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Why do Croats Migrate to Austria? Motives for and Experiences of Migration since 2013

The study aimed to determine the push and pull factors and the impact of the pandemic and the opening of the Austrian labour market for Croatian citizens in 2020 on the migration of Croatian citizens to Austria after Croatia entered the EU. The study was conducted using qualitative methodology, i.e., semi-structured interviews as the main research method. The results showed that, in addition to the influence of economic and personal factors on emigration from Croatia, social migrant networks stood out as a strong pull factor for respondents to migrate to Austria. Nevertheless, some respondents, regardless of family and friends in other countries, migrate to Austria for its better living and working conditions. The pandemic and the opening of the Austrian labour market in 2020 were at one time an obstacle to emigration for some respondents, and their experiences indicate that in the next few years the number of Croats who immigrate to Austria could increase, both due to delayed emigration from Croatia and the migration of Croats from Germany.

Keywords: migration, Croatia, Austria, push and pull factors, legal regulations, COVID-19.

Zakaj se Hrvati selijo v Avstrijo? Motivi in izkušnje z migracijami po letu 2013

Namen študije je bil opredeliti dejavnike odbijanja in privlačenja ter vpliv pandemije in odprtja avstrijskega trga dela za hrvaške državljane leta 2020 na migracije hrvaških državljanov v Avstrijo po vstopu Hrvaške v EU. Študija je bila izvedena z uporabo kvalitativne metodologije, zlasti polstrukturiranih intervjujev. Kot kažejo rezultati, na odločitev za selitev v Avstrijo poleg ekonomskih in osebnih dejavnikov pomembno vplivajo socialne mreže izseljencev, a se nekateri anketiranci kljub družini in prijateljem v drugi državi v Avstrijo selijo zaradi boljših življenjskih in delovnih pogojev. Pandemija in odprtje avstrijskega trga dela leta 2020 sta v določenem trenutku predstavljala oviro za izselitev, vendar pa izkušnje anketirancev kažejo, da bi se lahko v prihodnjih nekaj letih število Hrvatov, ki se priseljujejo v Avstrijo, povečalo tako zaradi preloženega izseljevanja s Hrvaške kot tudi zaradi priseljevanja Hrvatov iz Nemčije.

Ključne besede: migracije, Hrvaška, Avstrija, dejavniki odbijanja in privlačenja, predpisi, covid-19.

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1. Introduction

Globalisation and communities like the European Union (EU), whose members have opened their doors to migrants from other member states, have given additional impetus to international migration, driven by an ever-widening spectrum of factors. According to data from 2020, 1.2 million people from one EU member state migrated to another member state, and of all EU members, only Croatia, Latvia and Romania recorded a negative external migration balance (Eurostat 2023). The latter data are confirmation that by joining the EU, Croatia, as an economically and demographically weakened country, is exposed to strong, mostly negative migration processes which require a lot of effort in the form of various measures, incentives, etc. within the framework of public policies in order to be mitigated or stopped.

According to the latest data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), since Croatia's entry into the EU (1 July 2013), about 300,000 people have emigrated from Croatia, most of them Croatian citizens. Among the member states of the EU, the most attractive destinations for Croatian emigrants during the recent emigration wave were Germany, Austria, and Ireland, to which about 170,000 people emigrated between 2013 and 2021 (CBS, Migration of Population of Republic of Croatia 2013–2021). The number of emigrants is certainly higher, primarily because some citizens, regardless of the legal obligation (Residence Act 2023, Art. 3), did not deregister their residence in Croatia before emigrating.

Although in the recent wave of emigration most Croatian citizens undoubtedly emigrated to Germany, the subject of our study is the migration of Croatian citizens to Austria after Croatia entered the EU. The topic is primarily imposed by the aforementioned data from the CBS which confirms that Austria is among the most attractive destination countries, with 22,168 Croatians emigrating between 2013 and 2021. At the same time, the data from Austria's Federal Statistical Office show that the annual volume of migration from Croatia to Austria is significantly higher than shown in the annual reports of the CBS and that on January 1, 2022, 95,000 Croatian citizens lived in Austria (Statistik Austria 2022a; 2022b).¹ In addition, the research subject was also imposed by the review of previous research on emigration from the Republic of Croatia during the recent emigration wave presented in the third chapter.

2. What Causes Migration? – A Theoretical Approach

In literature on migration, there are many theoretical approaches, from those that refer only to one type of migration, to more general ones that try to answer the question of what causes migration; however, to date there is no single, coherent theory that explains all migration movements (Massey et al. 1993; Mesić 2002). One of the most well-known theories of migration is the push-pull theory, according to which the decision to migrate does not depend solely on objective

reasons such as low living standards and socioeconomic status, but also on the potential migrants' perception of their status, satisfaction, and life aspirations. One of the most famous theorists of this theory is E. Lee who systematised push and pull factors of migration into four basic categories: "factors associated with the area of origin, factors associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles and personal factors" (Lee 1966, 50). Push factors, according to Lee (1966) and Lewis (1982), include changes in the natural environment, economic factors, political factors, and social factors, i.e., the migrant's feeling of deprivation, while the pull factors refer to better economic opportunities at the new destination, the acquisition of better education and working conditions, better living conditions, and going after someone who attracts the migrant in any way, thus strengthening social migrant networks (Lee 1966; Lewis 1982). The decision to migrate, according to Lee (1966), is primarily the result of push and pull factors, however, personal factors and intervening mechanisms also play an important role.

Lee's commonly used model from the second half of the last century, like many others, is often contested, but it is still regularly used to explain migration movements and serves as a basis for defining other models (Božić & Burić 2005). In the same period, a "place utility model" was developed, which emphasises the personal aspirations of migrants and their satisfaction. According to this model, a potential migrant analyses their living place and thinks of it in relation to its usefulness and their aspirations, and if the usefulness is lower than the aspirations, motivated by dissatisfaction, they look for alternative ways to satisfy their aspirations (Wolpert 1965, 60). "A key role is played by the integration of the individual into a place of residence and the way of defining utility, which in this case goes beyond just economic benefits and opportunities" (Božić & Burić 2005, 13). A few decades later, a model of subjective expected utility was developed; through a subjective evaluation process, individuals choose the option that provides them with the greatest utility among several alternatives (De Jong & Fawcet 1981). Fassmann and Hintermann also based their model on E. Lee's assumptions and supplemented it with the knowledge that the perception of one's situation and personal motivation are key factors in the behaviour of potential migrants. The same authors, beginning with the assumptions of the push-pull model and the place utility model, accept the assumptions about the "effect of differences in income and employment between sending and receiving countries on the decision to migrate" (Fassmann & Hintermann 1997, cited in Božić & Burić 2005, 16).

Much like the authors we mentioned, many others, in their theoretical or empirical research, have recently dealt with identifying factors that push people to leave their homeland and pull them to immigrate to another country and act in the background of migration. However, we still consider Lee's (1966) statement to be valuable today; that it is not possible to specify an exact set of push-pull factors that affect a certain person, nor a general set of them that apply

to all population migrations, but it is possible to single out some of them that stand out as the most common factors or that are of special importance. Recent research highlights economic factors, especially the unemployment rate and low income, among the most frequent push factors of migration, while higher standard of living and higher wages for the same workload are often mentioned as pull economic factors, but also related factors such as more favourable working conditions and greater career opportunities (Parkins 2010; Zoelle 2011; Djafar 2012; Krishnakumar & Indumathi 2014; Lang & Nadler 2014; Mujić & Zaimović Kurtović 2017; Rajković Iveta & Horvatin 2017; Todorović et al. 2020; Carbajal & Calvo 2021; Adamović & Potočnik 2022; Urbanski 2022). Social factors related to the education, social and health system, religious intolerance, etc., also play an important role in recent migration movements, but the population is often also encouraged to leave their country of origin by corruption, legal uncertainty, and the immorality of political elites (Parkins 2010; Lang & Nadler 2014; Jurić 2017; Carbajal & Calvo 2021; Urbanski 2022). Some authors also point out crime, violence, discrimination and security problems as frequent push and pull factors for recent migration (Parkins 2010; Urbanski 2022), and when it comes to forced or involuntary migration, war, political revolutions and religious conflicts stand out as the most common push factors (Hager 2021). In addition to the aforementioned, other frequent factors of migration in recent decades are climate change and natural disasters (Martínez-Zarzoso et al. 2022), as well as demographic changes such as overpopulation and, accordingly, a lack of jobs in developing countries and the aging of the population in developed countries that are forced to import foreign labour (Abella 2005).

3. A Review of Previous Research on Emigration from Croatia after 2013

Previous research on emigration from Croatia after 2013 is mainly concerned with defining the volume and characteristics of the recent emigration wave. The authors point out that the contemporary demographic development of Croatia is characterised by intense emigration (Jerić 2019), which occurs in conditions of total depopulation, population aging, natural decline, etc. (Pokos 2017), and causes intense loss of human capital, which is crucial for the development and progress of any country (Balijsa 2019). Also, traditional destination countries that attracted Croatian emigrants back in the era of guest workers, such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy, were among the most attractive destination countries for Croatian emigrants during the recent emigration wave. The temporary state of working abroad in the 1960s is an important factor in understanding the current depopulation processes in Croatia, especially because the temporary departure of some of the guest workers turned into a permanent situation, and some of them were joined abroad by their families (Friganović & Pavić 1974;

Gelo 1987; Nejašmić 1994; Akrap 2004; Čizmić et al. 2005; Župarić-Iljić 2016; Akrap et al. 2017).

In the recent wave of emigration, it was mostly the young population between the ages of 20 and 40 that left Croatia (Pokos 2017; Balija 2020; Mesarić Žabčić & Šimunić 2022), which is not surprising, considering that the majority of the population decides to migrate at a younger age (Božić & Burić 2005). Of particular concern, however, is the growing number and share of minors, families, and the highly educated who were migrating, especially because of their low share in the total population of Croatia (Jurić 2017; Troskot et al. 2019), but also the share of emigrated people in the total population of certain Croatian demographically emptied areas, such as Slavonian counties, passive mountain areas, and post-war areas of special state concern (Župarić-Iljić 2016).

Research on motives for emigration after 2013 has been conducted on Croatian citizens who emigrated to Germany and Ireland. Jurić (2017, 362) states that the main motivation for migration from Croatia (to Germany) is the perception that in Croatia, “the work ethics values and fairness in general are not institutionalised, and emigrants believe that Croatian society has morally broken.” In their research, Rajković Iveta and Horvatin (2017, 247) problematized the emigration of young people to Ireland and pointed out that among the respondents, except the main economic motive, “psychological dissatisfaction, positive experiences of previous migrants, the possibility of quickly finding a job, simple bureaucratic procedure, knowledge of the English language, etc.” also stood out as motives for emigration.

Reviewing previous research on the recent emigration wave from Croatia has established that there are studies on the volume of emigration and the characteristics of emigration from Croatia, as well as research on the motives of emigration from Croatia to Germany and Ireland, while studies that problematize recent emigration from Croatia to Austria are lacking. Among the research dealing with recent emigration from Croatia to Austria, it is possible to single out the study by Mesarić Žabčić and Šimunić (2022), which aimed to map selected demographic characteristics of contemporary migration trends between Croatia and Austria and showed that the largest share of Croatian citizens today live in two Austrian regions – Vienna and Graz. There is also research by Šćukanec (2017), based mainly on the experiences of emigrants to Austria in the 1990s, which showed that respondents’ satisfaction with life in Austria mostly concerns the organisation of the state and economic security.

4. Objectives and Research Methods

Following the review of previous research, the contribution of this paper is to deepen the knowledge of existing studies on the emigration of Croatian citizens to Austria. The study aims to determine the push and pull factors for the migration of Croatian citizens to Austria during the period of the recent emigration

wave. Given that in the recent wave of emigration from Croatia almost half of the emigrants chose Germany as their destination country, we were primarily interested in why some emigrants nevertheless chose Austria. We tried to find out whether migration from Croatia to Austria was decisively influenced by social migrant networks. The study also aimed to determine the impact of the opening of the Austrian labour market for Croatian citizens on July 1, 2020 and the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus on the recent emigration of Croatian citizens to Austria.

In studying the motives and experience of migration (influence of social migrant networks, administrative-legal obstacles, the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.), qualitative methodology, i.e. an interview, was used as the base research method.² The interviews were conducted from February to December 2022 and covered the migration experiences of sixteen Croatian citizens. According to CBS data, which indicate that the majority of the emigrated Croatian citizens after Croatia's entry to the EU were between the ages of 20 and 40, these represented the study's target group. At the time of the interview, the youngest respondent was 23, and the oldest was 39. All respondents migrated to Austria after 1 July 2013, mostly between 2014 and 2022. Before going abroad, the respondents had lived in the City of Zagreb, Zagreb County, Koprivnica-Križevci County, Varaždin County and Karlovac County, and in terms of their level of education, six respondents had completed high school, four respondents had an undergraduate degree, and six had a graduate degree.

The conducted interviews were semi-structured; some of the questions were prepared in advance, while some were asked spontaneously during the interviews. This form of interview was chosen so that the respondents could talk about their own experiences without time limits or suggested answers by the interviewer. The research sample was collected through Facebook groups (*Hrvati u Austriji* and *Idemo u Austriju*) and using the snowball method (we ensured that the respondents were not from within the same family). Given the geographical distance between the interviewer and the respondents, some of the interviews were conducted online, and some of them live, during the respondent's visit to Croatia, in public spaces. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed for easier access to the data, coding, thematic analysis and interpretation of the content. All interview details were saved on the author's computer, and the respondents were guaranteed anonymity and the use of their answers exclusively for scientific purposes.

5. Push Factors for the Emigration of Respondents from Croatia

The push factors include forceful aspects that encourage people to leave their homes and their countries of origin to become permanent residents in some

other country (Lee 1966; Lewis 1982; Krishnakumar & Indumathi 2014; Urbanski 2022). Migration can be the result of a wide range of push factors; from economic, such as a lack of employment options, low wages, etc., to political, cultural and others; clearly, the main factor encouraging the population to change their place of residence relates to differences between the two areas (Martin et al. 2006; Krishnakumar & Indumathi 2014; Urbanski 2022). The results of the conducted interviews showed that the push factors for the emigration of the Croatian citizens who emigrated to Austria after 2013 can be classified into two categories. Of the sixteen respondents, eleven emigrants pointed out that their main reason for emigration was economic and primarily related to unsatisfactory living standards and working conditions, low income, and the related inability to buy real estate in Croatia, thereby confirming the importance of differences in income between the country of origin and the receiving country of migrants on the decision to migrate (Fassmann & Hintermann 1997, cited in Božić & Burić 2005). The latter respondents most often gave answers similar to the following:

Respondent 1: Primarily because of better salaries. I got a job here [in Croatia] after high school and worked for a couple of years, but I had a couple of friends from high school who [...] went abroad, some to Germany, some to Austria and they had double, even higher, salaries, better work conditions [...].

Respondent 2: We didn't have a place to live, that is, we couldn't get a loan and buy a house for ourselves and our three children, and we decided to move out.

Of the sixteen respondents, only one respondent was unemployed before leaving Croatia, and it was the impossibility of finding a job for him and his wife that he pointed out as the main reason for emigrating from Croatia. This corresponds with the results of a study by Jurić (2017, 354), conducted among Croats who emigrated to Germany after 2013, which show that “unemployment or the inability to find a suitable job in the profession” are not the main motives for recent emigration from Croatia. However, while Jurić's results point to the conclusion that the main motivations of respondents to emigrate are not economic, the results of this study point to the opposite. The reason for the disparity among the results are certainly methodological shortcomings in recording data on external migration in Croatia, which do not allow for defining a representative research sample, that is, the limitations of qualitative research and quantitative research conducted on a convenient sample.³

The importance of economic push factors for leaving Croatia after 2013 is also confirmed by the results of a study by Rajković Iveta and Horvatin (2017, 266), whose respondents stated that the most common push factors for emigration from Croatia to Ireland were “the impossibility of finding employment in the profession, solving the housing problem issues and the joint life of the young

couple”, in combination with other reasons. Economic factors as crucial motives for emigration are confirmed by several other studies conducted in neighbouring and other countries (Mujić & Zaimović Kurtović 2017; Wasuge 2018, etc.), and the desire to improve the standard of living, higher wages and better employment opportunities are the dominant motives for young people’s migration aspirations in almost all countries in Southeast Europe (Todorović et al. 2020; Adamović & Potočnik 2022). Almost the same motives have been the driver of intensive emigration flows from the member states of the EU since 2004 – Slovakia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hungary and Poland (Lang & Nadler 2014). These results are in accordance with theoretical explanations that emphasise that unfavourable economic conditions and the disparity between immigration and emigration countries as the basic motive for emigration determine the overcoming of the economic situation of deprivation (De Jong & Fonseca 2020).

The second category of emigration motives refers to the remaining five respondents, who cited self-proving, leaving to gain new experience, and a desire for change as the main reasons for emigrating.

Respondent 3: [...] purely because of some new experience, there was no special reason or dissatisfaction [...].

The same respondents highlighted economic factors as secondary motives for emigration, and apart from the latter, a smaller number of respondents also highlighted dissatisfaction with the atmosphere where there is no progress at all and the desire to merge with a partner abroad as secondary motives for emigration, which additionally influenced and accelerated their desire for emigration driven by other push factors.

Respondent 7: And then you see that getting a job is based on ‘who you know’ [...] you get into an atmosphere where there is no progress at all. [...] you want to prove to yourself that you can apply everything you’ve learned to something big.

Respondent 5: I was a bit fed up with work. [...] Then I met my current husband, he was out there in Austria [...]. Well, primarily the desire for change and certainly additionally the desire to create a family with my partner [...].

These statements confirm the findings of earlier research, which highlighted the significant role of family/partner unification in deciding on migration, especially among the young population (King et al. 2016). The respondents’ statements confirm that the departure of Croatian citizens abroad is often the result of not only one, but several factors, most often one primary, and several secondary ones, but also that for the majority of respondents, the push factors for emigration from Croatia are stronger than the pull factors for immigration to Austria. In addition, although this study does not allow for generalisation, the findings of

the analysis of motives for emigration according to the educational structure of the respondents are also interesting. All respondents who had completed high school cited economic motives as the main push factors for emigration, while highly educated respondents more often cited motives such as gaining new experiences, the desire for change and self-proving as the primary reason for their emigration. Economic motives were more often their secondary reason for emigration.

6. Pull Factors and the Respondents' Experience of Migration to Austria

The main research question is primarily related to pull factors, and the reasons for choosing Austria as a destination country, which are most often considered in combination with the previously analysed push factors. Therefore, although they partially coincide with the results of certain previous studies, they are indispensable in the context of this one. While push factors encourage the population to leave their country of origin, the term pull factors refers to the various aspects that attract people to move to a particular location, and they are most often in contrast with push factors (Lee 1962; Lewis 1982; Krishnakumar & Indumathi 2014; Urbanski 2022). Most often, they refer to better conditions than those enjoyed by migrants in the countries of origin, and precisely the differences between the same factors in the country of origin and destination encourage the population to migrate. The same do not only refer to differences between economic factors, but also political, social, etc. (Krishnakumar & Indumathi 2014; Urbanski 2022). The importance of social factors was already confirmed in the previous chapter, in the statements of several emigrants whose migration from Croatia to Austria was accelerated precisely because of joining a partner who was already abroad.

The research question was approached with the assumption that social migrant networks hold a key role for respondents when choosing their destination country. The choice of a potential destination country for migrants is closely related to the tradition of emigration, and among potential destination countries, migrants most often consider those where migrant groups that are ready to accept them already exist. This refers primarily to family and friendship ties which, in addition to enabling migrants to be more likely to be accepted and initially integrated, also serve potential migrants as a channel of information about the destination country and opportunities in the labour market (Božić & Burić 2005; King et al. 2016). The importance of social migrant networks in providing information about the destination country is also confirmed by the statements of the majority of respondents who, when choosing the destination country, used information collected from acquaintances, friends or family members who had moved to their desired destination countries.

Respondent 15: Mostly through friends and acquaintances, and even now there are groups on Facebook for almost every country, so you can ask there.

Some of the respondents, when stating the ways of being informed about living and working conditions in Austria, pointed out that newspaper articles and comments on social platforms, such as Facebook, that conveyed the positive experiences of Croatian emigrants, as well as websites that provide the information needed when moving to Austria, encouraged them when leaving and choosing their destination country, especially those whose close friends or family members were not abroad and, accordingly, they could not be informed through their experiences.

Respondent 11: Our family is all in Croatia. But we heard and saw through newspapers, comments on social networks, etc. that people living better abroad so their experiences were kind of our encouragement for going abroad.

Respondent 7: Austria has quite a good amount of information on the Internet, even in Croatian.

These statements and explanations depart from traditional approaches that cannot explain individual differences in migration patterns and indicate that international migration is not only the result of individual responses to the laws of supply and demand but the result of interpersonal connections, i.e., social migrant networks, which have an extremely important role. The mentioned connections are a link between previous migrants, migrants, and non-migrants in the area of origin and destination, which through kinship, friendship and common local origin, and by lowering the costs and risks of moving, while also increasing the expected net gain, increase the probability of migration (Massey et al. 1993, 448–449). In addition, social migrant networks present an important form of social capital that emigrants often rely on when looking for employment abroad (Massey et al. 1993, 448). The latter is confirmed by the statements of the respondents who pointed out that it was friends, family members or acquaintances who helped them immigrate to Austria by offering them temporary accommodation or helping them find a job. Additionally, a few respondents stated that they had used their own experience to encourage their close friends or family members to emigrate or to support their intensive thoughts of emigrating from Croatia in the future.

Respondent 13: A close friend, also a colleague from work in Croatia, and now here in Austria, and her husband and children were in Austria at the moment when I was already thinking a lot about leaving Croatia. She also told me that they are looking for a lot of medical workers there and they even invited me to live with them until I find my apartment.

Respondent 7: A lot of them called me for experience, I helped some of them, [...] a lot of them went abroad according to my experience [...].

Respondent 13: I haven't yet, but I would like my younger brother to come here as well [...]. For now, he's changing his mind and [...] I think he's coming abroad soon too.

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Therefore, family, friends, acquaintances and personal factors, in addition to socio-economic conditions in the country of origin and destination, significantly influence the direction of contemporary emigration flows from Croatia. According to the above statements, it is difficult to expect that the current emigration flows from Croatia will stop, especially because of the increasing number of Croatians outside the homeland, but also the ever-widening spectrum of ways of informing and transferring the experiences of emigrants to non-migrants, and potential migrants in Croatia. The same statements also confirm the importance of the meso-level for explaining migration movements, which, as claimed by Božić and Burić (2005), was neglected for a long time.

Except for Austria, when thinking about leaving Croatia, the majority of respondents also inquired about life in Germany and Ireland, while fewer inquired about USA and Canada. For almost half of the respondents, the aforementioned social migrant networks were decisive when choosing Austria as their destination country, but some of the respondents decided to move to Austria regardless of their family abroad, specifically in Germany or USA.

Respondent 2: We specifically went to Austria because there are the best conditions for living and working, 13th and 14th salary. [...] those additional salaries were crucial for us.

These statements confirmed the settings of the liberal theory of migration, according to which the basis of everything is a human who tries to maximise his earnings and whose behaviour is guided by the criteria of satisfaction and utility (Vukić 1999, cited in Mesić 2002). Voluntary and economic migrations confirm that people are not satisfied with mere survival but constantly strive for better and higher, which they hope to find in a more developed country (Peračković & Rihtar 2016). Between the two countries more developed than the country of origin, some of the respondents found the country that offered them a higher income more attractive than the one where they had family and friends. Better living and working conditions were confirmed by the majority of emigrants as an important pull factor for immigrating to Austria, while some pointed out that their search for betterment, i.e., emigration, was encouraged by the emigration experience of their family members who had emigrated to the other parts of the world for the same reason.

Respondent 4: My uncle has been in America for a long time, he went there when he was a child, my brother has been in America for ten years, we are not in one place, we all look and go where it is better for us.

In addition to the above, several interviewees pointed out that better working conditions and the proximity of Croatia and Austria, increasingly in the last year or two, according to their observations and the experiences of their family members, encourage Croatian citizens who emigrated to Germany to move to Austria.

Respondent 7: It is an interesting phenomenon here that a lot of our people, even those who were previously in Germany, are now coming to live in Graz because of the proximity to Croatia [...] lately there have been enormous amounts of people, Croats, who are coming to live here [in Austria]. [...] and first they followed their families to Germany.

Respondent 16: [...] they went to Germany, to their relatives, and in the end came here [in Austria] because it is better, higher wages, 13th and 14th salary [...].

We might therefore cautiously conclude that social migrant networks have a strong influence on some Croatian emigrants during their first emigration experience, however, after gaining experience of living and working abroad, they often decide to go after higher incomes and better working conditions. In addition to the above, the results showed that knowledge of the German language was not decisive for the majority of respondents when choosing their destination country. Some of them, especially those who were working in their profession in Austria at the time of the interview, had prior knowledge of the language, while the respondents who immigrated to Austria without prior knowledge of the German language were either not employed in their profession when they arrived in Austria or knowledge of the German language was not necessary for their employment. Knowledge of the English language was therefore not a sufficient reason to choose Ireland as a destination country, which at the time of their emigration was also among the popular destination countries of Croatian emigrants.

7. The Impact of Legal Regulations and the COVID-19 Pandemic on Respondents' Migration to Austria

Lastly, the study aimed to determine the impact of legal regulation, such as the opening of the Austrian labour market for Croatian citizens on 1 July 2020, and the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus on the migration of Croatian citizens to Austria. The aforementioned were viewed as obstacles that at one time partially prevented the migration of Croatian citizens abroad. Migration can occur after push and pull factors are properly weighed, however, intervening obstacles also play an important role in migration as restrictions that often

hinder potential migrants when changing their place of residence and must be overcome before migration finally takes place (Lee 1966). The difference between the volume of actual and potential migration is the result of unforeseen factors, such as legislation and migration policy of immigration countries, which often change and directly affect the migration of potential migrants (Fassmann & Hintermann 1997, cited in Božić & Burić 2005, 16). In addition to those mentioned, intervening obstacles to migration can relate to migration costs, transport accessibility, language, cultural differences, family ties, and the availability of necessary documents such as passports, work permits, etc. The importance and influence of some of them changes over time, and the modern age brought with it some new obstacles to migration, such as limiting access to the labour market in certain countries for foreign workers or even restrictions on movement that were once in force during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goals of the interventions are those that greatly influence migration movements, reduce migration pressure, control migration, or even prevent it (Van Hear et al. 2018).

Concerning the latter aim of the study, an important factor in the selection of respondents was the time of their migration to Austria, so that we could compare the experiences of those who migrated before and those who migrated after July 1, 2020, as well as before, during, and after (the beginning of the) pandemic. The majority of respondents who emigrated to Austria before July 1, 2020 pointed out that the process of obtaining a work permit was not complex for them because of the deficit of their profession in Austria, and their work permit was obtained by their employer.

Respondent 4: The employer applied for me and we waited for about two weeks, that's roughly how long it takes to see if there are local people interested in that job position and if anyone will complain [...].

Only one respondent, who moved there in January 2020 and managed to get a job after July 1, 2020, was not sure whether the aforementioned regulations contributed to this.

Respondent 3: I can't say whether that permit affected that I didn't get a job before July 1, 2020. I have been intensively looking for a job since I came [...].

According to the statements of the respondents, the opening of the Austrian market on July 1, 2020 mostly did not have a limiting effect on the employment of those who decided to migrate before this date, however, some respondents who emigrated after January 1, 2020 pointed out that the obligation of a work permit prolonged their migration abroad.

Respondent 1: [...] it was some additional brake that made thinking about leaving Croatia only a thought. [...] we knew that this permit will be cancelled in 2020, so I waited.

Experiences like this are certainly one of the reasons for the increasing number of Croatians who immigrated to Austria in 2021 (CBS, Migration of Population of Republic of Croatia 2013–2021). Therefore, a part of the total contingent emigrated from Croatia to Austria in 2021 consisted of those who had been thinking about going to Austria even before July 1, 2020 but they were limited by the aforementioned restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a global immobility crisis, i.e., the closing of international borders, making it impossible for people/migrants around the world to take advantage of the opportunity to work in another country (Newland 2020). The closing of the borders was inevitable because it represented a way to stop or slow down the transmission of the COVID-19 virus between people, which spread through face-to-face contact (Barker et al. 2020). The pandemic had two effects on the respondents' migration. Some respondents, who were still in their homeland at the time of the beginning of the pandemic, were prompted to postpone their departure because they did not feel safe even in their homeland, therefore the option of emigrating during the pandemic seemed unattractive to them. On the other hand, some respondents decided to migrate precisely because of being unemployed in the conditions of crisis and insecurity caused by the pandemic.

Respondent 12: Honestly, we planned to move abroad at the end of 2019, but then my husband's injury slowed us down a bit, and then when the pandemic started, we stopped all plans until 2022. We were scared, there were also occasional quarantines [...].

Respondent 6: My wife and I lost our jobs at a time when it was very difficult to find a new job in Croatia, and we also had a child [...].

This is also confirmed by the aforementioned data of the CBS (CBS, Migration of Population of Republic of Croatia 2013–2021), which show that the number of Croatian citizens who migrated to Austria decreased by 20% in 2020, compared to 2019, while the increasing number of migrants recorded in 2021 was the result of the cancellation of the aforementioned restrictions, as well as emigration due to the pandemic-induced economic crisis in Croatia, which forced some Croatians to search for a better life outside their homeland. The decrease in the number of people who migrated from Croatia to Austria in 2020 is not surprising, given that the pandemic has had a negative impact on almost all forms of human mobility. According to UN data, due to the consequences of the pandemic, the growth in the number of international migrants in mid-2020

was 27% lower than expected (UN, n. d.), primarily due to the partial closure of borders and immigration regimes of a large number of countries around the world (IOM 2020).

8. Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the push factors in the emigration of the respondents were mostly economic or personal, while social migrant networks stood out among the respondents as a strong pull factor for immigrating to Austria. Nevertheless, some respondents, with family and/or friends in Germany or the USA, decided to move to Austria primarily because of the better living and working conditions in Austria. According to the statements of some respondents, in the last year or two, the latter benefits have increasingly encouraged Croatian citizens who emigrated to Germany to move to Austria. Although the research methodology does not allow for generalisation, the results suggest that social migrant networks have a strong influence on some Croatian emigrants during their first emigration, however, after gaining experience abroad, they often decide to move to a country that provides higher salaries and better working conditions. In addition to this, according to respondents, the proximity of Croatia and Austria also influenced the migration of some Croats from Germany to Austria, especially during the pandemic when some of them felt safer closer to their homeland. The aforementioned leaves a gap for new research focused on the volume and motives of the migration processes of Croats between Germany and Austria.

In addition, the results indicate that the pandemic and the opening of the Austrian labour market on July 1, 2020, were at one time an obstacle for some respondents when emigrating. The emigrants' experiences also indicate that in the coming years the number of Croats immigrating to Austria could increase, both by emigration of Croatian citizens from their homeland and migration of Croats from Germany. The latter, in addition to the growing number of Croats in Austria, and thus the ever-widening network of former migrants, migrants, and non-migrants in the country of origin and destination, indicates that in the coming years it is almost impossible to expect a weakening of the emigration flow from Croatia to Austria. Also, the respondents' statements about the pull factors of immigrating to Austria, which are incommensurable with the conditions in their homeland, are particularly worrying and suggest that in the near future we cannot expect a large number of returnees from Austria.

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Notes

- ¹ More about the methodological obstacles to the research of external migration of the Republic of Croatia and the differences between the data of the CBS and statistical data from the countries of immigration of the Croatian population in Akrap et al. (2017), Pokos (2017) and Balija (2020).
- ² The interview as a main research method was chosen primarily because of the methodological shortcomings of Croatian data on external migration that do not allow us to define a representative research sample, but also to collect as much information as possible about the individual migration experiences of the respondents.
- ³ The latter once again points to the need for new research on the motives for emigrating from Croatia aimed at one of the most important challenges of this country.