

## LEAVE OR STAY IN HOMELAND

### The eternal dilemma of young people

According to the data from Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia for 2019, Serbia has 6,664,449 inhabitants, and young people between the ages of 16 and 30 make up one-third of the population. With 51,000 mostly young people leaving the country annually, Serbia has one of the highest rates of youth emigration in the Western Balkans. Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and the USA are the countries that most attract young people from Serbia to live there.

As a young and promising person in Serbia, you're expected to go abroad at some point. Our own experience confirms this. After finishing high school, people started encouraging us to study abroad. Then, in my last year of college, as we were about to enter the working world, the question arose again - why not work abroad? These questions made us think carefully about our options.

When we face a difficult decision, we tend to weigh the advantages and disadvantages, just like we did when deciding whether to leave the country. As time passes, we find ourselves revisiting those reasons more frequently, but ultimately, one side always triumphs. Before we reveal which side won, let's first examine why we left the country.

We are currently employed in jobs with salaries that correspond to the average salary in Serbia, according to the data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia for 2023. However, we would earn significantly more for the same job if we worked abroad. This is why improving our financial situation was our top priority when considering leaving the country.

We work extra to maintain a comfortable life, which is manageable since we don't have any children yet. However, we often think about what we will do when we have kids and must dedicate most of our time to them. Hence, Serbia's unfavorable standard of living is second on the list of reasons to leave the country.

After this, you may wonder what is on our list of reasons not to leave the country. We are realistic people who are aware of the situation in Serbia and other parts of the world. We believe that Serbia is still a country where some things are different. It is still a patriarchal country with traditional values, which is the first reason we've included it on our "stay" list.

Perhaps this may sound clichéd, but our love for our country is powerful. Our homeland represents our nation's mentality, tradition, history, and culture, and we wouldn't find that anywhere else. As Aleksa Šantić once said:

*"Stay here! The sun of the foreign skies will not warm you as this one does."*

The feeling of belonging is essential to us, which is why it's the second reason on our 'stay' list."

No matter how close you are to your family, especially if you have children, it's hard to live separated by borders. The awareness that in every spare moment, we would run to



visit our parents, family, and friends outweighed any reason to leave the country. Living standards may change, salaries may increase or decrease, and politicians may come and go, but the love for childhood friends, siblings, parents, and grandparents only grows stronger. You probably already guessed that we have decided to stay in Serbia and start our family there. Maybe we were raised that way, but being average among our people is more fulfilling than standing out as foreigners.

We hope some readers can relate to our story, regardless of whether they are from Serbia or any other country. We want to emphasize that staying in one's country can require just as much courage as leaving it. Furthermore, we hope that our story prompts readers who are considering leaving their country to reconsider their decision. However, if they still choose to go, we wish them all the best in their future journey.

“The Immigrants Void” – Sculpture by Bruno Catalano <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Figure is available at Pinterest (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/661677370224979171/>)