

INTRODUCTION

This briefing presents selected relevant findings from the qualitative research carried out by the Bulgarian team under the WP4 of the Growth, Equal Opportunities, Migration and Markets (GEMM) Project. One should bear in mind that our sample targeted only migrants active on the labour market (mostly employed but also temporary unemployed) and only in some activity domains (ICT, medicine and finance for the highly skilled; construction, transport and care work for the low skilled), so the findings from our analysis may differ from official statistics and/or the findings of other researches.

FINDINGS

REASONS TO MIGRATE

Experts' perspectives

To pursue better paid jobs, escape from financial difficulties at home, including heavy indebtedness, look for better opportunities for training and career growth.



To gain new work and personal experience, enrich one's own personality – especially for younger to-be-migrants.

'These are low paid positions, these are the low-skilled jobs, and people get respectively the minimum wage. But the truth is that no matter how small their wages are, there is simply no equivalent in Bulgaria. On the basis of their minimum wage and their working week of 36 hours, a worker has the opportunity to pay his rent, is not deprived of any food, has the opportunity to send money to his family in Bulgaria and to secure, I do not say in any case a luxurious lifestyle, but a normal way of life...' (BG.BG.AG.3.F.44).

Migrants' perspectives



To run away from multiple problems of the home country, such as deteriorating living conditions (a mix of economic, demographic and moral decline); declining confidence in Bulgarian institutions and disgust with the facade rule of law.



To look for positive perspectives: education and career opportunities; better future for one's children; wish for travel; making something different with one's life.

"The Bulgarian state, to put it mildly, drove me out... I have built up this plant, I am not going to destroy it, and I just left, and nobody was able to understand what happened to make me leave..." (BG.DE.AC.1.M.69)

"Everything is somewhat more corrupt, it's up to who is who, whose man you are... it is, in the sense, that we do not have such a democracy - I do not know. That's how I feel it." (BG.UK.AC.12.M.36)

MIGRATION CHANNELS

Contacts with recruitment agencies among the interviewed Bulgarian migrants are rare. Applying for university education and direct contacts with employers are more common as "official" channels, particularly for younger and highly skilled migrants. People prefer using various kinds of social ties: friends, neighbours and acquaintances in the host countries. Accessing information and identifying opportunities through specialized internet sites and professional forums are widespread as well.

Lived experiences of Bulgarian migrants in Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK

Siyka Kovacheva, Radka Peeva & Boris Popivanov

'First through familiar Bulgarians, then through strangers, in the sense - when someone says something, and I immediately go there. Then through the Internet - you find what you find... Just, you need anything to hook up and yes, to go on from there...' (BG.UK.AC.12.M.36)

'They were our boys, there was a whole community there of our people and I was sure they would not leave me alone' (BG.DE.AC.10.M.40)

ADAPTATION DIFFICULTIES



No or little knowledge of the host country language constitutes the topmost challenge facing the Bulgarian migrants upon arrival.

The language of the people here is more bypassing, more decorated, not as direct as ours. It is quite often that the English tell us foreigners that we are rude, simply because in Bulgarian we are used to speaking more directly. Something I can tell you now in five words, I have to say in English with 15 words, just so as not to offend anyone... (BG.UK.AC.4.F.27)

A majority of the interviewees have a rather negative assessment of the work of the administrative institutions, both Bulgarian and of the host-country. They usually cite either incompetence or discriminatory behaviour as the reason. Provisions regarding accommodation, setting a bank account, registration with authorities are found to be very bureaucratic and time consuming.

Social networks are of utmost importance in the process of finding the first job. In many cases recommendations by familiar people are regarded as more valuable than one's own CV and performance in interviews. Readiness for taking up odd jobs initially is widespread, and few migrants remain out of employment for a long time. Jobs (in healthcare) providing housing are highly valued. Otherwise, new migrants are often forced to live with multiple neighbours (usually co-nationals) in small and inadequate dwellings.

"5 years ago, we were looking for a place to live [...] nobody tells you that directly but eventually you realize it is so. In a coded way, if we are among three people who have applied for a flat, two Germans and we Bulgarians, they choose someone of the others... It's constantly repeating." (BG.DE.AC.5.F.41)

"I didn't know the language, but I got hired because I was recommended by another Bulgarian. If you get recommended by a person who is sure of your integrity, you will get a job. Nobody's going to hire you from the street. Very few people risk hiring candidates from agencies." (BG.SP.AC.4.F.42)

WORK TRAJECTORIES

The highly qualified Bulgarian migrants can be roughly divided into two main types. First, there are ones who leave Bulgaria in order to find any job abroad regardless of the qualification needed for it and often proceed to low qualified sectors of the labour market. Second, we have the example of people who have gone abroad for doing their higher education and who then make a transition to work in the same sphere. The picture among the low-qualified migrants is a bit more complex. They have often experienced multiple job changes in various sectors for a relatively limited period of time and also tend to combine two or more part-time jobs.

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IDENTITY



Bulgarian first

Many of the Bulgarian migrants highlight their national origin and traditions and claim they departed in search for better life not for changing identity. In some cases even, the 'Bulgarian' in them is said to crystallise over time.

'I always feel Bulgarian in the same way, from the moment I came, until now. No more, no less, the same way. But I will never feel Spanish [...] We are immigrants. We'll always feel, we always feel that way.' (BG.SP.AC.7.F.46)



Bulgarian and European

Many migrants see the European identity not in opposition but rather complementary to the Bulgarian one. *'Maybe more like a European, yes. As a Bulgarian [...] I hope the little ones will keep, will know they are Bulgarian, they will keep their traditions'* (BG.UK.AC.11.F.35)



Cosmopolitan identity

Though few in number (and mostly young and engaged in the ICT), there are Bulgarian migrants who refuse to identify themselves in strict national or European terms and see themselves as citizens of the world.

'Previously I always felt like a Bulgarian and there was no point in getting citizenship. Now that I am about to get it, I wonder if it's only formal or I feel a UK citizen. I think I feel like a UK citizen, but even more I feel a citizen of London, and mostly a citizen of the world' (BG.UK.AC.6.M.36)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- More intense cooperation between private and public recruiting agencies as well as providing much better organisational capacities of the Bulgarian authorities abroad are needed to make preparation for departure and subsequent adaptation of migrants easier and more efficient.
- Propagation of official information sources and better control of the faithfulness of the provided 'advice' could reduce the effects of the insecurity of social networks and informal channels.
- More attention should be focused on the policies and practices of European labour mediation in the sending countries: information campaigns about the added value of labour mobility for all countries involved, both sending and receiving; training and networking among experts in the field, particularly for the EURES councillors and managers of state employment agencies; more state support from the home country for the labor migrants, protecting their rights and helping them reconcile their family responsibilities.
- Two kinds of practices should be particularly addressed by policy-makers: one related to the (sometimes) discriminatory behaviour of the host country's institutions, employers and even landlords towards Bulgarians as 'second-hand' European citizens; and second, the growing discriminatory behaviour among migrant communities (when, for instance, 'old' Bulgarian migrants develop negative prejudices towards 'new' Bulgarian migrants and recent migrants