



Creative Commons Attribution –
NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Preliminary communication

<https://doi.org/10.31784/zvr.14.1.31>

Received: 30. 11. 2025.

Accepted: 11. 4. 2026.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES AND EMIGRATION INTENTIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA: THE ROLE OF JOB SATISFACTION AND OPPORTUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Rejhan Sulejman

PhD, Assistant Professor, University of Tetova, Str. Ilinden nn, 1200 Tetovo,
Republic of North Macedonia; email: rejhan.sulejman@unite.edu.mk

Emilija Andovska – Dina

PhD, Lecturer, Skopje Metropolitan College, Bul. 8 Septemvri 19a, 1000 Skopje,
Republic of North Macedonia; email: e.dina@skopjemetropolitan.edu.mk

ABSTRACT

This study examines the interplay between job opportunities, job satisfaction, and emigration intentions among young adults in North Macedonia. Using a cross-sectional survey of 110 respondents, the research explores (1) how satisfied young adults are with their current job or job opportunities, (2) how difficult they perceive the task of finding a good job in their field to be, and (3) their likelihood of emigrating within the next two years. Furthermore, the study assesses willingness to remain in North Macedonia provided a stable job in their field were available. The research applies a descriptive methodology to understand how job opportunity perceptions and job satisfaction relate to emigration intentions in a transitional economy context. Findings indicate that although many young adults face constrained job opportunities and significant barriers to commensurate employment, a majority would prefer to stay in North Macedonia provided they secure a stable, well-paid position in their field. The original contribution of the study lies in connecting job satisfaction and perceived job opportunity in a transitional economy with emigration intention, offering implications for policymakers seeking to retain skilled youth.

Keywords: young adults, job satisfaction, job opportunity, emigration intention, North Macedonia

1. INTRODUCTION

Transitional economies-those shifting from centrally planned to market-oriented systems-face distinct challenges in labor markets such as systematic unemployment, skill disparities, and precarious job transitions. For young people entering these types of labor markets,

research shows amplified risks of “employment scarring,” a phenomenon where early career unemployment negatively affects future job prospects (Mojsovska-Blazevski *et al.*, 2017).

According to the literature, it takes an average of 31 months for young people in North Macedonia to find a stable and/or fulfilling employment after graduating from high school, and many of them continue to be unemployed or working in unsatisfactory positions during this time (ILO, 2023). Recent data indicates that 57.1% of employed youth are underemployed, holding precarious positions with pay below their qualifications or the national average, highlighting the nation’s youth labor market weakness (UNICEF, 2024).

The perception of a scarcity of quality employment among youth in North Macedonia is corroborated by qualitative evidence showing that many are poorly paid, require long hours, or are in informal labor markets (Trpeski *et al.* 2023). These constraints influence perceptions of difficulty seeking professional-level employment,” and subsequently shaping their expectations and behavior in the labor market (Pashovska, 2024).

Job satisfaction serves as a key indicator of labor market attachment and well-being. Among employed youth in North Macedonia, satisfaction levels vary, with younger cohorts generally reporting higher levels of contentment than their older young counterparts (World Bank, 2020). However, high levels of underemployment and skills mismatch undermine overall job satisfaction (UNICEF, 2024). Approximately half of young workers are engaged in positions that do not fully utilize their qualifications or skills, leading to decreased job satisfaction (European Commission, 2025).

Furthermore, factors associated with job quality, specifically remuneration, stability, and opportunities for advancement, all impact job satisfaction, and the willingness to remain in the position. Conversely, poor job quality is more likely to have the opposite effect and increase the chances of individuals, particularly younger individuals seeking alternative occupational opportunities, like emigration (Ciunova Shuleska, 2022).

Job satisfaction should therefore be considered in a broader context, reflective of job quality and associated job characteristics.

The decision to emigrate is further influenced by economic, social, and psychological factors. In the case of North Macedonia, research indicates that a significant portion of young individuals consider emigration, prompted by limited employment prospects and material aspirations (Shapkova *et al.*, 2024).

In particular, young professionals at the beginning stages of their employment journey, considering uncertain employment prospects, seek alternative employment opportunities (Zulfu Alili *et al.*, 2024). Studies indicate that two-thirds of young people claim at least some desire of migration, including employment mismatch and underemployment as significant underlying drivers (FES, 2023). According to IMF (2025) the population in North Macedonia has been continuously decreasing primarily due to high emigration rates, and is expected to decrease over the medium term, potentially significantly reducing the economic growth.

However, non-economic factors such as family relationships, cultural attachment, and quality of life are also contributing factors in emigration intentions. The literature confirms that a stable, well-remunerated employment in their field raises the chances of youth deciding to remain in the country (Gomez, n/a).

Both the literature and recent empirical evidence indicate limited job opportunities and low job satisfaction, as well as significant emigration aspirations for young adults in North Macedonia (Bajrami Ollogu *et al.*, 2023). However, despite the strong preference to stay, this decision is mainly contingent on whether they can secure a stable high-quality employment (UNICEF, 2024).

From the literature review we can conclude that existing studies for North Macedonia research these phenomena in isolation, focusing on either job satisfaction or migration intentions. However, there is a clear gap in understanding of how job satisfaction and the job opportunities influence emigration intentions among young adults.

2. METHODOLOGY

The goal of this paper is to examine the interconnection between employment opportunities, job satisfaction and emigration intentions among young adults in North Macedonia. This study explores whether the availability of quality employment and working conditions can change the young people's perceptions of their future in the country. It also investigates how the economic conditions, workplace environment, and opportunity for career advancement contribute to the decision-making process of whether to stay in North Macedonia or emigrate abroad.

In order to achieve the research objectives, a quantitative research method was established, and an online survey was distributed through a snowball method to reach young people across North Macedonia. The data collection took place from July to October 2025 and produced 110 valid respondents from diverse regions of the country.

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Responses
Male	21.80%
Female	78.20%

Source: Author's research

This paper targets young adults aged 18–35 in North Macedonia. The sample's gender distribution is largely female, comprising 78.2% of the total respondents, whereas male represent 21.8%.

Table 2. Age

Age	Responses
18-24	42.70%
25-29	25.50%
30-35	31.80%

Source: Author's research

The age distribution shows that 42.7% are aged between 18-24, 25.5% are 25–29 years old, and the remaining 31.8% belong to the 30-35 age category.

Table 3. City

City	Responses
Skopje	84.55%
Kumanovo	9.09%
Bitola	2.73%
Ohrid	0.91%
Gevgelija	1.82%

Source: Author's research

Geographically, the majority of the respondents are from Skopje, which accounts for 84.55%, followed by respondents from Kumanovo with 9.1%. A percentage of 2.73 of the respondents are from Bitola, while Ohrid and Gevgelija contribute with only 0.91% and 1.82%, respectively.

Table 4. Level of education

Education	Responses
Secondary education	37.30%
Vocational training	1.80%
Bachelor's degree	46.30%
Master or higher	14.50%

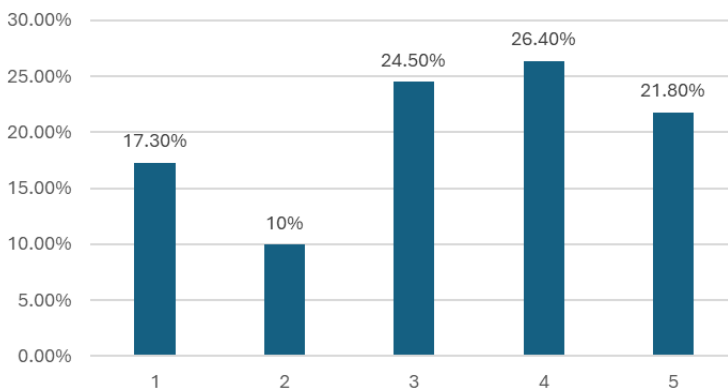
Source: Author's research

3. EMPIRICAL DATA AND ANALYSIS

This section provides empirical findings derived from the online survey conducted among young adults in North Macedonia. The results provide insights into the level of job satisfaction of young adults, their employment opportunities and their correlation with emigration intentions. Furthermore, it gives us insights about the main reasons that give potential emigration intentions among young adults in North Macedonia.

3.1 Job Satisfaction

Figure 1. How satisfied are you with your current job (or job opportunities)?

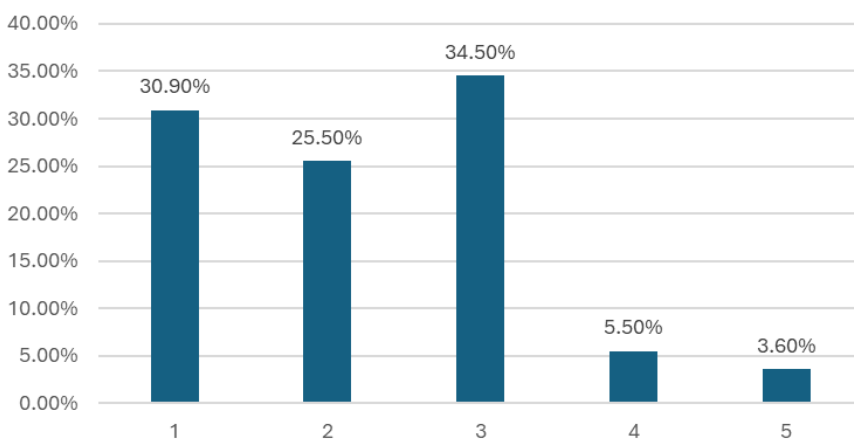


Source: Author's research

The distribution of satisfaction level shows a considerable variation. The given data range from level 1 – very dissatisfied to level 5 – very satisfied. A total of 17.3% of the respondents have rated very low levels of satisfaction with their current job, 10% have selected level 2. Mid-level satisfaction is a little higher with 24.5%, while level 4 and level 5 represent 26.4% and 21.8% of the respondents, respectively. The given results show us that the level of job satisfaction is generally moderate, however the substantial proportion of lower levels suggest considerable job dissatisfaction among young adults in North Macedonia.

3.2 Difficulty of finding quality employment

Figure 2. How difficult is it to find a good job in your field in North Macedonia?



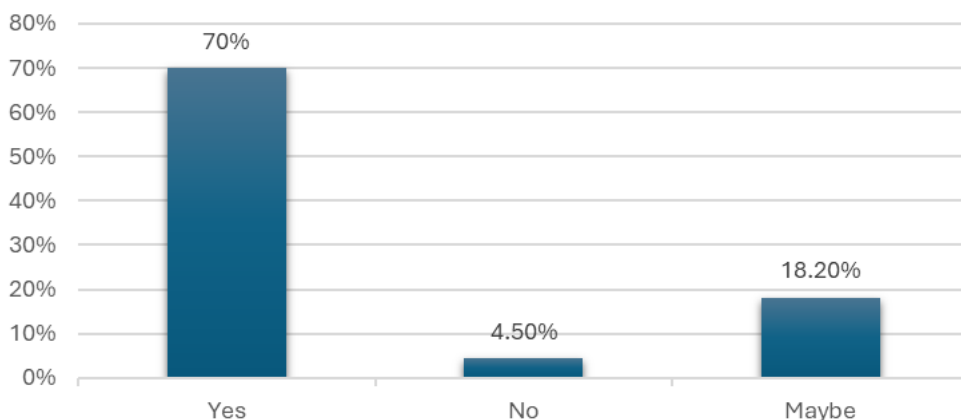
Source: Author's research

Figure 2 presents the distribution of difficulty in finding high-quality employment in North Macedonia. The given data ranges from level 1 – very difficult to level 5 – very easy. A percentage of 30.9 of the respondents have rated that it is very difficult to find a high-quality employment, followed by 25.5% which have selected level 2, and the largest portion of the respondents i.e. 34.5% have reached a moderate level of difficulty. A very low number of the respondents have selected level 4 and level 5, or 5.5% and 3.6%, respectively.

The given data indicates that young adults in North Macedonia perceive the labor market as very constrained, with a limited availability of high-quality employment opportunities. Furthermore, it suggests that with improvements in the labor market and quality of employment, it could significantly reduce the tendency to move abroad among young adults in North Macedonia.

3.3 Intentions to remain in North Macedonia

Figure 3. Would you remain in North Macedonia if you had a stable job in your field?

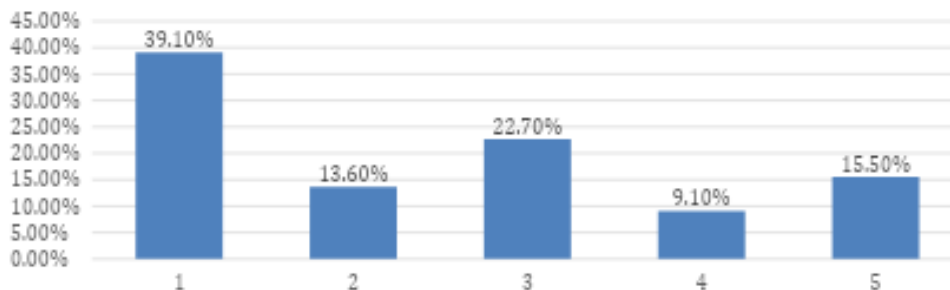


Source: Author's research

When young people were asked if they would have stayed in their homeland if they had a stable job, 70% responded positively, demonstrating job stability as the crucial factor in shaping retention. Regarding the inclination to migrate, 18.2% of the respondents declared 'maybe', indicating that they might take other factors into consideration in their decision-making process, and only 4.5% of the respondents responded negatively.

3.4 Migration intentions

Figure 4. How likely is it that you will emigrate in the next two years?

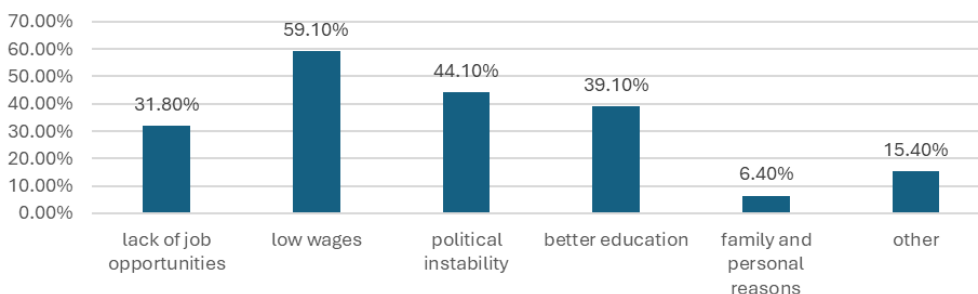


Source: Author's research

The data from this figure shows how interested young people are in leaving North Macedonia within the next two years. Most of the respondents, 39.1% have reported that it is very unlikely that they would migrate, followed by 13.6% who show a low probability of leaving the country. Meanwhile, 9.1% have selected level 4, and 15.5% have selected level 5, which represents a high level of migration intentions.

3.5 Motivation for emigration

Figure 5. What are the main reasons that would motivate you to emigrate?



Source: Author's research

Figure 5 shows the main reasons that young adults take into consideration in their decision-making process regarding migration intentions. The respondents had the possibility to choose up to three options when answering the question. The most prominent factor is low wages with 59.1%, followed by political instability with 44.1% indicating that governance-related issues influence the everyday life concerns of young adults. Regarding specific motivators, 39.1% expressed their emigration intentions are driven by superior education opportunities abroad, and 31.8% identified the lack of employment opportunities as a key motivator for moving abroad. Only 6.4% of the respondents have selected family or personal issues, and 15.4% have selected 'other' reasons.

4. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small and is based on a sampling method, which can limit the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, there is a gender imbalance in the sample, with a majority of the respondents being female, which can influence the results since the findings may not reflect the perspective of migration intentions among males. Thirdly, the majority of the respondents are from Skopje, which means that this study may not fully represent the experiences of young adults from other regions of North Macedonia.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research align with the prevailing literature review on youth labor market challenges and emigration intentions in transitional economies such as North Macedonia. Prior research indicated that in transition economies young people face high unemployment rates, risky job transitions and skill disparities (Mojsovska-Blazevski *et al.*, 2017). These dynamics are corroborated by the present research, which generally highlights low satisfaction of employment opportunities and limited access to employment. The survey reveals that 21.8% of the respondents have reported high satisfaction, and 26.4% have reported good satisfaction indicating that almost half of the respondents are satisfied with the current job position. However, 17.3% have reported to be very dissatisfied followed by a portion of dissatisfied respondents with 10%. The finding shows disparities between young people, while a large group is satisfied a considerable portion continues to struggle with dissatisfaction at their job position.

The perception of job availability is another concern for young people in North Macedonia. A combined percentage of 56.4 of the respondents have stated that finding high-quality employment is very difficult (30.9%), or difficult (25.5%). The finding aligns with previous evidence stating that it takes 31 months for young people in North Macedonia to find a stable or fulfilling job after secondary school (ILO, 2023). Despite the challenges, 70% of the respondents have stated that they would remain in North Macedonia if they found a good stable employment, with 18.2% that would still be uncertain about leaving the country. The finding is consistent with the argument from the literature review that job mismatch and underemployment are significant drivers for leaving the country (FES, 2023).

When examining the migration intentions, most of the respondents have expressed a low propensity of migration intentions. Even though the literature review stated that two-thirds show some desire for migration (FES, 2023), this study demonstrates that 52.7% of the respondents do not expect to migrate in the next two years. However, it should be taken into consideration that there is still a significant portion of young adults wanting to leave the country, totaling 24.6%.

Economic factors proved to be the primary driver of migration intentions, where low wages were cited with 59.1%, followed by political instability with 44.1%, superior education opportunities abroad with 39.1%, and lack of employment opportunities with 31.8%. These

findings reinforce the argument from the literature review that economic reasons are the main factor for migration intentions (Ciunova Shuleska, 2022; Shapkova *et al.*, 2024).

Overall, the empirical results align with the argument in the literature review that young adults in North Macedonia confront a labor market with limited opportunities, low wages and skills mismatch all of which influence them to have a low job satisfaction and increase migration desires.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper is to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction, employment opportunities and emigration intentions among young adults in North Macedonia. To realize the objective an online survey through a snowball method was disseminated among young adults aged between 18-35 years in North Macedonia. The findings from this research reveal that young people in North Macedonia continue to face significant barriers in the labor market, such as limited availability of quality jobs, underemployment and skills mismatch. These factors contribute to moderate levels of job satisfaction with a notable portion of respondents reporting dissatisfaction from their job position due to unstable, low-paying or mismatched employment.

Despite these issues, the majority of the young adults have expressed a strong willingness to remain in the country, if they were provided with a stable well-paid job in their field. This furthermore emphasizes the importance of job quality such as adequate wages, stability and career opportunities.

These results provide practical implications for policymakers such as improving job stability, better remuneration and aligning skills with the labor market. Future studies could do research on larger and more geographically diverse samples to have a better and deeper understanding on the influence of job satisfaction on migration intentions.

Overall, this study emphasizes that job satisfaction and employment opportunities are an important factor in retaining young adults in North Macedonia.

REFERENCES

- Ayerst, S. and Kovachevska Stefanova, S. (2025) *Population dynamics, labor market integration, and migration: Republic of North Macedonia*. IMF Selected Issues Paper No. 2025/064. Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/-/media/files/publications/selected-issues-papers/2025/english/sipea2025064.pdf>
- Bajrami Ollogu, E. and Xhelili, A. (2025) *Lost potential: Understanding youth migration drivers and labor market perceptions in North Macedonia*. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/399156092>
- Ciunova Shuleska, A. (2022) 'Reflections on the emigration aspirations of young, educated people in small Balkan countries: a qualitative analysis of reasons to leave or stay in North Macedonia', *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*. doi: 10.54667/CEEMR.2022.07. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/91299701/Reflections_on_the_Emigration_Aspirations_of_Young_Educated_People_in_Small_Balkan_Countries_A_Qualitative_Analysis_of_Reasons_to_Leave_or_Stay_in_North_Macedonia

- European Commission (2025) *Integration of young people in the labour market – Republic of North Macedonia*. Available at: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/republic-of-north-macedonia/36-integration-of-young-people-in-the-labour-market>
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2023) *Youth migration and employment in North Macedonia*. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/skopje/21550.pdf>
- Gomez, T. (no date) 'Understanding youth migration patterns: an analysis of motivations and influencing factors', unpublished paper. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/125436535/Understanding_Youth_Migration_Patterns_An_Analysis_of_Motivations_and_Influencing_Factors
- International Labour Organization (2023) *Youth employment in North Macedonia: challenges and opportunities*. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/youth-employment>
- Mojsoška-Blazevski, N., Petreski, M. and Bojadziev, M.I. (2017) 'Youth survival in the labour market: Employment scarring in three transition economies', *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 28(2), pp. 312–331. doi:10.1177/1035304617706424.
- Pashovska, S. (2024) 'Different perception regarding employment opportunities – unemployed individuals and employers', *Horizons*, 1. doi: 10.20544/HORIZONS.1.1.24.P03. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392419923_DIFFERENT_PERCEPTION_REGARDING_EMPLOYMENT_OPPORTUNITIES_-_UNEMPLOYED_INDIVIDUALS_AND_EMPLOYERS
- Shapkova Kocevská, K., Tashevská, B., Trpkova-Nestorovská, M. and Makreshanska Mladenovská, S. (2024) 'Crossroads of aspiration: unveiling the migration intentions among university students in North Macedonia', *Stanovništvo*, 62(2), pp. 293–320. doi: 10.59954/stnv.651
- Trpeski, P., Trenovski, B., Kozheski, K. and Cvetanoska Mitev, M. (no date) *What determines informal economy and informal employment – the case of North Macedonia*. Available at: <https://repository.ukim.mk/server/api/core/bitstreams/f7373477-6b3e-4494-8e53-fa75d8d038e3/content>
- UNICEF (2024) *Youth in North Macedonia: employment and migration*. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/media/5256/file/Youth%20in%20North%20Macedonia_EN.pdf
- World Bank (2020) *Finding solutions to youth unemployment in North Macedonia*. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/867231589230179351/pdf/Finding-Solutions-to-Youth-Unemployment-in-North-Macedonia.pdf>
- Zulfu Alili, M., King, R. and Memeti, M. (2024) 'The migration intentions of university staff in North Macedonia: a potential brain drain?', *Eastern European Economics*, 62(5), pp. 633–649. doi: 10.1080/00128775.2023.2225494. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00128775.2023.2225494>
- UNICEF (2024) *Youth in North Macedonia: Employment and migration*. Skopje: UNICEF North Macedonia. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/media/5256/file/Youth%20in%20North%20Macedonia_EN.pdf



Creative Commons Attribution –
NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Prethodno priopćenje

<https://doi.org/10.31784/zvr.14.1.31>

Datum primitka rada: 30. 11. 2025.

Datum prihvaćanja rada: 11. 4. 2026.

IZAZOVI ZAPOŠLJAVANJA MLADIH I NAMJERE ISELJAVANJA U SJEVERNOJ MAKEDONIJI: ULOGA ZADOVOLJSTVA POSLOM I PERCEPCIJE PRILIKA

Rejhan Sulejman

Dr. sc., docentica, Sveučilište u Tetovu, Ul. Ilindenska bb, 1200 Tetovo, Republika Sjeverna Makedonija;
e-mail: rejhan.sulejman@unite.edu.mk

Emilija Andovska – Dina

Dr. sc., predavačica, Skopje Metropolitan College, Bul. 8 Septemvri 19a, 1000 Skoplje,
Republika Sjeverna Makedonija; e-mail: e.dina@skopjemetropolitan.edu.mk

SAŽETAK

U radu se analizira međuodnos mogućnosti zapošljavanja, zadovoljstva poslom i namjera iseljavanja među mladim odraslim osobama u Sjevernoj Makedoniji. Primjenom presječnog istraživanja na uzorku od 110 ispitanika ispituje se: (1) razina zadovoljstva mladih njihovim trenutačnim poslom ili prilikama za zapošljavanje, (2) percepcija težine pronalaska adekvatnog zaposlenja u struci te (3) vjerojatnost iseljavanja u iduće dvije godine. Nadalje, procjenjuje se spremnost na ostanak u Sjevernoj Makedoniji pod uvjetom dostupnosti stabilnog zaposlenja u struci. U istraživanju se primjenjuje deskriptivna metodologija kako bi se razumjela povezanost percepcije poslovnih prilika i zadovoljstva poslom s namjerama iseljavanja u kontekstu tranzicijskog gospodarstva. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da, iako se mnogi mladi suočavaju s ograničenim mogućnostima zapošljavanja i značajnim preprekama pri pronalasku odgovarajućeg zaposlenja u struci, većina njih bi radije ostala u Sjevernoj Makedoniji pod uvjetom da osigura stabilno i dobro plaćeno radno mjesto u struci. Izvorni doprinos istraživanja očituje se u povezivanju zadovoljstva poslom i percipiranih mogućnosti zapošljavanja u tranzicijskom gospodarstvu s namjerama emigracije, nudeći relevantne implikacije za kreatora javnih politika usmjerene na zadržavanje kvalificiranih mladih kadrova.

Ključne riječi: mladi, zadovoljstvo poslom, mogućnosti zapošljavanja, namjera iseljavanja, Sjeverna Makedonija

