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EXPLORING RETURN INTENTIONS FROM THE YOUNG MIGRANT'S POINT OF VIEW

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper investigates migration behaviors of young migrants to identify the main factors influencing their return intentions. Recognizing that return migration decision-making is a complex and multidimensional process, the paper sheds light on two under-researched topics in migration literature: return migration intentions and young migrants.

Methodology: Using a mixed theory approach that accounts for both individual and contextual factors as determinants of possible return, the paper utilizes data obtained through surveys of Croatian migrants. It proposes an ordered logit regression model based on three composite variables—economic success, social integration, and cultural shock—to calculate the return intention probability.

Results: The results show that the variables of economic success, social integration, and cultural shock, which were determined through factor analysis, play a significant role in shaping return migration intentions. In particular, the perceived level of social integration has the most significant influence on the likelihood of intention to return, indicating that young migrants are not solely or predominantly motivated by economic factors.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that the factors influencing migrants' return intentions overlap, and as a result, no single theory is adequate for providing a comprehensive understanding of young migrants' return intentions. For the majority of Croatian migrants, it seems that the *myth of return* does not exist; they do not plan to return. These findings constitute a valuable foundation for developing migration policy recommendations for both the host and home countries.

Keywords: Return intentions, international migration, youth, myth of return, Croatia

1. Introduction

International migration as a global phenomenon has stimulated the scientific debate on academic scholars across various branches of social sciences

(anthropology, sociology, economics, demography, law, and political sciences), yet return migration has proved to be a research topic less investigated but equally challenging (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011;

Piotrowski & Tong, 2013; Tezcan, 2019; Bensassi & Jabbour, 2022). In recent years, interest in return migration has been increasing, displaying the multifaceted character of return migration (Bilecen, 2022). Furthermore, return and reintegration represent significantly different processes from immigration and integration in the receiving countries, mostly because the sending states are in the position of geopolitical marginality (Vathi et al., 2023). Return migration of ex-communist or socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), particularly in recent times, has not received scholarly attention it deserves (Roth, 2018).

While much of the theoretical and empirical migration literature sees migrations as permanent, one cannot omit the fact that many migrants move temporarily (e.g., Dustmann & Görlach, 2016; Bossavie et al., 2021) or with the intention to return to their home country. The *myth of return* has been present for a long time in migration literature (e.g., Dahya 1973; Anwar 1979; Mansour, 2020; Cakmak, 2021), and it refers to the idea of returning to the home country, not necessarily doing that. Namely, the myth of return embodies various processes (social, psychological, political, and cultural) through which migrants uphold the idea of return even if real-life circumstances suggest otherwise. According to Carling (2015), this myth cannot be considered only as an individual expectation of future events; it is based on collective ideas with a normative aspect.

In addition, the definition of return migration is not clear-cut, primarily due to the ambiguity of the term "return" itself. This definition can vary depending on a number of factors, including the duration of migration, the nationality of migrants, the intention to return (permanent or temporary), and whether it is voluntary or forced, as in cases of deportation or coercion (Kuschminder, 2022). Furthermore, return migration can be distinguished based on factors such as migrant motives, expectations, needs, etc. Schiele (2021), for instance, examined how life satisfaction affected migrant returns to Germany. According to the study, cross-country disparities in return intentions can be explained by the anticipated cross-country variations in the gains or losses in life satisfaction experienced by returning migrants. Weber and Saarela (2023) investigated how income and family formation trajectories varied across the analyzed motives and how these influenced the risks of return migration. They emphasized that return migration risks are influenced by both the

initial migratory purpose and the trajectory at the destination. Thus, this heterogeneity of migrants is making the scientific debate on migration challenging since it opens up possibilities for various theoretical considerations and methodological issues. This paper refers to return migration simply as the relocation of migrants to their home country.

Return migration to CEE countries is particularly interesting, given significant geographical mobility experienced in this region, including the phenomenon of individuals returning to their home countries (Martin & Radu, 2012). The process of return migration from these new European Union (EU) member states is often scrutinized through an economic lens, with the return home predominantly analyzed using economic parameters (Košťalová & Hofreiter, 2018). These returnees are frequently viewed as catalysts for development due to their investments in saved capital and the transfer of human capital. Despite sharing a common history of political regimes and the experience of transitioning to market economies that started in the 1990s, the entire CEE region exhibits diversity in economic, social, and institutional aspects (King & Kuschminder, 2022).

Existing studies on return migrants in CEE countries reflect various issues such as return migration and employment mobility between pre-migration and after return (Jephcote et al., 2023), emergence of returnee entrepreneurship (Gittins et al., 2015; Anghel et al., 2017), income premia for work experience abroad, occupational choices and selectivity patterns (Martin & Radu, 2012). However, return migration is not only an economic phenomenon but it also contributes to social innovations. A Slovak study (Košťalová & Hofreiter, 2018) observed how young migrants become actors of change and thus modify life in their immediate circle, community and even society. They emphasize that as relevant as economic topics are social remittances and cultural innovation that are realized through the transfer of experiences, knowledge, skills and norms, which young returning migrants bring from the host countries (Košťalová & Hofreiter, 2018). This illustrates the importance and relevance of research on return migration.

This paper aims to explore migration behaviors of young migrants in order to identify the main factors that influence their intentions to return home, taking into account that the decision-making process related to return migration is complex and

multidimensional. It employs the ordered logit regression method to examine the data obtained by surveying 1,043 Croatian migrants. This is because the responses of the dependent variable, return intentions of young migrants, have a natural ordering. The ordered logit method has already been used in migration literature (e.g., Guo, 2016; Tabuga, 2018), particularly to analyze migration behavior and decision-making.

This paper contributes to migration literature in several ways. It focuses on *return migration intentions* and *young migrants*, both issues under-researched in migration literature, yet on the rise when it comes to academic and broader policy concerns. Although research on return migration intentions has a long history dating back to the 1960s, the focus has been primarily on the migration-development nexus (Faist, 2008; Geiger & Steinbrink, 2012), as well as on adult migrants. Young migrants are still a less researched topic in migration studies, as are (their) return intentions (Darren et al., 2014; de Haas et al., 2015). By using the mixed theory approach, this paper focuses on return intentions of younger people, considering individual and contextual factors as determinants of possible return. By detecting these determinants, one can create better policy measures not only to encourage people to return, but also to encourage them to stay in their home country.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section delineates the theoretical background and gives a brief review of the literature in this field. Section 3 describes the data and method used in the analysis and provides background information about return intentions of young migrants. Section 4 presents and discusses the main findings obtained by the econometric analysis, while Section 5 concludes with policy recommendations and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical background with a literature review

2.1 Multifaceted nature of return migration motives

There is no universal migration theory that can capture the complexity of migration (de Haas, 2014). Several authors provide a comprehensive overview of various migration theories explaining different degrees of explanatory power offered by each theory and methodological approach (e.g., Massey et al., 1993; Hagen-Zanker, 2008; de Haas, 2014).

The micro and macro migration theories used to investigate initial migration decisions can be used as theoretical underpinnings for return migration research. Theories are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they are often complementary to each other, proving that the decision to migrate or return is often influenced by many factors that are socio-economic in nature.

Different theories are used to assess or explain various facets of the international migration phenomenon (Massey et al., 1993). For example, according to neoclassical theory, people migrate to different countries because of wage differences, i.e., migrants expect higher earnings in host countries (Todaro, 1969). The new economics of labor migration considers the decision to migrate a household decision, whereby migrants hope to generate higher incomes and accumulate savings, while at the same time they tend to remit part of their income to the household in their home country (Stark & Bloom, 1985). A structural approach suggests that utility-maximizing individuals make decisions taking into account the broader institutional, social and market context. Thus, the social network of migrants plays a significant role in decision-making according to social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986), and global trends significantly impact incentives to migrate, as suggested by a transnational approach (Pries, 2004). Cumulative causation theory suggests that individual decisions to migrate can, over time and through social networks, encourage others to migrate, resulting in circular and cumulative causation (Myrdal, 1957). Thus, no single theory is self-sufficient. The same holds for return migration research as return itself is influenced by the initial motivation for migration, the duration of the stay abroad and the conditions under which the return takes place, not only in the host country but in the home country as well (Cassarino, 2004, according to Ghosh, 2000).

Return migrants can be differentiated in terms of their motives to return, as well as their responses to situations in the host and home countries related to economic, social, political and institutional conditions (e.g., a new government, the end of war, a desire to raise children in the country of origin). For example, Battistella (2018) identified four major types of return: (i) return of achievement, which happens when the original goal of migration is met; (ii) return of completion, which occurs when the contract is done even though the migrant would

rather stay, but it is not an option; (iii) return of setback, which is caused by a migrant's desire to end the migration process due to personal reasons, dissatisfaction with work and the like, and (iv) return of crisis, when a migrant returns due to political or security reasons in the home or host country, or it can be forced return.

The pull-push theory (Lee, 1966) identified several factors that explain the direction and extent of migration, including objective and subjective factors such as status perception, satisfaction with one's own life and aspirations. Push factors are those that motivate individuals to voluntarily or by force leave their home country (war, natural disasters, bad economic conditions, unemployment, etc.). Pull factors are those that attract migrants to move to the host country. They include better employment opportunities, better quality of life, having a family or friends in a certain country, a better social or health system, a better political situation, and the like. This theory is interesting in the sense that it can also be applied to return migration.

That said, we build our research on return migration using neoclassical theory, the new economics of labor migration, and a structural approach that encompasses a social network and transnational approach. These theories respond to the complexity of return migration by relating return migration as an individual decision to earn a higher income elsewhere (a neoclassical theory approach), which is often made on behalf of and for the whole family (the new economics of labor), taking into account economic, social, political and other contexts (a structural approach). Each selected approach addresses one facet of migration returns. The neoclassical approach sees migration as a permanent move to the host country and return as a failure to do so, because the migrant has failed in his or her attempt to take advantage of higher earnings. When it comes to the new economics of labor, migration to the host country is of a temporary nature and return is understood as a success story in the host country, where the migrant has met his or her original goals of higher income, savings and remittances to the household. Finally, in terms of the structural approach, return is considered to be a question of context and it is evaluated as a success or a failure depending on the reality of the home economy and society (Cassarino, 2004).

The issue of young migrants and their intentions to return is particularly interesting. Young migrants

comprise over 10 percent of the 232 million international migrants and represent the most mobile social group (International Labor Organization, 2023). Young people's decision to migrate corresponds to the prevailing migration theory, according to which it is a response to better labor opportunities, educational attainment, or it may be part of a broader household strategy for risk diversification (Heckert, 2015). Hall (2021) also suggests that the reasons why young people migrate are related to either high unemployment or underemployment, labor market flexibility, various governance failures, gender inequality, etc. It is equally challenging to investigate return migration of young people in general, i.e., their return intentions, since they are determined by ties to the host and home country at the same time (Carling & Pettersen, 2014). A further challenge arises from the disparity between the intention to return and actual return, which makes the research more complex, but still valuable from a public policy perspective (Waldorf, 1995). Cassarino (2013) uses the notion of returnee's preparedness, which does not refer only to the willingness of migrants to return, but also to their readiness to return. This is a voluntary act of the migrant that requires time and willingness to mobilize tangible and intangible resources and social capital, as well as to collect information on circumstances and conditions in their home country in order to actually return. Resource mobilization and the returnee's preparedness can be used to explain why some returnees become actors of development while others do not (Cassarino, 2013).

Hall (2021) outlines three issues hindering research on youth migration and development. Firstly, insufficient age-disaggregated data restricts a comprehensive insight into youth migration patterns. Secondly, dataset biases toward certain regions hinder a global understanding of youth migration dynamics. Thirdly, limited data on distinctions between general international and internal/irregular migration, such as those absorbed into the informal economy, hinder understanding of their impact on development and government efforts to optimize their contributions.

The research on young Croatian migrants and their intentions to return presented in this paper expands the empirical resources on return migration in the CEE countries and reveals some of the pull factors that need to be taken into consideration when creating migration policies.

2.2 Return migration in the Republic of Croatia

The Republic of Croatia has been dealing with a significant emigration problem for a long time, with a constant population outflow outpacing the inflow. Migration statistics show that this situation is ongoing, with long-term negative net migration. According to the migration pattern, 63.5% of emigrants were men, and people aged 20 to 39 made up the largest age group (45.9%) (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Working on a proactive immigration policy would be of great national importance, given the economic and demographic repercussions of these numbers.

The Republic of Croatia has grappled with a persistent emigration challenge, marked by a continuous outflow of population that exceeds incoming individuals. Migration data underscore the endurance of this situation, with a constant negative trend of net migration from foreign nations. In 2021, for instance, 64.2 percent of Croatian citizens chose to emigrate abroad, while 29.6 percent relocated to the Republic of Croatia. According to migration patterns, 63.5 percent of emigrants were male, and individuals aged 20 to 39 constituted the largest age demographic with 45.9 percent (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). In the light of these statistics, the formulation of a proactive immigration policy takes on significant national importance due to the economic and demographic implications associated with these figures.

Return migration in general and youth migration and its impact on development in particular are rather under-researched, even though Croatia is recording an increase in emigration with all the negative social and economic consequences. To the best of our knowledge, return migration of Croatian (young) emigrants has not been systematically analyzed. More attention has been paid to emigration flows. Thus, the expansion of the theoretical and empirical knowledge on return migration of Croatian emigrants would serve as a qualitative input in the effective design of migration policy.

Earlier studies on emigration trends include analysis conducted by e.g. Vidović and Mara (2015), Župarić-Iljić (2016), Jurić (2017) and Draženović et al. (2018), each contributing to the discussion of emigration outflows in Croatia. These authors drew attention to an important issue of Croatian migration research – inaccurate migration statistics and methodological problems. According to Vidović

and Mara (2015), there were no reliable migration data since the number of emigrants depends on the self-reporting of emigrants to the Ministry of Interior. The same applies to immigrants. Župarić-Iljić (2016) also warned of the methodological problems that indicate the need to compare the number of emigrants to the number of immigrants at the final destination. The same difficulties with methodology and data collection are still present.

There are several studies on migration motivation in Croatia. Rajković Iveta and Horvatin (2017) identified economic motives as the most important but not the only factors – in their study, they emphasize psychological reasons caused by nepotism and corruption. Jurić (2017) investigated the more recent emigration of Croats to Germany and found out that the main motive for leaving is the assumption that work ethics and honesty as values are not institutionalized in Croatia, which jeopardizes the morality of Croatian society. Becić et al. (2019) explored the role of labor market indicators in migration movements and confirmed that differences in wages, as well as precarious employment, influence international movements, supporting both traditional and recent economic migration theories. A recent study on migration motivation of young people in Croatia (Perić Pavišić et al., 2022) shows that migration motivation of Croatian youth is a combination of push and pull factors, whereby pull factors are perceived as stronger motivation than push factors. Among push factors, respondents identified a generally bad situation in their home country (a social situation, a low standard of living, insecurity, lack of perspective, uncertainty). The most important pull factors identified were better economic conditions and quality of life in the host country. This was also confirmed in another study on Croatian migrations (Kozic et al., 2020). A study carried out by Vukić et al. (2023) showed that young Croats see the possibility to migrate to EU countries as a type of internal migration, and they make decisions based on information about the situation in Croatia and the potential host country. Most respondents in the study expressed their intention not to stay abroad permanently. Although these are migration-motivating factors, their identification is necessary for the analysis of return intentions, since their elimination might have a positive impact thereon.

The issue of return migration is related to the efforts of governments to attract back the population

that emigrated. This requires national strategies and policies aiming to promote returning migrants to remit funds, bring back their knowledge and skills obtained abroad, enable them to have certain rights such as dual citizenship, and the like (Lang, 2013). In the case of Croatia, the importance of emigration and the process of joining the EU have had an impact on the development of national migration policies. The first formal policy document on migration was adopted in 2007, in the midst of the EU accession process followed by the development of the legal and institutional framework necessary to regulate migrations (Knezović & Grošinić, 2017).

More recent government actions aimed at return migration are envisaged in different acts, strategic documents and programs focused on returnees. For example, the Central State Office for Croats Abroad is defined by the Act on Relations of the Republic of Croatia with Croats Abroad (Official Gazette, 124/11, 16/12) and aims at conducting various activities to help create conditions for return migration to Croatia, propose policies that inspire and assist return and the integration of returnees. The Government introduced the scheme titled *I choose Croatia* ("Biram Hrvatsku") aimed at motivating emigrants to return with incentives to start a business and to encourage demographic revival in the parts that suffered significant migration outflows (Croatian Employment Service, 2023). Furthermore, the *Central State Office* for Demography and Youth has created the *National Youth Program 2023-2025*, approved by the Government of the Republic of Croatia (2023), which includes strategic goals such as the necessity to create conditions for youth not to emigrate, as well as to encourage return and integration of those who left. The implementation and capacities of these institutional efforts have yielded some results (Petrić, 2023), yet the net migration remains negative (according to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2022), the highest and the lowest net migration were recorded in 2017 with -31,799 and in 2020 with -632, respectively), indicating that programs and policies still lack significant effectiveness.

Research on Croatian emigrants and their reasons for considering return may help policymakers identify relevant pull factors. This information can serve as a foundation for evaluating and potentially modifying existing migration policies, along with developmental strategies.

3. Data, descriptive statistics and method

The present study utilized data obtained through an online structured questionnaire survey conducted in 2018. The survey gathered responses from 1,043 participants, aged between 18 and 35, who had already emigrated from Croatia and were active users of one or more social network sites dedicated to Croatian emigrants, such as "Croats in Ireland" or "Croats in Germany". An online questionnaire was made accessible through these networks, allowing any eligible emigrant to voluntarily participate. Moreover, the collected data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. The data show that a significant proportion of respondents were female, accounting for 64.02% of the sample. Most participants emigrated alone, belonged to the age group of 25 to 31 years, and were married (42.84%). The educational background of the majority of respondents included completed four years of secondary school education. Although a considerable number of participants were employed, they were primarily working outside of their professional fields (48.54%). Most of the respondents resided in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, followed by Great Britain, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark, and the smallest number of respondents resided in the Mediterranean (Greece, Spain, and Portugal).

We cannot confirm with certainty whether this sample represents the broader population of Croatian emigrants because the exact socio-demographic profile of Croatian emigrants is mostly unknown. However, for the purpose of comparison, the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2019) data indicate that there were 35,515 Croatian inhabitants who emigrated in the year of our survey (2018). Most of them were men, accounting for 55.06% of the emigrants. The statistics also indicate that the most numerous age group was between 20 and 39 years. Similar patterns in emigration statistics can be observed in subsequent years. Furthermore, our sample size significantly exceeds the recommended guideline of 10:1, as suggested in the literature (Hair et al., 2014). Consequently, despite the uncertainty surrounding the socio-demographic profile, the findings derived from this ample sample offer valuable insights into migration trends within the Croatian emigration population.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable		Obs	Mean	Frequencies
Demographic	Return intention	1,030	1.577	No: 55.73%; maybe: 30.87%; yes: 13.40%
	Gender	1,034	0.360	Male: 35.98%; Female: 64.02%
	Marital status	1,034	2.149	Single: 27.25%; in a relationship: 29.21%; married: 42.84%
	Age	1,030	2.107	18-24: 20.68%; 25-31: 47.96%; 32-35: 31.36%
	Educational level	1,035	4.397	Primary school and lower: 1.16%; 3-year secondary school: 17.00%; 4-year secondary school: 36.71%; University: 31.01% Master's degree, PhD: 4.11%;
	Working status in the host country	1,030	3.101	Unemployed: 9.51%; Student: 6.41% Employed outside of profession: 48.54%; Employed in the profession: 35.53%
	Migration way	1,030	1.842	Alone: 41.94%; Coupled: 31.94%; With the family: 26.12%
	Migration year	1,037	0.650	Before 2017: 65%; After 2017: 35%
	Destination preference	1,027	1.621	Continental: 57.74%; Anglo: 27.07%; Nordic: 10.52%; Mediterranean: 4.67%
			VIF	
Situation-driven	Economic success	1,016	4.123	1.25
	Social integration	985	3.066	1.47
	Cultural shock	986	2.818	1.46
	Crime perception	972	2.870	1.10

Source: Authors' own research

As descriptive statistics show, the majority of young Croatian emigrants do not intend to return to their home country – only 13.4% do. Interestingly, another study (Perić Pavišić et al., 2022) shows quite equivalent results: only 23.4% of respondents claim they intend to return to their home country, while almost one third (30.2%) do not. Moreover, the same study emphasizes the importance of social identity, i.e., belonging to a certain social group, which can be related to social integration in our study as a significant predictor of young people's intention to return. A Polish study (Eade et al., 2007) also confirmed that young people's plans to stay or return were often open-ended, with some pursuing a strategy of 'intentional unpredictability', while others always meant to return.

The dependent variable in this study is return intentions of young Croatian migrants. It was measured by asking the respondents if they plan to return to

Croatia, with the following three response categories: no, maybe – I have not decided yet, yes. In line with Snel et al. (2015), we treated the latter category as a meaningful category under the assumption that migrants, who do not know how long they will stay in the host country, make "intentional unpredictability", which is, as stated by Snel et al. (2015), typical of post-accession migrants from CEE countries. Values from 1 to 3 were associated respectively to these three ranked levels of migration intentions, whereby the baseline category, or "reference case", is given to the variable when it takes the level 1.

Drawing on the theoretical and empirical literature on general migration, youth migration and return migration briefly reviewed in the previous section, the paper assumes that return migration decision-making is a multifaceted and multidimensional process. It is predominantly the process in which a migration unit (an individual or a household),

guided by a strategic plan and goals, makes decisions determined not only by its demographic characteristics and transnational experience, but also by the perception of economic, social and institutional factors in the home and host countries. Since it cannot be explained by relying on a theory that puts into focus a single variable or a factor composed of one-dimensional variables, we have used a mixed theory approach. Accordingly, we constructed three composite variables – economic success, social integration, and cultural shock, which became independent variables. The former is in line with neoclassical economics and the new economics of labor migration, while the second two variables, social integration and cultural shock, draw from the social network and transnational approach, respectively. These variables were created to get a clearer picture of return intentions, and at the same time, avoid multicollinearity issues. Considering the variance inflation factors (VIF), this is successfully done and hence multicollinearity is not an issue (the highest VIF does not exceed 2, as shown in Table 1). Factor analysis enabled us to reveal the composition of each index. Among a set of twelve items on return migration intentions stated in the questionnaire, using the principal component factor method and the Kaiser off criterion, factor analysis extracted three factors that explain 58.51% of variance. Economic success was measured by satisfaction with the standard of living in the host country, satisfaction with income and employment compliance with qualifications. Social integration was measured by social life opportunities, evaluation of established social relations, the feeling of stress and the perception of work overload. Cultural shock included the feeling of nostalgia and loneliness, the perception of host country as a “new homeland” and the perception of emigration as a bad decision.

The calculated values of Cronbach's alphas (0.6910, 0.7886, 0.7349, respectively) suggest that each of them has been internally consistent, indicating that they are suitable for further analytic procedures. Hence, their factor scores are calculated as a weighted sum of the selected items, whereby the rotated factor loadings (via varimax orthogonal rotation) were used as weights. Finally, the variables are rescaled to the values 1-5 to correspond to other variables, particularly to the crime perception (defined as a feeling of walking safe alone in the dark, walking alone during the day and being home alone at night) variable, which represents our last variable

subset. This variable addresses the question of security and trust in the policy and legal system and it generally reflects the perception of institutional quality. A common name for the economic success, cultural shock, social integration and crime perception variables, which is used in this paper, is the situation-driven variables.

The higher the values of the economic success or crime perception variables, the more the respondents are satisfied with their own economic success, they consider their life in the host country less safe than in their home country, and consequently have less trust in institutions in the host country. Likewise, the higher the value of the cultural shock or social integration variables, the more the respondents experience cultural shock and feel less integrated in the host country.

As for the situation-driven variables, respondents are mostly satisfied with economic success achieved in the host countries. The highest average grade of 4.12 supports that finding. In addition, the average grade of cultural shock (2.82) suggests they have not perceived the socio-economic situation in the host country as a shock. Transnational practices such as travelling or communication facilitated by modern technology is the reason for such perception as well as the migration tradition and the numerous Croatian migrant communities established in the host countries. Furthermore, considering the average grade given for the social integration variable (3.07), they feel neither socially integrated nor disintegrated in the host country. Moreover, the average value of the crime perception variable (2.87) indicates that the respondents feel relatively safe in the host country, and hence, have more trust in the institutions in the host countries than in Croatia. Wilcoxon signed-rank z test statistics support these findings; they indicate that all situation-driven variables are significantly different from the neutral stance (“neither agree nor disagree”) except the social integration variable (for economic success: $z = 25.842$, $p = 0.000$; for social integration $z = 1.133$, $p = 0.257$; for cultural shock $z = -7.362$, $p = 0.000$; for crime perception $z = -3.512$, $p = 0.000$). Further analysis performed by an ordered logit regression method needs to reveal the impact of explanatory variables on return intentions of young migrants.

An ordered logit regression model was used as a tool to model the factors that affect the outcomes of return migration intentions. This allows us to predict the dependent categorical variable, migra-

tion intentions, which is measured at a three-level ordinal scale, as previously explained. We possess four independent explanatory variables: crime perception, economic success, social integration, and cultural shock. These variables were assessed on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. A rating of 1 signifies a very high perceived crime level and cultural shock, as well as very low levels of economic success and social integration. A rating of 3 denotes a neutral response, while a rating of 5 indicates a very low perceived crime level and cultural shock, as well as a very highly perceived achieved economic success and social integration. A detailed description of an ordered logit regression model can be found in Fullerton and Xu (2016).

The Brant, Wolfe Gould and likelihood ratio tests, which provide chi-square statistics, may be used to test if the proportional odds assumption holds. The underlying null hypothesis is that the relationship is proportional, i.e. parallel. If the assumption, i.e. the null, is violated, parameter estimation will be inconsistent (Eluru & Yasmin, 2015). In that case, the generalized ordered logit/partial proportional odds model may be used as a superior alternative, as suggested by Williams (2016).

4. Results with discussion

Based upon logit regression, we present a model in the form of log odds. It provides the results of the proportional odds logit model (POM) with the situation-driven variables only (see Table 2).

Table 2 Logistic model results

	Estimated Coefficient	Robust Standard Error
Crime perception	-0.021	0.060
Social integration	1.401*	0.111
Economic success	-0.273**	0.117
Cultural shock	0.162***	0.096
Obs.	964	
Log pseudolikelihood	-759.8365	
Wald chi2(4)	278.47 (p < .000)	
Pseudo R ²	0.175	
Brant test	3.95 (p = 0.413; df = 4)	
Wolfe Gould	4.022 (p = 0.403; df = 4)	
Likelihood ratio	4.035 (p = 0.401; df = 4)	

Note: Return intentions is the dependent variable. The user-written command "oparallel" was used to test the odds assumption in STATA 16.0. *, ** and *** denote significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels.

Source: Authors' own research

The Wald chi-square of 278.47 with a p-value of .000 indicates that the model is statistically significant, compared to the null model with no predictors. Likewise, the values of McFadden's pseudo R-squared suggest the model fits the data in a satisfactory way. In addition, the Brant, Wolfe Gould and likelihood ratio tests confirm that the proportional odds assumption is not violated.

In the estimated model, the statistically significant and positive coefficients of the social integration and cultural shock variables show that migrants

who feel they are less socially integrated in the host country or have less transnational experiences and hence consider that it is harder to live and work in the host country than in Croatia, are 4.06 and 1.18 times more likely to express return intentions, respectively, while other variables in the model are held constant. The statistically significant and negative coefficient of the economic success variable shows that the respondents who perceive that they have achieved economic success in the host country are 0.76 times more likely to express the intention

to stay there, *ceteris paribus*. In addition, those who perceive it is safer in Croatia than in the host country are 0.98 times more likely to express their intention to return, while all other variables are constant.

The results show that the reasons shaping return migration intentions are overlapping; they are obviously multifaceted and multi-determined. A significant effect of economic success supports neo-classical migration theory which hypothesizes that failure to achieve economic success, i.e. expected earnings in the host country, provides an important motive to return.

The same was found in a study on Turkish emigrants to Germany - their return or return intentions are hypothesized to be mainly the result of their economic failure (Bettin et al., 2018). At the same time, transnational experiences and the density of social network matter, as hypothesized by the corresponding theories. A study conducted in Thailand (Tong & Piotrowski, 2010) emphasizes existing family and other social ties in the home country as a significant predictor of return intentions. The above-mentioned Turkish study (Bettin et al., 2018) found that several life events do have an important role in shaping intentions to return. Entering the empty-nest stage, becoming unemployed, and becoming employed in the host country increases the likelihood of return intention, while partnership dissolution and childbirth act as a deterrent.

In a nutshell, the results show that the social integration variable has the largest impact on the probability of a migrant expressing return intention. Tabuga (2018) also claimed that migrant networks are significant during the later stages of migration planning rather than in the initial phase. From the host country's point of view, this is valuable information. A country must ensure their full social integration if it wants to attract young people. From the home country's perspective, the valuable information is associated with the results with regard to the perception of institutional quality and economic success. To keep young talents at home, it should create a positive, optimistic, favorable business environment, full of opportunities, as well as stable, effective and efficient institutions. The role of the government is important, which is in line with proposal of the new economics of labor.

Our results, emphasizing the importance of social integration and cultural shock and adding to Borozan and Barković Bojanić's (2012) findings, also

suggest that Croatian young people are not exclusively and predominantly economic migrants, and emigration will not stop even if expected earnings are equalized internationally. It seems that Croatian young migrants are looking for better opportunities in all spheres of life.

5. Conclusion

Return migration has received less attention in the migration literature even though it is equally challenging for both academia and policy makers. However, a review of the existing literature reveals that sustainable return migration represents a complex issue that is particularly important when viewed in the light of the return migration-development nexus due to potential returnees in terms of financial and human capital.

This paper is focused on the return intentions of young people, who are of both economic and demographic importance to the host and home countries. Thus, from the policy perspective, understanding return intentions of young people serves as a valuable input for public policy makers in terms of keeping them as citizens and labor force. Our research offers new empirical evidence for Croatian emigrants as potential returnees, who share many socioeconomic similarities with expatriates from other CEE countries and for whom research on return motives is scarce, in order to better understand return motives, intentions, and readiness to return. Given that the outcome categories of return migration intentions are ordered in terms of the intensity of intentions, the ordered logistic regression method was chosen for the analysis. It took the natural ordering of responses into account to examine the effect of situation-driven variables on return intentions of Croatian young migrants.

The research results have once again proved that no single theory can explain the complexity of migration and that often contrasting theories have a better explanatory effect. Our empirical research was built upon a mixed theory approach, which proved theoretically and empirically that economic determinants play an important role in return intentions, yet non-economic factors are gaining momentum in this decision process. Namely, factors such as social acceptance, integration and intensity of cultural shock in the host country are highly "valued" in terms of intentions to stay, as well as social ties

to the home country, the perception of safety in the host and home country and age.

Our findings reveal that return intentions of young migrants remain open to further empirical research. There are several suggestions for further research. A decision to return is as complex as the decision to migrate, thus many factors are included in the decision-making process. To capture this complexity, a more holistic approach is needed when investigating potential returnees and their reintegration into the economy and society in the home country. In addition to the economic perspective, it would be valuable to include a sociological and psychological approach since return encompasses challenges of a social and psychological nature. Returnee adaptation to the political, social, and cultural environments after gaining international migration experience should be the focus of the sociological perspective. The psychological perspective should consider the changes in returnee's own life in terms of work ethics, attitudes, beliefs and behavior in general. Collecting data on Croatian emigrants should be enhanced with particular emphasis on their socio-economic and demographic profiling in order to capture emigrants as a diverse group of people. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to investigate potential transnational relationships and

networks they develop, both formal and informal back home. Research should focus on good practices abroad and the measures used to assist voluntary return.

By contrasting theoretical perspectives and expanding empirical research using various methodological approaches to migration, particularly examining economic and non-economic factors that impact migration decision-making, we can deepen our understanding of return intentions and be a step closer to comprehending the complexity of the entire migration process, which is in turn beneficial to policy interventions in both home and host countries.

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