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What Characteristics in the Youth Labour Market of Serbia Are Likely to Result in Employment?

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ABSTRACT

In stark contrast to certain EU member countries, Serbia faces a high youth unemployment rate of over 30% (34.9% in 2016, 32.8% in 2017 and 31% in 2018). This paper provides a logistic regression analysis of what characteristics among youth (15-30 years of age) contribute to the likelihood of their employment in Serbia. While youth is internationally defined as being between the ages of 15-24, this paper broadens it to 15-30, as it is defined in Serbia (RS) for the purposes of youth employment/unemployment and for the country's "National Youth Strategy from 2015 to 2025." The study was conducted using micro data from the Labour Force Survey provided on request from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. The indicators that affect whether a young person will be employed or not are: the financial background of the participant's household, earnings, age, gender, and total years of work experience. Theoretically, although it may be anticipated that unemployed individuals who have greater work experience find it easier to find a job, employment does seem to automatically generate longer working hours. The results of the research are both practical and scientific, as they may not only assist policy-makers in the process of writing strategies on youth employment, but also bear groundwork for further study.

KEYWORDS

youth | unemployment rate | Serbia | labour market | logistic regression

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INTRODUCTION

Significantly high youth unemployment rates are of serious concern to economic research. The Republic of Serbia's unemployment rate among those between 15 and 24 years of age is elevated compared to those of EU member states (averaging 19%) and is twice as high as the average for OECD member countries (13%) (OECD 2017; International Labour Organization 2017).

While Serbia has made efforts to more easily allow those under 29 years of age to readily enter the labour market, the rate of youth unemployment has remained high (21.7%) (Serbian National Employment Office 2018). While numerous studies have reported that the financial crisis has worsened the current situation (Chaundri et al. 2010), others point to problems that existed prior to 2008 (Marginean 2014; Kelly and McGuinness 2015). At the root of the matter is a distinct lack of education and skills among those seeking employment to meet the needs of the market/employers (Cho and Newhouse 2013; McGuinness and Sloane 2011; Pavlović and Ljumović 2016) as well as inadequate wages to promote young people to actively seek employment (Pavlović et al. 2017; Flinn 2006).

At 51.5%, 2012 marked the highest rate of unemployment among Serbian youth (15-24 years of age). Since then, through changes to policy and the implementation of programs aimed at bettering the number of youth employed, this rate has fallen from 51.5% to 32% from 2012 to 2018 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2018). The current unemployment rate for those aged from 15 to 30 is 21.7% (Serbian National Employment Office 2018).

In contrast, although several EU member states have youth unemployment rates below 10% (Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany, where rates in 2017 were 9.3%, 8% and 7%, respectively), EU policymakers remain concerned. According to the International Labour Organization (2016), roughly 4.2 million young people in EU member states are unemployed. The average unemployment rate for those aged 15-24 in the EU fell from 23% to 19% between 2013 and 2016; however, the same rate remains twice as high as the average EU unemployment rate (around 40%) in Greece (47.3%) and Spain (44%), which are still facing the effects of the financial crisis (International Labour Organization 2017).

The instability of Serbia's youth labour market, the main factor behind the country's high unemployment, has been primarily caused by socio-economic factors. Chief among these has been the growth of the grey economy, youth emigration, negative demographic trends, weaknesses in Serbia's educational system, asymmetric labour supply and demand, stark contrasts in regional development, and insufficient acquired work experience (Nikitović 2016; Domazet 2018; Paraušić et al. 2017).

It is true that the countries hardest hit by the financial crisis still are dealing with particularly high rates of youth unemployment. However, Vasile (2012), Cho and Newhouse (2013)

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Marginean (2014), and Malo and Mínguez (2018) have all come to the same conclusion that the economic crisis of 2008 only had a short-term impact on the unemployment rate of those under the age of 24, while other economic and social factors have had a more significant influence on their position in the labour market over the long term (Marginean 2014; Zdravković, Domazet and Nikitović 2012). For instance, Marginean (2014) analysed changes in youth unemployment in Romania from 2007 to 2013, ultimately concluding that the crisis only affected youth employment in the short term. Indeed, when reviewing statistical data on youth unemployment, it was found that the unemployment rate was significantly higher than the general unemployment rate prior to 2008.

A study carried out by Pavlović et al. (2018) focused on Serbia more precisely. It analysed indicators that influence youth participation in the labour market (gender, age structure, level of education attained, and region). These authors have demonstrated that education has a significant impact on active employment in the youth labour market. This paper will analyse factors affecting youth employment in the Republic of Serbia. The research was based on data from the Labour Force Survey 2016, which was obtained by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. It stems from previous research that used the same database and examined the same group of dependent and independent variables. Firstly, descriptive statistics of the Database of the Labour Force Survey 2016 will be presented. Thereafter, they will be applied to a logistic regression analysis to illuminate what characteristics among those aged between 15 and 30 correlate with employment.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

For this study, the database of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia – compiled from the Labour Force Survey (2016) – was used. The survey is conducted nationally on a six-monthly basis and provides an overview of demographic and socio-economic characteristics for over 130,000 respondents. The following independent variables are taken into account:

Box 1 Independent variables

I. sex (male / female) II. age (in years) III. education level obtained (ranging from "no education" to "PhD") IV. informal education (yes / no) V. financial background of the participant's household (from "good" to "very bad") VI. region (Belgrade / Vojvodina / Šumadija and Western Serbia, South and Eastern Serbia) VII. Area of origin (urban / rural)	I. marital status ("single," "married," "divorced," and "widower" as applied to two categories: "not married" / "married") II. total years working experience (0 assigned to respondents who have never been employed: 0.5 for those employed less than one year, 1.5 for less than two years) III. earnings (constructed on the basis of two variables: the participant's salary when employed; the minimum acceptable salary if the participant was unemployed as corresponding to five tiered categories)

Logistic regression serves as the foundation of empirical analysis, allowing for regression analysis to be used in situations of binary dependent variables or when the dependent variable can have only two values (0 and 1), describing the two complementary states of characteristics in the scope of the observation unit. Here applied, the dependent variable represents employment among youth: 0 if the respondent is unemployed and 1 if they are employed. In contrast to standard regression analyses, the results of a logistic regression analysis or estimated regression coefficients are interpreted as a marginal contribution to the overall probability that the respondent will be employed if the corresponding independent variable changes for a unit value.

The dependent variable in the regression model is an indicator of the working status of young people in Serbia, while independent variables are classified into four categories in relation to the characteristics of the respondents. The function of logistic regression we used is:

$$\Pr(Yi = 1) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\Sigma_{j=0}^{k} \beta_j X_{i,j})}} \quad (1),$$

Pr (Y*i*=1) is interpreted as the probability that the respondent is employed in relation to the set of characteristics X*ij*, which in this case are dependent variables.

Dependent variable quantification

Taking into account the international definition of employment, an indicator of youth employment has been constructed, aggregating the indicators of employment and unemployment. Employment indicators are defined on the basis of positive answers to the following groups of questions:

a) Questions related to respondents who perform an activity that can be characterized as employment at the time of the interview.

b) Issues regarding respondents who were, at the time of the interview, absent, but generally perform some activity that can be characterised as employment.

In the next step, unemployment indicators are defined based on adequate answers to the question "Have you been looking for a job in the past four weeks?" These include "Yes," "No, because I have found a job that I will start within the next 90 days," and "No, because my job will start after the next 90 days."

By aggregating the indicators of employment and unemployment, an aggregate employment indicator was constructed, assigning a value of 1 if the respondent is employed and 0 if unemployed. If not active in the labour market, the value is not assigned. The defined employment variable is fully in line with the calculation of employment and unemployment made by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, which is also annexed as an extension of the primary data in the Labour Force Survey database.

Descriptive statistics

The described quantification methods were applied to a database containing a total of 133,704 subjects in order to

generate relevant variables. Subsequently, a sub-sample of 20,864 people aged 15-29 years was drawn from the total sample.

The total number of active respondents was obtained by counting employees and unemployed young people. This amounted to 9,605 observations, which equates to an activity rate of 46% among young people at the subsample level.

The frequency of employment within active youth shows that the youth unemployment rate is 30.3% (Table 1). The following tables illustrate the distribution of the working status of young people in relation to selected independent variables in the model, which can theoretically be considered the most relevant predictors. In the case of demographic variables, this includes respondents' gender, marital status, and age.

Table 1 Employment distribution according to gender and marital status

Working status	Gender		Married		Total	%
	Male	*Female*	***No***	***Yes***		
Unemployed	1,624	1,286	2,562	348	2,910	30.3
Employed	4,233	2,462	5,410	1,285	6,695	69.7
Total	5,857	3,748	7,972	1,633	9,605	100.0

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 2 Employment distribution by age

Age	Working status		Total
	Unemployed	***Employed***	
15	2	28	30
16	8	29	37
17	18	55	73
18	88	118	206
19	207	225	432
20	258	339	597
21	246	381	627
22	171	440	611
23	247	512	759
24	266	691	957
25	250	654	904
26	296	730	1,026
27	307	787	1,094
28	305	871	1,176
29	241	835	1,076
Total	2,910	6,695	9,605

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 3 Employment distribution according to education

Level of education	Working status		Total
	Unemployed	*Employed*	
No education	12	6	18
1–3 years of elementary school	5	7	12
4–7 years of elementary school	39	47	86
Elementary school	257	712	969
Secondary school (1–2 years)	7	17	24
Secondary school (2–3 years)	663	1,755	2,418
High school (4 years)	1,100	2,464	3,564
Higher education	126	268	394
Technical school or tertiary education	8	25	33
1 year of higher education (pre-Bologna)	97	200	297
University degree	464	902	1,366
Master degree	132	288	420
PhD degree	0	4	4
Total	2,910	6,695	9,605

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of employment according to respondents' age. This confirms the expectation that the number of employed and unemployed young people grows with increasing age, since an increasing number of young people are activated in the labour market.

Table 1 shows the distribution of employment in relation to gender, which suggests that young men are more likely to be employed, while the unemployed distribution is more gender-uniform. Similarly, unmarried people dominate the structure of active and employed young people (Table 1). The distribution of employment and activities in terms of both included variables – the highest level of qualifications (Table 3) and informal education – was discussed (Table 4).

Table 4 Employment distribution according to informal education

Working status	Informal education (course, seminar, conference, private lessons)		Total
	Yes	*No*	
Unemployed	80	2,830	2,910
Employed	171	6,524	6,695
Total	251	9,354	9,605

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 3 shows that the largest number of young employed people who are active in the labour market have three or four years of education in secondary vocational schools. Also, there is noticeable and increased participation among employees and active young people with an eight-year elementary school education. Table 4 implies the worrying fact that very few active youths are educated with some form of informal education (course, seminar, conference, private lessons), regardless of whether they are employed or not.

As far as socio-economic characteristics are concerned, the financial situation in the household (Table 5) and actual / minimum expected earnings (Table 6) were taken into account. Theoretically, the relationship between the financial situation in the household and employment can be dual in nature; on one hand, a poor financial situation in the household can be an incentive for young people to activate themselves in the labour market and find a job as early as possible. On the other hand, employed young people contribute financially to the total household income, which automatically corrects the financial situation.

Table 5 Employment distribution according to respondents' financial background

Working status	Financial background				Total
	Very good	*Good*	*Very bad*	*Bad*	
Unemployed	17	479	803	1,611	2,910
Employed	140	2,256	1,916	2,383	6,695
Total	157	2,735	2,719	3,994	9,605

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 6 Employment distribution according to wage expectations

Wage expectations	Working status		Total
	Unemployed	*Employed*	
From 20,000 RSD	65	251	316
20,000–30,000 RSD	1,001	1,692	2,693
30,000–40,000 RSD	561	1,041	1,602
40,000–50,000 RSD	163	366	529
50.000 +	84	236	320
Total	1,874	3,586	5,460

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 5 indicates the presence of this effect. In absolute terms, the number of young people either active or employed who assess their financial situation as very bad is significantly higher than in other categories. Nevertheless, the proportion of employed and unemployed is proportionate to those who consider their household's financial situation to be very good. The variable wage is an insightful indicator due to construction

from two entirely different components - the minimum for which the unemployed respondent is ready to work and the actual salary if the respondent is employed. Due to the nature of the question and sociocultural limitations on openly speaking about one's wealth, not all respondents provided a response to this question. As a result, the number of observations was reduced from the standard 9,605 for all other variables to 5,460. The structure of the answer was unanticipated; while the largest number of unemployed people are willing to work for less than 30,000 RSD per month, the largest number of employed young people make between 40,000 and 50,000 RSD per month (the Serbian average) (Table 6).

Finally, two regional characteristics – area of origin (Table 7) and region (Table 8) – were taken into account. There was a balanced distribution of employed young people across both urban and rural regions.

Table 7 Employment distribution according to area of origin

Working status	Area of origin		Total
	Urban	*Rural*	
Unemployed	1,690	1,220	2,910
Employed	3,320	3,375	6,695
Total	5,010	4,595	9,605

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 8 Employment according to region

Working status	Financial background				Total
	Belgrade	*Vojvodina*	*Šumadija and Western Serbia*	*Southern and Eastern Serbia*	
Unemployed	569	736	909	696	2,910
Employed	1,446	1,748	2,046	1,455	6,695
Total	2,015	2,484	2,955	2,151	9,605

Source: Authors' calculations

Regarding the region (1. Belgrade, 2. Vojvodina, 3. Šumadija and Western Serbia, 4. Southern and Eastern Serbia), youth unemployment in the region of Southern and Eastern Serbia is considerably more pronounced than it is in the three other regions, which all show similar unemployment rates (Table 8).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender, marital status, and age are seen as significant explanatory variables; while women are less likely to be employed (a negative coefficient), those who are married and those who are older are more likely to be.

The model's exploiting power is 33% and the results of this logistic regression are below. The indicators that affect whether a young person will be employed or not are: the financial background of the participant's household, earnings, age, gender, and total years of work experience.

Variables such as gender, marital status, age, and level of education are statistically significant and have a "correct" direction of influence: negative for sex, positive for marital status, positive for age, and negative for education level. For example, longer education time reduces the length of working age.

Theoretically, although it may be anticipated that unemployed individuals who have greater work experience find it easier to find a job, employment does seem to automatically generate longer working hours.

Should the respondent possess little to no work experience, they are less likely to become employed the older they become. The reverse is found to be true for education: if the respondent has little to no working experience but does have a higher level of education, their likelihood of finding employment is higher.

Table 9 Results of logistic regression

	Coef.	Standard Error	Stat. Test *Wald*	Degree of Freedom	P>W	*Exp(B)*
Sex	-0.238	0.068	12.250	1	0.000	0.788
Marital status	0.190	0.096	3.911	1	0.048	1.209
Age	-0.048	0.012	15.273	1	0.000	0.953
Level of education	0.044	0.017	6.616	1	0.010	1.045
Informal education	-0.036	0.200	0.032	1	0.008	0.965
Area of origin	0.180	0.066	7.380	1	0.007	1.197
Region	-0.028	0.031	0.837	1	0.360	0.972
Total years of work experience	0.354	0.016	495.654	1	0.000	1.425
Financial background	-0.587	0.041	207.494	1	0.000	0.556
Earnings	-0.141	0.038	13.951	1	0.000	0.869
Constant	3.118	0.542	33.041	1	0.000	22.594

Source: Authors' calculations

The estimated regression coefficients for work experience and the financial situation of the household are statistically significant; the greater the work experience and the poorer financial situation of the household, the higher probability that the respondent is employed.

By introducing all five indicator groups, region becomes statistically insignificant as an indicator. This is due to the fact that earnings and region are two variables that have a high correlation. Consequently, the impact of earnings changes the region's influence on how likely youths are to be employed.

The lack of influence by region may be accounted for by the assumption that earnings incorporate regional differences into themselves. Earnings have a positive and significant influence, contradicting the theory that lower expected earnings increase the likelihood of young people being employed.

From 2014 to 2018, only the Belgrade region achieved a positive migration balance, which amounted to about 7,000 individuals annually. Other regions recorded a decline, as reported by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. The country's annual population growth according to the World Bank is −0.6%, which, with the aforementioned factors, can lead to a misunderstanding of the growth or decline of employment in the regions in Serbia, as well as in total.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia reports that the inactivity rate has decreased slightly over the past five years and is usually around 70% among the population aged 16–25 years (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia 2019). The government's annual expenditure on education is around 4% of GDP over the past five years (The World Bank 2019). Almost all low-skilled occupations are in short supply, which means that in almost all sectors, the workforce is ageing and not rejuvenated.

While there may be a youth contingent within the labour market ready to work for lower earnings, employers do not ask for such personnel profiles. The assumption is that this reflects the existence of frictional unemployment among young people. Therein, the results of the analysis show that wage expectation isn't a decisive factor in employers' decisions to employ young people. This may be further seen by the relation of expected earnings and working status remaining robust in regression, despite the inclusion of other explanatory variables. This phenomenon remains the subject of further analysis and discussion.

CONCLUSION

Significant legislation and strategies based on good practices set out by EU member states have been recently adopted in Serbia. Despite increased efforts both locally and internationally, the issue of youth employment remains of great concern. Those under 30 in Serbia find employment hard to come by due to the fact that their qualifications do not match those sought on the labour market.

Structural changes in the labour market have resulted in rising unemployment and have forced young people to accept jobs requiring lower qualifications or part-time jobs that earn higher wages but lie within the grey economy (Zdravković, Domazet and Nikitović 2012). Unlike countries in the Western Balkans, developed economies view human capital as one of the key factors for economic growth and development. In the business world, as well as nationally, human capital has become important for the successful implementation of strategies.

On one hand, Serbia has a large number of educated young people. But on the other hand, the country is facing a significant brain drain. According to the research conducted by the Cabinet of the Minister without portfolio responsible for demography and population policy (Bjelobrk 2018), the share of university students planning to seek a job in Germany is 24.2% (about 2,700 university students). The next most

popular options Switzerland, Austria, and the USA. However, more than half of Serbian students (51.6%) would not leave Serbia if they were provided with a job in their area of interest. Furthermore, about 15% of them would stay in the country if they were given the money to start their businesses.

There is no doubt that young people will forge Serbia's future and policy-makers have recognised their role in society.

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Koje karakteristike tržišta rada mladih doprinose zapošljavanju u Srbiji?

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SAŽETAK

Emigracija mladih iz manje razvijenih u razvijenije zemlje je tema razmatranja među istraživačima na nacionalnom ali i na globalnom nivou. Ovo se posebno odnosi na istraživanje emigracije u EU. Od 2016. stopa nezaposlenosti mladih (između 15 i 24 godine) u Srbiji beleži značajno smanjenje zbog vladinih mera (fiskalne konsolidacije) uvedenih iste godine, ekonomskog rasta i stranih investicija. Ipak, mnogi u istoj starosnoj grupi, ali i stariji, nastavljaju da se iseljavaju iz zemlje uprkos pozitivnom ekonomskom rastu. Za razliku od pojedinih zemalja članica EU, Srbija se suočava sa visokom stopom nezaposlenosti mladih (34,9% u 2016, 32,8% u 2017. i 31% u 2018). Mladi u Srbiji su i dalje značajno ugroženi u odnosu na svoje vršnjake u zemljama EU. Prema Eurostatu, stopa nezaposlenosti mladih u Srbiji dvostruko je veća od proseka u EU 2017. godine.

Prema Popisu 2011, više od 180.000 građana napustilo je Srbiju od 2002. do 2011, većinom mladi sa visokom stručnom spremom (19%). Razlozi iseljavanja su politički i ekonomski. Stoga je u najboljem interesu Vlade Republike Srbije da se uvedu konkretne mere koje će pomoći da se zaustavi odliv mladih, posebno među visoko obrazovanim. Istraživanje Kabineta Ministra bez portfelja zaduženog za demografiju i populacionu politiku (2018) pokazalo je da su za emigraciju najatraktivnije zemlje poput Nemačke, Austrije, Švajcarske, Švedske, SAD i Kanade. Prisutne su i unutrašnje migracije, iz manjih urbanih i polururalnih područja u veće gradove u Srbiji. Takođe, depopulacija loše utiče na razvoj regiona, dok niska koncentracija mladih u nerazvijenim oblastima dodatno ugrožava ekonomski rast i opstanak. Stoga zapošljavanje mladih nije pitanje ograničeno na jednu oblast, već zajednička odgovornost svih državnih i lokalnih organa vlasti.

Ovaj rad se fokusira na logističku regresionu analizu kako bi se ustanovilo koje karakteristike mladih doprinose verovatnoći zaposlenja u Srbiji. Iako se omladina međunarodno često definiše u starosnom opsegu od 15 do 24 godine, u ovom radu smo uzeli u obzir osobe starosti od 15 do 30 godina prema Zakonu o mladima i „Nacionalnoj strategiji za mlade od 2015. do 2025. godine“. Mikropodaci za analizu (Anketa o radnoj snazi) dobijeni su od Republičkog zavoda za statistiku. Rezultati pokazuju da grupa indikatora, odnosno karakteristike kao što su finansijska situacija domaćinstva, zarada, godine, pol i radno iskustvo utiču na zaposlenost mladih. Teorijski gledano, mladi sa većim radnim iskustvom brže dolaze do posla nego mladi bez radnog iskustva. Rezultati istraživanja prikazani u ovom radu imaju i praktični i naučni značaj, jer mogu ne samo da pomognu kreatorima nacionalne politike tokom procesa razvoja strategije o zapošljavanju mladih, već mogu da daju i okvire za buduća istraživanja ove izuzetno važne naučne oblasti na kojoj se bazira razvoj zemlje.

KLJUČNE REČI

mladi | stopa nezaposlenosti | Srbija | logistička regresija | tržište rada

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