

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Should I Help Or Should I Go? Is Volunteering Linked With The Migration Intention Of South-East European Youth?

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Abstract. Young people in South-Eastern Europe have a lot of particularities, two of them being that they volunteer less (FES 2019) and migrate a lot (Williams et al. 2017). While volunteering increases civic participation (B. Davies 2019), leading to a person's increased will to change and be mobile; it also creates a sense of belonging (Kragt 2022), which then diminishes the desire to leave the community. Yet, no research has addressed the relationship between volunteering and migration intention, despite the fact that, recently, there has been an increase of interest in research addressing the question of migrants doing volunteering (Alfieri et al. 2019; Baillie Smith et al. 2019; Sime and Behrens 2023).

Using a 2018 youth database collected by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in ten countries from South-Eastern Europe, we address this lack of research between individual volunteering rates and the migration intention of young people in the region.

Individual volunteering does seem to have an effect on migration intention, but that effect becomes non-significant when other metrics are taken into account. When checking for different volunteering rates, there are significant differences between youth who volunteers sporadically and those who do so periodically. As such, my research suggests that there exists a moderator effect of volunteering on migration intentions, affecting a young person's view of their country's democratic identity and their own wellbeing within it.

Keywords: youth, volunteering, migration, south-eastern Europe, democracy

Introduction

Everyone has been young at some point, and we feel a sort of nostalgia towards that period, so much so that in recent years, research and policy interest in young people has increased significantly. However, in many parts of the world still, young people remain under strenuous conditions. This paper has a particular interest in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) youth, who grow up through significantly increased expectations, as now they must thrive in an ever-accelerating world, where it is assumed that only the most mobile, either cognitively, economically, or physically, can survive (Reiter and Steiner 2016). Mobility itself is not devoid of risks, as several young people need to migrate in precarious conditions (Ferrara et al. 2016; Marcu 2014; Adamović and Potočnik 2022), with uncertainties about their future success, even if they go through with their migration process (Domas and Avery 2024). In his research on Eastern European students going to Denmark, (Ginnerskov-Dahlberg 2021) shows that even after their insertion in the

educational and working fields, some young people still do not view this as a worthwhile experience.

To be mobile in your youth means to be flexible within all of your forward movement choices: education, career, location, relationships etc. This very complicated process can happen either as part of their developmental process, or for various socioeconomic reasons, such as pursuing academia, finding a job, finding their own place, developing themselves, or in search for meaning (Belmonte and McMahon 2019), although recently, also because of environmental reasons (Drago 2017). Some scholars also argue that migration could be used as a mechanism of prolonging youth or your own developmental process, through education or new experiences (Doumas and Avery 2024). Other scholars argue that the inherent definition of what it means to be a mobile individual is wrong, and that the current tools that we use are too tied to transnational exchanges, so much so that we are missing the point of an individuals' relationships, networks, and previous mobilities which could explain their desire to eventually migrate transnationally (Mazzucato 2024).

Volunteering seems to have the opposite effects to migration, even though it works through the same mechanism of network-building (Gil-Lacruz et al. 2015), by increasing your subjective well-being and desire to be active within your community (Nurse-Bray et al. 2022). It also helps answer the same question for a young person in their process of becoming adult – what is my purpose? (Baillie Smith et al. 2019). Regardless of what it means for a young person to be a volunteer: (1) to develop yourself, to satisfy your intrinsic desires and your career chances, (2) to devote yourself for a cause, or your own ideas of righteousness, or to (3) appreciate the process of helping, and making friends, or (4) gaining short/long-term benefits, most of the time, volunteering does not happen alone (Heley et al. 2022). This suggests that the mechanism of meaning-making or community-building for volunteers happens in groups (Haski-Leventhal and Cnaan 2009), which implicitly ties volunteering work to community-moderated effects.

This article makes two very important contributions to the current literature: (a) it checks what is the impact that volunteering¹ has on the intention to migrate, by analysing the relationship between volunteering time, and the number of volunteering organizations one devotes their time to; and (b) it checks which factors are the main drivers for migration for two categories of volunteers²: (1) strategic volunteers (those who volunteer scarcely and do it for a specific purpose, such as better employment or education opportunities, and with several organizations) and (2) community volunteers (those who dedicate a lot of time for volunteering, regardless of their reasons, usually within a few organisations).

Youth Migration In Europe

Even though Europe hosts merely 7% of the total youth population, the share of youth migrants across the continent of Europe is four times higher, at 27%. Of these, the share of total youth migrants increases in the category of 15 to 29 years old, and starts decreasing afterwards, with 60% of them coming from high-income countries, and 90% from either high or medium-income countries (Belmonte and McMahon 2019). Additionally, 10% of those who wish to migrate, have already made their plans to migrate (Migali and Scipioni 2018). This mobility of the very able

¹ Understood in a non-specific way (local vs. remote, physical vs. online, project or organization-based etc.).

² These categories are further explained in the next chapters.

is such a common phenomenon in Europe, that scholars have coined the term Eurostars – highly educated individuals who are mobile and agile within Europe, which move to fill important positions in Eurocities' centers of economic, political, or cultural development (Favell 2008). However, we should also note that the previous term is not devoid of elitism, as specific groups benefit disproportionately from extensive mobility capabilities within Europe (Hof 2019).

We consider that, regardless of their migration route, young people are affected by micro, meso, and macro-level factors (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022; Williams et al. 2017). Micro-level factors refer to socio-economic, demographic, and psychosocial elements; meso-level factors have family, networks, and societal components and macro-level factors refer to legal, cultural, and developmental factors.

The SEE migration research boomed after the EU's 2004 and 2007 expansions, which allowed for more transnational movements, as well as after the 2008 financial crisis, which created fertile ground for intra-EU mobilities, especially from East to West (King 2017, 4; Organiściak-Krzykowska 2017). This periphery-centre type of migration was disproportionately done by younger people (Williams et al. 2017), affecting the economic and demographic evolution of both home and host countries. Out of all of them, Poland and Romania have had the biggest total migration among Eastern countries (Van Mol 2016, 1308), followed by Bulgaria (Organiściak-Krzykowska 2017, 168); while Croatia and Hungary are the highest providers of the Central countries (Lulle et al. 2019, 1726–29; Organiściak-Krzykowska 2017, 171); and Albania and Kosovo are the biggest from the Balkans (Stojanovski et al. 2023, 275–76). In a nutshell, as another scholar has put it, you can either migrate for a better life, or forever expect that a market economy deity will come rescue you (Roberts 2016, 51).

On the other side, indefinite migration might not have the best benefits for oneself. Disappointed by a mismatch between the reality and expectations inside the new society, young people are often constrained to either assume different identities, or to actually lie to their peers about the status of their "successful" migration (Doumas and Avery 2024). If they then try to extend their duration in the host country, hoping for better social integration, it appears that both their levels of confidence, and skill acquisition decrease over time (Lulle et al. 2019). This means that the best strategy a young person has is to migrate several times, adhering to the 6 months – 3 years timeframe when they develop the most.

Research shows that migration routes are also sometimes fragile, being affected by anything from a change in perspective, to changing personal or group conditions, to public policies (O'Reilly et al. 2015; Stojanovski et al. 2023). The biggest threat is, as some researchers argue, the breakdown of some of the networks used for the original migration, either between the individual who migrated and its network, or within the network itself (Herz and Altissimo 2021). This would suggest that, although there are many benefits to migration, there are also some threats and downsides, so staying could be as equally beneficial to young people. Some data shows that those who remain in their country could have a chance for an increase positive affect and well-being, especially when migration is a common path inside the country, and when there are remittances involved; yet there has been no reduction in the onset of stress and depression caused by missing those who leave (Ivlevs 2015). As such, their relations with those who leave cannot be the sole explainer of their more positive overall state.

All things considered, if you choose to stay, you need a "survival" strategy; and I propose that one such viable strategy is volunteering, which was shown to better help a young individual

integrate into the community (Nursey-Bray et al. 2022), increase their network/ human capital (Gil-Lacruz et al. 2015, 2), and improve their well-being (Plagnol and Huppert 2010, 161–62). Volunteering can also be seen as a process of identity or sense-making (Baillie Smith et al. 2019, 1366–67; Kragt 2022, 60), which helps the young person find their unique place, and make them stay. However, no researcher had the opportunity to check what effect volunteering has had on the intention to migrate of young people in SEE, as we can expect that volunteering, through the previously-mentioned mechanisms, could either impede or support mobilities.

Youth Volunteering In Europe

Here, volunteering has its own quirks: socio-cultural, related to democratic values (Wilson 2012, 192) and moral-ethical, related to the spread of Christian values (Cesaltina et al. 2010, 4–6). These quirks get morphed the more east you go, where the communist regimes made it so that the majority of the population was forced into voluntary activities, which made them despise the idea of “free labour” (Silló 2016, 103). For this reason, following the author’s recommendations, I will analyse young people, as they are most likely to volunteer against their parents communist view of volunteering, regardless of the type of organization (Silló 2016, 99). Most of the times, youth are also the only ones prone to accepting a new narrative that puts forth the advantages and rewards of volunteering (Silló 2016, 108), as they are equally able to do so while migrating (Lulle et al. 2019, 1730).

Already, from the beginning of the century, volunteers in Europe, particularly young volunteers, who were more flexible and gathered digital skills more easily, have begun to transition their views on what volunteering meant. “Old(er)” types of volunteering did not get lost in the process, but its intertwining with a fast-paced world gave birth to a new, reflexive type of volunteering that has emerged as an alternative to the membership-based, high-intensity, impact-driven means of helping (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003). This hypothesis was later tested in some countries (Sengupta et al. 2023; Eimhjellen et al. 2018; Smith et al. 2010) and held ground. Based on this factor, it is probable to expect that these two categories of volunteers would behave differently also when it comes to their desire to migrate.

For example, the newer group of volunteering-type, which I would also call strategic volunteering, were shown to carefully handpick the types of volunteering that are trendy, or widely contribute to “development” (Georgeou and Haas 2019; Yea 2018), could use this strategy of survival, into ensuring that they qualify for a better workplace later (Jones 2011). As youth themselves becomes more instrumentalized in public and private policies worldwide, they could instrumentalize volunteering, particularly abroad volunteering, as a means for social success and the climbing in social ranks. This type of volunteering was also shown to improve the chance of reaching educational objectives (Pantea 2013). On the other side, critics have noted that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus cannot as easily be broken through the opportunities one might get through volunteering, as both subjects, and their recruiters, are more prone to stick to familiar activities when it comes to joining volunteering (Dean 2016). However, even when we would apply a similar procedure of abroad volunteering, such as voluntourism to some marginalized youth volunteers, the outcome is similar for different social groups (Judge 2015).

The older types of volunteer strategy, namely community volunteering are those who seek to have a meaningful helping experience, and to connect with their peers (Nursey-Bray et al. 2022). They constantly work longer hours, derive more joy from assisting others, and are value-

driven (Sengupta et al. 2023; Smith et al. 2010). There are more likely to volunteer because of intrinsic or self-determined motivational factors (Güntert et al. 2022, 16), and normative incentives (Kragt 2022, 58), and to also do it in times of crises (Florian et al. 2019; Puzyreva et al. 2022; Sengupta et al. 2023) This type of volunteers have also been observed to compensate in case their fellow volunteers are more passive (Graf 2014) driven by a mechanism where they constantly re-negotiate their sense of meaningfulness (Florian et al. 2019).

For these reasons, I find it extremely interesting to search for the relationship that exists between volunteering and migration intentions, considering that both interact with very important socio-developmental metrics, such as economic status (Plagnol and Huppert 2010; Williams et al. 2017), well-being (McGarry et al. 2021; Plagnol and Huppert 2010), and political participation (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan 2018; Gil-Lacruz et al. 2015). I choose to analyse how this relationship exists with youth, as they are more likely to have an untainted view over volunteering (Silló 2016), and in South-Eastern Europe, as it is a hotspot of differences, and a point of interaction between East-West and North-South values and societal views.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature at hand, we expect two different possible relationships between migration intention and time dedicated to volunteering: a linear, negative relationship, and a non-linear, bell-shaped relationship. The first one assumes that volunteers are a homogenous group, and that the effects that they produce are directly proportional with the hours invested when volunteering. On the other side, the second one hints that there are two big, heterogenous categories of volunteers, which co-exist, and on which the amount of volunteering that they do has different effects.

From the literature talking about the 'youth transitions' turn in migration studies (King 2017, 7–8), we can expect that higher rates of volunteering are negatively correlated with higher rates of migration intentions. This happens because we see both volunteering and migration as a way for the young person to create meaning in their lives, so we can expect that those who have not succeeded in doing so through volunteering will resort to migration. We see a similar relationship when we compare our variables in Tables 4 and 5 of the supplementary materials, where most of the variables that correlate positively with volunteering, correlate negatively with migration intention.

H₁: Young people that have higher rates of volunteering have a reduced intention to migrate.

The theory that the perception of volunteering is split into two meta-categories has been advanced by a widely cited paper (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003), which split volunteering styles in a non-normative way, into (1) reflexive, and (2) collective styles. The first category encapsulating the reflexive styles³, which here I will call strategic volunteers, choose specific volunteering roles and durations, meaning they also volunteer less, because they have a pre-defined goal in their mind, which is usually tied to having a better life, or getting a better job or education. This is seen in recent research looking at motivations to do volunteering for CV-building (Bocsi et al. 2020, 87; B. Davies 2019, 228; McGloin and Georgeou 2016, 11–12; Smith et al. 2010). At the same time,

³ How the dataset will be split between strategic and community volunteers will be detailed in the following section.

the strategic volunteer will also choose roles that maximise their chances of a successful migration attempt, because volunteering facilitates getting an education or a job in a foreign, more developed country. The approach is supported by the neoliberal theory of migration, in which people (also volunteers) seek to maximise their efforts and to ensure the best migration route for labour efficiency (King 2017, 2–3). This means that every additional volunteering hour is chosen so that it increases migratory success.

H_{2a}: Strategic volunteers have a positive relation between their volunteering rates and intentions to migrate.

The second category which talks about collective styles of volunteering, will be called here community volunteers, which are people who volunteer because of a mix of joy they feel when helping, and a bonding link that they establish with the people that they help. This type of volunteers are those who recurrently score positively when it comes to social involvement, and helping your community (Lai and Wenhong 2016; Pearce 2017). This hypothesis is cemented by the social approaches towards volunteering, which supports its community-building effects (Nursey-Bray et al. 2022, 255; Wyn et al. 2019, 19).

H_{2b}: Community volunteers have a negative relation between their volunteering rates and intentions to migrate.

Data And Methods

I use the dataset of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2018 youth study which was done simultaneously on 10 countries in SEE: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia with 10000 respondents aged 14-29 (FES 2019). The descriptive statistics are detailed for all models in each regression references.

The dependent variable will be the intention to migrate, which was shown to correlate with actual migration action (Van Mol 2016, 1305). Our variable will be a scale where 1= no intention, and 5= a very strong intention to migrate. Our independent variable will be the volunteer status (scale of 0 - 1 to volunteering in the past 12 months), volunteering time (scale of 1= never volunteering to 5= volunteering almost daily), and volunteering organisations, which is the sum of all the organisations that the respondent has volunteered for in the previous year.

Some of the control variables did not exist in the original dataset and had to be added. The summary of the variables in the equation, alongside their sources, is detailed in Table 6 of the supplementary materials. Most of the variables were included into a linear regression, either as a standing variable, or as part of a scale; the original democracy scale, which included an average of Freedom House, Democracy Index (EIU), Liberal Democracy Index (V-Dem), State of Democracy Index (GSoD) scores, had to be transformed into a Democracy-Development Index due to high internal correlations. The new scale, alongside all of the other scales, are detailed in Table 7. In order to ensure there is no multicollinearity, the variable measuring HDI Differences had to be removed, as it had a VIF >10. Due to the large number of variables, a Durbin-Watson test was done on each regression to ensure that no multicollinearity is present, and the results are mentioned for each regression.

Results

Table 1 - Liner regression testing the relationship between volunteering and migration on the entire available sample

Linear Regression using FES 2018 Youth Study Database	Model 1.1 H1 N= 8850 Adjusted R ² = 0,039	Model 1.2 H1 N= 7562 Adjusted R ² = 0,617	Model 1.3 ⁴ H1 N= 5979 Adjusted R ² = 0,649
Constant	2.226(0.171)***	1.392 (0.177)***	2.450 (0.230)***
Volunteering time (1-5)	.008 (.016)	-.015 (.012) ⁵	-.011 (.013)
Number of volunteering organizations you are in	.013 (.046)	.000 (.032)	.006 (.035)
Previous volunteering (1-2)	.093 (.073)***	.014 (.051)	.007 (.056)
Employment scale (1-6)	.090 (.006)***	-	-
Highest completed education (1-7)	-	-.035 (.012)***	-.023 (.013)*
Income (1-5)	-.074 (.017)***	-.036 (.012)***	-.033 (.013)***
Respondent's sex (1-2; 1 = Female)	.048 (.031)***	.017 (.022)*	.019 (.024)*
Respondent's age	-.084 (.005)***	-	-
Urban scale (1-4)	.029 (.011)**	.020 (.008)**	-
Importance of God in your life (1-10)	.021 (.005)*	.063 (.004)***	.020 (.005)*
Migration network (1-2)		.168 (.026)***	.137 (.028)***
Previous migration (1-2)		.038 (.036)***	.025 (.039)**
Previous travel for education (1-8)		-	.015 (.016)*
Well-being (subjective, 1- 25 scale)		-.054 (.003)***	-.056 (.004)***
Generalized trust (1-40 scale)		-.052 (.002)***	-.039 (.002)***
Scale from single-married (1-6)		-.030 (.006)***	-.025 (.007)**
Religious attendance (1-5)		-.046 (.007)***	-.040 (.008)***
Knowledge of host country (1-35 scale)		.672 (.001)***	.683 (.001)***

⁴ Durbin-Watson = 1,751

⁵ p = 0,051



	Model 1.1 H1 N= 8850 Adjusted R ² = 0,039	Model 1.2 H1 N= 7562 Adjusted R ² = 0,617	Model 1.3 ⁴ H1 N= 5979 Adjusted R ² = 0,649
Linear Regression using FES 2018 Youth Study Database			
Development-Democracy Scale (1-5)			-.097 (.019)***
Competition is harmful, it brings out the worst in people (1-5)			-.014 (.008)⁶
Satisfaction with own country's democracy (1-5)			-.035 (.012)***
View of EU Economy (1-5)			.019 (.012)*

Table 2 - Linear regression testing the relationship between volunteering and migration on the high volunteering rates sub-sample

	Model 2.4 H2b N= 1450 Adjusted R ² = 0,055	Model 2.5 H2b N= 1143 Adjusted R ² = 0,585	Model 2.6 ⁷ H2b N= 942 Adjusted R ² = 0,625
Linear Regression using FES 2018 Youth Study Database			
Constant	2.901***	2.138***	2.929***
Volunteering time (1-5)	-0.029 (.052)	-0.013 (.040)	-0.007 (.043)
Number of volunteering organizations you are in	.018 (.055)	.010 (.041)	.016 (.046)
Previous volunteering (1-2)	.140 (.111)***	.042 (.083)	.027 (.090)
Employment scale (1-6)	.084 (.014)**	.056 (.011)*	-
Income (1-5)	-.058 (.040)*	-	-
Respondent's age	-.146 (.013)***	-	-
Urban scale (1-4)	-	.040 (.021)*	-
Importance of God in your life (1-10)		.076 (.011)**	-
Migration network (1-2)		.111 (.067)***	.091 (.071)***
Well-being (subjective, 1-25 scale)		-.047 (.009)*	-.039 (.009)⁸
Generalized trust (1-40 scale)		-.072 (.004)***	-.063 (.005)**
Scale from single-married (1-6)		-.057 (.017)*	-.052 (.018)*
Religious attendance (1-5)		-.055 (.017)*	-.045 (.018)⁹

⁶ p = 0,065

⁷ Durbin-Watson = 1,751

⁸ p = 0,092

⁹ p = 0,053

	Model 2.4 H2b N= 1450 Adjusted R ² = 0,055	Model 2.5 H2b N= 1143 Adjusted R ² = 0,585	Model 2.6 ⁷ H2b N= 942 Adjusted R ² = 0,625
Linear Regression using FES 2018 Youth Study Database			
Knowledge of host country (1-35 scale)		.679 (.003)***	.701 (.003)***
How often you go out with friends (1-5)		-.035 (.031)¹⁰	-.036 (.033)¹¹
Living with your parents (0-2)			-.041 (.042)¹²
Development-Democracy Scale (1-5)			-.127 (.047)***
Satisfaction with own country's democracy (1-5)			-.060 (.030)**
View of EU Economy (1-5)			.042 (.031)¹³

Table 1 - Linear regression testing the relationship between volunteering and migration on the low volunteering rates sub-sample

	Model 2.1 H2a N= 7379 Adjusted R ² = 0,039	Model 2.2 H2a N= 6372 Adjusted R ² = 0,624	Model 2.3 ¹⁴ H2a N= 4976 Adjusted R ² = 0,654
Linear Regression using FES 2018 Youth Study Database			
Constant	1.963***	1.290***	2.370***
Volunteering time (1-5)	.056 (.044)***	-.008(0.031)	.001 (.033)
Number of volunteering organizations you are in	.007 (.081)	.001 (.057)	.006 (.059)
Previous volunteering (1-2)	.067 (.111)**	.007 (0.077)	-.001 (0.082)
Employment scale (1-6)	.092 (.006)***	-	-
Highest completed education (1-7)	-	-.036 (.013)**	-.024 (.014)*
Income (1-5)	-.078 (.018)***	-.039 (.013)***	-.035 (.014)***
Respondent's sex (1-2; 1 = Female)	.057 (.034)***	.016 (.024)*	.018 (.026)*
Respondent's age	-.071 (.005)***	-	-
Urban scale (1-4)	.030 (.012)**	.015 (.009)¹⁵	.015 (.009)¹⁶
Importance of God in your life (1-10)	.023 (.006)¹⁷	.061 (.004)***	.023 (.005)*

¹⁰ p = 0,077

¹¹ p = 0,088

¹² p = 0,08

¹³ p = 0,059

¹⁴ Durbin-Watson = 1,8

¹⁵ p = 0,058

¹⁶ p = 0,094

¹⁷ p = 0,052

	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3 ¹⁴
	H2a	H2a	H2a
Linear Regression using FES 2018 Youth Study Database	N= 7379	N= 6372	N= 4976
	Adjusted R ² = 0,039	Adjusted R ² = 0,624	Adjusted R ² = 0,654
Migration network (1-2)		.178 (.028)***	.146 (.031)***
Previous migration (1-2)		.043 (.039)***	.033 (.042)***
Previous travel for education (1-8)		-	.016 (.017)¹⁸
Well-being (subjective, 1-25 scale)		-.055 (.004)***	-.059 (.004)***
Generalized trust (1-40 scale)		-.047 (.002)***	-.034 (.002)***
Scale from single-married (1-6)		-.025 (.007)*	-.020 (.008)¹⁹
Religious attendance (1-5)		-.046 (.008)***	-.040 (.008)***
Knowledge of host country (1-35 scale)		.670 (.001)***	.678 (.001)***
Development-Democracy Scale (1-5)			-.088 (.021)***
Competition is harmful, it brings out the worst in people (1-5)			-.018 (.009)*
Satisfaction with own country's democracy (1-5)			-.029 (.013)**
Value alignment with home country (1-40 scale)			-.018 (.002)²⁰

Model 1, comprising of parts 1.1 through 1.3, has shown a positive relation between having previously volunteered and the intention to migrate, whose effect spreads to other variables in the more complex models; and a negative relationship between time dedicated to volunteering and the intention to migrate (at .051 significance level), which also loses its effect once national and value-based questions are taken into account. The latter would suggest that *H1 is true*. The effect of previous volunteering seems to be lost with the inclusion of meso-level variables, most likely within the support from a migration network, as volunteering often build social capital (Nursey-Bray et al. 2022), and the effect on volunteering intensity disappears, suggesting that young people are more likely to leave because of their values and beliefs about their current contexts (Pates 2023; Naterer and Lavrič 2022), rather than because of how often they volunteer.

While other studies did not get a difference between genders when it comes to migration (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022; Williams et al. 2017), I did, which is on par with other research on SEE (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan 2018; Naterer and Lavrič 2022). Income and urbanization have similar effects as others across literature (Czaika and Reinprecht 2022; Grönlund et al. 2011;

¹⁸ p = 0,063

¹⁹ p = 0,064

²⁰ p = 0,099

Organiściak-Krzykowska 2017; Stojanovski et al. 2023). Surprisingly, I got opposite results when it comes to the harm produced by competition (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan 2018, 842) and educational levels (Van Mol 2016, 1312).

Although Berlinschi and Harutyunyan do not provide an accurate description of why their dataset showed a positive correlative with negative views on competition, due to its low statistical significance, other authors paint a more comprehensive picture. For example, Wilder found out that Baltic young people's view on competition has been worsening since the 1990s (Wilder 2013, 63), so perhaps the trend kept increasing, and Mieriņa showed that there is a clear negative correlation between view on competition and views on the EU (Mieriņa 2018, 46), which positively correlates with migration intention. Some author have proposed that young people who already got their benefits for their education through previous migration will be less likely to migrate (Tufiş and Sandu 2023, 843), however, that is not our case since previous travel for educational reasons show a positive correlation with migration intention. The only other available explanation is that lower migration happens through a job-seeking formula in which the lower-skilled, lower-educated are more likely to migrate due to low employability in their home country (Kolev and Saget 2005; Williams et al. 2017).

The biggest positive effects on migration are the knowledge you have about the target country, which makes sense, as the biggest intentions to migrate are amongst the young people who have made a plan already, and that plan requires information; and having a migrant network you can rely on, because most successful migrations need some type of external support to happen. The biggest negative effects come from the perceptions that you have on the democracy and development of your own country, which works through a mechanism where the young person does not feel like they can connect with their home community; and their own well-being, which they tie to how good they feel in one place. Interestingly, there was no statistically-significant effect between value disalignment²¹ with home country and the intention to migrate for the general sample.

Model 2 checks the same effects, but on a subsample of young people who only volunteer on a monthly basis (2.1 through 2.3), and for those who volunteer more often (2.4 through 2.6). Although an independent samples t-test was performed, which showed a .11 higher migration intention in the first group when compared to those who volunteer more, the effects do not seem to be mediated by volunteering, but instead by similar factors that affect the youth volunteering population more broadly.

Interestingly, the effects of having previously migrated, alongside previous mobilities suggest that long-term²² trips, which gave them courage and information (although the effect of knowledge is smaller) might explain the difference, as this sub-sample shows a correlation with both previous migration and travel for education when compared to the larger sample. Alternatively, it could be that that once a month volunteering experience is an Erasmus or European Solidarity Corps, which could also explain the variance (Dabasi-Halász et al. 2019), since the youth volunteer country of choice for travelling might matter (A. Davies 2022, 36) for future migrations. Even though the relationship between individual volunteering and migration did

²¹ The values that I am referring to were measured against these factors: The rule of law; Human rights; Economic welfare of citizens; Employment; Equality; Security; Individual Freedom.

²² And I stress on *long-term* because the question related to previous migration refers to periods longer than 6 months.

not result in a direct correlation except for the initial model, looking at the holistic picture seems to support *H2a* – young people who do little volunteering are also carefully picking where and how often they are travelling and migrating, which seems to have a long-term effect on their migration intentions. This creates the ideal picture of the migrant-youth: the urban male with some volunteering in his CV, an average-income, currently-in-education, who has migrated before for education and other reasons, who despises his own country, but knows a lot about other countries where he would like to be and who says he loves God, but would not step foot in a church for any reason whatsoever.

For young people who volunteer a lot (weekly or daily), volunteering itself does not have an effect on their desire to migrate, but rather indirectly through some other factors. What I found unexpectedly is that, in model 2.4, previous volunteering was also shown to support migration intention, a result that completely contradicts the hypothesis we had about high-investment volunteers. *While H2b is not supported*, the logical thought behind it remains robust, because the intention to migrate seems to be affected by variables that have an effect on their sense of belonging and connexion within a community, such as their subjective views on the democracy, generalized trust, going out with friends, and living with parents. Additional variables related to family (parents being alive, parents having influence on you etc.) were tested to see if they could explain migration and travelling, but they were not statistically significant. What could invalidate this idea is the fact that we did not find a correlation between the value alignment of the person with its home country²³.

Overall, we can notice three more interesting findings:

(1) as volunteering rates increase, the effect their view on democracy has on their decision to migrate increases, suggesting that volunteers, because they are more civically engaged (B. Davies 2019, 227), also get more discouraged by disruptions to their countries or regions' democratic status (Nurse-Bray et al. 2022). It could also be that volunteers, while they mostly interact with what not works in their area, tend to have more negative views on the current state of their country, which, in term, increases their desire to migrate (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan 2018, 841–43; Fischer-Souan 2019, 12);

(2) as volunteering rates increase, the effect of having a migrant network decreases, suggesting that volunteers might place a higher importance to their own acquired skills, rather than on external support. It could also be that the effect is smaller because higher rates of volunteering increase belonging (Baillie Smith et al. 2019, 1368; Habib and Ward 2019; Wyn et al. 2019, 19), which means that the effect of the migration pull from a person's migrant network gets smaller.

(3) religiosity (the importance of God for oneself) is linked with an increase in migration intention, while religious attendance, are correlated with a decrease in the desire to migrate. I believe that contemporary religiosity, being a very intimate and individual practice, could support values similar to those who encourage migration, while religious attendance has been linked with an increase of social/ human capital (Guiso et al. 2006; McCleary and Barro 2006) at the place of origin, which might influence the decision to stay (Myers 2000, 762).

As a summary, when comparing the two typologies, strategic volunteers are more likely to migrate because:

²³ See Table 7 for an explanation of this scale.

- they know a lot about the host country and have someone who supports them,
- they are single, less educated urban men with a low income, who have previously migrated and studies in another country, who
- are not feeling good in a country that is not so well-developed; and who just
- yearn for competition and cannot align with the values of the country that they currently live in.
- they are not affected by the relationship they have with friends or family when making the choice to migrate.

Community volunteers, on the other hand, are more likely to migrate:

- because of the knowledge and network that they have with regards to their target country, but also
- because they do not trust their community and are not so satisfied with the state of the democracy in their countries, and
- if they are still living with their parents.
- they are not affected by individual educational levels, gender, the locality they live in, their level of income, or if they had migrated or traveled before.

Conclusion and Discussion

Overall, there is a statistically-significant relation between individual volunteering metrics and the intention to migrate for young south-eastern Europeans, which becomes null after accounting for several meso- and macro-level variables, particularly those who more generally explain migration.

Our biggest hypothesis, that which classifies previous volunteering as having a negative effect on a young person's intention to migrate, could not be proven in its entirety. This can be explained by the potential moderator effect that volunteering has on building up someone's network and on helping them gather knowledge of their target country, which were our biggest positive predictors. The decreasing effects that the migration network has over the intention to migrate, could signify that volunteers prefer to treat migration as an individual journey, rather than a communal one. This is further reinforced by the fact that having a good relationship with your friends decreases your desire to migrate. It could also be that, for many, volunteering is used a key to unlock a better/ more western educational journey, which could also explain why the negative effect of education disappears in the group of recurrent volunteers. This would signify that the informal requirements from universities that their students are better placed if they have volunteered before has succeeded in actually increasing volunteering rates, although with potential limited benefits on the individual overall.

Besides having support from someone from their target country, the knowledge about the country was the other positive predictor of migration for young volunteers, with a roughly similar size of effect, regardless of the amount they volunteered. For the general population, previous migration was also quite a strong predictor, alongside previous travel for the monthly volunteering group, which I explained following the theory that young people tend to do many, smaller migrations for educational reasons until they fulfill their desires to migrate. This could mean that short-term projects, such as Erasmus+, ESC, and other exchange programmes are a success, in a sense that they decrease the overall intention to migrate permanently, thus helping decrease brain drain.

This moderator effect can also be explored in the different effects of democracy and development based on the intensity of volunteering one does, which could signify that the mechanisms that volunteering has on migration intention are mediated through the person's view on the local and national state of affairs, particularly because a community volunteer is usually driven by a civic duty to keep on volunteering. On the other side, the other biggest detractors from migration were, at the general level, the income and the person's subjective well-being. While the income one is pretty obvious, as you need resources for a successful migration, the well-being effect is not clear-cut. As more studies clarify the effects volunteering has on well-being²⁴, we will be better equipped at understanding how this relationship affects a young person's desire to migrate. Generalized trust was another negative predictor, which is on par with current theories that explain that trusting your local community decreases your intention to migrate; with the effect being slightly higher for recurrent volunteers, because they are building trust while in-action alongside their peers.

To further test the hypotheses that came out of this limited study, more research is needed. The researcher did try to look for differences between the EU and non-EU samples, but did not find anything of relevance. Additionally, a qualitative research is necessary, alongside another study that could test the longitudinal effect that volunteering and volunteering rates have (had) on the intention to migrate on young people from south-eastern Europe, which could be of particular importance, especially for Balkan countries' policymakers.

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²⁴ (Nakamura et al. 2025; Whillans et al. 2016; Mokhzan et al. 2023).

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Supplementary Materials

Table 4- Elements that correlate with youth migration (author synthesis from a large body of literature)

	Macro	Meso	Micro
Political	The state of democracy (-) EU membership duration (-) HDI differences (+) Policies affecting migration Health policies (+)		Voting participation (-) Trust in other religions and nationalities (-)
Economic	Country GDP (-) Country AIC (-) Regional GDP (-) GDP/capita (-) View of the EU Economy (-)	(un)Employment rates ²⁵ (-) Cost of living (+) View of competition (-)	Employed (-) Income (-)
Socio-demographic	Country size (-) Distance from the origin to the hosting country (-)	Family Status (-) Children ²⁶ Youth being marginalised (subjective) (+)	Age (-) Gender ²⁷ Educational background
Personal	Value alignment with the origin country (-)	Part of a migrant network (+)	Personality traits ²⁸

²⁵ Some authors have shown that in countries with high employment, motivations simply change to non-economic reasons (Bygnes 2017, 2; Naterer and Lavrič 2022, 309; Tufiş and Sandu 2023, 847–49)

²⁶ Having children was shown to have both positive and negative effects on youth migration (Williams et al. 2017)

²⁷ Although it is overall higher in males, some age groups (16-25) show disproportionately higher intentions for females (Williams et al. 2017)

²⁸ For more detailed explanation and results, see (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan 2018; Boneva and Frieze 2002)

		Past migration experience (+) Past travel experience (+)	Sexual orientation (+)
		Knowledge about the hosting country (+)	Subjective well-being (-)
		Generalised trust (-)	

Table 5 -Elements that correlate with youth volunteering
(author synthesis from a large body of literature)

	Macro	Meso	Micro
Economic	Country GDP (+) Regional GDP (+) GDP/capita (+) Public expenditure for unemployment & others (+)	(un)Employment rates (+) Household size (+)	Employed (+) Income (+) Work importance (-)
Socio-demographic	Country % of people volunteering (+) Civil liberties (+)	Family Status (+) Children (-) Living with parents (-) Social capital (+) Cultural capital (+)	Age (+) Gender (F) Education level (+)
Personal	Value alignment with the origin country (+)	Past volunteering experience (+) Generalized trust (+)	Personality traits ²⁹ Religious ³⁰ Religious attendance (+) Subjective well-being (+)

²⁹ For more detailed explanation and results, see (Plagnol and Huppert 2010, 165)

³⁰ While (Plagnol and Huppert 2010) get a positive relation with religiosity, (Kameråde et al. 2016) find a negative relation in Eastern European countries

Table 2 - Control variables in the regression (Bold= affecting Migration, Italic= affecting volunteering)³¹

	Macro	Meso	Micro
Political ³²	<i>The state of democracy</i> ³³ EU membership duration ³⁴ HDI differences ³⁵		Voting participation ³⁶
Economic	<i>Country GDP</i> ³⁷ <i>Country AIC</i> ³⁸ <i>Regional GDP</i> ³⁹ <i>GDP/capita</i> ⁴⁰	(un)Employment rates ⁴² View of competition ⁴³ <i>Household size</i> ⁴⁴	<i>Employed</i> ⁴⁵ <i>Income</i> ⁴⁶

³¹ Variables that are excluded from control due to lack of available data for all considered countries: (a) Health policies, (b) Public expenditure for unemployment, or due to information not being available in the dataset: (c) Work importance, (d) Distance from the origin to the hosting country, (e) Personality traits, (f) Cost of living

³² The following variables were transformed due to high internal correlation: Civil Liberty Index, Country size, State of Democracy Scale, EU interaction duration, Country Size, HDI Differences. Instead, except for the latter, they were combined into a new scale, called Democracy-Development Index

³³ Measured by two variables: Subjective view on democracy: *How are you satisfied with the state of democracy in (COUNTRY) in general?* and a scale comprising the average of 4 liberal democracy indicators, detailed in Table 7

³⁴ Created by giving the following prompt to ChatGPT *'If I gave you 10 countries: Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, could you provide me statistics from official sources or research, of how many years does each of them have inside the European Union, starting from the moment they became EU candidates?'*

³⁵ Created by subtracting HDI of desired country (*Where would you prefer to move to? First/ Second/ Third country you favour the most*) from the HDI of origin country. Source: (HDR UNDP 2025) + (Global Data Lab 2023) for Kosovo

³⁶ Measured by response to *Did you vote in the last elections for the national parliament?*

³⁷ World Bank Indicator: NY.GDP.MKTP.CD

³⁸ Substituted by World Bank Indicator: NE.CON.PRVT.CD

³⁹ Substituted by questionnaire variable *Settlement Size*

⁴⁰ World Bank Indicator: NY.GDP.PCAP.CD

⁴² World Bank Data: SL.EMP.TOTL.SP.ZS

⁴³ Measured by response to *Competition is harmful, it brings out the worst in people*

⁴⁴ Measured by response to *How many rooms are there in the apartment/house of your parents?*

⁴⁵ Measured by response to *What is your current employment status?* recoded from unemployed to full-time employment

⁴⁶ Measured by response to *Which of the following descriptions most adequately describes financial situation in your household?*

	View of the EU Economy⁴¹		
Socio-demographic	<p style="text-align: center;">Country size⁴⁷</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Country volunteering rates⁴⁸</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Country youth volunteering rates⁴⁹</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Civil liberties⁵⁰</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Family Status⁵¹</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Children⁵²</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Living with parents⁵³</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Social capital⁵⁴</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Youth being marginalised (subjective)⁵⁵</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Age</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gender</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Education level⁵⁶</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Educational background</p>

⁴¹ Measured by response to: *How good or bad are, in your view, is the status of following listed values in your country and in the EU as a whole: Economic welfare of citizens: EU?*

⁴⁷ Created by giving the following prompt to ChatGPT: *If I gave you 10 countries: Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, and asked you to give them a score from 1 - 10, where 1 is the smallest country in the world (by surface) and 10 is the largest (by surface), which grade would you give each?*

⁴⁸ (Krasniqi 2018; Voicu and Voicu 2009)

⁴⁹ Calculated through the dataset data

⁵⁰ (Freedom House 2024)

⁵¹ Measured by response to *What is your current status?* measured from *single* to *married*

⁵² Measured by response to *Current number of children?*

⁵³ Measured as a scale, detailed in Table 7

⁵⁴ Since the dataset did not allow for the creation of a scale similar to the one in (Plagnol and Huppert 2010), I have used only the response to the question *How often do you engage in Going out with friends?*

⁵⁵ Measured by response to *How many rights, in your opinion, have: Young people?* measured from *not enough* to *too many*

⁵⁶ Measured by response to *What is your highest education level completed so far?*

<p>Personal</p>	<p><i>Value alignment with the origin country</i>⁵⁷</p>	<p>Part of a migrant network⁵⁸</p> <p>Past migration experience⁵⁹</p> <p>Past travel experience⁶⁰</p> <p><i>Past volunteering experience</i>⁶¹</p> <p>Knowledge about the hosting country⁶²</p> <p>Generalised trust⁶³</p>	<p>Sexual orientation⁶⁴</p> <p><i>Religious</i>⁶⁵</p> <p><i>Religious attendance</i>⁶⁶</p> <p>Trust in other religions and nationalities⁶⁷</p> <p>Subjective well-being⁶⁸</p>
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Table 7 - List of scales that are in the regression

Scale name	Cronbach's Alpha	Explanation
Generalized_trust	0,810	<p>A list of 8 variables comprising trust in various actors. Full list:</p> <p>1. To what degree do you trust Extended family members (relatives)?;</p>

⁵⁷ Measured as a scale, detailed in Table 7

⁵⁸ Measured by response to *Do you have an invitation or support from someone you personally know living in the most desirable host-country?*

⁵⁹ Measured by response to *Have you ever been away from your native country more than six months?*

⁶⁰ Because we had several questions that did not allow for the creation of a scale, I have introduced each of them separately: *Have you ever stayed abroad for learning or training purposes or are you currently abroad:* (Higher Education/ Secondary Education/ Vocational Education or Training/ Other)

⁶¹ Measured by response to *Have you engaged in voluntary activity over the last 12 months, i.e. have you done any unpaid work voluntarily?*

⁶² Measured as a scale, detailed in Table 7

⁶³ Measured as a scale, detailed in Table 7

⁶⁴ Substituted by a response to the question *Have you ever experienced discrimination because of Your sexual orientation?*

⁶⁵ Measured by response to *How important is God in your life?*

⁶⁶ Measured by response to *Apart from weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services these days?*

⁶⁷ Measured by response to *To what degree do you trust People of other religions/ nationalities*

⁶⁸ Measured as a scale, detailed in Table 7

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. [...]: Friends; 3. [...]: Neighbours; 4. [...]: Classmates, coursemates, or work colleagues; 5. [...]: Political leaders; 6. [...]: People of other religions; 7. [...]: People with different political convictions; 8. [...]: People of other nationalities;
Democracy_index	0,928	A list of 4 score variables comprising country-level data for the status of liberal democracy: Freedom House, Democracy Index (EIU), Liberal Democracy Index (V-Dem), State of Democracy Index (GSoD).
Democracy-Development Index	0,888	<p>A list of 8 variables encompassing variables related to democracy or development:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Freedom House Civil Liberty Score, 2. Democracy Index (EIU), 3. Liberal Democracy Index (V-Dem), 4. State of Democracy Index (GSoD), 5. Country Size (1-10 scale computed by ChatGPT), 6. EU Interaction (count of years since official EU candidate status was given) 7. GDP/capita⁶⁹, 8. Settlement size (1-8 scale, replacement for Regional GDP)
Value_alignment	0,916	<p>A list of 8 variables aiming at measuring the opinion for the status of the social and political context of the respondent's country (1= very bad; 5= very good). Full List:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How good or bad, in your view, is the status of the following listed values in your country: Democracy?; 2. [...]: The rule of law; 3. [...]: Human rights; 4. [...]: Economic welfare of citizens; 5. [...]: Employment; 6. [...]: Equality; 7. [...]: Security; 8. [...]: Individual Freedom;

⁶⁹ The scale did not correlate with GDP

<p>Knowledge_country</p>	<p>0,945</p>	<p>A list of 7 variables comprising knowledge about the country of desired migration (1 = not at all; 5 = to a high extent).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent are you familiar with the available possibilities for immigrants/foreigners in the MOST desired host country in terms of Permission to stay/remain?; 2. [...]: Employment; 3. [...]: Education; 4. [...]: Housing; 5. [...]: Healthcare; 6. [...]: Welfare benefits; 7. [...]: Cultural norms and values;
<p>Living_parents</p>	<p>0,857</p>	<p>A scale of 2 variables that measures whether the person lives alone (0), with either parent (1), or both (2).</p>
<p>Subjective_wellbeing</p>	<p>0,761</p>	<p>A scale of 5 variables that measure satisfaction with various life factors (1= Very dissatisfied, 5= Very satisfied).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent are you satisfied with your family life?; 2. [...]: your circle of friends; 3. [...]: your education; 4. [...]: your job, if relevant; 5. [...]: your life in general;