has been increasing but the comparison with the EU countries shows that Croatia is at the middle bottom of the scale, so the life expectancy is by 2.4 years below the EU average. This difference is higher for men (3.6) than for women (2.5). Life expectancy has risen to 80 for women and 73 for men, leading to the more rapid ageing of the population. Over the last fifty years, the average age of the population has increased by almost ten years, (from 30.7 years to 41.7) according to the last census the ratio between young (0–19 years of age), mature (20–59), and old (60+) population groups has become increasingly unfavourable. The percentage of young and mature populations is decreasing, while the percentage of old population groups is constantly increasing resulting in problems in age structure.

Almost one quarter of the population in 2011 was over 60 years old (24.1%), while fifty years ago, it was just 11.9%. In addition, the percentage of young people dropped to 20.9 while in the 1960s, it was 34.2%. This is also shown by the ageing index, which is the percentage of the population aged 60 and over in the population aged 0–19. The index exceeding 40% indicates that the population of Croatia entered the ageing process (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011b). The process of population ageing in Croatia will continue unless a dramatic increase occurs in birth rates – which is, under the existing circumstances, practically impossible – or an immigration of a population in the fertile age range happens. The ageing of the population is expected to continue, according to some

demographic projections by the year of 2031, the share of the elderly will reach between 20% and 25% of Croatia's total population (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare 2007).

If this trend continues in the future and no affirmative measures are implemented, today's youth will have to deal with the problem of supporting an ever-increasing number of non-active and retired population (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a; RABOTEG-ŠARIĆ 2015).

Table 2
Average age and ageing index of Croatian Population by sex, 1961–2011

Census	Average age			Ageing index			Age structure	
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	0–19	60>
1961	32.5	30.5	33.3	34.3	27.7	41.1	34.2	11.9
1971	34.0	32.4	35.5	47.2	38.5	56.2	31.5	15.4
1981	35.4	33.8	37.1	52.6	40.4	65.3	28.2	15.7
1991	37.1	35.4	38.7	66.7	50.8	83.3	26.2	18.9
2001	39.3	37.5	41.0	90.7	71.6	110.8	23.7	21.5
2011	41.7	39.9	43.4	115.0	92.3	139.0	20.9	24.1

Source: Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a; Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2014

There have been a lot of changes in the structure of Croatian families during the last 40–50 years. On the one hand, the share of families without children in the total number of families increased from 24.8% in 1971 to 28.6% in 2011, on the other hand, the share of couples with children decreased from 63.8% to 54.3% during the same period. However, the proportion of father-only families has not substantially changed (2.1% in 1971 and 2.7% in 2011) while mother-only families increased from 9.3% in 1971 to 14.4% in 2011 (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a; RABOTEG-ŠARIĆ 2015).

3. The ethnic structure

The Republic of Croatia has a relatively homogeneous population profile but there is also a considerable number of national communities and minorities who live in the country. According to the census 1991, 78.10% of the population were Croats, and their number increased to 89.63 after the war and continued rising to 90.42% by 2011. In 1991 the proportion of other national communities and minorities was 15.89%, among them the most prominent ones were the Serbs with 12.2% of the whole population. Serbs originally moved into the territory of Croatia as border guards during the period of the Habsburg area (GULYÁS 2012). They settled in the area of the former Military Border (Lika, Banova, Kordun, parts of northern Dalmatia and Slavonia). The Serb population decreased sharply from 12.2% in the 1991 census to 4.4 in 2001, and 4.36 in 2011 mainly as a direct result of the war. Not only the percentage of Serbs have decreased in Croatia since 1991, but also the number of other minorities – with the exception of Roma, Albanians and Bosnians – and pre-1991 war minority population has fallen from 22% to under 8%. The most drastic decrease is seen among the indigenous national minorities (Serbs, Czechs,

Hungarians, Italians and Slovenians) due to various reasons: natural decline, assimilation and emigration (RÁCZ 2014).

There are 22 national minorities in recent Croatia, among them the most prominent and populous are the Serbs. There are less than 1% Bosniaks (0.5% in 2001, 0.7% in 2011), Italians (0.42%), Albanians (0.41%), Roma (0.40%), Hungarians (0.33%), Slovenians (0.25%), Czechs (0.22%), and others (Slovaks, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Germans, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Turks, Russians, Poles, Jews, etc.) (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2017a; MAGAŠ 2015).

When Croatia achieved international recognition as an independent state in 1992, all non-dominant ethnic communities received official recognition of their minority status, regardless of whether they had formally enjoyed such a status. However, in the first years of the post war transitional period, minority rights protection did not work. Only after 2000 were important steps made towards the implementation of minority rights – the most important ones are the Constitutional Act on Human Rights and Freedoms and on the Rights of Ethnic and National Communities or Minorities (2000) and the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities in December 2002. Since then the status of national minorities, particularly the Serb minority, has improved significantly in comparison to the negative treatment in the 1990s (MESIĆ–BAGIĆ 2016).

According to the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities: *“A national minority shall be a group of Croatian citizens whose members have been traditionally settled in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, and who have ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or religious characteristics which are different than those of other citizens and who are guided by the wish for the preservation of those characteristics”* (Constitutional Law 2002). The Act grants national minorities the right to use their own language and script, the right to education in their own languages and script, the right to use their own insignia and emblems, the right to cultural autonomy, to practise their own religion, to access public media, the right to self-organisation, and to be represented in representative bodies at national and local levels, and in administrative and judicial bodies (Constitutional Law 2002; Minority Rights Group International 2003).

One of the novelties of the Constitutional Law is the establishment of the Council for National Minorities. Its first elections were held in May 2003. With these elections and the formation of the council *sui generis*, in addition with the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Croatia entered a new era of the protection of minority rights (TATALOVIĆ 2006).

In Croatia, several groups are hit hard by social exclusion and poverty such as the disabled, the mentally impaired, the homeless, the unemployed, the retired and the Roma. Social exclusion and poverty are much more widespread among the Roma than in other social groups. It is estimated that 76% of the Roma and 20% of other population live in absolute poverty. That is why the government adopted the National Roma Inclusion Strategy from 2013 to 2020 in 2012 (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2012).

The Croatians outside the Republic of Croatia include the Croatians in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatian minorities and Croatian emigrants (diaspora). The Croatians in Bosnia and Herzegovina are as an equal, sovereign and constituent people with Bosniaks and Serbs. Croatia has one of largest diaspora communities among the states of comparable size and population. According to the data of the State Office for Croats Abroad, approximately

3 million Croats and their descendants live abroad. Autochthonous Croatian minorities are located in 12 European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Montenegro, the Czech Republic, Italy, Kosovo, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Serbia) and their number is about 350,000 (State Office for Croats Abroad 2018).

In Croatia, as in some other countries, the religious and ethnic composition of the population match almost completely. Although there is no “official religion”, according to the 2011 census (Census 2011), the population of Croatia is predominantly Roman-Catholic (86.28%). The second largest religious group is Orthodox Christians (4.44%), (mostly Serbs, some Croats, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Bulgarians). Other significant religious groups are Muslims (1.47%) and Protestants (0.34%). Only 2.2% of the population did not declare their religion, 3.8% are atheists, 0.8% are agnostics or sceptics, while 0.3% have no declared religious beliefs (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a).

4. Regional heterogeneity

Croatia has today a two-tier system of sub-national government. Municipalities, towns and cities represent the local level of government, while counties [županija] referred to as regional self-government units. The municipality is a unit of local self-government, consisting of the territories of several inhabited places representing a natural, economic and social entity, and which is connected by the common interests of its inhabitants (SUMPOR 2004). The capital city of Zagreb, having double, local and regional status, so in total, there are 21 units of regional self-government. According to the Census 2011, Croatia consists of 556 local self-governments and 21 regional self-governments, and they are further subdivided into 6,756 settlements [naselje] (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a; ALIBEGOVIĆ 2012).

More than 60% (276) of the municipalities are too small with a population between 1,000 and 3,000 people and they have too little capacity and financial resources for good governance and efficient management. They have difficulties in using their resources to achieve further development, their finances, staff and organisation are not capable to provide local public services. According to the Census 2011, there are 38 municipalities having a population under 1,000, and in 36.7% of them live just 2,000 inhabitants or less, while 7 have more than 10,000 inhabitants and could become cities according to law. The average population of the municipalities is 2,958, including 10 settlements and 86 km² territory. In spite of the huge difference, they all have the same responsibilities and functions (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a).

The number of the towns has increased significantly – from 68 in 1992 to 127 in 2011 – and there are huge differences among them. The population size of cities varies widely. According to the Census 2011, only four cities have more than 100,000 inhabitants, on the other hand there are 18 that have less than 5,000 and 60 cities having a population below 10,000. The share of inhabitants living in urban areas has increased from 54.3% to 70% during the period of 1992–2011, although many of these cities are too small. Most cities (their number is 58) are medium sized from 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants, for one third of the urban population. Many of these urban settlements are not capable either of financing their expenditure or of providing the basic services (Državni zavod za statistiku

Republike Hrvatske 2011a; MALEKOVIĆ 2011). That is the reason why they do depend on direct transfers from the national budget and national authorities, as well as the low level of decentralisation (KONJHODŽIĆ 2009).

Croatia is characterised by a significant population concentration in several regional and macro-regional centres and economic activities are mainly centralised in these urban areas and in the surroundings. Croatia misses the bigger cities, and the country's urban development is based on four growth poles: Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Osijek. According to the Census 2011, only these four cities have more than 100,000 inhabitants: Zagreb has 790,017 inhabitants, Split 178,102, Rijeka 128,624 and Osijek 108,048, and 40% of the whole urban population, one third of the total population lives in these centres (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a; LŐRINCZNÉ 2013).

A trend of rural-urban division has continued in the country, which is characterised by a growing concentration of population in Zagreb and a few other macro regional and regional centres (Zadar, Varaždin, Slavonski Brod, Pula, Karlovac and Dubrovnik) and narrow coastal areas, while other regions are being depopulated. It leads us to the problem of huge inner migration from underdeveloped regions (Slavonia, hills, island and rural areas) towards the Western and Adriatic territories and urban settlements.

The results of the latest population census show that the first five counties in terms of population (Zagreb city, Split-Dalmatia, Zagreb, Osijek-Baranja, Primorje-Gorski kotar) encompass half of the total population, while other sixteen cover the other half. The highest population density is registered in Zagreb (1,232.48 inhabitants/km²), which amount is almost 8 times higher than the county in the second place (Međimurje 156.11 inhabitants/km²) – and 16 times higher than the Croatian average (75.71 inhabitants/km²) (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a).

Not to take into account Zagreb, the ratio of population density of the least populated county (Lika-Senj) to the most populated county (Međimurje) is very high: 1:16.4. Besides the differences generated by the number of inhabitants, there are other differences among the regions generated by the geographic position and by land areas they cover. The average size of the counties is 2,700 km², but there are huge differences among the regional self-government units. The most extreme example is Lika-Senj County (5,353km²) which has a territory twice bigger as the average, but the lowest demographic index (9.51 inhabitants/km²). Lika-Senj County covers a land more than seven folded bigger than the smallest county, Međimurje (729 km²) with its 156.11 inhabitants/km². These differences of the fragmented system of territorial division makes more unequal regional units. Significant regional discrepancies are also noticed in the economic and social development of the counties which are usually defined in terms of unemployment rate and GDP/capita in a region, and are aggravated by structural changes, which have social and economic consequences (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011a).

The natural population decline is also visible at the county level. Only three counties have a positive balance: Split, Dubrovnik and Međimurje županija. The natural loss was highest in the ring around the capital city region (Krapina, Koprivnica, Bjelovar, Sisak and Karlovac) and the mountains (RÁCZ 2014).

Initially three NUTS 2 (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics, NUTS 2 is the second level which refers to the statistical regions) level regions were introduced in 2006, which was changed in 2013 to only two regions: Continental Croatia encompassing

13 counties and the city of Zagreb, and Adriatic Croatia encompassing 7 coastal counties. Both regions have huge regional disparities. Disparities may not be considerable at the NUTS 2 level; however, significant differences can be noticed at the individual county (NUTS 3) level caused by diverse factors such as their location, demography, population density, economy, transport connectivity to other regions or countries, local conditions, natural resources and different traditions (National Strategic Reference Framework 2013).

According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of people at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion was about 29% and the share of severely materially deprived people was 13.7% in 2015. The poverty in Croatia is also characterised by great territorial differences. While in the continental part of the country one in five people are poor, in the coastal region only one in eight people is considered to be poor. The poverty rate on the one hand is the lowest – around 9.8% – in the urban areas of the northwestern and western parts of the country. On the other hand, the poverty rate is very high in the eastern parts of the country. In three out of five counties in Slavonia, the poverty rate exceeds 30%. Regarding the poverty by age, the highest poverty rate was in the over-65 age group, reaching 26.3% in 2015 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018).

The regional inequality is presented in the existence of the categories of special concern, such as war-torn areas, hilly and mountainous areas and islands, where almost 50% (280) of the total of 556 local self-government units exist. The Areas of Special State Concern territories encompass 180 local self-government units (municipalities and towns), amounting to 15.3% of Croatia's total population. The population of hilly and mountainous areas counts for 4.8% of the total population, while 131,000 inhabitants live on islands which make up 2.9% of Croatia's total population. According to existing criteria, altogether 23% of the total population of Croatia falls under the category of areas receiving assistance covering 64.3% of the surface of the country (LŐRINCZNÉ 2015).

5. Forecasts and decision-makers' reactions

On the basis of longstanding changes in the past and the present situation in normal circumstances, (that is, not in wars and heavier economic and social crises) the Central Bureau of Statistics made the population projections of the Republic of Croatia until 2061 when the Croatian population is estimated at 3,554,000. It means that the population could drop by more than 700,000 (16%) in the next four decades. In addition, according to the UN's world population forecast, the population of the country is expected to be only 2,615,000 by the end of the century (UN 2017). The median age in 2061 would be 49.7 years for both sexes, 47.1 for males and 52.0 for females, which is a substantial increase from the 41.7 median age in 2011. At the same time the share of people ageing 65 or more would increase by around 70% and would account for 29.4% of the total population (17.3% in 2011). Meanwhile the number of young (0–14) would fall from 15.3 to 13.5 in the same period (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2011c; European Training Foundation 2012; Sveučilište u Zagrebu Ekonomski fakultet Katedra za demografiju 2014).

In Croatia, the Ministry of Demographics, Family, Youth and Social Policy performs administrative and professional tasks related to the social welfare institutions, the care and protection of people and families, youth, persons with disabilities, victims of trafficking,

refugees and asylum seekers. The ministry added the name “demography” to its official title in 2016 due to extremely poor long-term demographic trends in Croatia to deal with. Since then the ministry has implemented several social programs that extended social assistance and direct compensation to support the social empowerment of young people, families and children.

Concerning the young people, the Croatian government founded the Youth Council with the goal to supervise and develop national youth policies. In addition, the Youth Advisory Boards Act was issued to form the institution to enhance the participation of young people in public affairs of their interest, active engagement of young people in public life and their informed participation at the local level in Croatia. Despite the legal provision, only 52% of cities, 15% of municipalities and 90% of counties formed youth advisory boards until the end of 2016 (Hrvatski Sabor 2014). In 2007, the law on higher education student unions and other students organisations was adopted, which protects the students’ interests, participation in the decision-making process within university bodies and represents students in higher education structures (Hrvatski Sabor 2007).

In October 2014, the government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the third youth strategy entitled National Youth Program for the Period of 2014–2017 with the aim to make better the activities and responsibilities of state administration bodies and public institutions in order to improve the quality of the youths’ lives for the purpose of their optimal social integration. The Strategy refers to those persons between the ages of 15 and 30 who represent 18.6% of the total population in Croatia (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2014).

In 2017, the Croatian government formed a Council for Demographic Revitalisation which is headed by the Prime Minister and its task is to give proposals and recommendations on the demographic policy and monitor the implementation of demographic policy measures from the government’s 2016–2020 programme. The Council’s activities are directed at creating conditions for a demographic revival of Croatia.

The government recognised the demographic problems and put the family and its support into the centre of social policy in its National Reform Programme for 2018. In order to halt the negative demographic tendencies and achieve their priority goal of empowering the family to raise children several measures were introduced. The most important ones are creating a more favourable environment and financial conditions for families with new-born children, increasing of parental benefits, implementing the socially-motivated housing construction and from the 1st of July 2017, new amendments to the Law of Maternity and Parental Benefits Act was introduced (Vlade Republike Hrvatske 2018).

Demographic renewal and revitalisation of the Croatian society is one of the aims of the country’s National Security Strategy. Due to complexity and interdependence of multiple factors that affect demographic trends, efficient population policy is implemented in the field of social, health, economic, housing, educational, legal, financial, tax and other policies aimed to create conditions for demographic renewal. The population policy focuses on the protection and rights of the children, reinforcing families and family values, with particular emphasis on harmonisation of the work and family life and increasing level of the standard of living of the young families (National Security Strategy 2017).

6. Migration

Traditionally, Croatia has been a country of immigration and it represents a complex and multidimensional space of migration activity from the 19th century onwards. The country was/is affected by both cross-border movements as well as internal mobility. Mass migration started in the 16th century as a result of wars between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy and until the mid-19th century, it is estimated that 400,000 people left the country. Before the First World War, due to economic reasons an estimated 350,000 to 450,000 people left Croatia mainly for overseas destinations (KRANJEC–ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ 2014). During the interwar period this destination was replaced by European countries such as Germany, Belgium and France. It was followed by forced migration during the Second World War. Migration under the socialist Yugoslavia could be divided into two distinctive periods. The first one lasted from 1946 until 1963–1964 and it was characterised by the increase of illegal emigrants because of political and economic purposes. The second period was marked by state-tolerated migration when a large number of legal labour migrants, who worked on a temporary basis went abroad. The most attractive destinations were Western European countries, especially Germany (MLINARIĆ 2009; NEJAŠMIĆ 1991; MLINARIĆ et al. 2015).

In general terms one can distinguish three major periods in the migration process since the dissolution of Yugoslavia (MEŽNARIĆ–STUBBS 2012). The first was the conflict period of the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the war between 1991 and 1995, resulted in both emigration from but also massive immigration flows into Croatia, causing large numbers of refugees and displaced persons, displacement and exile of more than three million people. This period was mainly characterised by forced, primarily ethnic-based movements of the population which occurred in two major flows. During the first one ethnic Croats and other non-Serb ethnic groups were expelled from areas in Croatia with the help of the Yugoslav army. The second one was, in connection with the Croatian liberation operations Flash and Storm, resulting in the exodus of the Serb population.

In the second post-conflict period (1996–2000) the emigration pattern normalised, although the entire South-Eastern region was affected by significant population movements, as the partial return of refugees to their former residence. The normalisation of migration flows after 2000 coincided with the relative normalisation of life in Croatia. Programmes were introduced to facilitate the return of the Serbian population to war-affected territories (ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ 2012).

Today the increasing emigration of highly skilled labour together with the ageing population are the biggest problems of the country. In addition, the majority of emigrants are from the prime working age. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the largest number of persons emigrated abroad in 2016 were aged 20–39 (46.7%). Almost half of the emigrants had completed secondary education and around 8% higher education. Especially high was the number of healthcare professionals who left the country: according to estimations, 525 medical doctors emigrated between 2013 and 2016 (ŽUPARIĆ-ILJIĆ 2016; European Commission 2017).

Croatia is placed among the top thirty countries in the world with the most significant problem of brain-drain. The difficult economic conditions and high level of unemployment (especially among the youth) produce an increasing number of mobile labourers. It is true

that some positive impacts of emigration are visible such as remittances, return after acquiring additional knowledge and skills, possibilities of creating business networks. The Croatian diaspora is channelling more than 1.1 billion € annually to Croatia, which is more than the total of the entire annual FDI amount (KNEZOVIC–GROŠINIĆ 2017).

From 1996 right until 2008, Croatia recorded a positive net migration (which means that the number of persons arriving was greater than the number of departing ones), which has been steadily dropping since 1998. From 2009 up until now this trend changed, and Croatia has a negative net migration. It has a strong connection with the beginning of the global crisis that, among other countries, hit Croatia, resulting in increased moving out of the country and raising the negative net migration rate even further. This trend became bigger after Croatia's accession to the European Union on 1 July 2013 (ŽUPARIĆ–ILJIĆ 2016).

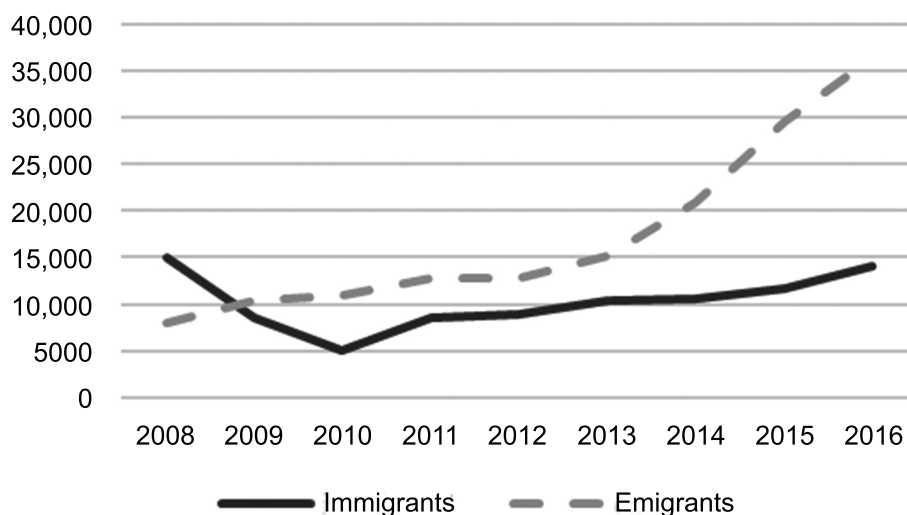


Figure 1

Net migration of the population of the Republic of Croatia with foreign countries (2008–2016)

Source: Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2017b

According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, the net migration rose from 1,472 in 2009 to 22,451 in 2016 when a total of 36,436 persons emigrated, but levels of emigration from Croatia are higher than official statistics suggest, perhaps double or even triple. In 2016, there were 55.3% of Croatian citizens and 44.7% of foreigners who immigrated into the Republic of Croatia. Out of the total number of immigrants, there were 1,921 persons (31.1%) who arrived from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The other countries from where immigrants also came were Serbia (557 persons), Slovenia (467), Germany (462), Italy (300), Ukraine (206), Macedonia (173), the Russian Federation (139), Austria (134). Traditional destinations such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy have still remained the most frequent destinations for Croats given that some 68% of all emigrants moved to these countries in

2016. Regarding to sex, out of the total number of immigrants, there were more men who immigrated than women (60.0%) and out of the total number of emigrants the number of men was also bigger (54.1%) (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2017b).

Croatia has to face not only international migration but also internal one. In 2016, there were 74,752 persons who changed their place of residence within the Republic of Croatia. The largest positive total net migration of population in 2016 was recorded in the City of Zagreb (2,706 persons), while the largest negative total net migration in the County of Osijek-Baranja (–3,952 persons) and the County of Vukovar-Sirmium (–3,526 persons) (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske 2017b).

Until 2013, when Croatia entered the EU, most immigrants came from the countries of former Yugoslavia (the only exception was Slovenia), and almost half of the immigrants arrived from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Two third of them were Croatian citizens by possessing dual citizenship. Since 2013, the number of immigrants arriving from the European Union has been steadily increasing (KRANJEC–ŽUPARIĆ–ILJIĆ 2014).

The first official policy document, *Migration Policy of the Republic of Croatia 2007–2008* was adopted in 2007, which was followed by the *Migration Policy of the Republic of Croatia for the Period 2013–2015*, as well as the *Action Plan on the removal of obstacles to the exercise of particular rights in the area of the integration of foreigners 2013–2015*. Newcomers to Croatia face barely halfway favourable policies for their integration, but compared with other countries in the region, Croatia has gone furthest in its legislation and institutional infrastructure, as well as in the development of the asylum system; however, the country's real capacities in the face of a crisis have never been properly tested (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Ministry of Internal Affairs 2013; GREGUROVIĆ – ŽUPARIĆ–ILJIĆ 2014).

It is a fact that Croatia has never been a destination country. Even during the immigrant crisis (15 September 2015 – 8 March 2016), when 650,000 people passed through Croatia, there were only 22 of them who wanted to stay and seek asylum in Croatia. So, obviously the country was only a transit destination. Since the second half of 2016, the refugee crisis halted as a result of the closure of the Balkan Route. In order to normalise the situation, a number of bilateral agreements and protocols have been signed. One of the most important is that Croatia and Serbia signed the agreement which came into force in early November 2015, which helped the authorities to control the movement of immigrants, reduced the income of traffickers, and facilitated the development of capacities for temporary accommodation during the winter season (KNEZOVIĆ–GROŠINIĆ 2017).

Croatia is willing to participate in the EU's proposal to relocate and resettle refugees according to a consent to accept the EU quota system, hosting and accommodating 1,617 refugees (1.87% of the total EU amount) (LŐRINCZNÉ 2016).

The survey held by the Croatian Employers Association covering the period from Croatia's accession to the EU to February 2018, with 661 respondents who have emigrated to 26 countries shows that political reasons are the main motive – poorly organised and run state, incompetent politicians, incompetent politicians and political parties (8%), decline of the state, society and nation (7.6%), corruption and crime (7.3%) – why workers are emigrating, followed by social and personal reasons. Low salaries were cited only by 5.2% of the respondents. Emigrants for Croatia are satisfied with their new place and only one in ten thinks about returning to Croatia in the next ten years (Hina 2018).

7. Conclusion

The demographic losses in the 1990s sped up and strengthened the overall process of natural depopulation, as well as the regional polarisation in the structure of settlement. Due to the reciprocal effect of a number of destabilising determinants in the movement and development of population, after the millennium, Croatia found itself on the threshold of a severe demographic crisis. The almost 30-year long depopulation has resulted in many negative consequences, such as the reduction of the core population producing new generations, the decreasing of the active working population and the increasing of the older population. Later, increased economic and social burdens are placed on the State Budget in the areas of pension insurance, social and health care of the elderly. Population changes are determined by reproduction and migration. The number of deaths has persistently exceeded the number of live births since 1998, which phenomenon has caused the drastic drop in the birth figures and has resulted in an ageing population and natural population decline (RÁCZ 2014).

The scope of the recent emigration flow that Croatia has to face is ever more significant. It is expected that, in combination with extremely negative demographic trends, it will have repercussions for the labour market disturbances. It may destabilise the economic, healthcare, social, pension and education systems in the long run. Emigration, together with a natural decrease of population, has aggravated further depopulation and ageing in Croatia. Although demographic trends have been a cause of political concern, there have been few policy initiatives. The Government of Croatia could do more to solve the demographic problems of the country.

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