

**University of Sopron**  
**István Széchenyi Economics and Management**  
**Doctoral School**

**DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AMONG  
HUNGARIAN YOUTH, WITH SPECIAL  
EMPHASIS ON MIGRATION MOTIVATIONS**

**Theses of the doctoral thesis**

**Tamás Ruff**

**Sopron**

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**Doctoral School: István Széchenyi Economics and  
Management Doctoral School**

**Head of the Doctoral School:** Prof. Dr. Csilla Obádovics

**Programme:** Socio-economic Inequalities

**Supervisors:** Prof. Dr. Csilla Obádovics

Dr. Richárd Resperger

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**Signature of the Supervisors**

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# **1. BACKGROUND, RELEVANCE, OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES**

## **1.1. Background and relevance of the work**

Nowadays, beyond academic interest, the topic of migration is often encountered in public policy, the media and public discourse. In recent decades, its legal and illegal forms have made visible to broad sections of society on the European continent the processes that have a major impact on the development of economic and social systems. Citizens of certain countries do not hear about this phenomenon as an abstract category, but can directly see and experience its effects on population growth, economic performance and the level of development of certain geographical areas.

The processes described above have also become visible and tangible in Hungary. The closed socialist social and economic framework that existed for several decades after World War II changed with the transition to democracy, and we became part of an open and increasingly globalized world. Joining the European Union and the opening up of Western European labour markets have led many people in our country to develop a new way of thinking and a new strategy for planning their lives, with the future being planned in an international context.

Many different figures have been published to estimate how many people have left our country. When we hear absolute numbers, they may seem high at first glance, but when we look at the

proportions, it is not certain that we can speak of high rates. The question is whether it is possible or necessary to define a threshold above which we consider migration to be harmful to our society. What determines whether we view this phenomenon in a positive or negative light?

We can consider and debate the effects of this demographic process from a number of perspectives, or we can use it in certain interest articulation processes, but in doing so, it is important to bear in mind that we should use professionally substantiated data and the results of their analysis in our discourses. We should not form opinions about this phenomenon based on our intuitions or trends observed in our immediate environment, but rather make statements and draw conclusions based on data collected through scientific work.

The above reasons were decisive in my choice of dissertation topic, i.e. the topicality of the subject and my intention to contribute to the dialogue on it with data and perspectives that can help to understand the process in more detail. In my opinion, this is also important because it allows us to understand the thinking of the people, families and groups who are involved in and shape these processes.

On the other hand, in my professional work in previous years, I had the opportunity to analyse some of the data collected by the national youth research programme, which is organised every four years, and within this, I also dealt with the emigration plans of Hungarian youth. While conducting these analyses, I became aware of

the importance of the topic, the possibility of a multi-faceted approach, and the narrower issues that formed the basis of my doctoral research.

## 1.2. Objectives and hypotheses

At the beginning of my research, my **first aim** was to use the available relevant databases to determine the proportion of young people aged 15-29 living in Hungary who are involved in international migration.

My **second objective** was to explore the emigration tendencies of the above target group and how these have changed over time. **The third objective** of my research was to find out why migrants leave and return home, i.e. I wanted to systematise the motivational factors behind migration. **The fourth objective** of my work was to identify and describe the economic effects of migration among young people.

### Hypotheses:

H1. The proportion of people aged 15-29 living in Hungary who participate in foreign migration is low.

H2. The proportion of mobile young people increases with age and educational attainment.

H3. The majority of young people emigrate for work rather than for study.

H4. When making the decision to migrate, emigrants under the age of 30 are influenced more by their friendships than by other relationships.

H5. From a regional perspective, young people emigrate from the more developed regions of the country to another country.

H6. Returning migrants primarily use the money they earned abroad to achieve their housing goals after returning home.

H7. The majority of young people plan to go abroad to work or study in the future.

## **2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE**

In this dissertation, I examined the mobility of 15-29 year olds, a key age group in terms of international migration, and explored in detail its demographic and economic characteristics among young Hungarians.

Researching international migration is not a simple professional task; it faces many methodological challenges and uncertainties, which I also summarise in my work. I review the theories that serve as explanations for understanding how the phenomenon works, as well as the data sources that can be used to track migration processes.

In my research, I use the 2016 microcensus, the 2022 census, the national youth survey conducted every four years since 2000, and the primary research project entitled "Return migration – selections, causes and effects" carried out by the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute. I will use these to present the characteristics of the above target group living in Hungary. In addition to determining the number and proportion of people involved in migration processes, I examine the motivations behind emigration and return migration, the factors underlying these motivations, the impact of migrants' networks, the characteristics of activities carried out abroad, and the economic effects of the process.

During my research, I analysed data from four databases. The 2016 microcensus and the 2022 census data provided an opportunity



to measure long-term migration and to explore differences in gender, age, education and region. Data collected by the Hungarian Youth Research between 2000 and 2020 provided a picture of young people's migration intentions, work experience abroad and mobility for study purposes. The fourth data source was the primary research entitled "Return migration – selection, causes and effects", based on which I used principal component analysis and regression modelling to examine the motivations for emigration and return, future migration plans, and to learn about the economic situation of returnees.

### 3. RESULTS, THESES

#### 3.1. New scientific results

The empirical analyses in the dissertation contribute to the domestic literature on international migration among young people in several respects. The new and novel scientific results cannot be summarised in a single methodological innovation, but rather **in the coordinated, targeted application of various large-scale and primary data collections, as well as in a more detailed and nuanced interpretation of the migration and return processes of young people aged 15–29.**

##### 3.1.1. Refining empirical estimates of the extent and structure of youth migration abroad

A detailed, age-specific analysis of migration data from the 2016 Microcensus and the 2022 Census enabled a more in-depth examination of the migration characteristics of the 15–29 age group. Previous publications typically treated this age group as part of broader age comparisons, while this dissertation **examines young people as a separate unit of analysis**, exploring the demographic, territorial and social contexts of migration.

Based on the empirical results, it can be concluded that long-term stays abroad are a phenomenon affecting only a small proportion

of young people, but migration experiences and plans show significant differences according to age, educational attainment and place of residence. Foreign experience is more common among older young people, those with higher educational attainment, and those living in Budapest, Central Hungary, South Transdanubia and the Southern Great Plain. The regional pattern of destination countries also varies: migration to Austria is mainly linked to the Western Transdanubia region, to the United Kingdom to the Northern Hungary and Southern Great Plain regions, and to Germany mainly to the Great Plain regions.

These results empirically distinguish actual migration from migration potential and contribute to clarifying the public discourse and literature on youth migration.

### **3.1.2. Exploring demographic and territorial differences in migration patterns**

The analyses in the dissertation confirm that international migration among young people **is not a homogeneous phenomenon**, but a markedly selective process. Age, educational attainment and regional characteristics of place of residence all play a significant role in foreign mobility. Young people from more developed regions and urban areas are overrepresented in migration, which links the mobility of young people to the system of domestic territorial inequalities.

### **3.1.3. Multidimensional interpretation of the motivational structure of migration decisions**

In addition to the data collected by the Central Statistical Office, a comparison of the results of the Hungarian Youth Survey and the primary data collection on return migration enabled a structured analysis of the motivations behind migration decisions. Based on empirical studies, three key dimensions can be identified behind the motivations for emigration:

- 1) financial and welfare considerations related to higher salaries, better living conditions and career opportunities;
- (2) family and labor market pressures, which include the role of partner, children and job search problems; and
- (3) factors related to gaining experience and studying.

The results show that young people's migration decisions are not based solely on economic rationality, but are the result of complex, intertwined motivational structures.

The dissertation shows that the factors encouraging return can be classified into four dimensions:

- (1) failed return migration,
- (2) emotional-rational reasons,
- (3) innovative factors,
- (4) family motivations.

### **3.1.4. Empirical exploration of the motivations and economic consequences of return migration**

The analysis of data from the study entitled “Return migration – selection, causes and effects” provides new scientific findings on the motivations and economic situation of young returnees.

Economic analyses show that the vast majority of returnees have savings accumulated abroad, with significant differences between age groups and types of settlements. A higher proportion of older people and those from smaller settlements return home with savings, while this is less common among younger people from Budapest, mainly due to the higher rate of migration for study purposes.

Savings are mainly used to cover everyday expenses and housing costs, while only a negligible proportion is used to start a business. This result contributes to the interpretation of the relationship between migration and career development in Hungary.

## **3.2. Theses**

**T1.** International migration is a phenomenon that affects only a small proportion of Hungarian youth aged 15–29, but at the same time it is **a highly selective process in terms of demographics, education and geography**, in which young people with higher educational

qualifications, older young people and those living in more developed, central regions are overrepresented.

**T2.** Young people's migration decisions and plans **are organised along complex motivational structures**, in which social relationships, life circumstances and experience-seeking are independent explanatory factors alongside the decisive role of economic factors.

**T3.** Return migration is not exclusively the result of forced or unsuccessful migration trajectories, but is often **a conscious career decision** in which the utilisation of resources acquired abroad plays a key role.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The aspects described in the literature clearly show that the study of migration is a complex and methodologically challenging task. This is not only due to modern mobility options, which allow migrants to change their place of residence quickly and flexibly, but also to the fact that migration is often multidirectional and does not always follow a one-off pattern in terms of time.

Recording these processes in time and space poses a significant challenge for the relevant professional institutions, especially since this would require the cooperation of the migrants themselves, which is not always possible.

Although international organisations recognised the significance of this demographic phenomenon early on and sought to formulate common definitions and harmonised methodological recommendations, no uniformly applied terminology and toolkit has yet been established. Due to the heterogeneity of national data collection systems and the lack of compliance with reporting requirements by citizens, the records often do not reflect the actual volume of migration, but only a fraction of it.

The results of primary empirical research can nuance and supplement the headcount data in administrative databases and can also help to reveal detailed motivations, but they are not suitable for determining the exact number of migrants. In the future, it will therefore be of paramount importance to establish a uniform definition

of international migration and, on this basis, to develop common research and data collection methodologies. This is essential because the phenomenon of migration is changing dynamically, and both the public administration and the research community need to respond adequately to new trends.

Based on data from the 2016 microcensus and the 2022 census, it can be concluded that the proportion of people with migration experience among 15-29 year olds in Hungary is small. However, it should be noted that these proportions and the figures given in the thesis only refer to young people living in Hungary.

Territorial analyses revealed differences in migration patterns, which can be attributed to social and economic inequalities. These have a significant impact on the opportunities and plans available to potential migrants and ultimately determine who leaves or stays in another country. This information cannot be ignored in terms of future domestic economic development, and further detailed studies and targeted labour market programmes are needed to integrate the groups affected by emigration into the domestic labour force.



## 5. RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

Kiss-Kozma Georgina, Ruff Tamás: Emigration Intentions Among Hungarian Youth

SZOCIOLOGIAI SZEMLE 34 : 2 pp. 55-74. , 20 p. (2024)

Kiss-Kozma Georgina, Ruff Tamás: Should I Stay or Should I go? Migration Potential Among Hungarian Youth

YOUTH AND GENERATION STUDIES 1 : 1 pp. 16-36. , 21 p. (2024)

Ruff Tamás: A fiatalok vándorlási motivációi nemzetközi összehasonlításban: (Migration Motivations of Young People in International Comparison)

In: Simándi, Irén (szerk.) Harminc éves a Kodolányi János Egyetem 2. : Társadalom és ember

Székesfehérvár, Magyarország : Enigma 2001 (2023) 281 p. pp. 62-72. , 11 p.

Ruff Tamás: A magyar fiatalok migrációs mintázata

In: Konecz, István; Szova, Ilona (szerk.) A PEME XXV. PhD konferenciájának előadásai : Húsz év – 25 PhD-konferencia : Húsz év az európai Magyarország tudományos megújulása és a fiatal kutatók szolgálatában

Budapest, Magyarország : Professzorok az Európai Magyarorszáért Egyesület (2023) pp. 191-198. , 8 p.

Ruff Tamás: A migráció mérésének módszertani nehézségei: Methodological Difficulties in Measuring Migration

In: Obádovics, Csilla; Resperger, Richárd; Széles, Zsuzsanna; Tóth, Balázs István (szerk.) TÁRSADALOM – GAZDASÁG – TERMÉSZET: SZINERGIÁK A FENNTARTHATÓ FEJLŐDÉSBEN (Nemzetközi tudományos konferencia a Magyar Tudomány Ünnepe alkalmából) : Konferenciakötet

Sopron, Magyarország : Soproni Egyetem Kiadó (2023) 593 p. pp. 65-72. , 8 p.

Kiss-Kozma Georgina, Ruff Tamás: A magyarországi fiatalok tizedik legégetőbb problémája: külföldre vándorlás, kivándorlás  
In: Pillók, Péter; Székely, Levente (szerk.) Kívánj tized!: A magyarországi fiatalok nemzedéki önreflexiója és jövőképe  
Budapest, Magyarország: Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács (2022) 219 p. pp. 195-214., 20 p.

Ruff Tamás: Mobilitási tervek és gyakorlatok  
In: Székely, Levente (szerk.) Magyar fiatalok a koronavírus-járvány idején: Tanulmánykötet a Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás 2020 eredményeiről  
Budapest, Magyarország: Enigma 2001 (2021) 277 p. pp. 141-158. , 18 p.

Ruff Tamás: Ifjúsági mobilitás: hajlandóság, lehetőségek és tervek  
In: Székely, Levente (szerk.) Magyar Ifjúság 2012: tanulmánykötet  
Budapest, Magyarország: Kutatópont (2013) 358 p. pp. 152-178., 27 p.