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Focus On: The impact of migration

Whenever the Western Balkans, “visa liberalisation” and EU enlargement are discussed, the subject of immigration always comes to the fore. The reason is the assumed potential for mass migration from the region and the fear by both policymakers and academics alike that this could stop EU citizens from supporting further enlargement. Even the advocates of Balkan countries joining the EU use the threat of migration to make their point – former Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg recently stated that if the Balkan countries were excluded from the EU, problems would remain and this could lead to “a new migration ... that no one will be able to stop at (the EU’s) frontiers”. What adds to the polemic nature of the debate is the lack of reliable data on the flow of people and – importantly – of remittances. This makes it hard to assess the impact of any relaxation of the EU’s strict visa regime.

The Gallup Balkan Monitor’s *Focus on Migration* report brings first-hand data to this ongoing debate, as it summarises the experiences and opinions of Balkan people on all aspects of migration. This data was collected in two waves of the Balkan Monitor survey - in 2006 and 2008. The findings show that while relatively high percentages of Western Balkan residents have considered leaving their home countries, these numbers have tended to decrease in recent years. Relatively few people now have concrete migration plans for the near future. The report also sheds light on the demographic structure of those residents willing to leave and on the target countries of citizens migrating from the Western Balkans.

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Photo: © Tim Judah

Another important finding on migration is the impact of the inflow of remittances. They were referred to by a remarkably high number of interviewees and constitute a relatively high percentage of household income for their recipients.

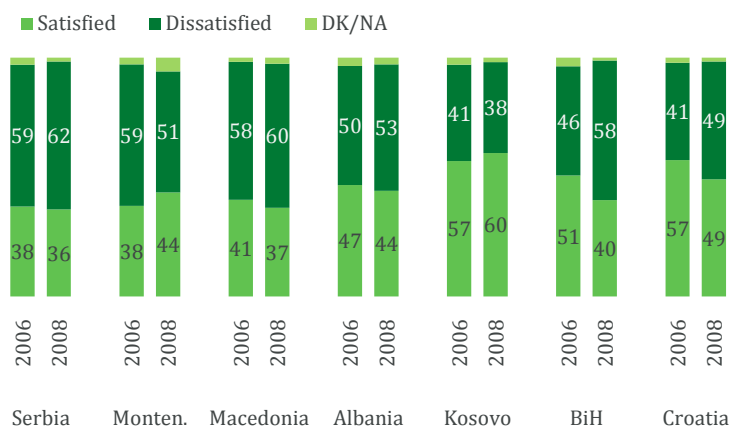
The GBM’s *Focus On Migration* gives a first impression of how the region’s people see the issue of immigration from all of the relevant viewpoints. To dig deeper into this topic and other key issues of the day, visit www.balkan-monitor.eu for the full GBM survey results and other reports in this comprehensive *Focus On* series.

The material situation as a migration driver

People's gloomy assessment of the region's economic situation makes them see (or seek) better opportunities outside of their country's borders. When they were asked to look at their own situation and standard of living, many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction: majorities of respondents in all countries - except for Kosovo and Croatia - are *dissatisfied* with their standard of living. A similar assessment was seen in 2006 and it has worsened significantly in 2008 in both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia (where the figures of those *dissatisfied* have risen from 46% to 58% and from 41% to 49% respectively). Asked whether they see their standard of living as

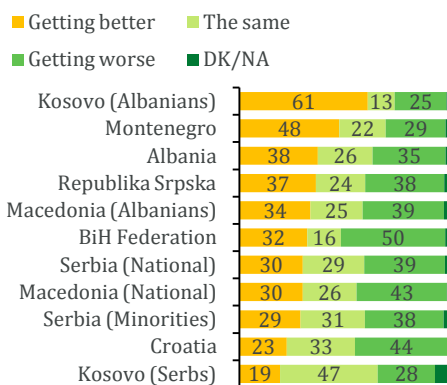
improving, people gave correspondingly pessimistic answers, with more people feeling it was *getting worse* than *getting better*; Albanians in Kosovo and Albania, and residents of Montenegro were exceptions to this rule. As the interviews were performed before the economic crisis unfolded, it is likely that the level of dissatisfaction would even be greater today.

Strong dissatisfaction with standard of living, only Kosovo has satisfied majority



Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your standard of living, all the things you can buy and do? %, base: all respondents

Kosovo Albanians are the most optimistic about development of standard of living



Right now, do you feel your standard of living is getting better or getting worse? %, base: all respondents

The fact that despite such a negative assessment of their country's future development, people do not leave the region in larger numbers could be explained by the future opportunities people see in their immediate surroundings. While, across the region, people who think their country's economic situation is *getting worse* outnumber those who think it is *getting better* (43% vs. 34%), people tend to be much more hopeful about the future of their place of residence: just over half (52%) of respondents in the Western Balkans think their city or area is getting better as a place to live, while just under a quarter (23%) think it is getting worse.

Despite the Kosovo Albanians' optimism regarding their personal material situation, this group is still the most likely to see *better opportunities outside their country*. Just under three-quarters (73%) of this group were convinced that one could make a better living abroad, with 18% seeing equal opportunities at home and abroad and just 2% seeing better opportunities at home. While this assessment makes the Kosovo Albanians the most critical of their own country in the region, such an opinion is supported by all other groups except for the residents of Montenegro and Croatia. These two countries are the only ones where people seeing *better opportunities outside of the country* do not constitute the largest group.

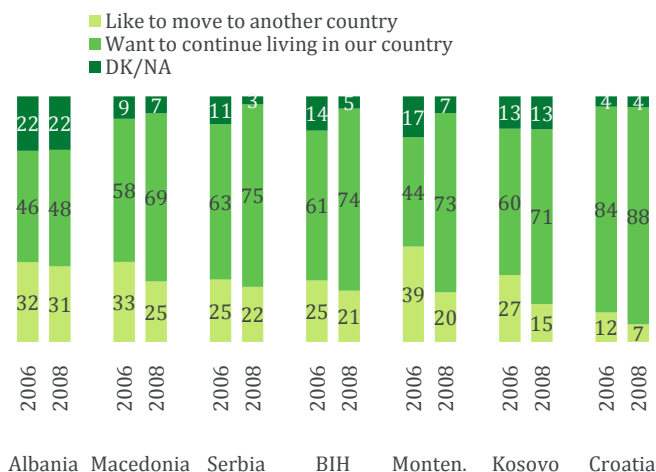
Only in Montenegro and Croatia do people perceive sufficient opportunities in own country



Based on the current conditions in our country, which of the following statements best reflects your opinion? For people like yourself... %, base: all respondents

The current state of Western Balkan migration

Willingness to migrate is decreasing in the whole region; strongest drops in Montenegro and Kosovo



All countries in the Western Balkan region have seen a decrease in their residents' willingness to leave. This reduction is especially pronounced in the countries that recently proclaimed independence: Montenegro and Kosovo. Here, the percentage of people willing to leave has almost halved.

In most countries, between 15% and 25% of residents expressed a wish to move abroad. In Albania, this figure was slightly higher at just under a third of respondents (31%). Croatia, however, has by far the lowest proportion of people who wish to migrate: only 7% would like to move to another country while 88% want to continue living in Croatia.

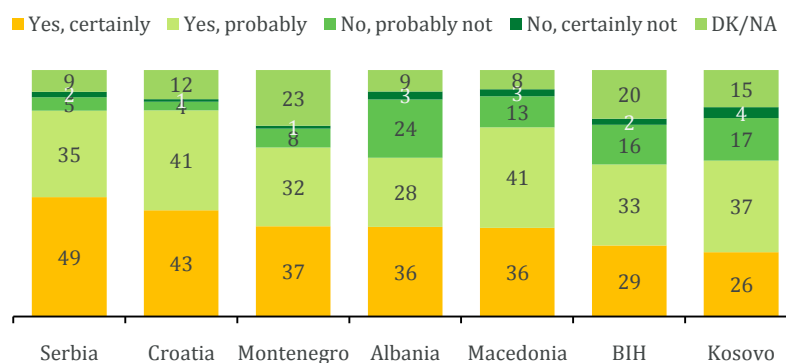
Ideally, would you like to move (permanently or temporarily) to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in [country/entity]? %, base: all respondents

When people wanting to migrate were further asked whether they intended to leave their country within the next year, those in Albania and Kosovo had the most concrete plans to migrate: 27% and 21%, respectively, thought that they would probably or certainly not be living in their country of residence within a year of being asked the question.

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Overall, one cannot speak of the likelihood of mass migration from the Balkans. Given that 24.7 million people live in the Western Balkans, the 21% of people in the region aged 15 years or older willing to leave their countries would mean a maximum of 4.34 million migrants. Of the potential migrants, only 17% stated that they would certainly or probably have left their country in the year following the survey: this amounts to a total of 720,000 Western Balkan residents with short-term migration plans, of which only 120,000 were certain that they would leave. By applying these figures to the most popular migration destinations listed on page 5, it is possible to indicate rough estimates for the number of short-term migrants from the Western Balkans that these "target" countries might have to expect. The most popular host countries are currently Germany (they could expect 15,000 potential migrants), the USA (13,000), Switzerland and Italy (both 12,000). In total, countries within the EU-27 can expect 70,000 short-term migrants from the Western Balkans. Given that the EU-27 currently experiences total annual immigration levels of around 3.5 million, potential Western Balkan migration towards the EU can be considered as "significant", but there is no sign of a "mass migration in the making".

In Albania, BiH and Kosovo, a sizeable percentage of people had concrete migration plans for the year after the survey



In one year's time, do you think you will still live in [country/entity]? %, base: all respondents willing to leave the country

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Results from the survey further suggest that migration from the Western Balkans is not likely to be of a permanent nature: of respondents that mentioned a desire to migrate, 60% stated that they intended to return after *a couple of years at the most*.

Of those willing to leave, 6 in 10 are planning to return

- Would like to move temporarily
- Would like to move permanently
- DK/NA



You mentioned, that you would like to move to a different country, would you move only temporarily (for a couple of years at most), or you would like to spend your life in another country? %, base: all respondents

An analysis of the data according to demographic subgroups shows that the younger the people interviewed, the more likely they were to express the wish to emigrate: 37% of 15-24 year-olds would like to move to another country, compared to just 11% of those aged 55 and older. This preference was especially pronounced in Albania (51% of those aged 15-24), Serbia (42%) and Bosnia (38%). Otherwise, demographic factors had little influence on residents' migration plans: there were no differences between men and women or between rural and urban dwellers in their desire to migrate. However, a slight correlation between the level of education and the wish to leave the country could be observed: among interviewees that did not finish secondary school or had graduated from university, one-fifth would like to move to another country, while this number rose to a quarter of those with all other levels of education.

This observation also addresses the effect of the "brain drain", feared by many when migration from the region is discussed. The low level of graduates that expressed the desire to emigrate suggests the absence of such a danger. However, it might be a consequence of the fact that many highly-educated people with Balkan origins have already left the region.

People with family members abroad are more likely to follow their migratory path. This phenomenon, often referred to by academics in this field, also finds support in the GBM data: while across the whole region, 17% of respondents without family abroad expressed the wish to leave, the figure rises to 25% among those with family that have already made a step across the border.

When people stated that they had friends or relatives living abroad, they were also asked in which country these persons mostly lived. The answer to this question can be used as a rough indicator of the "target" countries for recent migrants from the Western Balkans: the countries named most often were Germany, Italy and Greece. Of these, Germany was mentioned the most frequently by far; this country hosted most of the refugees and migrants from Ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Switzerland, Austria and the United States were also often mentioned as popular migration destinations for Western Balkan residents.

Those countries were also mentioned most often when people, who had expressed a wish to migrate earlier in the interview, were asked about their desired destination. Once again, the country named most frequently was Germany with 12.5% of responses, the United States, Switzerland and Italy were also popular (each one being mentioned by around 10% of respondents).

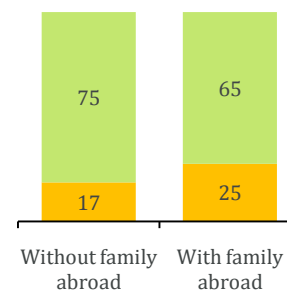
70,000 potential migrants headed for the EU in the short term

Current population of Western Balkans*:	24.7 million
Aged 15+*:	20.4 million
21.3% "would like to leave their country":	4.34 million
16.6% of these say that they will probably or certainly <i>not</i> be living in their country in one year's time:	720,000
Concrete short-term plans (will "certainly" be living somewhere else within one year):	120,000
Likely to be heading to the EU**	70,000

* CIA World Factbook, April 2009 data, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook
 ** Estimated on the basis of 2006 country preferences

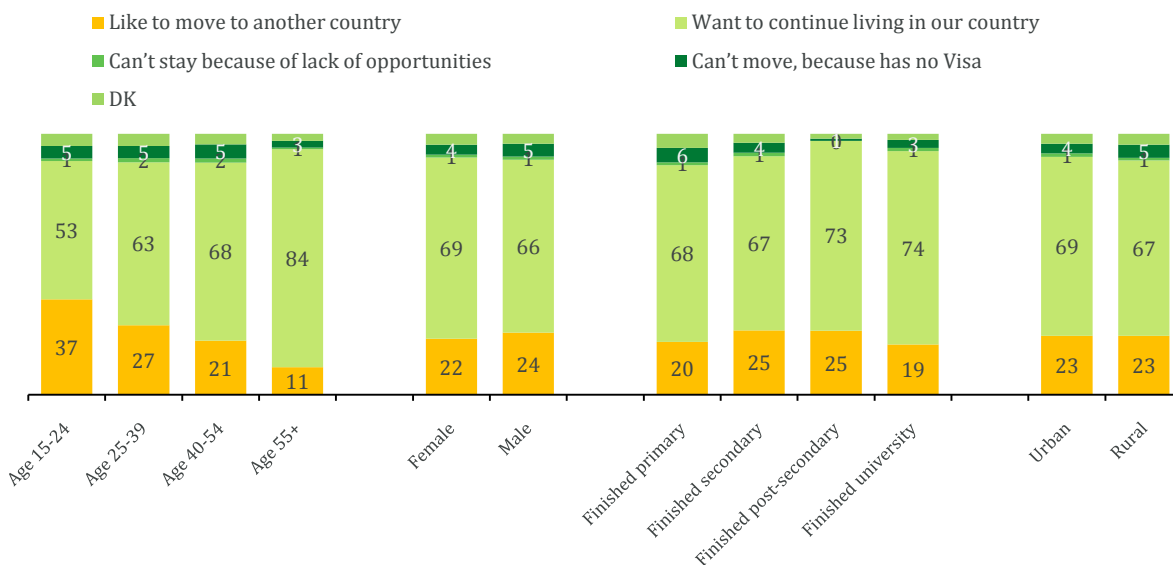
People with family abroad are more likely to migrate

- Like to move to another country
- Want to continue living in our country



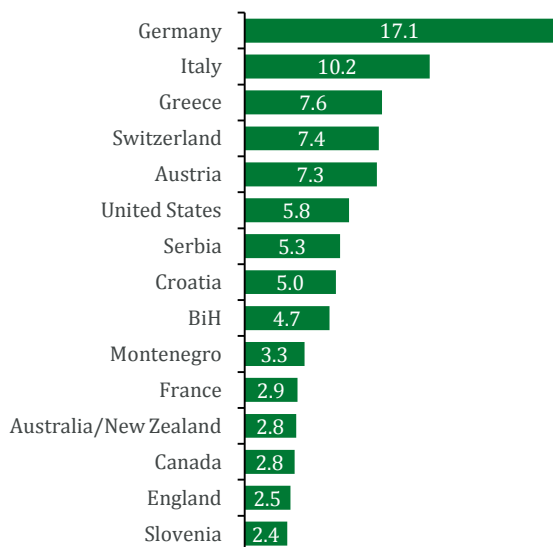
Ideally, would you like to move (permanently or temporarily) to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in [country/entity]? %, base: all respondents

Young people are the most eager to leave, no pronounced “brain drain” in the making



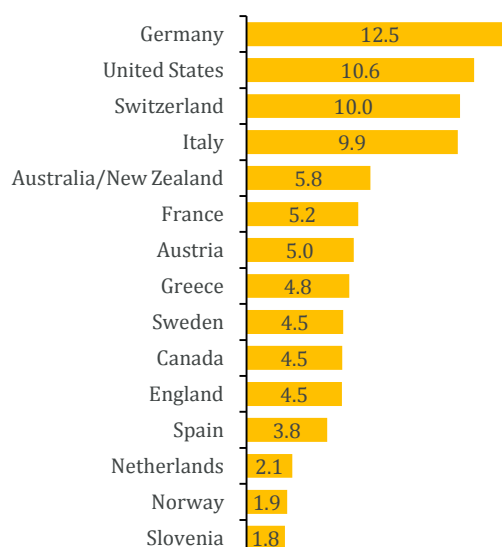
Ideally, would you like to move (permanently or temporarily) to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in [country/entity]? %, base: all respondents

Germany, Italy and Greece have the highest number of migrants from the region



Which are the three countries where you have most friends or relatives living? % of countries named, base: all respondents with friends or relatives outside of the country

Germany, the US, Switzerland and Italy are people's most desired migration targets



Which are the three countries that you would consider to move to? % of countries named, base: all respondents willing to leave their country

Having family abroad as a means of economic support

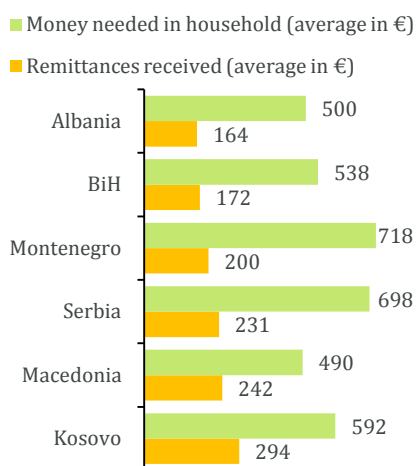
Although it is widely acknowledged that there are problems associated with people leaving both their family and their country behind, the residents of the Western Balkans are mostly supportive of migrants and consider their contribution to be a *big help*. Support is especially high among ethnic Albanians living in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia where around two-thirds are convinced that migration helps the region's development.

It is also among these groups that migration is the most pervasive. In Kosovo and Albania, for example, 38% and 44%, respectively, state that family members have left the country, the highest such values in the region. Serbs, in both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonian nationals report much lower levels of family migration: only about one-sixth of respondents have family members abroad.

Of the people with migrants in the family, ethnic Albanians were the group that received the most financial help from abroad: between three-quarters (Macedonian Albanians) and 8 in 10 respondents (Kosovo Albanians) stated that family members working or studying abroad help them financially. The inflow of remittances is the lowest in Serbia, where barely 4 in 10 respondents with family members abroad said that they receive financial support from the migrants.

Given the high importance of remittances for the Albanian communities, the case of Albanian work migration in the light of the current financial crisis is dramatic. The GBM data identifies Italy, Greece and Germany as primary targets for migrants of Albanian ethnicity – and these countries have been hit hard by the crisis with

For households with help from abroad, remittances cover between one-fourth and half of money needed



Which amount of monthly income does your household need in order to make the ends meet? / What is the approximate amount that your household receives on monthly basis from relatives living abroad? in Euro, base: all respondents / respondents that receive financial help from abroad

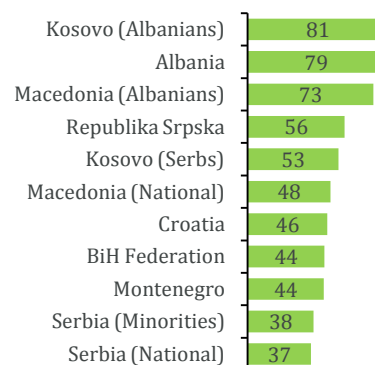
Ethnic Albanians have seen most family members leave



Has anyone from your family gone to work or study temporarily in another country? % yes, base: all respondents

Has anyone from your family gone to work or study temporarily in another country? % yes, base: all respondents

Albanian families biggest recipients of remittances



Do the members of your family who work / study in other countries directly or indirectly help your family financially? % yes, base: all respondents

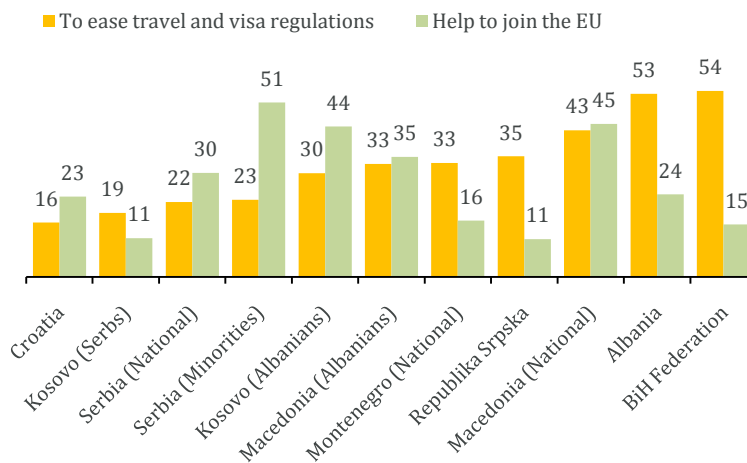
workers in manufacturing and agriculture being among the first to lose their jobs. There have been reports of Albanian seasonal workers not being able to find work in Greece; the Albanian minister for Economy, Trade, and Energy, Genc Ruli, was quoted as saying at the end of last year that he expected the financial crisis to affect

The amounts sent back by Western Balkan migrants are significant: the average monthly amount sent home is about 160 euros among households in Albania, 170 euros in Bosnia, 240 euros in Macedonia and 300 euros in Kosovo. In Kosovo, one in four households receive about half of their required monthly income from relatives living abroad.

Visa “liberalisation”

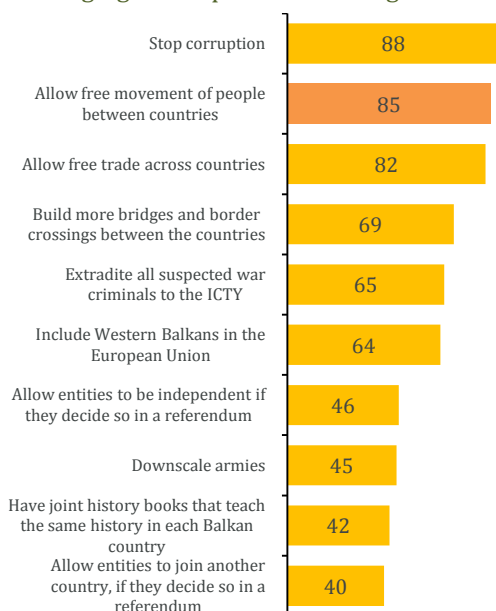
The high importance that Western Balkan residents place on the easing of travel restrictions is clearly reflected in the GBM’s results: asked what *single biggest assistance* the international community could provide to their country, over one-third of respondents in most countries chose travel and visa “liberalisation”. People in the Bosnian Federation and in Albania are especially eager to be able to travel freely: over half of these respondents demanded such help from the international community. The need to ease travel restrictions is much less pronounced in Serbia (barely a quarter wanted them to be lifted). In Croatia, where visa-free travel is already a reality, only a sixth of respondents insisted on easier access to the required travel documents.

People in Bosnian Federation and Albania most eager to receive visa “liberalisation”



What would be the single biggest assistance from the international community that could help your country? %, base: all respondents

Free movement of people and goods is seen as a key factor in ensuring peace and encouraging development in the region



In order to preserve peace and facilitate development, what do you think, which of the followings are worth to achieve, even if it is contrary to some or many people’s wishes? %, base: all respondents

Balkan conflicts and migration

Across the Western Balkans, people are convinced that the free circulation of people and goods will help the region to have a peaceful and prosperous future. Asked what is needed for peace and development, the free movement of people and free trade within the region came second only to putting an end to corruption. Unrestricted travel and free trade between countries were both said to be important by more than 8 in 10 respondents across the region. The desire for free movement of people between countries was particularly strong in Macedonia and Serbia, where more than 9 in 10 respondents thought there would be no peace and development without it.

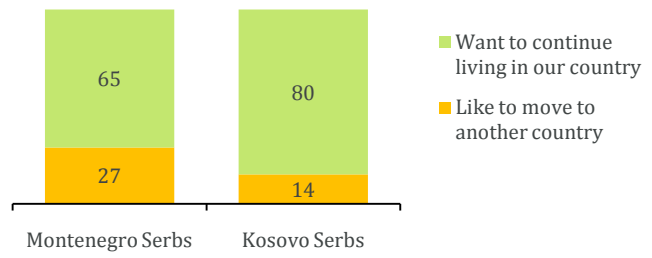
The two countries of the Western Balkans that have recently declared independence - Kosovo and Montenegro - are worthy of more in-depth study in this area. In Kosovo, in particular, where the international community has been discussing a potential exodus of the Serb part of the population, it is striking to see that 80% of Serb respondents declared that they would stay in the country. Of course it is a matter of definition what the interviewees understood by the term “country they were living in” – people could have considered a move to Serbia as staying in the same country. However, judging by the fact that of the roughly one in seven (14%) of Kosovo Serb respondents stated that they would like to move and that two-thirds thought that they would probably or certainly still be living

from Kosovo territory should be expected.

in Kosovo in one year’s time, no major emigration of Serbs

The situation looks slightly different in Montenegro. There, more than a quarter of Serbs - that constitute approximately one-third of the population - said they would like to leave the country. However, once again, a large majority of resident Serbs do not see the necessity to leave the country because of their home territory's secession from Serbia.

A large majority of Serbs in Kosovo and Montenegro has no plans to leave their country



Ideally, would you like to move (permanently or temporarily) to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in [country/entity]? %, base: Serbs in Kosovo and Montenegro

Conclusions



While the “migration” data collected in the Gallup Balkan Monitor by no means confirms the occasionally-voiced fears of mass migration from the Western Balkans, there is one cause for alarm: this is the significance of migration in order to find employment and remit funds back to the home country. This is particularly important for the Albanian communities in the Balkans. The effects of the financial crisis on the typical migration “target” countries for Albanians - Italy, Greece and Germany - could have a major impact on the economic situation of the Albanian communities in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania.

Overall, the survey shows that a majority of people in the Western Balkans are dissatisfied with their material situation and more than one-fifth of respondents would like to move away from their countries. However, only a few people have concrete short-term migration plans: based on the survey data, the number of people who are determined to leave their countries in the short term can be estimated at around 120,000. Of these, about 70,000 plan to go an EU member state. Countries with a high number of potential migrants are Albania and Macedonia, where more than a quarter of respondents have expressed a general wish to go abroad. The strongest drop in the potential for migration could be observed in Montenegro and Kosovo, where the number of people wanting to leave the country has almost halved between 2006 and 2008.

People with friends or family members outside their home country stated that these migrants were mostly living in Germany, Italy, Greece, Switzerland and Austria, while those wanting to emigrate named Germany, the USA, Switzerland and Italy as the most desired migration “targets”.

Remittances play a big role in the Western Balkans’ economy. Between 16% (Republika Srpska) and 44% (Albania) of Western Balkan respondents have family members outside the country and up to 81% (i.e. Albanians in Kosovo) of those with migrant relatives state that these family members support them financially. The average monthly amount sent home is about 160 euros among households in Albania, 170 euros in Bosnia, 240 euros in Macedonia and 300 euros in Kosovo. In the last-named, one in four households receive about half of their required monthly income from relatives abroad. These contributions from outside of the Balkans typically cover up to a half of a family’s needs in each of the countries.

People in Bosnia and Herzegovina are the most desperate to obtain visa “liberalisation”, while people in Serbia seem much less in need of more flexible travel. Across the Western Balkans, allowing free movement of people between countries is seen as one of the most important pre-requisites to peace and development in the region: 85% of people see it as being necessary. Only putting an end to corruption was mentioned more frequently.

Based on the GBM data, an exodus of Serbs from Kosovo seems unlikely, with 80% of Kosovo Serb respondents stating that they would stay in the country. In Montenegro, 27% of Serbs living there want to migrate.

Methodology of the Gallup Balkan Monitor

- Multi-year comparative project in all Western Balkan countries
- A stratified random sample of 1,000 respondents per country
- Stand-alone samples of ethnic minorities and other entities
- Fieldwork in September and October 2008
- Face-to-face methodology
- Comparative questions allowing for time series (comparison with 2006)
- Margin of error: +/- 3%

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Consult the results of the Gallup Balkan Monitor at

www.balkan-monitor.eu