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Big industrial employers and the airport of Braşov are beneficial for the whole area, and several processing plants were opened in Sfântu Gheorghe because of its low prices and wages. Altogether this keeps unemployment at a low rate, but wages also remain low. Education and culture have a very important symbolic role for the city, but good jobs are scarce. Only 18% of the labour force is employed in developing sectors (information technology, etc.). The EU accession of Romania in 2007 brought to Sfântu Gheorghe a significant amount of subsidies from structural funds, but the economic crisis of 2008, had a profound negative impact on the whole country.

As a consequence of the structural and economic hardships, there was a significant emigration wave. Between the censuses of 2001 and 2011, the city lost almost 10% of its population, and a significant share of it was due to emigration. Even more alarming is the fact that the proportion of youth aged 15-19 within the total local population dropped by 52.2% in these ten years, while the share of the 20-24 age group by 34.9%. Based on past population developments and current trends, all YOUNIG projection scenarios assume a severe decrease in the population until 2035. Main destination countries were Hungary (for ethnic Hungarians) and Italy or Spain (for Romanians), but with economic crisis reaching these countries as well, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and other destinations also became popular.

The Roma are a special case, they commute rather than migrate: many young Roma spend months in Hungary or in Austria, taking seasonal jobs, then return to Sfântu Gheorghe.

This large-scale youth emigration make local institutional actors see a rather dark future for the city. Most of them do not trust many will come back and settle down, which would be the most favourable outcome of migration, in their views. The general narrative on youth migration is that it is a loss for the community, while institutional actors are also very sympathetic, they understand young people's motivations in leaving. Immigration is largely seen as non-existent, although some cases were mentioned, for example when a local company did not find qualified local employees and finally brought a German and a Pakistani worker to fill the position. Particular issues to the Hungarian-speaking city were mentioned: local youth is not sufficiently fluent in Romanian, therefore pursuing a professional career might seem easier for them in Hungary, or in an English- or German-speaking country. This is especially so since 2011, when Hungary started offering a simplified naturalisation scheme for ethnic Hungarians living abroad. Yet, after moving to other countries, locals find it difficult to join the diaspora of Hungarians born in Hungary, and usually they seek the company of other Transylvanian Hungarians. Szekler patriotism is another important driver of their eventual return.

Interviewed young migrants were generally positive about their migration experience. Spending time abroad has been beneficial for their personal development, and only those who had worked in lower-status positions reported bad experiences. While work was in their focus, family also played an important role in their decision to emigrate or to return, as well as the pursuit of better-quality education. There was a strong emphasis on self-consciousness: most of the interviewees presented themselves as active shapers of their destinies.

Most young migrants felt that they could be, on the long run, agents of change for their home town, too. By improving their foreign language skills, accumulating know-how, as well as financial and social capital, their eventual return might benefit their home community, and if they choose not to return, they can still influence those who stay – in those subtle ways referred to as 'social remittances'. While returning migrants often accumulate capital and buy property as a result, the time spent abroad often does not add to their professional development (for example a young economist worked in the kitchen of a guesthouse near Salzburg). Concerning the future, young emigrants agreed that Romania was developing (rising salaries, electronic services, public safety, urban landscape), yet only two of them thought that the country could ever catch up with their host country. On the other hand, political corruption, impenetrable bureaucracy and negative attitudes of institutions and employers towards the youth were named as major obstacles that prevent young emigrants from moving back to Sfântu Gheorghe.