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WORK ABROAD – THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BULGARIANS

Summary

Since 1989 onwards an intensive external migration has been observed in Bulgaria. A part of the settlers and the long-term migrants, a huge group of short-term migrants took shape. In the article have been discussed some basic characteristics of the temporary external migration, Bulgarians' working abroad experience and its effects, drawn on the basis of an empirical investigation. The major part of Bulgarians going to work abroad are motivated by the higher incomes. The main destinations are Spain and Greece. As a rule the labor they accept is unskilled. Very often they work without any contract and benefits. Money earned abroad, are spent on current expenses. Respondents think that after working abroad they have a higher self-confidence, new information and abilities. But special attention should be paid to migrants' assessments that their health has worsened.

The investigated problem is very complicated, with multiple and contradictory determinants and effects and in order to understand it better and to be in a better position to formulate corrective measures, specialized studies are needed.

Key Words: External Migration, Short-term Migration, Causes and Consequences of Labor Migration.

During the past two decades the Bulgarians took active part in the intensive global migratory processes. A significant number of Bulgarian citizens left the country for various reasons in a historically short period. According to expert estimations about 716 thousand people emigrated from 1989 to 2002 (National Demographic Strategy, 2006). Only in 1989 more than 200 thousand people left Bulgaria and moved to Turkey. The gathering of the separated families continued this migratory stream during the following years, although it was less intense and popular. At the same time an essential change in the migratory behaviour emerged very quickly. The political emigration, based on ethnic ground was substituted by economic one. The range and the intensity of the process diminished and the destinations increased. The migratory policy and the restrictive measures of the economically developed countries had their effect on the structure of the migratory streams and the models of migratory behaviour. The short-term migration increased highly. Together with the permanent or long-term settlement abroad, a multitudinous group of people was formed, who periodically travel to some countries in order to work – both legally and illegally. (Even now, when Bulgaria is an EU member only 10 countries from EU have fully opened their labour markets for Bulgarian

workers). According to experts from the World Bank, in the beginning of 2007 one million Bulgarians were working illegally in the European countries.

Despite the importance of the migratory process for the demographic, economic and social development of the country, a system for current statistical registration has not been built yet and there are not enough surveys. The analyses are based mainly on common indices, on expert estimations and on surveys on the potential migration (the reason is that the composition of the emigrants is derived from the aggregate of the potential emigrants).

The range of the short-term labour migration (it has been a common practice lately for many Bulgarians to travel abroad in order to work as seasonal workers) and the wide-spread and stable reproduction of migratory attitudes, mainly connected with desire to work abroad for some time, are making the questions about its reflection on the particular individual and on the whole society a problem of the present day.

The specific character of the labour migration not only limits, but even makes the access to a large part of the migrants impossible. It is possible to get into contact and gather information only from people, who are in the country at the moment. This kind of information, gathered during an empirical sociological survey, held in the beginning of April 2007, will be presented and analysed in this material.¹ On the basis of this data, essential characteristics of the short-term labour migration outside the country and the experience of the Bulgarian workers abroad will be outlined.

The survey found that almost 10% of the respondents, who were in the country during the inquiry, worked abroad once or several times during the past ten years. This data coincide with those received during another survey of NCPOR² from the end of 2006, when a little more than 9% of the respondents gave the same answer. The percentage of the poorest and those, living in the municipal centers, who said they worked abroad, is a little higher than the average. 14% answered that they had a relative, who had worked outside the country. More often these are the answers of the unemployed and of the women in maternity leave. Approximately 40% of those, who worked abroad answered that the total time of their employment there was more than a year.

The destinations of the labour migrants show that those Bulgarians, who have decided to work abroad temporarily, most often direct to southern countries – Spain, Greece and Italy. Apparently at least two factors have a great importance:

¹ Data from a two-step representative for Bulgarian population above 18 years of age empirical survey, carried out by the National Center for Research of the Public Opinion, is used in the analysis. It includes 1000 persons from 86 towns and villages. The structure of the sample is: Sex: men – 48,5%, women 51,5%. Place: living in Sofia – 13.3%, in towns over 50 000 – 36.3%, in little towns 18.6%, in villages – 27.8%. Age: from 18 to 29 years – 21.1%, from 30 to 39 – 16.5%, from 40 to 49 – 17.4%, from 50 to 59 – 17.2%, over 60 – 27.8%. Education: university – 17.4%, college – 4.5%, secondary 51.7%, primary, elementary and illiterate – 26.4%.

² National Centre for Public Opinion Research

first – the development and the specialization of the agriculture in these countries define the necessity of considerable amount of unqualified, mainly seasonal labour, which is undesired by the local population; second – it is known that in these countries it is a common practice to neglect the migratory and labour legislations and to hire illegal seasonal workers.

Table 1: In which country did you work?

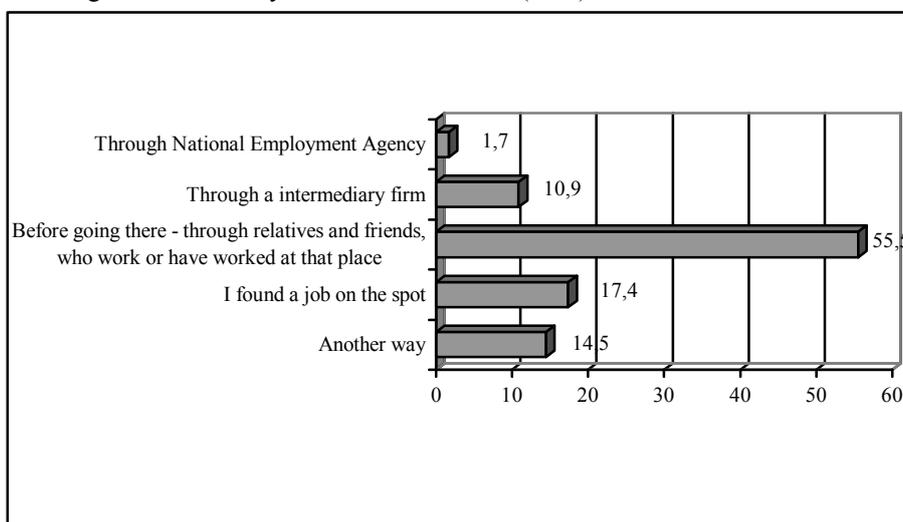
Country	%
Spain	25,7
Greece	23,6
Italy	17,0
Germany	13,3
USA	11,0
Netherlands	4,2
Cyprus	3,9
In some other country	31,7

Note: The sum of the percentages exceeds 100 because there could be more than one answer to the question.

Comparing the information to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, a pronounced segmentation in the destinations of labour migration is revealed. The main factors for the differentiation are gender, education and place of residence. Men are mainly going to work in Spain, Italy and Germany (usually in the construction) and in Greece (in the agriculture). Women most often work in Greece (as maid-servants, chambermaids and in the agriculture) and in USA (mostly those, who are highly skilled). USA is the most popular destination among the intelligentsia (probably a reason for this is also the visa policy) while those, who are less educated are mainly orientated to Greece. The unemployed prefer Italy and Greece and the students are mostly directed to USA (one may definitely say that the vast network of firms, arranging student brigades there has a crucial role). The residents of the villages most often point out in their answers Greece (more than 60%) and nearly three times less frequently Spain.

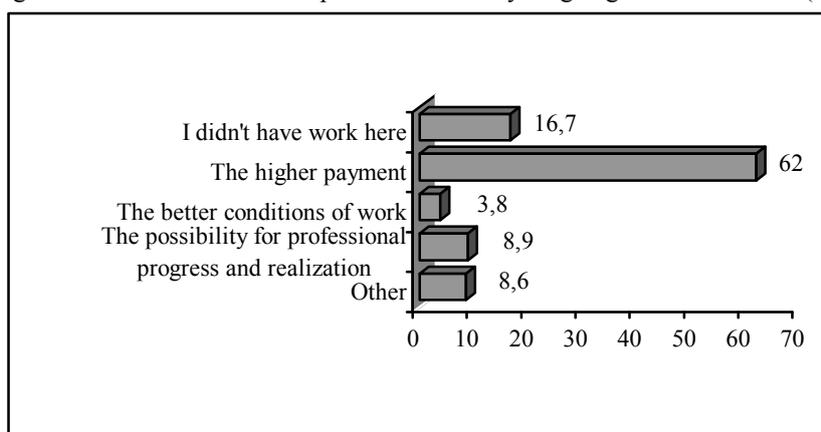
Informal networks are crucial for finding a job outside Bulgaria.

Figure 1: How did you find work abroad? (in %)



More than half of the respondents answered that while they were still in Bulgaria they were directed and assisted by their relatives or friends, who were working or had worked abroad. Nearly one-fifth found jobs on the spot. Only one-tenth used the services of intermediary firms while help from the National Employment Agency was used very rarely – one out of fifty of those, who worked abroad – mainly residents of the capital or employees. A reason for this could be the lack of information for its activities and the opportunities it provides, the limited access to its offices (because of their location), the insufficient amount of jobs it offers or the formed opinion that there are other possibilities for finding more attractive jobs and conditions of work.

Figure 2: What was the most important reason for your going to work abroad? (in %)

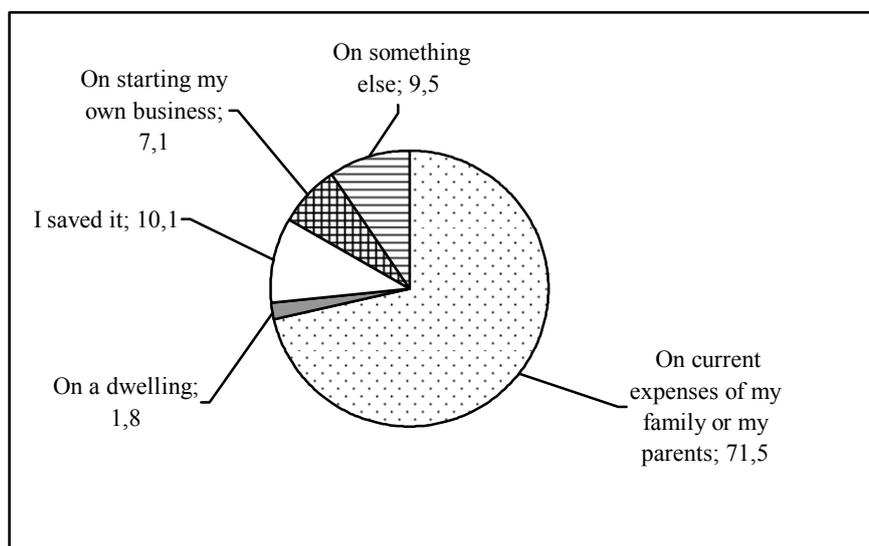


Having in mind the socio-economic situation in the country and the payment, which is several times lower than that in the developed countries (Mantarova, Zaharieva, 2006: 23-24), it is not a surprise that the higher payment is the main reason for people to leave to work outside the country. Every six out of ten people, who have worked abroad, said this was the most important reason. The next answer “I didn’t have work here” is far more unpopular – 16,7%. The possibility for professional progress and realization was the main reason to leave for less than one-tenth of the labour migrants.

The higher payment is more often pointed out as the main reason by women and younger people – those who are 18 – 29 years old – in almost three-fourths of the cases. For those, who are aged 50 – 59 the most important reason is the lack of work here. It is the same with those, who have basic education or are village inhabitants. This is not surprising, because it is well known that for the elderly and less educated people it is hardest to find job, and that the unemployment rate is much higher in the villages than in the cities. The situation is different with the highly educated groups – the intelligentsia and the professionals. The possibility for professional progress and better realization is a much more frequent answer in these groups and it is equal to the “higher payment”.

The reasons for the departure are confirmed by the information about how the money earned abroad is spent.

Figure 3: On what did you mainly spend the money, you earned abroad? (in %)

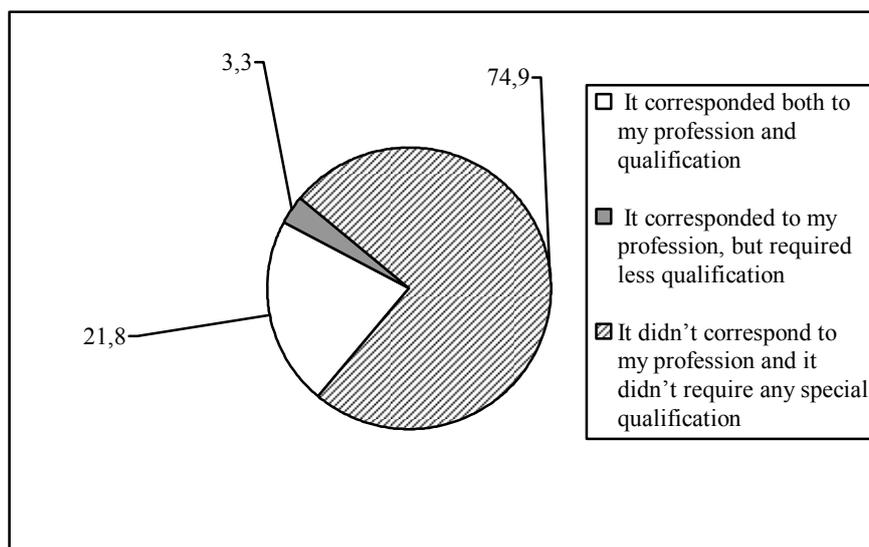


Naturally, the socio-demographic differentiation of the answers shows a considerable accumulation of the answers “on current expenses” among the representatives of the groups, which are poorly circumstanced – people with low education, people living in villages, Turks and Roma. The people from these

groups spent the money mainly on daily necessities of their families, except for about one-tenth of the village residents, who used the money for building houses. It is noticeable that approximately one-fifth of the people aged 40 – 49 spent the money also on starting their own business.

We may assume to what extent are the expectations for professional progress and realization fulfilled among different groups, by the answer to the question about the essence of the work the respondents did abroad.

Figure 4: Did your work abroad correspond to your profession and qualification? (in %)



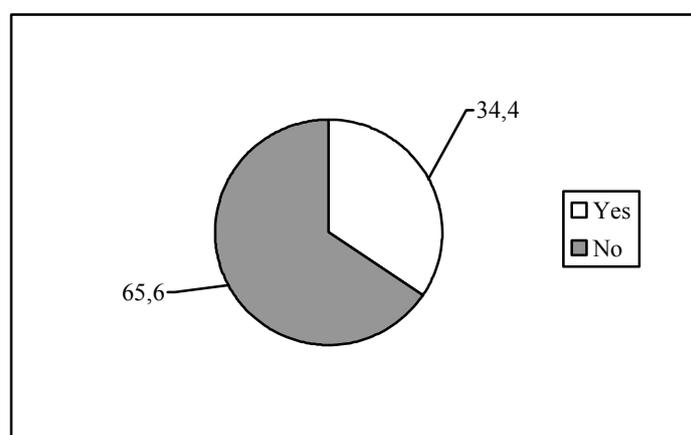
The information, gathered during the survey, shows that three-fourths of the workers performed unskilled work – their jobs were not in accordance with their professions and did not require any special qualification. Indeed, the number of those, who worked according to their qualification and profession, is higher in the groups, which motive to departure was professional development. This is a reason to think that the representatives of this group had act selectively and that the expectations and desires met the reality to some extent. But this does not belittle the fact that nearly six out of ten Bulgarians with higher education, who worked abroad, did unskilled work. This ascertainment brings to a very serious thought. And the answer to the question “what are the prospects for a society in which people with higher education are in such economic circumstances that they are forced to forget about their education and qualification and start doing unskilled work”, inevitably provokes pessimism.

We may certainly draw a conclusion that the type of labour performed abroad has an effect on the professional characteristics and qualification of the workers. The fact that the greater part of the emigrants performed unskilled labour means that when they return home they will not have better qualification and skills

to apply in their work. And the common expectation that work abroad would be a trigger for personal and social development is unfounded.

An important characteristic of the work abroad is its legitimacy and regulation. According to the information gathered during the survey, nearly two-thirds of the respondents have worked without having a contract with their employer. This is not very surprising having in mind that the legitimate labour market was and still is highly limited and even closed at some places (even after Bulgaria became a member state of EU).

Figure 5: Did you have a written labour agreement with your employer? (in %)

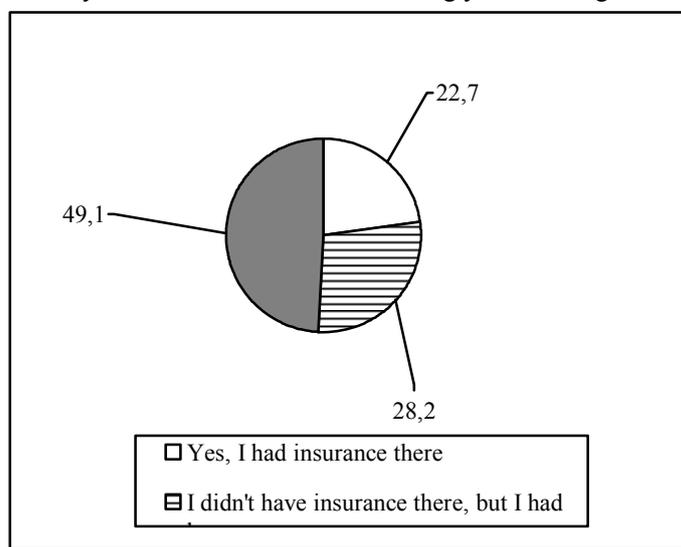


Only about one-third of the respondents had a labour agreement. Most often those were representatives of the intelligentsia, professionals and residents of the capital. The greatest part of those, who worked without a labour agreement, consists of extremely poor, unemployed, people aged 50-59, people with basic or lower education, residents of the villages and Roma.

The explanation for this fact apparently is the higher economic pressure on these groups, which due to their situation are forced to accept working at any conditions in order to provide some resources for their families. At the same time these groups are less informed about the possibilities to use certain channels for finding a job, which would protect their rights.

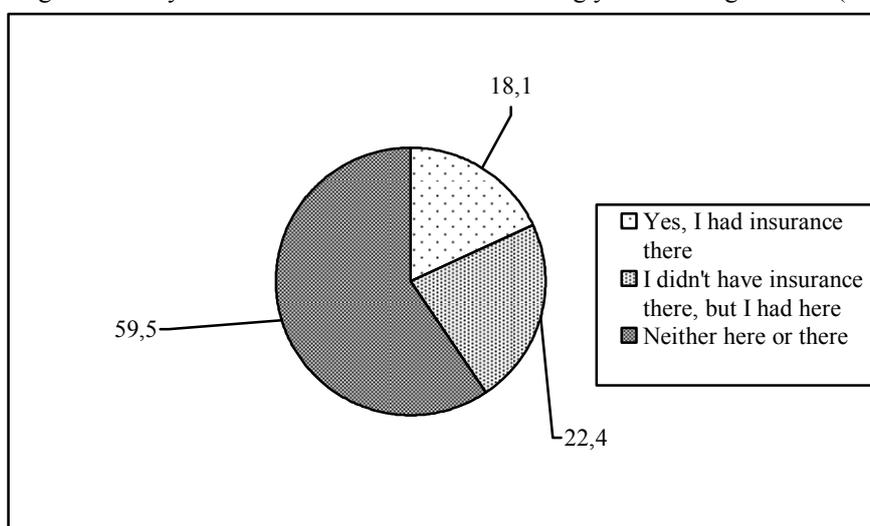
Naturally, the lack of labour agreements is connected with the lack of health and retirement insurances. Less than one-fourth of the Bulgarians, who have worked abroad, had health insurances in the respective countries. About 28% said that they paid insurances in Bulgaria. Despite the legislation requirements approximately half of the workers abroad were not paying insurances anywhere. This number is highest among the poorest, the residents of the villages and people with basic education.

Figure 6: Did you have a health insurance during your working abroad? (in %)



The situation with the retirement insurances is even more serious. Six out of ten Bulgarians, who have worked abroad, have not paid them either in the respective country or in Bulgaria. Naturally, the length of service abroad will not count for the formation of their pensions.

Figure 7: Did you have a retirement insurance during your working abroad? (in %)



The percentage of those, who did not pay insurances, is considerably higher among the young people – under 39 years old, those with basic education, the residents of the villages and small towns, the poor as well as among Roma and

Turks. The socio-demographic characteristics of this aggregate suggest that after some time their maintenance may become a dramatic problem for the society and for themselves.

An alternative for positive changes along these lines is the popularization and extension of the activities of State Employment Agency, so that it could reach the groups, which are under the highest economic pressure. The less educated and unqualified people, the residents of the villages and the representatives of ethnic minorities are less informed and respectively are more vulnerable to the foreign labour market.

Comparing the positive and the negative outcomes of the labour abroad, the self estimations of the workers show that the former prevail. They most often the respondents point out that they gained greater self-confidence, learned new things connected to the organization of the work, gained knowledge and skills – useful for a future business. Mainly the young ones gained self-confidence. Besides them, those who have their own business state that they have learned new things related to the organization of work. The residents of the small towns and villages gained knowledge and skills, which would be useful for starting own business. But yet it is another question to what extent are these self estimations adequate to the reality and what is the applicability of the acquired knowledge and skills to the local circumstances.

At the same time the negative outcomes, the most disturbing of which is the declining of health, can not be neglected. We must not pass over the fact that three out of ten people state that their health has declined (besides, we should not forget that the number of people from the elderly groups, who worked abroad was not so great). Most often men, representatives of the groups aged 18-29 and 50-59, people with basic education and residents of the villages, state to have this problem. It immediately makes an impression that these groups coincide to a large extend with the groups, stating that they did unskilled work, without labour agreement and insurances. From this we apparently can draw a conclusion about the circumstances, the duration and the heaviness of the work. The presence of young people in these groups brings special attention and concern – they have a long life of work in front of them and the decline of their health at such an early age does not lead to a favourable perspective. We should not neglect the answers – although they are not so many – stating that people lost qualification and skills, forgot some of what they had known before and lost track of the novelties in their professions. The percentage of the students, who gave such answers, is disturbing. Besides, they are the group, which having capacity and preparation is expected to be the force for the development of the society.

The survey renders the possibility for making a general characterization of at least the temporary labour migration. The first thing that makes an impression is the marked segmentation in the aggregate, as well as in some of the groups. In most cases Bulgarians leave to work abroad because they are attracted by the

higher payment. The southern European countries – Spain, Greece – are preferred destinations. People find jobs mainly with the help of their friends or relatives, who had already worked at those places. They often work illegally, without labour agreement or insurances. The work they do is unqualified and it does not require special training or skills. The money earned abroad is spent on current expenses of the family. The self estimations about the positive and negative outcomes of the labour abroad show that the self-esteem and self-confidence gained there preponderate. But special attention should be paid to the widespread confession that work there led to health decline.

The model of the labour migration among the highly qualified specialists, the representatives of the intelligentsia and the professionals is quite different. The possibilities for professional development and realization abroad are among the chief motives for their departure. The destinations are mainly Germany and USA. They find jobs through different channels, often by interinstitutional exchange, personal contacts with colleagues from the respective countries and so on. They usually have labour agreements and insurances. The work they do corresponds to their profession and qualification. The money earned there is usually spent on needs other than current maintenance or is being saved. It is distinguishing that they learn about the novelties in their professions, they acquire knowledge and self-confidence as a result of staying abroad.

Our great interest is focused on the groups, on which the hopes for the future development of the Bulgarian society are set.

The differentiation in the answers of the younger ones from the group aged 18-29, is probably related to their status – whether they are students, workers or unemployed. The latter usually go to work in Italy, where they are mainly hired in the construction or in the agriculture. Students go to work brigades in USA. The people from this group work for a relatively short period of time and due to their young age they do not have long working experience abroad. A reason for their departure is exclusively the payment. The money is spent on various expenses, probably it is also used for maintenance during the education and part of it is being saved. Very often they work without labour agreement or insurances. An interesting finding was that students are not acquainted with the Bulgarian health insurance system – they usually claim that they do not pay health insurances in Bulgaria, but the truth is that the students in Bulgaria automatically receive health insurances from the state. The work they do abroad is unqualified, it does not require training. Gaining self-confidence and esteem is recognized as a positive outcome. They state they have health problems more often than it is expected for people their age. It is interesting that the representatives of the group, who are not students, more often say they would go to work outside Bulgaria only if they are unable to earn their living here. This could be understood as an indicator that they were not very content with their work abroad. The students, however, show considerable willingness to go to work abroad again. Maybe this is because they saw attractive opportunities

for settlement and becoming highly qualified specialists. But it is not clear whether their expectations are adequate, and whether the difficulties they may face, will not chill the ardor of those, who emigrated after finishing their education.

There is a specific differentiation among the people with higher education. The migration destinations are polarized – Germany and USA are preferred by those, who insist to practice their professions while Italy is preferred by those who are ready to do unqualified work. There is also a polarization in the ways people find their jobs, in the presence of labour agreements and insurances, as well as in the spending of the money. Probably the differentiation is due to the demand of the respective professions and to the contacts the migrants have abroad.

Undoubtedly, the influence of the foreign labour migration on the development of the society is versatile. It reduces the pressure on the labour market and contributes to the decreasing of the unemployment rate. Besides, the emigrants import financial resources in the country. And although they are used for consumption rather than for investment, and do not directly contribute to the acceleration of the economic development, these resources increase the demand and the consumption thus stimulating the economy indirectly. The social effect of the financial transfers is that they provide maintenance for part of the population, settle certain financial issues of some households and raise their living standard. Undoubtedly a positive outcome is also the accumulation of knowledge and experience, gained by part of the migrants, especially the highly qualified ones, who practiced their professions abroad. During their stay abroad they adopt new organizational culture, proper to the new type of economic and social life in Bulgaria. The positive effect is that the migrants acquire new working style and behaviour – suitable for the market economy. The Bulgarians open themselves for the world, become more flexible, adaptive and susceptible to mobility.

The deficit of qualified personnel in the country, due to the emigration, is a negative effect, which becomes alarming. The low payment rates in Bulgaria push out not only the specialists with secondary education, but also highly qualified professionals, who are not always able to find jobs suiting their education. The country is highly affected by the brain drain, because of the specialists' permanent emigration and the disqualification of part of those, who did unqualified work abroad periodically. All this decreases the innovative potential of the society. The high emigration rate of specific professional and educational groups is threatening for the future Bulgarian economic specialization. Another negative effect is the lack of motivation for economic activities and innovations in the country. At the same time the labour emigration decreases the receipts of taxes in the state budget as well as in the health, insurance and pension funds. The widespread practice of working abroad without paying health and pension insurances is in fact a ground for serious problems, which will occur in several years. This will become an extra burden for the health and social systems; it will be a source for tension between

different groups. In demographic terms – even the short-term migration leads to postponing births and reducing the number of the children.

The conclusion which can be drawn is that the labour emigration abroad is a problem for the Bulgarian society, even though it is a new one, and it raised questions which need a thorough analysis. Bulgaria should elaborate and implement a considered policy directed to limiting the negative effects and to creating an environment in which the positive experience potential can be revealed.

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Анна Мантарова

Рад у иностранству – бугарско искуство

Од 1989. године у Бугарској се могу запазити интензивне миграције у иностранство. Разликују се дугорочни мигранти и велика група краткорочних миграната. У раду се, на основу емпиријског истраживања, разматрају неке основне карактеристике привремених миграната, искуство Бугара који раде у иностранству и последице. Већи део Бугара који раде у иностранству мотивисани су вишим зарадама. Главне дестинације су Шпанија и Грчка. По правилу, обављају нестручне послове. Врло често раде без уговора и социјалне заштите. Новац зарађен у иностранству троше на текуће трошкове. Испитаници који раде у иностранству сматрају да имају виши ниво самопоуздања, нове информације и способности. Међутим, посебну пажњу треба посветити процени мигранта да се њихово здравствено стање погоршава.

Проблем који је предмет рада је врло компликован, са вишеструким и контрадикторним детерминантама и последицама и потребна су специјализована истраживања да би се проблем боље разумео и да би се боље формулисале корективне мере.

Кључне речи: спољне миграције, краткорочне миграције, узроци и последице радних миграција.