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BETWEEN RETURN AND CIRCULATION: EXPERIENCES OF BULGARIAN MIGRANTS

This article assesses the extent and specifics of return and circular migration in Bulgaria, a South-eastern European country that joined the European Union in 2007. After defining return migration and reviewing the main theories contemplating return (and circular) migration, the principal section of the article deals with the current Bulgarian migration scenario. It draws from quantitative research data as well as insights from semi-structured interviews carried out in the country in summer 2014 for the research project "Migration and Transnationalism Between Switzerland and Bulgaria". At the end, a typical biography of a return and circular migrant is presented and compared.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays the speed of communication and transportation increases the diversity of migrant countries of origin and allows migrants to arrive in more locations around the globe than ever before. Virtually any country in the world is simultaneously, albeit to a varying extent, a country of origin, transit and destination. Migratory behaviour is also getting more complex and diverse. Compared to the past, when migration tended to be unidirectional and permanent, many more migrants now engage in shorter-term movement, circular movement between two countries, or movement to multiple countries, making return an important element of the process for many types of migration (IOM, 2008, p. 1).

Return migration is a multifaceted and heterogeneous phenomenon, which constitutes a relatively new topic on the European research agenda. Except for historical considerations on return migration from the "New World" in the first decade of the last century (Cerase, 1974), and a short-term interest in the remigration of Southern European guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s, the theme remained an underrated research field of European

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migration for quite a long time (Dustmann, et al., 1996). Gmelch (1980, p. 135) notes different reasons for this longstanding neglect of return migration. It has been neglected since migration has long been seen as a one-way movement in the nineteenth century; migration was conceptualised as permanent and seen in a rural-urban framework moving only in one direction towards the urban centres. In addition, return is also the most difficult aspect of the migration cycle to quantify because of lack of comparable data on outgoing persons (Gmelch, 1980, p. 136; King, 1978).

Four motives, explain the recent rising interest for return migration on the research and policy agenda: (1) retired circulation/remigration of the former guest workers (e.g. Bolzman et. al., 2006) and possible “remigration” of the second and third generations; (2) the sound out-migration of skilled migrants from Central and Eastern new EU members which raises concerns about brain drain and the question of possible regain of human capital through remigration (e.g. Pollard et al., 2008; Williams and Baláz, 2005); (3) the cost and benefit on host and origin countries resulting from assistance or repatriation programmes addressing rejected asylum seekers, irregular migrants or refugees at the end of their protection programmes (e.g. Koser, 2001); and (4) the recession in which the world’s advanced industrial economies slipped one by one starting from 2008 contributed to the prospect of return migration in immigrant-receiving states around the world. In June 2008, the European Union Parliament approved a directive encouraging unauthorised immigrants to voluntarily return to their countries of origin (CEC, 2008). In September, Spain’s parliament authorized a programme that effectively pays some unemployed immigrants to leave if they promise not to return to Spain for three years (mpi, 2008, p. 12).

At last, the attention paid by international organizations to the link between migration and development has highlighted the need to revisit approaches to return migration. The growing diversity of migration categories (ranging from low- to highly skilled economic migrants to refugees and asylum seekers) necessitates a distinction between the various types of returnees (Cassarino, 2004, p. 254). Empirical work on these topics so far is rare, as well as to some extent, a comparative and interdisciplinary discussion of theoretical and policy approaches which are appropriate to tackle the questions arising in the context of return migration.

2. Definition and theoretical overview of return migration

The terms remigration (as per German researchers’ definition) or return migration are generally used in case of a migrant’s return to his/her country of origin, after having passed a significant time-span abroad.⁴

More recently, a personal dimension in the process of return migration has been identified by the MIREM project⁵ according to which a returnee is “any person returning to his/her country of origin, in the course of the last ten years, after having been an international

⁴ The United Nations’ definition differentiates between permanent migration for time abroad of more than one year and temporary migration for stays shorter than one year.

⁵ <http://rsc.eui.eu/RDP/research-projects/mirem/>

migrant (whether short-term or long-term) in another country. Return may be permanent or temporary. It may be independently decided by the migrant or forced by unexpected circumstances”. The definition is partially based on the one recommended by the United Nations which considers this ten years’ time limit adequate to assess the experience of migration on the interviewee’s pattern of reintegration.

The academic literature suggests that return migration results from both *failure* and *success*. Some migrants may decide to return because they fail to integrate or advance in the host-country society or simply cannot find jobs. Most recent research indicates, however, that large-scale return migration corresponds more to *political* and *economic conditions* in the origin country. Migrants may be motivated to return by the prospect of new opportunities at home or because they achieved their financial goals. At the same time, this definition also acknowledges, that even the migrants themselves do not know for sure whether their return is for good or whether it is only another step in the migration cycle and should rather be termed *circular* migration. In this sense, it is important to consider all people returning from migration as return migrants whether their return is intended to be permanent or temporary.

The **migratory processes** that fall into this category are thus quite different:

First, we can distinguish between *forced remigration* (deportation, expulsion, etc.) and *voluntary return*;

Second, we can differentiate after the *intention of the return migrant*: return of former guest workers, frequent return of circular migrants, return of retirement, return of graduates who studied abroad, etc. (Glorius, Grabowska-Lusińska, 2008; Glorius, 2013).

In many established migration corridors between developed and developing countries – such as between Mexico and the United States, Europe and North Africa, the Philippines and the Middle East – return often occurs at the end of the life cycle as migrants prepare to retire.

While scholarly approaches related to return migration can be traced back to the 1960s, it was only in the 1980s that the scientific debate on the return phenomenon and its impact on origin countries started to evolve. These debates resulted in the production of several volumes and critical essays, and in the organization of conferences (Kubat, 1984; Council of Europe, 1987). As Cassarino noted (2004, p. 254), in addition these debates contributed intensively to the development of the literature on return migration, together with the growing concern on “co-development”, the “voluntary repatriation of third country nationals”, the emergence and implementation of bilateral readmission agreements between sending and receiving countries, and the link between international migration and economic development in migrants’ origin countries.

The conceptual problems related to the definitions of immigrant – which have an impact on the formulation of national immigration policies – translate also in several definitional approaches to return migration, and to returnees that are playing a crucial role in orienting, if not shaping, the perceptions, taxonomies and policies adopted by governmental and intergovernmental agencies (Kritz, 1987, p. 948).

There are *five different theories* contemplating return migration. In the *neoclassical economics of migration*, return migration is viewed as the outcome of a failed migration experience, which did not yield the expected benefits. Migrants return because they cannot establish themselves in the host country or because they do not reach their goals abroad (Cassarino, 2004, p. 255; Borjas and Bratsberg, 1996).

The *new economics of labour migration (NELM)* on the other hand, views return as the logical outcome of a calculated strategy, resulting from successful achievement of goals or target and return is seen as a success story (Cassarino, 2004, p. 255; Borjas and Bratsberg, 1996). Migrants return because of attachment to home and household and return when the goals are met. Both these approaches have economic factors as point of departure since returnees are only viewed as foreign income bearers. Moreover, there is no reference to the social, political and economic environment where the migrants return. As a result, the success/failure paradigm shows several shortcomings in fully explaining the return migration phenomenon (Cassarino, 2004, p. 257).

To the *structural approach* on the other hand, return migration is not only a personal issue but also a social and contextual one affected by situational and structural factors in the country of origin (Cassarino, 2004, p. 257). The weakness of this theory is the focus on the core/periphery dichotomy. The theory's benchmark is the urban developed character of the host countries and conversely the rural developing or underdeveloped nature of the home country (Cassarino, 2004). Return is based on incomplete information about the country of origin and the return expectations are readjusted upon arrival to the structural context at home.

Next, there is the *transnational approach* to return migration that tries to frame the strong social and economic links between migrant's host and origin countries. It does not view return as the end of migration cycle, but for transnationalists with return the migration process continues. Return occurs when enough financial resources and benefits are gathered to sustain a household and when the conditions in the home country are favourable.

The transnationalist approach views identities as dynamic. Migrants are seen as capable of negotiating their place in society and are able to form a hybrid identity instead of incompatible cultural identities. The regular contacts the migrants maintain with the country of origin as well as the back and forth movement illustrates the transnational mobility (Portes, et al, 1999). As noted by Chapman and Prothero (1983-84) thanks to the transnationalist approach to international migration, in general, and to return migration, in particular, it is possible to question the binary structuralist vision of cross border movements, taking into account the circularity of migration movements, which facilitates migrants' mobility.

Last, the *social network theory*, in which return is seen as the first step in completion of the migration project. Cross-border networks of social and economic relationships secure and sustain return. Reasons to return are linked to social, economic and institutional opportunities at home as well as by the relevance of migrants' own resources.

The insights of transnationalism and the social network theory allow viewing return no longer at the end of the migration cycle but as one stage in the migration process. In fact,

while recognising the influence of structural micro and macro factors in origin countries, both theoretical frameworks argue that the maintenance of linkages between receiving and origin countries fosters the ability of migrants to prepare and secure their own return, as opposed to what structuralists contend (Cassarino, 2004, p. 268).

The social network theory goes a step further than the transnational approach contending that the cross-border social and economic networks are conducive to complementary exchange relations among actors, which go beyond the commonality of attributes since they are based on commonality of interests.

Four factors as identified by Cassarino (2004, p. 270) – the growing diversity of international migration flows including migrant students, asylum seekers and refugees; the liberalisation of markets as well as the development of the private sector in migrant-sending countries; cross-border mobility sustained by cheaper transport costs that made return a multiple-stage process; and the flows of information between origin and host countries thanks to the technological means of communication – urge, however, to revisit the above approaches. As Ghosh (2000, p. 185) points out, return “is largely influenced by the initial motivations for migration as well as by the duration of the stay abroad and particularly by the conditions under which the return takes place”. Reference to the returnee’s preparedness and patterns of resource mobilisation complements Ghosh’s argument (Cassarino, 2004, p. 275).

3. Study and data

The following sections are based on quantitative and qualitative data we gathered during a research co-operation that lasted from January 2013 to June 2016. The team comprised researchers from both Bulgaria and Switzerland, most of which have contributed with papers to the special issue of this journal.⁶ The research aim was to assess the migration patterns from Bulgaria in general and in particular from Bulgaria to Switzerland. From a transnational migration perspective, we analysed questions of social inequalities, regional disparities and the changing migration policies’ framework in both countries but also at the EU level. We were interested in the interlinkage of these concepts, how they shape migration and – vice-versa – how migration shapes the inequality distributions and regional issues such as intra-national development.

As the data used later in the paper shows, we opted for a mixed-methods approach that combined several quantitative and qualitative instruments. Among the quantitative instruments were: (1) a national survey in Bulgaria (N=3907) that constitutes of a representative sample of returned migrants, potential migrants and general non-migrants; (2) an airway and bus survey in Bulgaria that focused on the fast and cheap mobility; (3) a national survey in Switzerland (N=1137) conducted as mail-back survey being sent to all officially registered Bulgarians in Switzerland at that time (response rate 26%).

⁶ The research was funded jointly by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Bulgarian Ministry for Education and Science.

On the qualitative side, we conducted interviews in both countries. In Switzerland, we conducted in-depth interviews with 23 Bulgarians covering a range across social and regional differences. In Bulgaria, we selected return migrants in different parts of the country, aiming at a maximum diversity of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. In total, 25 interviews were carried out.

This paper restricts, however, the analysis to those data, which emphasize the return and circular migration dimension.⁷

4. Return migration to Bulgaria

Several scholars have researched return migration to Bulgaria (for a list, see for instance Ivanova, 2013). There is, however, still very limited empirical research on the topic that should give the picture of the number of the people abroad in certain periods as well the number of the money transfers they have generated there. Mintchev and Boshnakov (2010, p. 232) advance two reasons to explain this situation: first, the lack of trustworthy information as well as comprehensive studies and secondly, the difficulty in obtaining a representative sample of return migrant households to draw reliable conclusions as far their consumption and/or investment patterns.

The most prominent publication on the topic is “Family Patterns and Migration. National Representative Survey” (Mihailov, et al., 2007) from whose findings the following paragraphs are drawn. The enclosed migration survey deals with returned migrants from abroad during the period 2002-2006. The number of returnees for this period is about 384,000. 8% of the active population in Bulgaria has various kinds of occupation abroad during that time. However, as of April 2007, 14% of the active Bulgarians had relied on or still rely on different kind of employment arrangements abroad.

The average income of the Bulgarian migrants is a bit less than 800 Euro. The average duration of their stay is a bit more than a year – 13.8 months. Their expenses are about 45% of all that they have earned. The other 55% are considered to be saved and transferred to Bulgaria. Therefore, this category of emigrants brings to the country about 468 million Euro each year. Without going into details, it could be said that the emigrants’ transfers are a main factor for sustaining the macro-economic stability in the country. Migration and remittances should therefore constitute a major concern for the Bulgarian government.

The Bulgarian emigration is estimated at more than 700,000 people (on a population of almost 7.7 million at the end of 2006). A major theoretical challenge is to understand the ratio of circular migration, the one of those who will permanently settle abroad, and the ones who will return to Bulgaria.

There is a need to understand the motives of the people who leave Bulgaria. Do they develop their qualifications? Their language skills? Why do they return? How long did they stay abroad? What did they earn abroad? How did they support their relatives in Bulgaria? What kind of social mobility do they experience? In this section, we focus therefore on the

⁷ For a thorough discussion of the data and results, see Richter, et al., 2017.

reasons for return, the duration of the stay abroad, the search for employment, financial aspects and occupational shifts.

4.1. Main reasons for return

The main reason/motive for return is the adherence/attachment to the family, the close ones; this is important and very important for more than 80% of the ones who have returned to the country according to Mihailov et al. (2007) survey. For more than 40% of the returnees a reason for remigration is the difficulties in finding a legal job, generally the unstable realization abroad. Another explanation includes reasons such as “I do not wish to live abroad anymore”. Hopes for positive perspectives of country development, chances for better employment and business opportunities in Bulgaria come afterwards with minor impact.

4.2. Duration of the stay, finding a job before leaving Bulgaria

The duration of the stay is an important characteristic. It gives understanding on the type of migration – permanent, temporary, circular. As mentioned earlier, the average duration is a bit more than 1 year (13.8 months). More than two third of the people have stayed less than a year.

- Up to 3 month – 22.9%;
- More than 3 months and up to 6 months – 22.8%;
- More than 6 months and up to 12 months – 16.9%.

The return depends very much on the (il)legality of the stay and the type of work conditions. 33.3% of the returnees have migrated after getting a work's contract with an employer; 12.1% relied on the support of relatives/friends already settled in the destination country. Almost half (45.5%) of migrants have decided to try their chance without having the security of an employment's contract. The destination country is a key factor. Migrating to the USA and Canada without a contract or the support of relatives/friends is very difficult. The proximity of the European countries and the EU membership of Bulgaria facilitate migration to the EU, and particularly to Germany and those Southern European countries such as Spain and Greece where there are longstanding Bulgarian networks and still available niches in the informal labour market.

4.3. Income, expenses and remittances

Half of Bulgarian migrants (46.6%) receive between 400 and 1200 Euro. About 12% of the people work for less than 400 Euro. Another 11% work for more than 1200 Euro, so the average goes about 810 Euro. This is about 100 Euro less than the estimate of income for 2005 (Mintchev and Boshnakov, 2006). Nearly half of the ones who have returned say that they have spent not more than half of what they have earned. More than half of the ones who come back have sent money to their families – 23.3% regularly; 14.2% just once,

when they came back; 12.8% from time to time. Finally, more than 40% say that they have not had such a possibility.

4.4. Social mobility

Because the adherence/attachment to the family and the difficulties in finding a legal job are more important motives to return than chances for better employment and business opportunities, there remains the question whether they can hold or even improve their economic status in Bulgaria. However, we suppose that highly skilled migrants return if they can improve or at least preserve their status in their country of origin. By contrast, lower skilled migrants are assumed to return when they fail economically or become unemployed in the host country.

The survey data (conducted in 2013/2014) is based on migrants who have returned to Bulgaria from various countries. We will focus on an analysis of their occupational shifts. In fact, return migrants are often pushed into lower social positions or even unemployment. The social costs, including those for unemployment benefits and related insurance costs for the unemployed return migrants thus weigh on the sending country. Concerning the direction of the status shift, the level of qualification matter. While many well-qualified return migrants can preserve or even improve their occupational status, the low-skilled return migrants risk the experience of downward mobility. These shifts in professional status, downgrading the occupational and respective social status of migrants often results in inferiority self-perceptions within the local community.

Our findings corroborate this polarization between lower and highly skilled migrants. Whereas 4.7% of the migrants were managers and team leaders before migration, compared to only 3.3% abroad, their share surges up to 8.3% after coming home. These are the ones for whom migration has provided new opportunities at home, the ones that have accumulated experience and skills promoting their careers. This mobility pattern is typical for the specialists, who constitute 9.6% before migration, falling down to 3.4% abroad and doubling at 19.3% after coming back home.

In contrast, the share of people employed in the lowest qualification jobs resumes around the level it used to be in Bulgaria before migration. In other words: after coming back home, many return migrants who have been employed in low qualification jobs abroad are not able to conserve their former "higher" occupation and are compelled to work in underqualified jobs. These returnees are obviously losing from the migration experience, and there is good reason to assume that many of them try to emigrate once more. This finding is supported by the interviews with the few cases who manage to take advantage of their skills or improve their situation after an initial process of deskilling.

In short, taking into account all the data sources including the qualitative interviews, migration suggest three qualification shifts of return migrants: downward mobility, which is generally prevailing, upward or persistent mobility, typical for a limited circle of qualified migrants, and unstable status. In fact, most returnees suffer from a decreasing qualification when it comes to comparing occupation at home and occupation abroad. However, concerning the opportunity to re-enter the labour market at home, migration has a

polarizing impact – the job experiences abroad increases the promotion chances for the few top qualified positions such as managers and specialists but at the same time sustains the majority of low-qualified labour at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy.

5. Typical stories of return and circular migration

Until now, we have only discussed return migrants and pointed towards the possibility of circular movements. In conceptual terms, the distinction between circular and return migration is clear-cut. But when conducting empirical work, it becomes difficult to draw a neat line between both as the distinction can only be made safely after years and in a certain sense only after the death of concerned individuals. We, as researchers, and the individuals themselves can only assess their intentions and their actual situation based on their experiences.

Nevertheless, the literature stresses the distinction because it is necessary to recognize that circular migration has developed as an important pattern of migration and is due to different economic and political factors in Europe. Based on the qualitative interviews we conducted in Bulgaria, we carve out the differences between the typical stories encountered of return and of circular migration. We use the respective past migration experience(s) to distinguish the two types.

5.1. Return migration

We found that the typical return migrant lives rather in the cities and less in smaller villages. Although we cannot be sure, that these people may not migrate again, there is a number of stories we collected of people who only told us about going once, eventually a second time, but never in this regular and repeated way we described above. All these stories were rather about a single migration necessary because of specific problems and not a systematic circular movement. Here there were no clear distinctions between men and women. Some occupations were more typical for women such as cleaning; others such as factory work were more typical for men. Another possibility is, of course, migration for educational reasons. We will not discuss this possibility further as it is driven by very different motives than the other two types discussed here. For the sake of gender balance, we take as return migrant a woman.

Milena is responsible for her two children, as her partner has left her long time ago. She used to work in a technical company in the administration but recently she lost her job. In addition, she still has debts from her marriage because they bought a house and needed a credit to cover all the costs. When she loses her job, she faces financial difficulties and decides to live with her parents. Nevertheless, life with her parents and her children at the same time leads to many conflicts and she does not want to depend financially on her parents. Additionally, there are still the debts she has to pay.

A friend tells her about good working opportunities in the UK and she decides to go to London to earn money. Her children stay with her parents. Although the friend tells her that she could even work without formal documents, she seeks for information on the internet and inquires directly with the authorities. Finally, she regularises her situation. After some time she is officially recognised as an independent worker, can work legally, and has access to social benefits. At the same time, she also pays taxes.

She starts cleaning houses on an hourly basis. As soon as her language skills get better she starts working in administrative jobs such as data input. By cumulating jobs, she is able to earn a decent salary. At that moment, she starts thinking about her future. She even thinks of bringing her children to London, but she sees obstacles regarding the school system, as she is not sure that the public schools are good enough, but mostly the international mix of people in London shocks her. Although she praises the efficient way things are organized, how clean and tidy everything is, she still feels somehow strange. As she said in the interview: "I am used to having people of my kind around me".

From time to time, she visits her children in Bulgaria for a couple of days. After a year and a half, she has saved enough to return to Bulgaria, pay back her debts and keep some savings as a fall back. She needs a full year to find a job but finally she has again a stable income that allows her to rent a flat for her and the children. Her migration experience has been positive in the sense that she acquired skills (English) and that she knows, if the financial situation gets too precarious, she can always leave again. She is still in contact with the people she used to share a flat with in London. At the same time, she says that stones are heavy, that it is hard to leave the place where you grew up, but the migration experience makes her more relaxed about future economic problems.

5.2. Circular migration

In contrast, there were a couple of respondents who told us how they had repeatedly left the country to work abroad and how they are already thinking about the next place to go. These accounts form the basis to construct a typical account for a circular migrant.

Although the story is quite similar for men and women, there are some differences in pattern. Both travel to Western European countries for agricultural and factory work. For women, there is a specific field of occupation in the care sector. Mostly they engage in elderly care and often in Greece, but also Turkey or Western European countries. We chose to give the portrait a male name and depict therefore a migration path that is more common also for men.

Ivan lives in a larger Roma area nearby a middle-sized city of Bulgaria. He is married and has two daughters. Apart from his little house, he has no belongings, no land to cultivate crops. Therefore, he seeks for employment in agricultural work for landowners or other work such as road construction. Having only finished primary school and being a Roma, he is excluded from

other more skilled, better-remunerated and more secure positions. His working situation is precarious and often he does not know how to meet month's end. In addition, he wants to ensure a better future, for his children and wants to pay their school fees.

Once in a while, an agent, another Roma with connections to Western Europe, who organises short-term labour migration, comes to the area. Ivan decides that next time he would accept the job offer and leave for some months to work in the fields in France, for instance picking grapes. Thirteen people from the same area travel together, men and women, in a minivan that is allowed for nine people. The driver knows where to cross the borders and how to deal with possible obstacles. Finally, after a long drive they reach France.

The working and living conditions are bad. Many people live together in a flat and as they do not speak the language, they depend on the agent who organises everything: their living facilities, the working conditions such as working hours. As he also pays them their salary, they are never sure, whether they get fully paid. After buying food and other things for living, there is not that much left and from the family back in Bulgaria there is a constant pressure to send money. Ivan is a very humorous person and tells us that when his wife called him, instead of answering the phone and saying "hello", he answered by saying "I have no money!".

Back in Bulgaria, the family lives from the money he sent and from what he has brought back. This does not last long and Ivan starts to look for a new opportunity to work abroad. After several comings and goings, sometimes to the same place, sometimes to other destinations, he is getting tired of the travelling and searches again for work, but the situation has become more difficult for him. In addition to the exclusion from the labour market he experienced before, he now also has lost the contact to potential employers and it is even more difficult to find a job than before. He is forced to leave again and work abroad to maintain his family.

The degree of irregularity of stay and working conditions can vary according to country and according to the path and type of occupation the Bulgarian migrants choose. For instance, some migrants reported very skilful abilities in dealing with the Greek social system. They know how to ensure their eligibility for social insurance, child benefits, etc. In other cases, it was never fully clear which aspects of migration, stay and work were legal and whether the migrants were fully aware of their legal status, as everything was organised by agents or other intermediary persons.

5.3. Comparison

Return migrants are characterised by the fact that they were working before in rather good conditions, often they have some higher diploma or even a university degree. They either lost their job or have some financial problems because of debts. We encountered many people highly indebted because loans are given out quite freely with little security and at

very high interest rates. In order to pay back these debts, many chose to migrate. They therefore have a clear aim for migrating: they need money to overcome temporal economic needs. After they return, they manage to rebuild their lives by finding a job. If at least they were able to pay back their debts, they have financially gained a lot of security combined with the acquired skills and the security of knowing how to overcome economic hardship by migrating.

The commonalities among circular migrants as exemplified in the story of Ivan above include, in contrast, the exclusion from the Bulgarian labour market because of poor education and ethnic background (Roma). After migration, this exclusion is aggravated by the fact that during their stay away they lost the contact to the weak ties they used before to find jobs. Further, there is a constant pressure of their family to provide money for basic needs. When coming back the money usually only lasts a couple of months and then these migrants need to leave the country again. The remittances (either sent while abroad or brought with them on return) are used for basic needs and maybe some house investment, but seldom in projects that provide an economic future.

Regarding social inequalities, return migrants and circular migrants come from different social backgrounds. Return migrants have a higher socio-economic status than circular migrants, have therefore better education and generally also a better employment situation before leaving. As in the case of Milena, migration was a solution to a momentary situation of unemployment. The money accumulated through her stay abroad provided enough security to search for a job during a whole year after her return to Bulgaria. From being unemployed before migrating, she now has rebuilt her life and is working. The low social status coupled with low education and the ethnic background provides a precarious condition for the described circular migrants. While they may have some unsecure job arrangements prior departure, their savings accumulated while working abroad do not last long. Furthermore, their fragile contacts to the labour market in Bulgaria diminish with every time they go abroad. Therefore, they rather face prolonged unemployment in Bulgaria and the need to migrate once again.

6. Concluding remarks

This article has provided research on return migrants in Bulgaria and portraits of two typical return and circular migrants based upon the stories collected from individuals involved in these types of movements. There seems to be a good internal coherence between the explained theoretical definitions of these processes and the two cases presented: the main dividing lines between the two types of migration being the different ethnic backgrounds, social and educational status of the portrayed individuals. As far the time of migration is concerned, while middle-skilled returnees aim at one and single migration experience to cope with momentary hardship in Bulgaria, circular low-skilled migrants, usually belonging to the Roma minority, seem often compelled to migrate again to make end's meets for them and their households. The returnees usually experience deskilling abroad, but they regain their social capital and a certain employment status once back home. Circular migrants are instead trapped in migration. They gain temporary

income and a better social status through migration by dissimulating their Roma identity, but remain victims of social exclusion and their ethnic networks once back at home. In line with our finding that low-skilled returnees mostly experience downward mobility, their working conditions in Bulgaria even worsen as they lose important contacts in the local labour market during their time abroad.

The exploration provided an insight into different types of movements involving Bulgarian migrants, and particularly after the country EU accession, which facilitated different types of circulation and mobility. The specific characteristics for circular and one-time migrants might differ for other contexts, but the paper suggests that it is necessary to analyse the social differences structuring patterns of migration in order to understand constraints and opportunities of migration. The understanding of the different causal factors behind the different migration categories may therefore help in elucidating the impact and extent of external migration on the country's development, but at the same time the role that the Bulgarian migrants and communities abroad can play in furthering the country's development.

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