

Emigration and remittances as a form of labour market adjustment – The case study of Macedonia¹

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Abstract

The past two decades Macedonia has gone through the process of transition which is still shaping the social, political and economic ambience in the country. The initial transitional recession has inter alia manifested salient effects on the labour market performance. Macedonia is among rare countries, where the unemployment rate during the whole period of transition hovers above 30%. Even though there is some criticism regarding the accuracy of the Macedonian unemployment rate estimated by the Labour Force Survey, it is still evident that we are facing an odd phenomenon. By using the Keynesian terminology, the Macedonian labour market experiences a suboptimal equilibrium assumed as a state where significant part of resources are not utilised or underutilised. We argue that this suboptimal equilibrium to great extent is result of the alternative labour market adjustment mechanisms that mitigate the high and sustained unemployment. These mechanisms cushion the social implications of unemployment by absorbing a part of unemployed workforce and/or providing additional incomes for households that enables their basic subsistence. One form of adjustment mechanism among the unemployed workers is emigration and remittances that provides the necessary income support for the households. In this paper we make an attempt to identify the role of emigration and remittances as income support for unemployed workers. For this purpose we use results from the survey carried on a representative sample of registered unemployed workers in Macedonia. Furthermore, we estimate an econometric model that reveals the relevant factors that influence intention to emigrate. Finally, we formulate appropriate policy measures that target emigration and remittances in order to improve the labour market functioning and to provide the necessary conditions for balanced economic development.

Key words: Labour market, emigration, remittances

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1. Introduction

The past two decades Macedonia has gone through the process of transition which is still shaping the social, political and economic ambience in the country. As a part of South-Eastern Europe, the Macedonian economic growth is constrained by the general regional predispositions, which amongst other things are determined by the political instability of the region. Hence, the economic performance of the South-Eastern European countries (SEECs) has not been strong enough compared to Central-Eastern Europe countries (CEECs), which are part of the European Union. In this sense, Macedonia and other SEECs, are known as 'lagging reformers' with regard to completion of the reforms in all spheres of the society.

The transitional process as a multidimensional phenomenon has affected every domain of the political, economic, and social life in the country. In the economic sphere, transition has been characterised by a change in the ownership of capital, liberalisation of goods and capital markets, liberalisation of the foreign economic relations, radical change in the role of the state in the economy, and the creation of a less regulated labour market. In the sphere of social life, transition has led to rising poverty and income inequality, a weakening of the middle class and social exclusion of vulnerable social groups. Politically, the transition has been accompanied by the creation of a democratic society, differentiation of power into legislative, executive and judicial branches, the creation of a pluralistic political system and implementation of public and democratic elections (Pechijareski and Rocheska, 1998).

The initial transitional recession has *inter alia* manifested salient effects on the labour market performance. Generally, the transitional reforms initially had negative effects on labour markets, which were manifested in declining participation rates and in persistent high unemployment. The processes of ownership restructuring and sectoral reallocation assumed a large-scale transformation of state owned firms into privatised ones and, a reallocation of a substantial part of the labour force from the manufacturing and agricultural sectors towards the expanding service sector (Blanchard, 1997). The experience in almost all transition countries, including Macedonia, shows that the creation of new jobs in the emerging private sector was not initially strong enough to absorb the mass of workers laid-off from the restructured state-owned firms. At the same time, the mismatch between the skill requirements of newly created jobs and effective skills of the workers has become a substantial problem (Svejnar, 2002). Consequently, the labour markets in early transition became less dynamic with a relatively

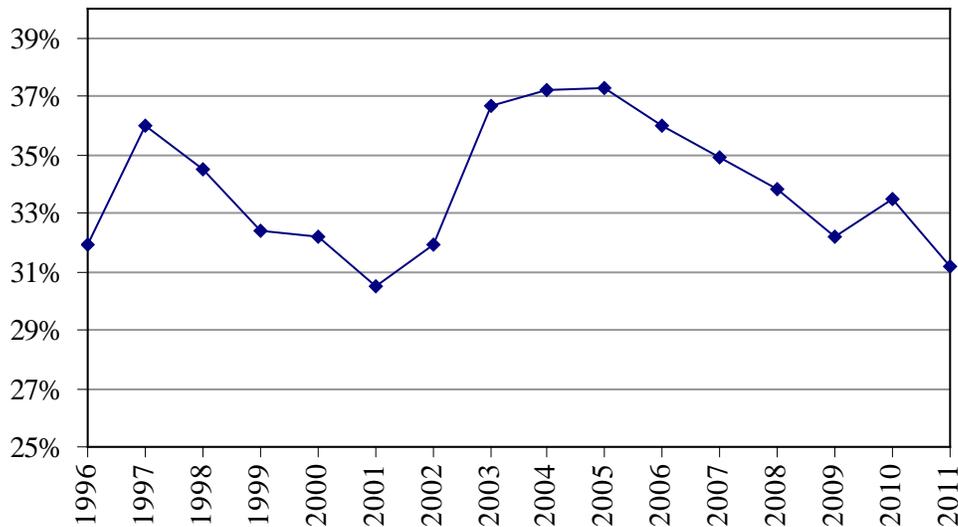
stagnant unemployment pool leading to increases in unemployment and especially long-term unemployment (Cazes and Nesporova, 2003). The initial ‘transitional unemployment’ differed in several aspects from other types of unemployment in that it was characterised by pronounced labour market segmentation, long average duration of unemployment and a low probability of exiting unemployment into employment (Nikoloski, 2004).

The aim of this paper is to identify the role of emigration and remittances as labour market adjustment mechanisms in transition countries and particularly to investigate the case of Macedonia. For this purpose we will use the empirical results from a survey of registered unemployed workers. To our knowledge this is among rare studies addressing this issue in Macedonia that will shed light on the role of emigration and remittances as income support for unemployed workers. In this context, in section 2 we first present the general labour market trends in Macedonia. Next, in section 3 we will define the theoretical concepts related to emigration and remittances. The empirical assessment of emigration and remittances in Macedonia will be the subject of section 4. Finally, in section 5 we will conclude and formulate suitable labour market policies that target the unemployed population.

2. Macedonian labour market performance

In order to investigate the features of the Macedonian labour market during transition, it is appropriate to divide the transitional period into two sub-periods. The first period encompasses the transformational recession from 1990 to 1995, with the second period starting immediately thereafter and lasting until the present. The changes of the unemployment rate in relative terms during the business cycle are rather small, which reflects the depressed characteristics of the Macedonian labour market (Nikoloski, 2009). The dynamics of the unemployment rate in Macedonia for the period 1996-2011 is shown on Figure 1.

Figure 1 The unemployment rate in Macedonia 1996-2011



Source: Macedonian Statistical Office, Labour Force Survey

The first Labour Force Survey (LFS) in Macedonia was conducted in 1996, and since then we have detailed data concerning labour market trends. During the period 1996-2003, the Macedonian LFS was conducted on a yearly basis, whereas since 2004 it is conducted as a continuous survey throughout the year with quarterly processing of data. For the period prior to 1996 we can explore labour market trends based on the number of registered unemployed workers. According to both sources of data we can generally distinguish several features of the Macedonian labour market presented as follows.

First, during the initial phase of transition, the labour force participation and the employment rates fell for most of this period, while the unemployment rate steadily increased. These trends are in line with the normal labour market patterns found in the CEECs *i.e.* declining employment under the initial shock of recession and subsequent persistence of sluggish demand for labour.

Second, the mature phase of transition is characterised by broad stability in all three rates. However, we can observe recessions in 2001 (primarily caused by the already mentioned political instability) and in 2009 due to the global economic crisis. The downward trend in the unemployment rate was broken and unexpectedly remained high for several years due to the lack of job creation in the formal part of the economy (Micevska, 2008). Only recently, there are some positive signs of a slow recovery and the possibility of renewed decreases in unemployment.

Third, the Macedonian labour market is affected by strong segmentation, meaning that certain social groups such as the youth, less skilled workers, and women, face a higher risk of unemployment and inactivity than the rest of the labour force. As a consequence, the high Macedonian unemployment rate has enormous social implications such as rising poverty, income inequality and social exclusion of the deprived social segments (Nikoloski, 2011).

Fourth, long-term unemployment prevails over the short-term unemployment implying likelihood of possible 'discouraged workers' phenomenon. For instance, long-term unemployment accounts for almost 80 percent of total unemployment (OECD, 2002). Long-term unemployment has significantly contributed to an erosion of skills and motivation of unemployed workers, making them less employable over time (Gregg and Manning, 1996). The deterioration of skills further reduces the attractiveness of the labour force and contributes to a blurring of the difference between the states of unemployment and inactivity. After remaining unemployed for a long period of time, a considerable part of unemployed workers stops looking for jobs and quits the labour force.

Fifth, the sectoral reallocation of labour has been characterised by a significant increase of subsistence agriculture and other non-standard forms of employment at the expense of rapid shrink of employment in industry. These trends in employment by sectors indicate that in Macedonia new jobs are not predominantly created in the more productive industries and service sector, but rather in agriculture and low productivity services. The increase in the share of employment in agriculture suggests that this sector has become a buffer for some people who have lost their jobs in the state-owned industrial enterprises (Nikoloski, 2009).

Finally, given the rigidities in the standard adjustment through employment and wages, less traditional (in the western context) labour market adjustment mechanisms may play a more significant role. Among the alternative labour market adjustment mechanisms in SEEC we particularly distinguish the non-participation, emigration and employment in the informal sector of the economy.

3. Theoretical background

Alongside employment in the informal sector and increased inactivity, emigration has become a prominent way to escape unemployment in a number of transition countries including Macedonia. In

this section we bring to the fore the theoretical concepts related to emigration and remittances. Migration is simply defined as an act of changing location from one place to another and can be classified from different aspects. In our analysis we are interested in international migration that from the point of view of migration duration can be distinguished between temporary and permanent.

Different theories offer explanation of the determinants of migration flows. According to the neo-classical theory, migrations arise as a result of wage differentials between regions or countries. Thus, one can expect, in a world of no regulation of migration, that a large real wage difference would cause intense migratory flows (Bauer and Zimmermann, 1999). By contrast, the Keynesian economic theory considers migration movements as a form of equilibrium adjusting mechanism in labour markets. In other words, the determinants of migration movements are more likely to be unemployment differences rather than wage differences. Consequently, in terms of net migration flows, relatively high unemployment has a negative effect on net migration flows into labour importing countries, but a positive effect on net migration flows from labour exporting countries (Jennissen, 2003). Besides this, a high level of poverty in the country of origin can be considered as another 'push' economic factor for migration. The network effect, consisting of established social ties among the immigrants in a given country, can also contribute to easier integration, which fosters further migration movements (Bauer et al., 2000).

Taking into account the nature of international migratory movements, they have significant consequences for the socio-economic development of both the source and destination countries. The two most frequently cited effects of emigration on the source country, are the release of labour market pressure and improvement in financial flows via remittances (McCormick and Wahba, 2000). According to the first mechanism, emigration from less developed countries should lower the unemployment rate by reducing the labour supply. However, if emigration mostly occurs among workers with a specific profile and there is low substitution between workers in different labour market segments, then the expected beneficial effect via diminishing unemployment will only be in this particular segment, with unemployment in other labour market segments remaining largely unchanged.

On the other hand, a possible beneficial effect of emigration is exerted via remittances defined as financial flows arising from the cross-border movement of workers. Although emigration and

remittances are interrelated, they are determined by different factors. The economic theory that covers this issue provides different views about the microeconomic motivations to remit, as well as the possible macroeconomic consequences of the remittances. At the macro-level, we can generally distinguish between two opposing effects of remittances on domestic labour market performance, with some authors differentiating between 'productive' and 'unproductive' use of remittances (Drinkwater et al., 2003). According to the negative view on remittances, they are mostly used for consumption purposes thus exerting a negative income effect on labour market participation of the remaining family members in the destination country. Therefore, remittances exert an upward shift on the reservation wage, which may discourage labour supply or diminish the search effort among the remitters' relatives in the home country. In this context, some authors claim that there is a moral hazard problem, which might be part of a mechanism responsible for a negative relationship between remittances and economic growth (Chami et al., 2003). Furthermore, if mostly spent on goods and services, remittances may cause inflation, which can lead to excessive wage claims or appreciation of the domestic currency. However, even in the cases where remittances are mainly spent on consumption they may still exert positive effects on the home economy by increasing aggregate demand. In the spirit of the Keynesian approach the short-run impact of remittances on the sending economy would depend on the value of multiplier (Rapoport and Docquier, 2005).

Alternatively, remittances can be used for investment purposes in order to overcome credit constraints faced by the firms in the home country. In this case, we expect remittances to play a positive role in the economic development of the sending country and a better performance of the domestic labour market viewed in terms of reduced unemployment. Although the empirical evidence suggests that in reality only a small portion of remittances are directly invested, they can still be channelled into productive use by the banking system (Drinkwater et al., 2003). With this in mind, remittances can promote growth even in the less financially developed countries by providing alternative way to finance investment *i.e.* by becoming a substitute for the inefficient or non-existent credit markets (Giuliano and Ruiz-Arranz, 2006). However, this positive impact of remittances on growth can be expected only in countries where governments implement economic policies that support a sound investment environment (Catrinescu et al., 2006).

Although the importance of emigration and remittances on a global level is largely recognised (World Bank, 2011), their role as labour market adjustment mechanisms in transition countries is rarely considered. For instance, Abdulloev et al. (2011) analyse the income generation capacity of remittances in Tajikistan and their interaction with informal economic activities, where they identify that these two adjustment mechanisms are substitutes for one another. To our knowledge, in Macedonia there is a lack of consistent cross-section data about different alternative labour market adjustment mechanisms including micro-data on emigration and remittances for unemployed workers. In order to fill this gap we next turn to an empirical assessment in order to get evidence on the role that emigration and remittances play in Macedonia.

4. Empirical assessment

The emigration and remittances play significant role in the Macedonian economy both in absolute and relative terms. The stock of emigration from Macedonia by 2010 was estimated to 447,1 thousands, which represent 21,9% of the population (World Bank, 2011). Moreover, the remittances have shown a continuous growth from 129 million Euros in 2003 to more than 200 million Euros in 2011, which represent about 3,5% of the Macedonian GDP². In this context, we intend to shed light to a particular aspect of emigration and remittances as labour market adjustment mechanisms. In other words, we estimate to what extent the unemployed workers are prone to emigration as well as the amount of remittances they receive from their emigrated relatives as income support.

For this purpose we have designed and carried out a survey based on a representative sample of registered unemployed. The survey was conducted during a reference period from mid October to mid November 2011. The sample size is 2300 unemployed workers selected randomly in each of the 30 centres of the Employment State Agency (ESA) all over the country. Moreover, the geographical distribution was maintained by selecting from each centre a proportional number of respondents with respect to the total number of registered unemployed workers in that centre. The structure of the sample according to the basic demographic characteristics is given in Table 1.

According to the results from the survey, 21,5% of the respondents are short-term unemployed, whereas 78,5% are unemployed more than one year i.e. they are long-term unemployed. Majority of the surveyed (70,9%) find that the Macedonian government is most responsible for the high

² Source: National Bank of the Republic of Macedonia.

unemployment rate in Macedonia and even higher percent (73,7%) think that the Government is the most important factor which is responsible for solving the unemployment issue. Almost two thirds of the respondents are dissatisfied with the situation because they think that membership in political parties to great extent influences the employment process in Macedonia. As a consequence, the unemployment represents an embarrassing situation for the majority of unemployed workers. In this context, 38,2% of the respondents declared that unemployment causes for them stress situations and health problems to great extent, while these effects prevail to lesser extent among 44,8% of the interviewed unemployed.

Table 1. The structure of the sample according to various demographic characteristics

Gender		Place of living		Age	
Male	50,30%	Urban	77,89%	15-20	4,09%
Female	49,70%	Rural	22,11%	21-25	23,27%
				26-30	19,23%
				31-35	11,70%
				36-40	10,61%
				41-45	10,61%
				46-50	8,96%
				51-55	6,92%
				56-60	3,61%
				61-65	0,87%
				65 and more	0,13%
Education		Ethnicity			
Primary or less	15,11%	Macedonian	81,80%		
Secondary	50,35%	Albanian	10,21%		
Higher	34,54%	Turk	2,26%		
		Roma	2,26%		
		Serbian	1,95%		
		Vlahos	1,00%		
		Bosnian	0,35%		
		Other	0,17%		
Marital status					
Single	40,43%				
Married	53,66%				
Divorced	3,74%				
Widowed	2,18%				

Source: Authors' calculations

With respect to the services that registered unemployed receive from the ESA, 60,72% of the respondents stated that they have received health insurance, whereas only 8,46% receive unemployment benefit. These figures are close to the official statistics that ESA publishes about the services provided for the registered unemployed workers (ESA, 2011). Having in mind the low coverage of unemployment benefits, we argue that incentives for registering as unemployed in Macedonia come from other entitlements. On the other hand, participation in some of the active programmes or measures of the ESA declared about 9,85% of the respondents, of whom only a small portion of 16% acknowledged that the attended programmes helped them find job.

In our empirical analysis we found that 27,7% of the surveyed unemployed workers if have possibility would emigrate permanently, whereas 33,9% have intentions to work abroad temporarily. However, about 46% of those who declared having intentions to emigrate undertake concrete activities to find work abroad, while the remaining 54% do not undertake such activities. Moreover, 11,7% of respondents stated they have close relatives who are currently abroad, two thirds of whom receive financial aid for covering their costs of living. The share of remittances for this category of households in their total income is about 34,2%, which represents a considerable proportion.

In order to assess the factors that influence the intention to emigrate among registered unemployed in Macedonia, we furthermore estimate the so-called Logit model, where the dependent variable takes value zero in the case the person declared that if having the possibility they would not work abroad. In the opposite case where the unemployed worker declared that he/she has intention to emigrate, the dependent variable takes value one. Furthermore, we divide the possible determinants in four groups: personal traits, household characteristics, services from the ESA and the alternative labour market adjustment mechanisms. The results from the estimated Logit model are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Estimated Logit model for the intention to emigrate

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value
Intercept	-0.08452267	1.063099310	-0.07950591
Personal traits			
Male	0.52233926	0.161320811	3.23789136***
Age	0.02580046	0.056935285	0.45315417
Age square	-0.00081216	0.000711785	-1.14102298
Married	-0.36894588	0.215523821	-1.71185664*
Urban	0.42541973	0.189077506	2.24997540**
Long-term unemployed	0.26748777	0.215752851	1.23978792
Household characteristics			
Total number of members	-0.03253076	0.101466827	-0.32060491
No. of members at working age	0.02292265	0.100285894	0.22857303
No. of employed members	-0.13333541	0.108604309	-1.22771752
Another unemployed member	0.22241276	0.103334239	2.15236269**
Services from the ESA			
Health insurance beneficiary	-0.14521655	0.179446378	-0.80924760
Unemployment benefit	0.47034448	0.330022693	1.42518830
Participation in active programmes	-0.12119792	0.255840744	-0.47372408
Alternative adjustment mechanisms			
Have retired member(s)	-0.14601658	0.187842873	-0.77733362
Social assistance beneficiary	-0.37374242	0.267056374	-1.39948887
Have emigrated member(s)	0.33533381	0.245516066	1.36583247

Search for job	0.41580538	0.205583457	2.02256245**
Informal economic activities	0.08121623	0.168359826	0.48239674

Note: *, ** and *** represent statistical significance at the 10%, 5% and 1% levels respectively.

Among the personal traits, the statistically significant determinants of the intention to emigrate are the gender, marital status and the place of living of the respondents. In this context, male unemployed are 68,6% more likely to emigrate compared to female unemployed workers; those who are married are about 31% less likely to emigrate; and finally those who live in urban areas demonstrate about 53% higher intention to emigrate compared to those living in rural areas. The remaining two coefficients among personal characteristics, i.e. the age and being long-term unemployed have positive signs, though without exerting statistically significant impact on the intention to emigrate.

With respect to the household characteristics, only having another unemployed member significantly influences the intention to emigrate. Namely, an additional unemployed worker would increase the intention to emigrate for 25%. On the other hand, the provision of services from the ESA does not seem to have significant impact on the intention to emigrate. Finally, the unemployed who search for job have about 51,6% higher probability to demonstrate intentions to emigrate compared to those who do not look for a job. Hence, the manifested search effort either in the country or abroad is positively associated with the intention to emigrate.

The signs of the remaining coefficients are consistent with the assumptions of the model, though without having statistically significant impact on the intention to emigrate. For instance, having retired member in the household or being social assistance beneficiary negatively influences the intention to emigrate, whereas having emigrated close relative(s) or being engaged in informal employment increases the intention to emigrate.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have analysed the role of emigration and remittances as adjustment mechanisms in the Macedonian labour market. Due to the high and persistent unemployment, the labour market in Macedonia has adjusted through various alternative forms that helped cushion the social consequences

of unemployment. The conventional forms of labour market adjustment are characteristic for the employed workers, whereas non-standard forms are mainly alternatives for the unemployed workers. To our knowledge, in Macedonia there is a lack of consistent cross-section data about the role that emigration and remittances play as forms of labour market adjustment mechanisms. In order to estimate to what extent the unemployed workers are prone toward emigration as well as to estimate the amount of remittances they receive, we have designed and carried out a survey based on a representative sample of registered unemployed.

According to the results from the survey we found that more than 60 percent of unemployed workers if have possibility would emigrate either permanently or temporarily. Moreover, we revealed that only small proportion of unemployed have emigrated close relatives, but they heavily rely on the remittances that they receive from them. Therefore, remittances alongside other forms of labour market adjustment significantly contribute to the wellbeing of the unemployed workers. Regarding the determinants of the intention to emigrate we revealed that male, urban workers and those who search for a job manifest considerably higher intention to emigrate. In contrast, women and those who are married manifest lower intention to emigrate.

Having in mind the characteristics of emigration and remittances as adjustment mechanisms for unemployed workers we can draw several conclusions and policy implications. First, emigration and remittances for unemployed workers in Macedonia mostly represent a strategy of last resort rather than investment opportunity. Second, the labour market segmentation is particularly pronounced with respect to the personal characteristics of unemployed who manifest intentions to emigrate. Third, the policy measures should target the most vulnerable segments of the unemployed population in order to provide appropriate employment opportunities and decent work in the home labour market.

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