

PARTICIPATION OF RETURNING MIGRANTS IN THE LABOUR MARKET IN BULGARIA

The paper is focused on the issue of returning migrants and their participation in the labour market in Bulgaria. The study is based on data of a representative survey, conducted in 2017 under the project “Returning migrants: segmentation and stratification of economic mobility”. The analysis covers two main aspects of the subject: 1) age and education of the respondents as characteristics for inclusion in the labour market and their labour status at the time of the investigation; 2) comparison between the type of employment (by economic activity, qualification, type of labour contract, etc.) abroad and in Bulgaria after the return, outlining peculiarities, disparities and consequences. Some essential problems for the participation of migrants in the labour market in Bulgaria are described.

*Key words: returning migrants, labour market
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There are different fundamental and applied studies, trying to explain the nature, factors and effects from external migration. Part of them concerns return migration – the return of migrants to the origin country and their reintegration into the social and economic life therein. Various aspects of this issue have been studied: factors, influencing the decision to return to home-country, reasons and motives to return, process of returning – taking a decision, preparation of return, reintegration into the homeland.

The results from some of these studies show that many of the migrants have difficulties with their reintegration, including finding a job after their return home. The participation of returnees in the labour market depends on a number of factors, including on the educational and professional profile of these people, on the skills they acquired abroad, on the demand for such skills and qualification in the labour market in their home countries. An important matter in this respect is connected to (re)integration policies in the respective states.²

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² It should be mentioned that according to some representative surveys in Bulgaria the main causes for initial migration are the economic ones, while those for return are predominantly non-economic. Probably this is the reason why the prevailing share of the returnees does not have a pre-arranged job upon their return to Bulgaria. Such a situation requires more active and wide-ranging reintegration policies.

In Bulgaria the issue of return migration has been studied more profoundly during the last decade.³ Various aspects of the return and reintegration of migrants have been investigated. The insufficiency of official statistical information necessitates the conduction of empirical surveys. Some of the last results of such research works are published, for example, in: Nonchev and Hristova, 2018; Bakalova and Misheva, 2018; Mintchev and Boshnakov, 2006, 2018; Zareva, 2016, 2018; etc.

According to the data from the last Census of the Bulgarian population from 2011, for the period 1990-2011 two thirds of the migrants are economically active persons (65,7%), of which 54,2% – employed and 11,5% – unemployed. About one third (31,9%) of them are with higher education and less than one fifth (18,7%) – with primary or lower.

The results from a representative survey, conducted in Bulgaria in 2013 (published in: Richter and others, 2017) among the population of the age group 15-65 years, demonstrate changes in the economic activity of the returnees after their return in Bulgaria compared to that abroad – the share of the employed decreases and that of the unemployed significantly increases, i.e. not a small part of the Bulgarian migrants have difficulties to participate in the labour market in Bulgaria after their return.

Such a conclusion can be made also on the basis of the data from a representative national survey, carried out in 2018 among the population aged 18-65 years in the framework of the project “Measures for overcoming the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria”⁴ – over a quarter of the respondents (25,8%) claim that they have had problems to find a job and nearly 11% – with the recognition of their length of service and social security rights. It should be mentioned that 62,6% of the persons who have left the country for more than three months are specialists with secondary vocational and higher education. About 20% of the people with higher education also state that they have had difficulties to find a job in Bulgaria after their return, as well as 39% of those with primary or lower education. These peculiarities could be explained by the economic areas where the migrants have been employed abroad and also, of course, by the characteristics of the labour market in Bulgaria. The not well-developed reintegration policies in the country contribute to this phenomenon, too.

This paper presents some of the results of an analysis of data from a representative survey among returning migrants to Bulgaria of the age group 18 years and over⁵, conducted in 2017⁶, as another empirical evidence for the possibilities and prospect of migrants to

³ Some of the Bulgarian researchers in the field of migration are: A. Krasteva, V. Ivanova, Y. Kaltchev, V. Mintchev, A. Nonchev, V. Boshnakov, R. Rangelova, M. Micheva and others.

⁴ The project was concluded in connection with the fulfilment of assigned tasks under a Council of Ministers Decree by several institutes at the Bulgarian academy of sciences; the leading one is the Institute for population and human studies. The author of this paper was part of the team.

⁵ Bulgarian citizens, who have worked abroad for at least three months during the period 2008-2017. The target group does not include persons, returning to Bulgaria for a short period of time.

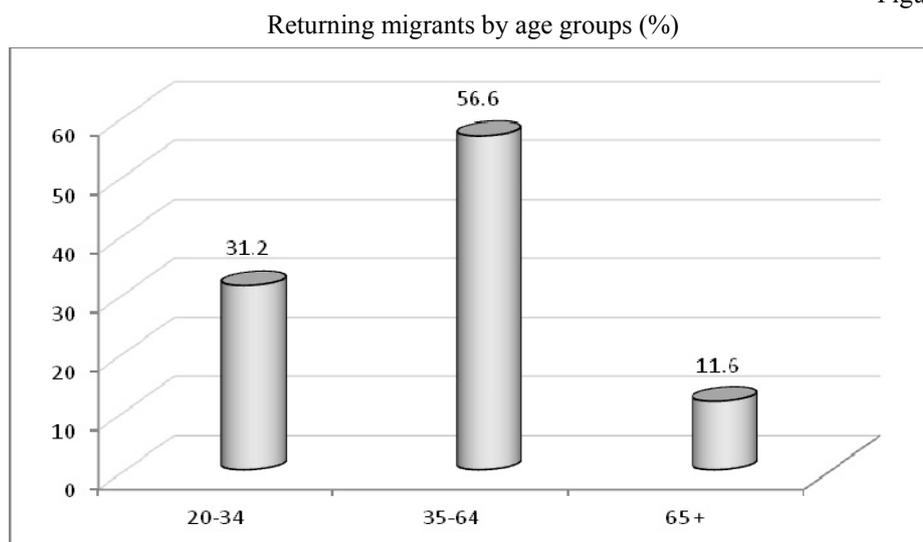
⁶ The survey was conducted in 2017 under the project “Returning migrants: segmentation and stratification of economic mobility”, financed by the Scientific Research Fund. Details about the survey sample could be found in Nonchev and Hristova, 2018. The author of this paper was part of the project team.

participate in the labour market. They outline the profiles of these migrants by age and education, as characteristics for inclusion in the labour market, and their labour status at the time of the investigation. A characteristic of the returnee's employment abroad and in Bulgaria, after their return, is made, outlining peculiarities, disparities and consequences. Some of the important problems with the participation of the returning migrants in the labour market in Bulgaria are drawn.

Age, education and labour status of returning migrants

Age, as well as education, is one of the main characteristics, concerning the participation of an individual in the labour market. According to the results from the survey, the main part of the people who have stayed abroad for more than three months are economically active, working-age persons, of the age group 20-64 years (87,8%). Nearly one-third of the migrants are under 35 years of age (31,2%) and about 12% are above working age (65 years and over) (Figure 1).

Figure 1



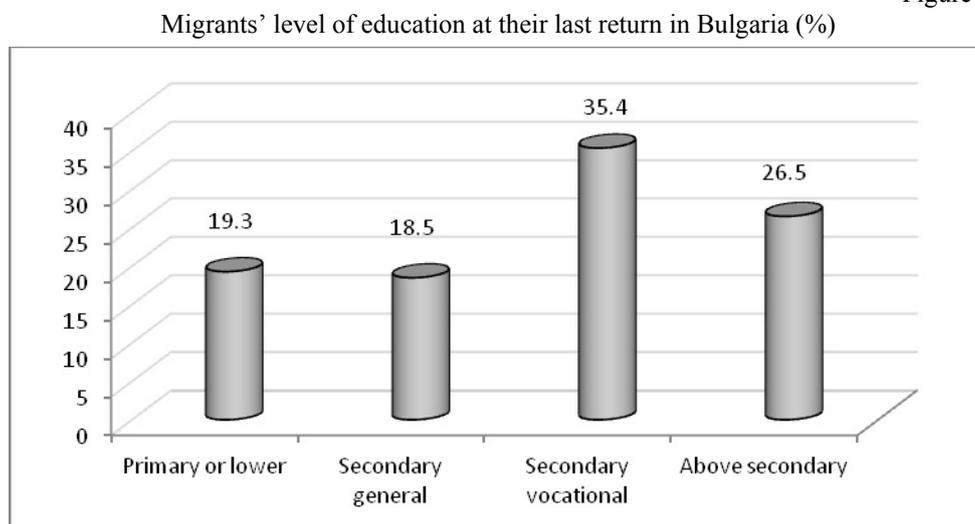
The main reasons for migration, pointed out by the respondents, could explain to a great extent such an age structure of the migrants. Getting a higher payment and finding a better job are the most common answers to the question about the reasons for their initial migration – respectively 69% and 38.4% of all respondents. The unemployment in Bulgaria is a reason for 19.5%. About 4% mention the receiving of the desired education and 19% – joining parents or relatives.

These goals correspond to the economic activity of the migrants before their initial departure from the country – around 60% were employed and nearly 28% – unemployed. The share of the students was 7%.

People with a different level of education have been abroad, but the predominant part are the well-educated. Nearly two-thirds of the returnees are specialists with secondary vocational and higher education. The share of low-educated persons is less than one fifth (Figure 2).

The educational structure has slightly changed compared to that of the migrants before their first departure abroad when 60% of them were with secondary vocational and higher education, 20% with secondary general and 19,5% with primary or lower. Some of the returnees have studied being beyond borders.

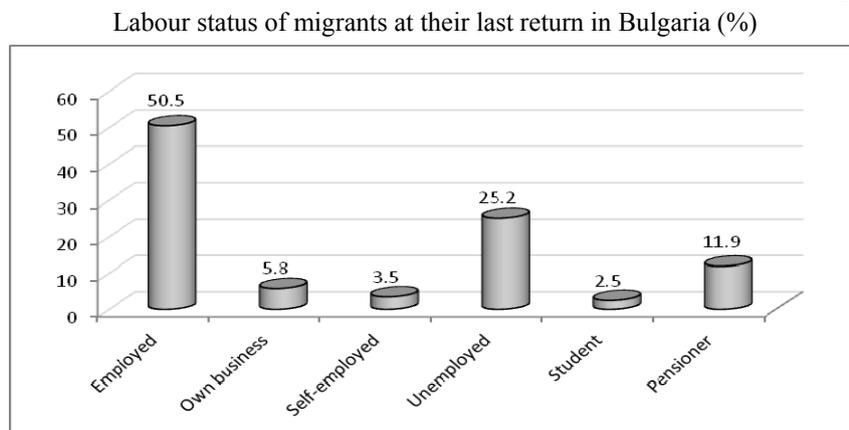
Figure 2



The prevailing share of the returnees are well-educated, working-age persons, not a small percentage of which – under 35 years of age. With such age and educational structures, more than 25% of them are unemployed at the time of the investigation, and about 60% – employed. The share of students is 2.5% and of pensioners around 12% (Figure 3).

The main incentives to go abroad, according to the respondents, are the economic ones. In the first place, they mention: higher payment, better job and higher living standard abroad, and lack of jobs in Bulgaria. With such motives for migration, the predominant part of economically active migrants is reasonable. Younger people are more flexible and well-educated persons – more demanded in the labour market, which explains to a certain extent their high share among migrants. Despite this, many of them remain unemployed after their return in Bulgaria.

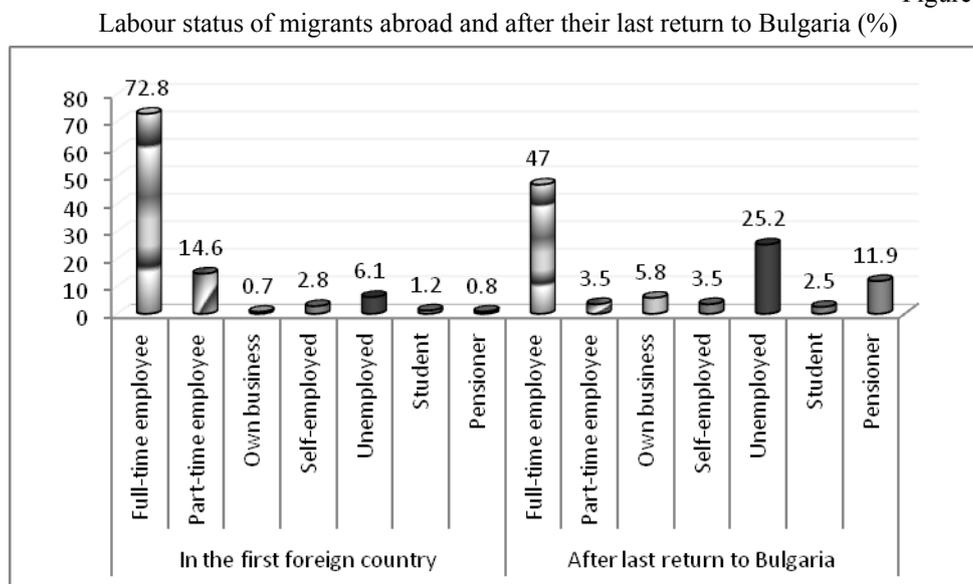
Figure 3



Employment of migrants abroad and in Bulgaria after their return

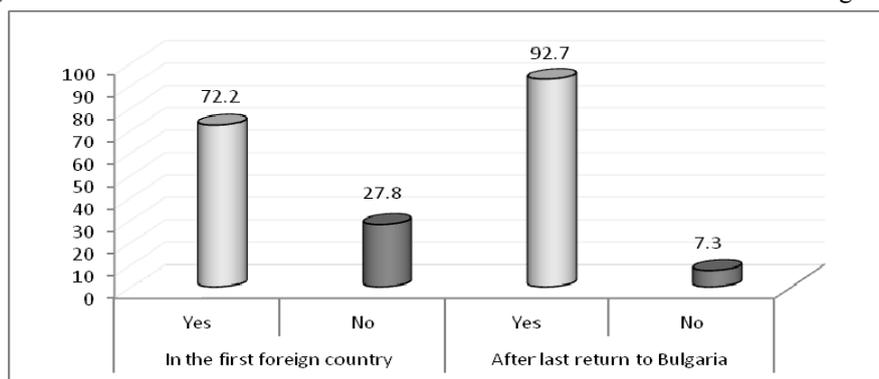
Being abroad, 90% of migrants have been employed while after their return to Bulgaria – only about 60%. The share of unemployed migrants abroad is several times lower than that of the unemployed respondents in Bulgaria. The percentage of pensioners, however, is also much higher (Figure 4). These figures demonstrate that many of the returnees have problems to find a job after their return to Bulgaria and another part retire on a pension or come back to the country after going on pension abroad.

Figure 4



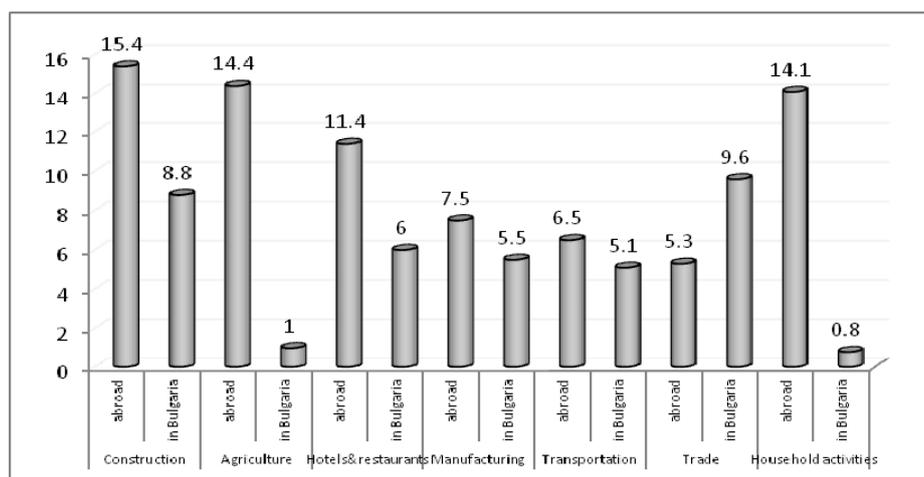
The higher employment abroad could be partly explained by migrants' work in the grey economy of the receiving country. The share of those who have worked abroad without a labour contract is high (nearly 28%) – higher than the respective share in Bulgaria by more than twenty percentage points (Figure 5). However, the difficulties to find a job in Bulgaria make part of the returnees to work without a labour contract in this country, too.

Figure 5
Migrants who work with a labour contract – abroad and after the last return to Bulgaria (%)



Another specificity of migrants' employment is that there are discrepancies between economic activities of their employment abroad and in Bulgaria. Bigger are the shares of the employed abroad in construction, agriculture, hotels and restaurants, and especially in household activities (such as adult, children or ill persons care against payment) (Figure 6).

Figure 6
Employment of migrants abroad and after their last return to Bulgaria by economic activities



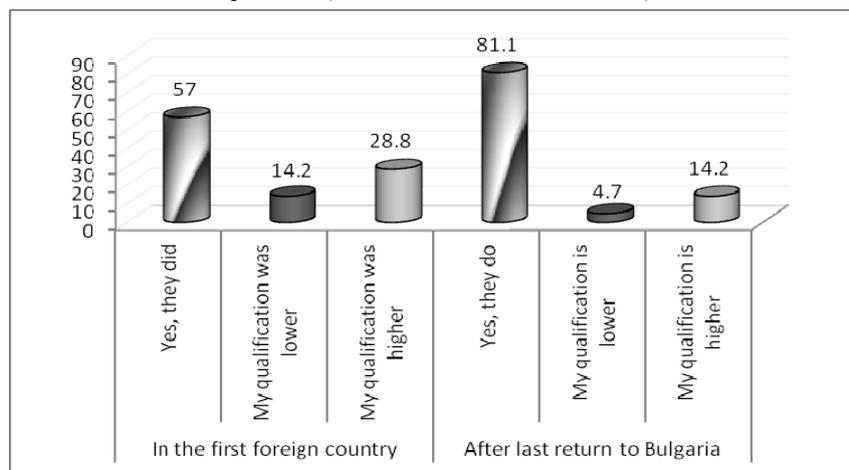
Women work mainly in household activities (30.7), as well as in agriculture and hotels and restaurants (15% each), while men – in construction (27.9%), agriculture (13.9%), transport and manufacturing (10.9% each).

Significantly higher is the employment of migrants abroad compared to that before their first departure and after the return to Bulgaria in: household activities (14.1% of the returnees have been employed in such activities abroad, 0.3% before the departure and 0.8% after the return), agriculture (respectively 14.4%, 2% and 1%), construction (15.4%, 8.1% and 8.8%) and hotels and restaurants (11.4%, 5.5% and 6%).

Being abroad many of the migrants have worked as low-qualified staff. More than a quarter (28.8%) of the respondents claim that they were overqualified for the position they have been hired (Figure 7). Especially high are the shares of those who have worked in the area of household activities (49.4%) and in agriculture and tourism (34.8%).

Two times smaller is the percentage of those who believe that they are overqualified for the position they are hired in Bulgaria. Still, 14% of the returnees consider that their qualification is higher than the required for the workplace they occupy, which is another indicator for the difficulties they meet to find an appropriate job.

Figure 7
In your opinion, did the qualification and skills you possess match the work you performed / perform (% of those who have worked)



The discrepancy between acquired qualification and occupied position is one of the reasons why nearly one-third of the migrants state that they have not acquired any qualifications and skills abroad – 26.4% haven't acquired skills and 1.2% have even lost.

At the same time, almost half of them (49.8%) have learned a foreign language, 6.8% have increased their qualification and 10% believe that they have learned to work better. The acquisition of skills and knowledge beyond borders creates possibilities for these persons to find easier a job at home. At the same time, it increases the chances for future realization of

returnees again beyond borders – 40% of the respondents claim that they would like to go abroad anew (temporarily or permanently).

The mismatch between acquired qualification and held position abroad implies a decrease or even loss of qualification and skills of migrants, which, on its turn, implies difficulty in their integration into the labour market in Bulgaria.

Problems for the participation of returnees in the labour market are created also by the fact that they have no pre-arranged job upon their return to Bulgaria. Nearly three-quarters of them (73%) did not have offers for appropriate employment prior to their return. This phenomenon depends, on the one hand, upon the activity of migrants in searching for a job, and, on the other, upon the level of development of the (re)integration policies and the activities of the respective authorities in the country.

Another possibility for the migrants to be included in the labour market is to start own business. However, 37.7% of them claim that they do not have savings from their stay abroad. Those who have savings intend to use them (or have already used) mainly for current consumption and only a small part use the savings for business start-up (Table 1).

Table 1

For what do you intend to use or have already used your savings? (%)

To repair the home I live in	42.4
To buy a home	12.4
To support financially my relatives	10.9
I have not used my savings	9.7
To refund an old loan (in Bulgaria)	3.5
To start own business	3.2

More than a half (56.1%) of the respondents state that their wages in the country of residence were lower than those of the local people (at the same sector of employment and position), especially persons who have worked in agriculture (73.6%), construction (70%) and household activities (65.9%), the economic areas where the biggest shares of migrants have been occupied. This could be a reason why some of them could not save money abroad or the savings are not enough to start a bigger business in Bulgaria.

The business the returnees start is mainly a small one (family business). The prevailing part of them work alone, without any hired persons, and a quarter – have hired one or two persons only (Figure 8).

Because of the existing disparities between the economic areas of employment of migrants abroad and in Bulgaria, loss of qualification abroad, lack of a pre-arranged job, discrepancies between acquired qualification and demand on the labour market in Bulgaria, as well as of some other reasons, more than one fifth (21.9%) of the respondents claim that they need assistance to find a job upon their return to Bulgaria.

Figure 8



Since more than 70% of the returnees possess an apartment or a house in Bulgaria, the prevailing part of them do not need housing assistance, but 9% declare that they need financial assistance, and 6.5% – psychological, upon return.

In this respect, the policies for (re)integration of migrants into the economic and social life in the country are very important. The legislation in the area of equal opportunities and anti-discrimination is well-developed, complying with the European standards, however there are substantial challenges for the integration of returnees which require the development and implementation of adequate policies. The efforts should be aimed at: assistance in finding a job (individual work according to the needs of migrants by the labour offices; appropriate training, if necessary; recognition of qualifications gained abroad; increased flexibility in the labour market and improved interaction between the administration and the employers; etc.), starting own business (administrative assistance; professional advice for business plan development; mentoring; training; credit facilities; etc), solving housing problems, involving children in education, provision of socio-psychological support, etc.

In order to have lasting effects, the policies and measures applied should not be conjunctural, but long-term.

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