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## Between unemployment and migration: institutionalised female labour migration from socialist Yugoslavia, 1963–1973

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores institutionalised labour migration from socialist Yugoslavia to Western capitalist countries, focusing on the recruitment of female labour migrants. By examining Yugoslav archival sources, it investigates the mechanisms of migration control and management developed by the Yugoslav government to discharge labour surplus to the West in accordance with state interests. The article highlights the alignment of women's unemployment and increased social mobility with these processes; further, it demonstrates that from the onset of Yugoslavia's liberalised labour migration policy, women were integral to the state's efforts to employ labour surplus in Western labour markets and shape labour migrants' demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Thus, the article expands the understanding of Yugoslav labour migration and governmental and institutional efforts to control and shape international migrations and underscores the value of archived sources in providing a comprehensive understanding of the state's role in labour migrations.

### KEYWORDS

Yugoslav labour migration;  
female labour migration;  
migration history; migration  
governance; Yugoslavia

The magnitude of post-Second World War labour migration from socialist Yugoslavia to Western capitalist countries reflected the country's inability to evenly provide its population with sufficient employment and remuneration.<sup>1</sup> Images of *gastarbajter*, young men departing with limited possessions from rural areas of Yugoslavia in overcrowded trains and buses, illustrated the shortcomings of the Yugoslav communist regime's promise of empowering the working class. Meanwhile, their return in the latest fashion and in Western cars filled with consumer goods, along with their ability to construct modern houses and finance their local communities' developments, highlighted Yugoslavia's failure to fulfil the aspirations of the general population for a higher standard of living and access to consumer products.<sup>2</sup> These factors – intertwined with broader economic and political forces and Yugoslavia's aim to discharge labour surplus to Western labour

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'Western' is used as a collective designation of economically and industrially advanced capitalist countries, including Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>2</sup>I. Dobrivojević Tomić, 'U potrazi za blagostanjem: Odlazak jugoslovenskih državljana na rad u zemlje zapadne Evrope 1960–1977', *Istorija 20. veka*, 2 (2007), 89–101, here 95–96; V. Ivanović, *Geburtstag Pišeš Normalno: Jugoslovenski gastarbajteri u SR Nemačkoj i Austriji, 1965–1973* (Belgrade, 2012), 277–87.

markets – further propelled and expanded labour migration. By the 1970s, approximately 19% of all employed Yugoslav citizens had worked abroad.<sup>3</sup>

To engage in a rapidly growing labour migration and align migration currents with the state's interests, the Yugoslav government constructed and successively expanded various mechanisms of migration control and management. Studies of Yugoslav labour migration have illuminated Yugoslavia's legal and institutional frameworks and policies pertaining to labour migration and their correlation with economic conditions in Yugoslavia and Western countries.<sup>4</sup> Following their own economic and political interests, Yugoslavia and Western countries joined efforts to further institutionalise, standardise and control Yugoslav labour migration through recruitment agreements and their implementation mechanisms. Such collaborations enabled Western countries to establish their recruiting offices and networks in Yugoslavia, which facilitated their attempts to align labour migrations with their immigration policies and cater to their economies' needs for eligible labour.<sup>5</sup> For Yugoslavia, the migration of its citizens and the implementation of recruitment agreements facilitated continuous collaboration with Western countries during its endeavour to address growing unemployment, modernise its economy and further integrate it into the global market. Furthermore, collaboration with Western countries enabled Yugoslavia to extend its institutional operations beyond national borders, to the countries where most of its citizens worked and lived. Studies have demonstrated Yugoslavia's exceptional ability to influence labour migrants and their descendants through a range of social, political and economic mechanisms designed to improve their living and working conditions abroad, foster their sense of belonging to socialist Yugoslavia and direct their economic capital towards the Yugoslav economy.<sup>6</sup> A portion of this success can be attributed to the extensive research efforts of Yugoslavia's scholars and academic institutions, undertaken domestically and internationally to understand out-migration and its consequences and to develop evidence-based political responses and policies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>I. Baučić, 'Some economic consequences of Yugoslav external migrations' in *Les Travailleurs Étrangers en Europe Occidentale, actes du colloque organisé par la commission nationale pour les études et les recherches interethniques* (Nice, 1976), 87–104, here 88, available at: [https://www.persee.fr/doc/ierii\\_1764-8319\\_1976\\_act\\_6\\_1\\_898](https://www.persee.fr/doc/ierii_1764-8319_1976_act_6_1_898).

<sup>4</sup>Dobrovojević Tomić, *op. cit.*, 89–95; Ivanović, *op. cit.*, 43–48, 55–68; P. Dragišić, 'Searching for El Dorado: workers from Serbia temporary employed abroad from the 1960s to the Dissolution of Yugoslavia', *Tokovi istorije*, 3 (2014), 131–42, here 131–36; C.-U. Schierup, *Migration, Socialism and the International Division of Labour: The Yugoslavian experience* (Aldershot and Brookfield, 1990), 76–97; W. Zimmerman, *Open Borders, Non-Alignment, and the Political Evolution of Yugoslavia* (Princeton, 2014), 75–81; U. Brunnbauer, 'Labour emigration from the Yugoslav area from the late 19th century until the end of socialism: continuities and changes' in U. Brunnbauer (ed.), *Transnational Societies, Transterritorial Politics: Migrations in the (post-)Yugoslav region, 19th–21st century* (Oldenbourg, 2009), 43–47; K. Novinščak, 'The recruiting and sending of Yugoslav "gastarbeiters" to Germany: between socialist demands and economic needs' in Brunnbauer (ed.), *Transnational Societies, Transterritorial Politics, op. cit.*, 125–28.

<sup>5</sup>D. Frank, 'Immigration from Yugoslavia to Sweden 1966–1971: an analysis of the impacts of firms and state', *Journal of Migration History*, 10, 1 (2024), 120–47, here 136–46; J. Svanberg, 'Labour migration and the Swedish labour market model: a case study of recruitment of Yugoslav workers to Svenska Fläktfabriken in Växjö, 1969–1970', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 36, 1 (2011), 91–113, here 98–105; K. Shonick, 'Politics, culture, and economics: reassessing the West German guest worker agreement with Yugoslavia', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 44, 4 (2009), 719–36, here 732–35; Ivanović, *op. cit.*, 115–42; Novinščak, *op. cit.*, 129–40.

<sup>6</sup>B. Le Normand, *Citizens Without Borders: Yugoslavia and its migrant workers in Western Europe* (Toronto, 2021); Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, 106–31; Ivanović, *op. cit.*, 143–220.

<sup>7</sup>S. Mežnarić, 'Jugoslavenska sociologija (vanskih) migracija – pokušaj sistematizacije', *Migracijske teme i etničke teme*, 1, 1 (1985), 77–96.

This article explores Yugoslavia's efforts to control and shape labour migration by examining Yugoslav employment authorities' recruitment process and practices.<sup>8</sup> In particular, it focuses on the institutionalised recruitment of female labour migrants, a category rarely associated with Yugoslav labour migration and the typical image of the Yugoslav *gastarbajter*, despite research underscoring their role. Scholars of female labour migration have frequently emphasised women's constitutive role in the social and economic contexts of Yugoslav labour migration by investigating their perspectives and trajectories after migration.<sup>9</sup> Migrant women's experiences revealed the multi-dimensional social and economic limitations they experienced in Yugoslavia, resulting in their need or aspiration to emigrate. Although most Yugoslav women migrated to join their husbands, they frequently utilised formal and informal recruiting platforms and passages to Western countries.

This article draws on Yugoslav archival sources to further elucidate women's position in Yugoslav labour migration and their passage to Western labour markets. It demonstrates Yugoslav employment authorities' direct involvement in recruiting Yugoslav labour migrants and their efforts to strategically respond to Western employers' demands for Yugoslav workers. The article shows that from the onset of Yugoslavia's liberalised labour migration policy, women constituted an integral part of the country's institutional efforts to employ labour surplus in Western labour markets and shape the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of its migrating citizens. In so doing, this article sheds new light on Yugoslavia's role in labour migration of its citizens and contributes to studies of state and institutional efforts to control and strategically shape international migrations.<sup>10</sup> More precisely, the article contributes to an increasing body of studies of female labour migrations, which (like this article) undermine a still rather reductive view of post-Second World War female labour migrations as mere extensions of male labour migrations.

## The state and female labour migrations – a literature overview

Utilising archival sources, scholars have shown that from the earliest post-war years, women possessed migratory agency and constituted an integral part of state and

<sup>8</sup>The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia comprised six republics – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia – and two autonomous provinces within Serbia – Kosovo and Vojvodina. Each republic and province largely independently managed their internal affairs, including labour migration. However, the state's labour migration policy from 1963 was applied across the entire federation.

<sup>9</sup>V. Lorber, 'To come into focus: female "guest workers" from former Yugoslavia in Austria (1960–1980)' in G. Bischof and D. Rupnow (eds), *Migration in Austria (Vol. 26)* (New Orleans, 2017), 161–86; W. Knocke, *Invandrade Kvinnor i Lönearbete och Fack: En studie om kvinnor från fyra länder inom kommunal- och fabriksarbetareförbundets avtalsområde* (Stockholm, 1986); M. Morokvašić, 'Cash in hand for the first time: the case of Yugoslav immigrant women in Western Europe' in C. Stahl (ed.), *International Migration Today, Vol. 2, Emerging Issues* (Paris, 1988), 155–67; K. Brčić, 'Zaposlenost, uvjeti rada, položaj na poslu i doškolovanje jugoslavenskih radnica u SR Njemačkoj', *Migracijske i etničke teme*, 6, 4 (1990), 21–31.

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, D. Fitzgerald, 'Inside the sending state: the politics of Mexican emigration control', *International Migration Review*, 40, 2 (2006), 259–93; C. Rass, 'Temporary labour migration and state-run recruitment of foreign workers in Europe, 1919–1975: a new migration regime?', *International Review of Social History*, 57, 20 (2012), 191–224; M.S. Teitelbaum, 'The role of the state in international migration', *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 8, 2 (2002), 157–67; K. Natter, 'Fifty years of Maghreb emigration: how states shaped Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian emigration', Paper 95, *DEMIG Project Paper 21* (2014); for overviews and syntheses see C. Strikwerda, 'Tides of migration, currents of history: the state, economy, and the transatlantic movement of labor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *International Review of Social History*, 44, 3 (1999), 367–94; S. Bernard, 'The regulation of international migration in the Cold War: a synthesis and review of the literature', *Labour History*, 64, 4 (2023), 330–57.

interstate efforts to respond to altered post-war labour market conditions in both sending and receiving countries. Johan Svanberg's study of state-governed immigration of German female refugees from Central and Eastern Europe to Sweden during the immediate post-war years shows the blurred boundary between the Swedish reception of refugees and labour recruitment, as the Swedish textile industry employed most women shortly after their arrival.<sup>11</sup> Further, Yannis Papadopoulos and Giota Tourgeli studied female labour migration from Greece, which was successfully mediated by the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration in the 1950s and 1960s. Women's migration was agreed upon between Greece, which experienced labour surpluses, and Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which needed women to fill labour shortages in lower-paying, female-typical occupations.<sup>12</sup>

Institutionalised female migrations from the European periphery to industrialised countries experiencing labour shortages occurred mainly under frameworks of bilateral recruitment agreements and migration policies of labour-sending and labour-receiving countries. For instance, Monika Mattes shows how West Germany catered to the economy's need for female labourers by expanding its foreign labour recruitment policies and practices and coordinating with governments in all major labour-sending countries to ensure a steady supply of foreign female labourers and support the country's economic growth.<sup>13</sup> The most important source of foreign labour for West Germany was Turkey; Jennifer Miller's study shows that women actively participated in the whole migratory process of West German and Turkish joint institutionalised efforts to systematically channel labour migrants from Turkey to West Germany.<sup>14</sup> Austria employed a similar strategy to West Germany in recruiting female workers from Yugoslavia and Turkey; Verena Lorber's study shows that Austrian employment authorities strategically targeted Turkish and Yugoslav women to support the economy's growing demand for female labourers.<sup>15</sup>

Women also migrated for work between socialist countries, albeit in significantly smaller numbers. Labour migrations between socialist countries also occurred under frameworks of bilateral agreements, but unlike labour migrations to the capitalist West, they were implemented primarily under institutional frameworks and state control. Studies suggest that female labour migrations between socialist countries followed the same patterns as female labour migrations to capitalist countries; namely, labour-receiving countries attempted to fill labour shortages in specific manufacturing industries and labour-sending countries sought to employ labour surpluses through emigration.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>J. Svanberg, 'Migration at the multi-level intersection of industrial relations: the Schleswig-Holstein campaign and the Swedish garment industry in the early 1950s', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 66, 1 (2018), 54–72.

<sup>12</sup>Y.G.S. Papadopoulos and G. Tourgeli, 'Gendering migration in a patriarchal society: assisted female migration from Greece during the early post-war period', *Labour History*, 64, 4 (2023), 358–72.

<sup>13</sup>M. Mattes, *Gastarbeiterinnen in der Bundesrepublik. Anwerbepolitik, migration und geschlecht in den 50er bis 70er Jahren* (Frankfurt, 2005), 33–38.

<sup>14</sup>J.A. Miller, 'Postwar Negotiations: The First Generation of Turkish "Guest Workers" in West Germany, 1961–1973' (D.Phil., New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2008), 58–62, 80.

<sup>15</sup>Lorber, *op. cit.*, 168–73.

<sup>16</sup>A.K. Alamgir, 'Recalcitrant women: internationalism and the redefinition of welfare limits in the Czechoslovak–Vietnamese labor exchange program', *Slavic Review*, 73, 1 (2014), 133–55; C. Schwenkel, 'Rethinking Asian mobilities: socialist migration and post-socialist repatriation of Vietnamese contract workers in East Germany', *Critical Asian Studies*, 46, 2 (2014), 235–58, here 242–46; O. Klipa, 'Polish women workers in Czechoslovakia: what made them to come?' *Český lid*, 98, 1 (2011), 31–52; H. Bortlová-Vondráková and M. Szente-Varga, 'Labor migration programs within the socialist bloc: Cuban guestworkers in late socialist Czechoslovakia and Hungary', *Labour History*, 62, 3 (2021), 297–315, here 301–03.

As in the case of labour migrations to most Western capitalist countries, the relocation and settlement of female labour migrants and their male counterparts were officially considered a temporary solution by both sending and receiving socialist countries.

## Empirical material

This article begins its inquiry with the implementation of the Yugoslav labour migration policy in October 1963 and explores the period of the most intensive labour migration, which lasted until 1973, when Western labour-receiving countries began restricting foreign labour recruitment due to the oil shock, the subsequent economic downturn and the decreasing need for immigrant labour. Although women migrated before and after, it was during this period that Yugoslavia commenced and extensively implemented countrywide regulated labour migration and cooperation with foreign recruiters and employment authorities. The empirical sources analysed for this article were retrieved from the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade and the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb. They include Yugoslav labour migration policy; the government's and president's directives to all stakeholders on its implementation; internal correspondence between the federal and republican governmental bodies involved in migration; reports on Yugoslav labour market conditions; and internal reports on labour migration produced by federal, republican and municipal employment authorities. Additionally, the article utilises statistical records from Yugoslavia's statistical yearbooks to demonstrate female employment and unemployment in Yugoslavia during the period under investigation and with regard to Yugoslavia's labour migration policy.

The practical implementation of institutionalised labour migration was mostly decentralised and under the jurisdiction of republican and municipal employment authorities. Federal employment authorities received a significantly smaller number of foreign requests for Yugoslav workers, which they forwarded to republican employment offices. Therefore, the most explicit evidence quoted in this article concerning the recruitment of Yugoslav workers was found in Croatian archives, mainly in the archives of the Croatian Commission for Emigrant Issues. The Commission preserved reports and correspondence distributed between the republics and federation and kept records of numerous foreign requests for Yugoslav labour, translated into Croatian and processed by the Croatian Migration Commission.<sup>17</sup> These requests were sent to Yugoslav employment offices mostly from foreign employers but also from various institutions and organisations, such as Yugoslav embassies, foreign embassies and foreign employers' interest organisations.

Foreign recruiters submitted three types of labour request: nominative requests, which sought one or more workers by name; anonymous requests that sought one or more workers with certain characteristics; and anonymous requests that sought workers with certain characteristics from a specific geographical area (namely an area identified by foreign employers as rich in workers with the desired skills and characteristics).<sup>18</sup> These requests varied in specificity, but they always included the name of the employer. Most

<sup>17</sup>See Croatian State Archives (subsequently HDA), Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja, 1609, 36, 37, 38. When this article was researched the Croatian State Archives contained foreign requests processed by the Croatian Migration Commission until 1965. Therefore, for institutionalised labour migration during later years, the article uses only sources archived in the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade.

<sup>18</sup>Nominative requests were sent by primarily West German employers since the Yugoslav–West German recruitment agreement explicitly allowed it. See Ivanović, *op. cit.*, 117; Novinščak, *op. cit.*, 140.

requests also specified the desired age range of workers, the duration of the employment agreement, the salary (most often expressed as wage per hour), and provided a brief description of working and living conditions.

The analysed foreign requests often contained a comment or correction from the Croatian Migration Commission. For instance, the Commission often changed the municipal employment office responsible for implementation, obviously in an effort to strategically distribute labour migration. Some requests were marked with comments on low salaries or unsuitable working and living conditions, indicating that local employment offices had to demand better conditions. Others were marked with comments that the request could or would be partially or entirely realised in another Yugoslav republic or that the requested workers had already been recruited and had departed Yugoslavia.

### **Yugoslav labour migration policy and female labour**

Growing legal and illegal labour migration to the West compelled the Yugoslav government and communist establishment to take control of migration currents and standardise the recruitment procedure for employment abroad. The procedure was standardised through a liberalised emigration framework that was communicated to all stakeholders through an 'Instruction' (hereafter 'labour migration policy') on labour migration implementation published officially in October 1963.<sup>19</sup> The policy's main aim was to facilitate a temporary out-migration of the unqualified and unemployable labour surplus, mainly from rural and less developed areas, and to regulate labour migrants' work and social rights in the country and abroad. The policy allowed the migration of qualified, highly educated, and employed labour because the Yugoslav constitution guaranteed the freedom to choose job and occupation, and because unemployment among qualified and educated jobseekers was constantly growing, as were labour surpluses in certain industries.<sup>20</sup> However, the migration of these categories of labour was to be limited as much as possible.

Municipal employment offices were appointed to implement workers' recruitment under the guidance and coordination of republican Migration Commissions. At the federal level, Yugoslavia established a Commission for Employment Abroad, which was intended to coordinate republican employment authorities in conjunction with republican Commissions for Employment Abroad. The federal commission also mediated between the republican employment authorities and foreign recruiters, who applied directly to federal authorities for Yugoslav workers. This design was supposed to ensure that foreign requests for Yugoslav workers and workers' individual requests for work abroad were accommodated in accordance with the labour migration policy while simultaneously ensuring that the needs of the Yugoslav labour market for all categories of labour were not jeopardised.

Western employers had recognised Yugoslavia as a rich and accessible source of labour even before the introduction of the Yugoslav labour migration policy. Reports and directives

<sup>19</sup>Archives of Yugoslavia (subsequently AJ), *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Izvod iz informacije o zapošljavanju jugoslavenskih državljana u inostranstvu; AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Informacija o osnovnim karakteristikama Uputstva o zapošljavanju naših radnika u inostranstvu.

<sup>20</sup>AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Informacija o osnovnim karakteristikama Uputstva o zapošljavanju naših radnika u inostranstvu.

issued by federal and republican authorities at the beginning of the 1960s and throughout the period under investigation witnessed the progressive expansion of multi-dimensional, mostly unregulated migration systems composed of transnational recruitment networks.<sup>21</sup> These opportunity structures further expanded Yugoslav labour migration and bridged and sustained the passage of Yugoslav workers to Western labour markets beyond or with limited institutional control. To respond to these developments, the Yugoslav government, starting in 1965, gradually signed recruitment agreements with most Western labour-receiving countries recruiting workers from Yugoslavia.<sup>22</sup> In 1967, it amended the employment law which further aligned the work of employment offices with the labour migration policy and the clauses in bilateral recruitment agreements, enabling municipal employment offices to operate independently, maintain direct contacts with foreign employers and take a fee from foreign recruiters for every implemented recruitment.<sup>23</sup> The Yugoslav government also established the Federal Employment Bureau, whose duty was to monitor labour migration, negotiate future bilateral recruitment agreements, oversee their implementation, and mediate between Western recruiters and employment offices in the Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces.<sup>24</sup> The Bureau replaced the federal Commission for Employment Abroad, but according to its report from 1971, it distributed foreign requests for Yugoslav workers in accordance with criteria established by the republics during the Commission's establishment.

Since all these mechanisms were only partially effective, large proportions of skilled, highly skilled or employed workers in Yugoslavia's most prosperous industries were recruited by Western employers or migrated individually from developed regions and urban areas. To strengthen labour migration control, the Yugoslav government redesigned the labour migration policy by introducing a more stringent recruitment procedure for work abroad from 1972. For instance, the migration of certain categories of qualified and highly qualified workers was forbidden in areas experiencing shortages of such workers.<sup>25</sup> However, the core principle of the 1963 labour migration policy – namely sending unqualified and unemployable individuals to work abroad – remained unchanged.<sup>26</sup> The new recruitment procedure of 1972 further emphasised this principle.

The core principles of labour migration policies immediately affected unemployed women. As [Tables 1](#) and [3](#) illustrate, between 1963 and 1973, women consistently constituted the majority in at least one category of jobseekers eligible for labour migration. In the initial years of the labour migration policy's implementation, women constituted a clear majority among all unemployed jobseekers, particularly among those lacking formal qualifications. Moreover, Yugoslav statistical yearbooks show that the share of job vacancies announced for women at

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-26, O nekim aktuelnim pitanjima spoljne migracije; AJ, *Arhiv predsjednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Informacija o zapošljavanju u zemlji i inostranstvu; AJ, *Arhiv predsjednika republike*, III-e-1-e-16, O Problemima privatnog zapošljavanja naših građana u inostranstvu; AJ, *Arhiv predsjednika republike*, III-e-1-e-16, Informacija o kretanju zaposlenosti u 1969. godini.

<sup>22</sup>Yugoslavia signed a labour recruitment agreement with France in 1965; Austria and Sweden in 1966; West Germany in 1968; and Belgium, Luxemburg, The Netherlands and Australia in 1970.

<sup>23</sup>Novinščak, *op. cit.*, 128.

<sup>24</sup>AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-31, Sprovođenje međudržavnih sporazuma o regulisanju zapošljavanja jugoslavenskih radnika u pojedinim zemljama – analiza; AJ, *Arhiv predsjednika republike*, III-a-1-E, 16, Informacija o zapošljavanju u zemlji i inostranstvu; AJ, *Savezno izvršno veće*, 130, F-780, Zaposlenost, zapošljavanje i aktivnost službe za zapošljavanje u 1965. godini.

<sup>25</sup>S. Bernard, *Deutsch Marks in the Head, Shovel in the Hands and Yugoslavia in the Heart: The gastarbeiter return to Yugoslavia (1965–1991)* (Wiesbaden, 2019), 54.

<sup>26</sup>AJ, *Arhiv predsjednika republike*, III-e-1-e-16, Informacija o problemima zapošljavanja i merama za veće aktiviranje stanovništva.

**Table 1.** Women's employment and unemployment trends in Yugoslavia.

Year	Registered unemployed women in relation to all registered unemployed (%)	First-time registered unemployed women in relation to all first-time registered unemployed (%)	Women employed through public employment offices in relation to all employed through public employment offices (%) <sup>a</sup>
1963	54.1	66.6	22.6
1964	55.3	70.6	23.8
1965	46.8	68.2	24.4
1966	45.7	64.5	36.2
1967	44.0	62.0	28.5
1968	43.4	57.2	30.2
1969	45.2	54.7	29.3
1970	49.0	54.8	29.8
1971	50.0	56.9	34.0
1972	50.0	58.1	35.8
1973	51.1	58.1	36.2

Sources: Savezni zavod za statistiku, *Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1970* (Beograd, 1970) for the years 1963–1969; Savezni zavod za statistiku, *Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1974* (Beograd 1974) for 1970–1973.

<sup>a</sup>It is unclear in Yugoslavia's statistical yearbooks whether these values also include women employed by public employment offices to work abroad.

**Table 2.** Registered unemployed women in relation to the labour force in the republics and autonomous regions of Yugoslavia (%).

Year	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Croatia	Macedonia	Slovenia	Serbia	Vojvodina	Kosovo
1963	47.3	41.3	65.0	39.2	77.0	57.2	62.6	15.6
1964	48.7	41.2	65.1	39.5	72.2	61.3	67.4	17.2
1965	39.8	34.7	57.3	37.0	60.0	55.2	56.0	11.3
1966	38.8	33.8	56.8	34.2	64.3	53.5	51.0	13.3
1967	32.0	36.3	53.5	36.3	61.7	52.1	46.1	11.5
1968	30.8	40.3	52.1	37.9	63.8	50.7	46.7	11.3
1969	31.9	44.4	57.3	39.3	67.3	52.4	49.6	10.1
1970	38.2	51.3	61.1	43.6	66.8	56.8	54.5	9.2
1971	41.8	49.3	57.1	45.0	63.1	58.6	56.4	11.1
1972	45.5	48.2	55.3	46.5	60.7	58.7	55.4	11.3
1973	49.3	48.9	55.7	50.0	60.7	57.2	56.8	13.8

Sources: Savezni zavod za statistiku, *Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1970*, (Beograd, 1970) for the years 1963–1969; Savezni zavod za statistiku, *Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1974*, (Beograd 1974) for 1970–1973.

employment offices was not nearly proportional to their share among the unemployed: 21% of all job vacancies in 1963, 21% in 1964 and 22% in 1965, the last year when it was legal to specify gender in job announcements.<sup>27</sup> Coincidentally, as [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) illustrate, women's pressure on employment offices was considerable across the country. However, as [Table 1](#) illustrates, throughout the period under investigation, employment offices' ability to find work for unemployed women was modest and not nearly proportional to their share among registered jobseekers.

One of the main characteristics of unemployed jobseekers in Yugoslavia during the period under investigation was their young age.<sup>28</sup> Young unemployed workers were

<sup>27</sup>Savezni zavod za Statistiku, *Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1967* (Belgrade, 1967), 104.

<sup>28</sup>E. Primorac and M.F. Charette, 'Regional aspects of youth unemployment in Yugoslavia', *Economic Analysis*, 21, 2 (1987), 193–219, here 201–04. For a historical analysis of unemployment in socialist Yugoslavia and its impact on the female workforce, as well as the political and economic policies involved, see S.L. Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The political economy of Yugoslavia, 1945–1990* (Princeton, 1995).

**Table 3.** Share of registered unemployed women according to educational attainment (%).

Year	Vocational, upper-secondary, and higher	Qualified and highly qualified workers	Semi-qualified and unqualified
1963	57.5	18.4	56.5
1964	60.5	21.1	61.7
1965	58.5	18.5	57.9
1966	58.4	15.7	50.9
1967	62.3	19.0	48.2
1968	64.3	20.4	44.9
1969	67.4	24.1	43.5
1970	69.7	29.0	44.0
1971	70.6	31.6	47.9
1972	70.2	32.0	48.8
1973	69.6	32.2	49.3

Sources: Savezni zavod za statistiku, Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1970, (Beograd, 1970) for the years 1963-1969; Savezni zavod za statistiku, Statistički godišnjak Jugoslavije 1974, (Beograd 1974) for 1970-1973.

mostly part of the generation of post-war baby boomers who came of age during major restructurings of the Yugoslav economy in the 1960s. In 1961 and 1965, the Yugoslav government implemented economic reforms to modernise the economy, increase its productivity, accelerate its transformation from labour intensive to capital intensive, and further align it with the global, primarily capitalist, market. Increasing alignment with the global market exposed Yugoslavia to Western social, economic and political influences and progressively embedded its economy and society into international flows of goods and people. The reforms had limited success domestically; for instance, the reform in 1965 resulted in countrywide dismissals, scarcity of new employment, growing unemployment, and accelerated outward labour migration.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the period under investigation, the shares of first-time jobseekers and unemployed individuals waiting for employment for six months or more constantly increased, the most intensive rise being in the share of unemployed individuals waiting for employment for more than a year.<sup>30</sup> Young people's pressure on the labour market was so intense that the Yugoslav Council of Labour listed it as one of the principal reasons for rapidly growing unemployment in the country.<sup>31</sup> Many of those young unemployed people were women, as Table 1 suggests by illustrating women's consistent majority among newly registered job seekers. From 1966, the most intense unemployment was among young women with vocational and higher education, whose share among registered unemployed constantly grew, as Table 3 illustrates. To contemporary observers in Yugoslavia, this development was already clear in 1965, as the Alliance of Workers' Unions warned that the unemployment among 'graduated young women is emerging and becoming a serious problem'.<sup>32</sup>

Reports from the Croatian and Serbian Republican Employment Bureaus illustrate employment offices' limited ability to provide women with work in Yugoslavia. In a 1964 report on employment and unemployment in Croatia, the Croatian Employment Bureau underlined the growing number of registered unemployed women, especially those who

<sup>29</sup> AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Savezni savet za rad, Informacija o zapošljavanju u zemlji i inostranstvu. See also Schierup, *op. cit.*, 74–84.

<sup>30</sup> J. Malačić, 'Unemployment in Yugoslavia from 1952 to 1975', *Eastern European Economics*, 17, 4 (1979), 85–109, here 96.

<sup>31</sup> AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Savezni savet za rad, Informacija o zapošljavanju u zemlji i inostranstvu.

<sup>32</sup> My translation. AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Problemi viška radne snage.

were unqualified and under-educated; the imbalance between women's professional characteristics and the needs of the labour market; and women's perpetual majority among the long-term registered unemployed.<sup>33</sup> The report shows that 65% of unemployed women were registered for one year or longer, 26% of the job vacancies were announced for women and only 11% of registered women were employed through employment offices. Following this report, the Croatian Parliament's Committee for Internal Affairs instructed all stakeholders to 'more freely approve unqualified women's requests to work abroad'.<sup>34</sup>

The 1971 report from the Serbian Republican Employment Bureau shows women's majority in all categories of registered unemployed jobseekers, except those with work experience.<sup>35</sup> For instance, women constituted 63% of first-time registered unemployed jobseekers, 77% of jobseekers with upper-secondary education, 68% of those registered as unemployed for one to three years and 55% of those registered for more than three years. The Bureau explained employment offices' limited ability to employ women more broadly by attributing it to imbalances between unemployed women's professional characteristics and the needs of the labour market.

When creating, expanding and legitimising the labour migration policy and its implementation mechanisms, Yugoslav policymakers regularly referred to employment offices' data on unemployment and the growing lack of employment possibilities for unqualified and certain categories of qualified jobseekers.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, Yugoslav female (and male) labour migration followed the typical labour migration patterns and was most intensive in socio-economically more developed urbanised areas and municipalities, chiefly in the Republics of Slovenia and Croatia and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.<sup>37</sup> The more progressive socio-economic development that occurred in these areas compared to the rest of the country, and which enabled women to reach the highest employment rates in the country, also enabled them to achieve higher social and spatial mobility and greater engagement in the active labour force. As migration scholars have repeatedly pointed out, labour migrations are usually most intensive in the more developed areas of labour-sending countries, where potential migrants possess more human and economic capital, thereby exhibiting stronger migration capabilities.<sup>38</sup> In the case of the aforementioned areas, the proximity to Western countries also facilitated labour migration. To counteract these trends, Yugoslav employment authorities endeavoured to distribute foreign requests for Yugoslav workers to less developed areas where employment opportunities were lower and labour surpluses higher.

<sup>33</sup>HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 36, Godišnji izvještaj službe za zapošljavanje radnika za 1963.

<sup>34</sup>My translation. HDA, *Zavod za migracije i narodnosti*, 1610, 15, Zapisnik sa sastanka u Odboru za unutrašnju politiku Izvršnog vijeća Sabora 26.V 1964.

<sup>35</sup>AJ, *Savezna konferencija socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Jugoslavije, Konferencija žena Jugoslavije*, 142-A-484, Republički zavod za zapošljavanje Beograd, Problematika zapošljavanja stručne ženske radne snage.

<sup>36</sup>See, for example, AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-I-e, 16, Izvod iz informacije o zapošljavanju naših građana u inostranstvu; AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-I-e, 16, Savezni savet za rad – Informacija o zapošljavanju u zemlji i inostranstvu; AJ, *Savezno izvršno veće*, 130, F-780, Predlog o potrebi neposrednog angažovanja predstavnika Saveznog biroa u inostranstvu na zapošljavanju radnika iz zemlje; AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-I-e, 16, Savezni savet za rad – Kretanje zaposlenosti u 1970. godini i predviđanja za 1971. godinu.

<sup>37</sup>I. Baučić, 'Osnovna strukturna obilježja jugoslavenskih radnika u inozemstvu', *Acta Geographica Croatica*, 12, 1 (1973), 35–88, here 44–46.

<sup>38</sup>M. Douglas et al., 'Theories of international migration: a review and appraisal', *Population and Development Review*, 19, 3 (1993), 431–66, here 453; H. de Hass, 'A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework', *Comparative Migration Studies*, 9, 8 (2021), 1–35, here 23–25.

## Women in Yugoslavia's labour migration governance

As early as February 1964, women became an integral part of institutionalised recruitment and of Yugoslavia's efforts to shape migration currents and align them with the conditions in the Yugoslav labour market. This is suggested by a report from a meeting of the federal Commission for Employment Abroad at the Federal Secretariat of Labour in Belgrade. According to the report, the Commission met to discuss foreign requests for Yugoslav workers, to agree on their distribution between republics, and to refine further inter-republican cooperation on the realisation of future foreign requests for Yugoslav workers.<sup>39</sup> Among other foreign requests, the Commission discussed requests for textile workers sent by two Swiss garment factories: one for 'six to nine qualified female workers' and the other for a 'certain number of female tailors'. The Commission decided that women would be recruited from the Republic of Macedonia 'since it experienced large surpluses of female sewers and confectionery workers'. Moreover, for a request from a Swiss chocolate factory for 50 workers, the Commission emphasised that 'exclusively unqualified female workers are to be recruited' and allocated their recruitment to Serbian and Macedonian republican employment bureaus. Similarly, the Commission decided that the request from the Swiss Association of Health Institutions for 300 unqualified workers would be fulfilled with female workers, of which 100 women would be recruited from Croatia, 80 from Serbia, 60 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 60 from Macedonia. Requests for male workers were distributed similarly, and the most outstanding is a request from a Dutch mining company for 1000 male workers, which the Commission distributed between Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

These and other examples in the analysed sources indicate intensive cooperation between federal and republican employment bureaus in the allocation of foreign requests for Yugoslav workers. For instance, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia shared another request from a Swiss chocolate factory for unqualified female workers. The Croatian Migration Commission decided that 20 women would be recruited from Croatia, 15 from Serbia and 15 from Macedonia.<sup>40</sup> The Serbian Republican Employment Bureau received a request from a West German electronics factory for 500 female workers and forwarded the request to Croatia with a comment that it was prepared to approve sending between 200 and 300 female workers from Serbia; accordingly, the Croatian Migration Commission approved sending 200 women from Croatia. Similar patterns reappeared in the distribution of requests for male workers and requests in which gender was not specified. For instance, a report from Montenegro stated that the republican employment office in 1965 sent agricultural workers to Switzerland on behalf of the Serbian republican employment office and construction workers to Austria on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina's republican employment office.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the federal Commission for Employment Abroad decided that the request from the Swiss Agricultural Association for 600 to 800 unqualified workers for work in agriculture would be

<sup>39</sup>My translation. HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, Zapisnik sa sastanka Komisije za poslove zapošljavanja u inostranstvu pri Saveznom sekretarijatu za rad održanog 29.II 1964. godine.

<sup>40</sup>HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, djel.br.155/64.

<sup>41</sup>AJ, *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije, Koordinacioni odbor za pitanja jugoslovenskih radnika u inostranstvu*, 142, I-482, Informacija o zapošljavanju radne snage u inostranstvu /Crna Gora/.

distributed among Serbia, which would contribute 400 workers, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, which would each contribute 200 workers.<sup>42</sup>

Such distributions reflect federal and republican authorities' efforts to direct foreign requests primarily to areas with large surpluses of unskilled and unemployable workforce. The report from the meeting of the federal Commission for Employment Abroad in Belgrade in 1964 states that republican and federal representatives agreed to strictly adhere to the recruitment guidelines prescribed by the labour migration policy.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, with the objective of simplifying the procedure of inter-republican cooperation, they resolved that the federal Ministry of Labour would disseminate any future requests for workers sent by foreign recruiters directly to Belgrade to each republican employment bureau. Moreover, the report notes that the commission delegates agreed that 'all materials pertaining to recruitments would be delivered to stakeholders through highly confidential mail', indicating that they regarded the distribution of foreign requests as a sensitive issue.<sup>44</sup>

According to the Federal Employment Bureau's report from 1973, the distribution agreement between federal and republican employment authorities remained valid throughout the subsequent years, and the Bureau utilised it to distribute foreign requests for unqualified workers to less developed, primarily rural and agrarian areas.<sup>45</sup> However, the Bureau inexplicitly acknowledged that its endeavours were significantly undermined by the nominal requests of foreign employers and the operational independence of municipal employment offices. According to the Bureau, foreign employers had a great impact on regulated labour migration since they predominantly demanded workers through nominative requests and requests seeking workers from specific areas. The Bureau also acknowledged its inability to effectively distribute anonymous requests for female workers to the least developed republics 'because employment authorities in those republics did not show interest in their implementation'.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the Bureau emphasised that its future objective and practice would still be to distribute anonymous requests for female workers, particularly those where foreign employers did not specify a recruiting area, to employment authorities in less developed republics.

According to reports from the Yugoslav government and the Federal Employment Bureau, municipal employment offices often approached labour migration opportunistically and applied the labour migration policy flexibly and inconsistently, perceiving it as a convenient way to reduce unemployment in their areas.<sup>47</sup> Such reports frequently illustrate a lack of coordination between employment offices and republican and federal employment bureaus, which Western employers and private recruiters frequently utilised to avoid bureaucracy and quickly find the desired workforce. Reports from municipal offices to the Federal Employment Bureau suggest that Western recruiters often exploited

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<sup>42</sup>HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, Zapisnik sa sastanka komisije za poslove zapošljavanja u inostranstvu pri Saveznom sekretarijatu za rad održanog 29.II 1964. godine.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, my translation.

<sup>45</sup>AJ, *Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije, Koordinacioni odbor za pitanja jugoslovenskih radnika u inostranstvu*, 142, I-489, Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja, Informacija o raspodeli ponuda inostranih poslodavaca republičkim i pokrajinskim zavodima za zapošljavanje.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, my translation.

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, AJ, *Arhiv predsjednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Informacija o zapošljavanju u zemlji i inostranstvu; AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-26, O nekim aktuelnim pitanjima spoljne migracije.

Yugoslavia's organisational inconsistency by sending the same request to several employment offices or recruiting from one municipality despite having an agreement with another.<sup>48</sup> It was also common for foreign employers and representatives of foreign employment authorities to withdraw from agreed recruitments or not to attend workers' selection, as in the case of women from Kosovo, whose employment abroad was not realised for those reasons.<sup>49</sup>

Similar incidents to those mentioned above are frequently reflected in the Yugoslav government's and Federal Employment Bureau's reports on problems and controversies regarding workers' recruitment and unregulated labour migration.<sup>50</sup> The government usually responded with directives aimed at strengthening Yugoslavia's recruiting mechanisms and protecting Yugoslav workers from deception and eventual exploitation. The sources analysed in this article generally suggest that Yugoslav government and employment authorities not only aimed to strategically discharge labour surplus but also negotiated various benefits for recruited workers, such as transit from Yugoslavia to the destination country paid by their foreign employers, higher salaries and the equality of Yugoslav workers with the domestic workers of the host countries.

One of the measures designed to facilitate labour migrants' integration into the new workplace and social environment was pre-departure training. In almost all recruitment agreements with Western countries, Yugoslav negotiators embedded stipulations that labour migrants could receive pre-departure training paid for by their foreign employers or host countries and stipulations that also guaranteed Yugoslav migrant workers' training and specialisation in the same capacity enjoyed by citizens of the host countries.<sup>51</sup> As early as 1965, the Federal Employment Bureau initiated pre-departure training programmes and courses, which municipal employment authorities and educational institutions implemented. Reports from the Serbian Republican Employment Bureau and the Federal Employment Bureau show approximately 10,000 participants in pre-departure training programmes between 1965 and 1970.<sup>52</sup> These reports also indicate a predominance of male workers in pre-departure training programmes and courses, likely because the planned and implemented programmes primarily focused on occupations typically held by men in the French and West German metal, vehicle and construction industries. However, the Federal Employment Bureau's annual bulletin reveals that women did participate in pre-departure training programmes. In 1966, Sweden financed language and cultural introduction courses for two groups of female nurses from Macedonia and a group of textile workers from Vojvodina.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup>See, for example, AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-26, Selekcija za SR Nemačku.

<sup>49</sup>AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-26, Rad komisije za selekciju radnika.

<sup>50</sup>See, for example, AJ, *Savezno izvršno veće*, 130, F-780, Informacija o problemima u vezi sa zapošljavanjem naših građana u inostranstvu; AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-26, Selekcije kandidatov za ZR Nemčijo. Poročilo o selekciji.

<sup>51</sup>AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-31, Sprovođenje međudržavnih sporazuma o regulisanju zapošljavanja jugoslovenskih radnika u pojedinim zemljama – analiza. According to this report from the Federal Employment Bureau, the recruitment agreement with Austria did not include such a clause.

<sup>52</sup>*ibid.*; AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11-26, izvještaj o poslovanju republičkog zavoda za zapošljavanje za 1969. godinu.

<sup>53</sup>AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, *Bilten* 3, 1966, Zapošljavanje u inostranstvu. See also M. Bošnjak, 'Building the migration industry: socialist Yugoslavia's agenda for labour migrants' pre-departure training', *Labor History* (2025), 1–25, here 11–12.

## Young, healthy, and accessible

Mirjana Morokvašić argued that migrant women, stripped of opportunities in their own country, represented a ready-made, easily obtainable and flexible labour supply for expanding Western post-war labour markets.<sup>54</sup> Yugoslavia's shrinking labour market, growing unemployment, increasing migration capabilities among women and institutional support to their migration all coincided with imbalances within Western labour markets and the urgent need for female and young workers. Rapid economic development in Western industrialised countries and the elevation of socio-economic standards among their populations brought shortages of a labour force ready to take low-wage, low-value jobs in the secondary labour market.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the increasing inability to employ the domestic workforce in these areas of work, especially women and young people who had filled these jobs previously, guided Western employers and employment authorities towards labour sources in developing countries.<sup>56</sup> Thus, while unqualified and young jobseekers, especially women, in Yugoslavia had to wait for employment for a year or more, Western labour markets craved those categories of workers.<sup>57</sup>

Foreign requests for workers submitted to Yugoslav employment offices clearly illustrate these phenomena.<sup>58</sup> The simultaneous submissions of requests from virtually all major labour-receiving countries highlights the labour shortages in industrialised Europe and the urgency with which Western employers approached Yugoslav employment offices. The substantial demand for young, unqualified workers to work in expanding industries such as the textile and food industries, as well as for skilled or experienced workers in the metal and automotive industries or the welfare and service sectors, illustrates the shortages of specific labour categories in Western labour markets. The seemingly instant and mostly unconditional approval of such requests by Yugoslav employment bureaus highlights the considerable surplus of those labour categories in Yugoslavia. Some of the most salient examples include requests from a Swiss garment factory, an Austrian garment factory and a West German hotel. Unlike most Western employers' requests, which either specified a number or a range of requested workers, the Swiss factory requested an unspecified number of qualified female tailors, the Austrian factory an unspecified number of unqualified female workers and the West German hotel an unspecified number of unqualified female workers. The Croatian Migration Commission approved these requests without any alteration or comment.

Most foreign requests sought male workers for employment in the mining, metal and construction industries, typically in large numbers ranging from a few dozen to several hundreds. Many foreign requests were gender-neutral, mostly seeking large numbers of

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<sup>54</sup>M. Morokvašić, 'Birds of passage are also women ...', *International Migration Review*, 18, 4 (1984), 886–907, here 1.

<sup>55</sup>M.J. Piore, *Birds of Passage: Migrant labour and industrial societies* (Cambridge, 1979), 26–32.

<sup>56</sup>*ibid.*, 26–32; D.S. Massey et al., 'Theories of international migration: a review and appraisal', *Population and Development Review*, 19, 3 (1993), 431–466, here 443.

<sup>57</sup>For instance, in 1966, West Germany altered a labour immigration regulation which allowed the issuing of work permits only to skilled Yugoslav workers, to ensure that the employment of Yugoslav female workers was not restricted. Furthermore, during the negotiations of recruitment agreements, West Germany demanded from Yugoslavia that recruitment include only skilled men, but all categories of female workers. See Novinišćak, *op. cit.*, 137–38. Moreover, according to Alfonso, Switzerland preferred labour immigration over the development of family-related welfare facilities which could have facilitated domestic women's entry into the labour market. See A. Afonso, 'Migrant workers or working women? Comparing labour supply policies in post-war Europe', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 21, 3 (2019), 251–69.

<sup>58</sup>See collections in HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 36, 37, 38.

unqualified workers for work in agriculture.<sup>59</sup> Since women constituted a large proportion of unemployed jobseekers without formal qualifications, many were probably recruited through such requests.<sup>60</sup> Some requests sought both women and men to work at the same workplace, predominantly in textile factories, hotel and restaurant facilities or in agriculture. It was common among Yugoslav labour migrants that married couples migrated together. The husband would usually migrate first, followed by the wife, who either immigrated to the husband's host country as a relative or was recruited through a nominative request.<sup>61</sup> However, the requests for Yugoslav workers analysed here do not reflect such patterns, as most sought an uneven number of men and women. For instance, a West German hotel and service company requested 35 men and 25 women, and a West German garment factory requested 10 proficient female sewers and one male tailor.<sup>62</sup> Although rare, the gender distribution could also be the opposite in requests from Western textile factories, as in the case of the Austrian factory request for 20 unqualified men and 10 unqualified women.<sup>63</sup> The factory even specified that the recruited men and women must be unmarried.

Requests seeking only women indicate that Western employers predominantly sought young, unqualified and (to a lesser extent) semi-qualified female workers. Further, they suggest that Western recruiters carefully studied the Yugoslav labour migration policy. Namely, they requested unqualified female workers even for positions typically requiring qualifications, such as nursing or tailoring, but they frequently emphasised that the recruited women needed to be either experienced workers or trained workers. Requests for unqualified and semi-qualified female workers were mainly for work in the textile and leather industries, the service and healthcare sectors, food factories and seasonal agriculture. Similarly, requests for qualified female workers were primarily for work in garment factories and the service and healthcare sectors. It is clear that women were also recruited through nominative requests, as both federal and republican employment authorities approved and archived nominative requests for female workers.<sup>64</sup> Even these requests recruited women mostly for work in the same labour market branches.

Several reports suggest that Yugoslav employment authorities' approval of requests for female nurses can be attributed to their large numbers among registered unemployed jobseekers, whereas the approval of requests for qualified female textile workers can be attributed both to their large numbers among registered unemployed jobseekers and to high labour surpluses within the textile industry. Although the textile industry flourished in Yugoslavia during the post-Second World War decades, it experienced a labour surplus throughout the 1960s, which reached approximately 50,000 by 1970.<sup>65</sup> According to a report from the Yugoslav Association for Professional Orientation from

<sup>59</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>See Table 3.

<sup>61</sup>See, for example, Lorber, *op. cit.*, 175–77; Knocke, *op. cit.*, 81–82; Svanberg, 'Labour migration and the Swedish labour market model', *op. cit.*, 102.

<sup>62</sup>HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, request without a reference number.

<sup>63</sup>HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, br.djel. 251.

<sup>64</sup>See, for example, AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-15, Nominativne ponude za zapošljavanje radnika u inostranstvu; HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, br.dj.125/1-64.

<sup>65</sup>AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-a-1-e, 16, Informacija o problemima zapošljavanja i merama za veće aktiviranje stanovništva.

1961, 72% of unemployed qualified women had certificates to work in the textile industry and the service and sales sectors.<sup>66</sup> A decade later, reports from the Conference for the Social Activity of Women, Yugoslavia's central female organisation, presented and discussed official data that showed similar trends among unemployed women.<sup>67</sup> For instance, data from the Federal Employment Bureau for 1969 showed that women constituted approximately 63% of unemployed qualified textile female workers and 90% of unemployed nurses. These occupations were strongly feminised in concurrent Yugoslavia; therefore, it is unsurprising that women constituted the majority of unemployed jobseekers in those categories. However, the same reports show that, during the same years, approximately 50% of female Yugoslav youth attended schools for nurses and vocational education oriented towards the textile industry, with their shares among students ranging between 70% and 90% during the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>68</sup> Given these figures, it is clear that female-dominated vocational schools were educating large numbers of young women with severely limited employment prospects.

Requests for female workers suggest that foreign recruiters were aware of these aspects, and of the vast number of unemployed young women in Yugoslavia with the particular skills, qualifications and characteristics needed in the West. Foreign requests seeking women workers were often more specific in their demands for workers' characteristics than requests for male workers and gender-neutral requests. In a study of labour migration to Swedish manufacturing industries, Denis Frank highlighted the often-overt nature of Swedish recruiters' demands for Yugoslav labourers. In 1969, a Swedish garment factory went as far as to explicitly request young, unmarried and childless female textile workers from areas in northern and middle Yugoslavia.<sup>69</sup> Demands similar to the Swedish ones can be found among requests processed by the Croatian Migration Commission. Foreign recruiters primarily sought young female workers, usually between 18 and 25 or 35 years of age. If age was not specified, the requests often sought 'girls', implying a preference for young unmarried women. Two examples illustrate the frequent explicitness in requests and indicate Western employers' perception of an endless and diverse labour supply in Yugoslavia: a West German textile factory sought eight female workers, demanding that they have nimble fingers and healthy eyesight and be no taller than 162 cm.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, a West German restaurant applied for four female bartenders aged 20 to 40, requesting that they have an attractive appearance and be approximately the same age.<sup>71</sup> In the same request, the restaurant

<sup>66</sup> AJ, *Savezna konferencija socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Jugoslavije, Konferencija žena Jugoslavije*, 142, I-619, Jugoslovensko udruženje za profesionalnu orijentaciju, Profesionalna orijentacija i zapošljavanje žena i ženske omladine.

<sup>67</sup> AJ, *Savezna konferencija socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Jugoslavije, Konferencija žena Jugoslavije*, 142, A-484, Obrazovanje, vaspitanje i profesionalna orijentacija ženske omladine; AJ, *Savezna konferencija socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Jugoslavije, Konferencija žena Jugoslavije*, 142, A-484, Svesno društveno usmjeravanje privredne aktivizacije žena sa gledišta objektivnih mogućnosti i potreba u razvoju našeg društva; AJ, *Savezna konferencija socijalističkog saveza radnog naroda Jugoslavije, Konferencija žena Jugoslavije*, 142, I 625, Zaposlenost žena i školovanje ženske omladine.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> As Denis Frank's study shows, northern and middle Yugoslavia included Vojvodina and Northwestern Croatia, areas that had a developed textile industry. In 1967, the same factory recruited young women from areas with a developed textile industry in Macedonia, even requesting that these women be unmarried. D. Frank, 'Staten, företagen och arbetskraftsinvandringen: en studie av invandringspolitiken i Sverige och rekryteringen av utländska arbetare, 1960–1972' (D.Phil., Växjö, 2005), 199–201.

<sup>70</sup> HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, br.djel.196/64.

<sup>71</sup> HDA, *Republički komisija za iseljenička pitanja*, 1609, 37, br.djel.196/64y.

sought female and male kitchen personnel without specifying their physical appearance, requesting only that they were aged 20 to 40. The Croatian Migration Commission approved both requests without comments or significant alterations, as it did other requests with similar demands, eventually changing the municipality from which women were to be recruited or annotating that the wages offered by Western employers were too low.

## Conclusion

The Yugoslav government and employment authorities never managed to entirely steer labour migration and align its currents with the labour migration policy. Labour migration was mostly driven and sustained by cumulative driving forces operating on micro and mezzo levels.<sup>72</sup> Social networks between migrants and potential migrants and Western employers emerged early and constantly expanded. Private recruiters operated successfully across Yugoslavia – utilising weak institutional mechanisms; organisations that perceived labour migration as a lucrative opportunity, such as tourist and transport agencies; and the Yugoslav press's liberal attitude towards advertising job vacancies abroad. Moreover, Yugoslav municipal employment offices and authorities often lacked sufficient experience and capacities to implement the labour migration policy or, empowered by the employment law, approached labour migration liberally, perceiving it as a convenient way of decreasing unemployment in their areas and increasing local economic standards through labour migrants' remittances. As this article has highlighted, the Yugoslav government designed, expanded and redesigned various measures to strengthen institutional influence and control over labour migration, gradually establishing institutionalised recruitment as a significant platform in mediating employment abroad.<sup>73</sup>

This article has shown that women constituted an integral part of Yugoslavia's migration management and strategic efforts to employ labour surplus in Western labour markets and to shape the demographic and socio-economic traits of its migrating citizens. From the onset of the liberalised labour migration policy, Yugoslav employment authorities included women when evaluating, deliberating and strategically allocating Western employers' requests for Yugoslav workers. Women's inclusion in institutionalised recruitment was essentially inevitable, as they constituted either the majority or a significant proportion of the categories of unemployed jobseekers prescribed for employment abroad by the Yugoslav policy-makers. Furthermore, women's increasing social mobility and aspirations to enter the labour market and employment offices' limited ability to allocate jobs to women domestically coincided with demands for their labour in expanding sectors

<sup>72</sup> AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-e-1-e-16, O Problemima privatnog zapošljavanja naših građana u inostranstvu; AJ, *Arhiv predsednika republike*, III-e-1-e-16, Informacija o zapošljavanju u zemlji i inostranstvu. See also M. Bošnjak, 'Driving forces of labour migration as barriers to labour migrants' professional mobility: the case of Yugoslav labour migration', *CES Working Papers*, 15, 2 (2023), 194–215, here 200–03.

<sup>73</sup> According to the Federal Employment Bureau, Yugoslav employment offices mediated employment abroad to 445,132 individuals between 1964 and 1970. AJ, *Savezni biro za poslove zapošljavanja*, 467, F-11–31, Sprovođenje međudržavnih sporazuma o regulisanju zapošljavanja jugoslavenskih radnika u pojedinim zemljama – analiza -. Ivo Baučić notes that, on average, Yugoslav employment offices mediated employment abroad to approximately 50% of labour migrants. See Baučić, 'Osnovna struktura', *op. cit.*, 41.

of Western labour markets and Western employers' increasing focus on recruitment in Yugoslavia. In an effort to respond to these developments and meet the guidelines of Yugoslavia's labour migration policy, Yugoslav employment authorities mediated women's employment abroad through all forms of institutionalised recruitment.

The analysed archival sources indicate that the proportion of women among labour migrants mediated by Yugoslav employment authorities was significantly lower than that of men. Nevertheless, the sources also reveal that women were the subject of employment authorities' efforts to allocate recruitment to areas with substantial labour surpluses, the inter-republican distribution of foreign requests for Yugoslav workers, and the Yugoslav government's endeavour to, in collaboration with their foreign contractors, select eligible workers and prepare them for their future living and working environments. Thus, the findings presented in this article demonstrate that archival sources, particularly those produced by employment authorities and institutions of labour-sending countries, can provide a comprehensive insight into the state's direct involvement in labour migrations.

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