

EDUCATION AND MIGRATION: THE (NON)RETURN OF BETTER EDUCATED MIGRANTS TO BULGARIA²

The article discusses the connection between education and re-migration with a focus on the return to Bulgaria of highly educated migrants, and especially those who have been educated abroad. The underlying hypothesis is that in the absence of specific personal or family reasons or clear economic motives, the return of highly educated migrants, and especially those who received education abroad, back to Bulgaria is due to the inability to find the realisation of their education abroad. Furthermore, the integration of returnees who have graduated abroad on the Bulgarian labour market is not without problems. The hypothesis is tested against qualitative and quantitative data from a 2017 national survey and 100 in-depth interviews with Bulgarian returnees. The analysis of the data reveals that the return of highly educated migrants back to Bulgaria is rather an exception in the overall picture of return, especially when it comes to migrants who have received their education abroad. Upon the return of highly educated remigrants, along with personal and family reasons for return, the rational dichotomy of “push” from the country of immigration (impossibility to find a job there) and “pull” to the homeland (availability of work in Bulgaria) stands out. For the highly educated (including those educated abroad) the “push” and “pull” factors act differently depending on the field of the received education. Moreover, professional realisation and finding a job are to a much greater extent determined by the field of education and not so much by the educational and scientific degree. Understanding the motives behind the return of highly educated Bulgarian emigrants to Bulgaria, as well as their separation into categories according to the specifics of their education and qualification, would help develop adequate incentives to support the return and reintegration into the Bulgarian society and economy.

JEL: A14; F22; J60

Introduction

As part of the growing interest in the migration issues, in recent years, the return migration or emigrants' return to their homeland has attracted increasing attention. Within this frame, a specific focus is placed on the return of highly qualified and educated migrants to their

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² The paper is prepared on the base of information received in the framework of the scientific project “Returning Migrants: Segmentation and Stratification of Economic Mobility”, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund with the Ministry of Education and Science, Competition for Financing of Fundamental Scientific Research – 2016.

country of origin. Especially in the CEE and SEE countries, this issue is particularly significant due to the considerable outflow of highly qualified and educated migrants from these countries in the last decades. The end of the Cold War and the lifting of a number of political and administrative restrictions on travel and resettlement have led to a considerable increase in emigration. The latest waves of EU enlargement in 2004, 2007 and 2013 have further contributed to the steady emigration from these countries. Furthermore, uneven economic development and differences in living standards and pay levels create a breeding ground for the “brain drain” of the less developed countries (Lang, 2013). Especially in the field of science, the availability of better conditions for scientific work and development abroad is a serious factor for scientific emigration (Gaulé, 2011).

For net “exporters” of labour, the need to return highly skilled and educated migrants in order to reverse the negative effects of the “brain drain” and enhance knowledge-based development (Conway, Potter, 2007 and Ammassari, 2004, cited in Bartram, et al., 2014, p. 124; Dustmann, Weiss, 2007 and Klagge, et al., 2007, cited in Smoliner et al., 2013, p. 21) boosts the search for policies of “brain gain” and stimulates research of such returns (WMR, 2013; UNDP, 2007; IOM, 2004; Lang, 2013; Gittins, Fink, 2015). For Bulgaria, the return of emigrants “back home” is a relatively recent phenomenon, in which emigrants by far outnumber returnees (Nonchev, Hristova, 2018). In other words, Bulgaria continues to be among the net “exporters” of labour, with the outflow of skilled labour and educated migrants being particularly sensitive. Therefore, issues related to attracting and returning highly qualified and educated migrants back to the country are of particular research interest.

The present article aims to discuss education as a factor of return, the focus being on the return of highly educated emigrants to their country of origin. Empirical data on such returnees to Bulgaria are analysed in terms of the reasons and motivation for return, on the one hand, and professional realisation and re-migration plans, on the other. The object of study are the highly educated migrants and those for whom migration and/or re-migration is associated with higher education. Special focus is placed on remigrants who have received their education abroad in the implementation of a previous migration project. Several interrelated hypotheses are being tested. Education as a factor is not unambiguously linked to migration projects. It can be part of both the motivation to emigrate and to return. In the absence of specific personal or family reasons or clear economic motives, the return of highly educated migrants (especially those who have been educated abroad) back to Bulgaria is due to the inability to find a job abroad. The integration of graduates abroad who return to Bulgaria on the Bulgarian labour market is not without problems.

The rationale behind such hypotheses stems from the understanding that in education-related emigration, there may be a transformation of the initial migration project after graduation and an attempt to stay abroad and seek a job there. The failure of the transformed migration project (in case of a successful initial migration project, namely receiving education abroad) leads to return and an attempt to effectively use at home the educational and qualification resources generated abroad. Although it seems to be related to the assumptions of neoclassical economics that return is a consequence of structural – educational and economic – failure (de Haas, Fokemma, 2011), the return of the highly educated should rather be seen in the context of the structural approach, the theory of social

networks and transnationalism (Cassarino, 2004) as theoretical paradigms to return migration. Understanding the motives for the return of highly educated Bulgarian emigrants to Bulgaria and their segmentation into separate categories according to the specifics of their education and qualification would help develop adequate incentives to support their return and reintegration into the Bulgarian society and economy.

The article is structured in several parts. The first part presents the theoretical discussion on return migration with a focus on the return and reintegration of highly qualified and educated migrants. Data and results of other research on the return of highly educated migrants are presented. The second part of the article presents the methodology and empirical research that underlies the analysis. The questions from the conducted representative empirical sociological study (ESS) and in-depth interviews are indicated, the answers of which are analysed in connection to the research hypotheses. The third part examines and analyses the data from that ESS and especially the qualitative part in the form of in-depth interviews with a special focus on the cases of return of persons with higher education and those who have initially emigrated for education. The data are compared with the results of the quantitative ESS. The last part presents the conclusions reached regarding the return of highly educated migrants in Bulgaria and the possible implications for the development of targeted policies to attract this group of returnees.

Theoretical Discussion and Relevant Research Findings

Certainly, education is a possible motivating factor for initial (outgoing) migration. Some authors specifically note that there are immigrants with a “pull” incentive who have migrated for educational reasons (Kunuroglu, et al., 2016). Achieving the goal of the initial migration project – namely getting an education abroad, would lead to two possible strategies: a) returning home after the success of the migration project (graduation abroad), or Battistella (2018) calls it a “return of achievement”; and b) transformation or upgrading of the migration project after completing the education abroad and seeking professional realisation there. In other words, these are students who leave to study abroad and originally may intend to return to their home country, but subsequently decide to stay after the end of their studies. Thus, an intention to return exists, but it keeps being postponed and ultimately fails to occur (see the classification of re-migration originally proposed by F. Bovenkerk and developed by King, 2000).

Building on the variety of theoretical understandings of return migration (following Cassarino, 2004), the importance and role of education as a factor of return can be inferred in several ways. For example, neoclassical economics (NCE) views migration as an investment in human capital and an attempt by an individual to maximise his/her usefulness by moving to a place where he/she can be more productive. In this paradigm, the return is seen as a result of structural – educational and economic – integration failure (de Haas, Fokemma, 2011). However, when the return is due to the fulfilment of migration goals (receiving education), it cannot be seen as a failure but rather as a “return of completion” (Battistella, 2018). Yet, the NCE logics suggests that the individual would rather choose the

second strategy, namely to seek realisation abroad. In this case, the failure of an upgraded migration project can lead to a return, which is seen as a failure of/by the migrant.

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) analyses migration processes in terms of the interdependence between migrants and their families. In these understandings, it is normal for the migrant to choose the first of the above strategies and, after successfully achieving his/her goals (completion of education abroad), to return to one's homeland and to family and relatives. The limitation of this understanding is that the mode of explanation is rationalistic, and the focus is mainly on economic factors (which in the case of education are obviously inconclusive) and the individual success-failure dichotomy, without taking into account the wider social conditions of the environment, to which the learned migrants return.

Contrary to these understandings, the Structural Approach (SA) examines migration processes and migration and return decisions in a more holistic and global context, identifying all the elements that are likely to affect migration and return (economic environment, technology, social environment, political factors). The SA perspective, according to which migration occurs in "migration systems" (Bartram, et al., 2014, p. 122), is relevant to the specifics of scientific and educational migration insofar as the return is linked to the general context understood in terms of unequal relations between the centre (host countries with better educational services and better conditions for scientific work, including in terms of payment) and the periphery (sending countries, where the conditions for education and scientific work are perceived as not so good). The SA is specifically focused on the extent to which returnees can influence the societies of origin upon return, which is also relevant to the return of educated and skilled migrants. The main shortcoming of the SA is the assumption based on the structural dichotomy that little information is exchanged between the sending and the receiving country, and hence the understanding that the return is due to incomplete information about the country of origin, and return-related expectations are clarified within the structural context in the origin country only after the arrival back home. With regard to educational re-migration, this criticism may not be entirely unfounded, as it can be assumed that a migrant who has graduated with two or more educational and scientific degrees abroad may not be fully informed about the institutional culture and procedures in the academic and scientific circles in the homeland and may face different than expected realities upon return.

In contrast, the paradigm of Transnationalism features a different understanding of return, where the focus is on the dynamics and maintenance of regular contacts and migration links between the origin and host countries, and migration is the result of the interaction of social networks in these two places (Schiller, et al., 1995). Return is seen as part of a circular system of social and economic relations and exchanges that facilitates the reintegration of migrants and through which knowledge, information and forms of belonging and participation are transferred. The possibilities for relating transnationalism to a more specific case of educational and research migrants are limited insofar as transnationalism considers the return on the basis of the assumption of maintaining cross-border ethnic and kinship ties between the country of origin and the host country and the construction of transnational identities. However, participation in an academic community gives also a sense of community identity, and contacts within that community can also be (and are)

maintained transnationally. The other important focus of this paradigm is on the actions and policies of the sending government to organise and maintain relationships with the community, and hence to capitalise on the benefits of return. For example, special attention is paid to goal-oriented initiatives, which have gradually been institutionalised as a result of interaction and coordination with the government of the sending country (Gamlen, 2006). This focus is relevant since the governments of net “exporters” of labour are presumably interested in attracting highly skilled and educated migrants and take action and develop policies accordingly.

In a fashion similar to transnationalism, the Social Network Theory (SNT) considers the return as a first step in the completion of the migration project and the returnees – as bearers of tangible and intangible resources, and assumes that they maintain strong connections to previous locations of establishment in other countries. In most general terms, social networks are defined as connections and relationships between individuals that vary in strength, type, and duration (Granovetter, 1973). They increase the availability of resources and information by supporting the success of returning migrants’ endeavours. When analysing network membership practices, other elements of the analysis may highlight the various ways in which actors are involved, as well as the types of organisations that influence their behaviour. Second, in a given context, different network structures offer different opportunities, and hence different orientations and strategies. Thus, thanks to the transnational approach and TCM, return is no longer considered the end of the migration cycle, but a stage in the migration process (Cassarino, 2004, p. 268). This perspective is particularly relevant in the study of educational and scientific re-migration, on the one hand, because alumni contacts (even if not institutionalised in an organisation or structure) can definitely be seen as a network that, in the case of education abroad, is transnational in nature. On the other hand, contacts established in scientific circles after training or specialisation abroad can also be considered as forming transnational social networks, in which information flows, which involve the participants in different ways and influence their behaviour.

Theorising return in terms of different paradigms exposes the various interpretations of education as a factor for outgoing and reverse migration, as well as of educated returnees as a specific target group of origin countries’ policies to “attract brains”. Specific research studies reveal a rather diverse picture. Most studies do not unequivocally connect motivation for return and migrants’ (potential returnees’) level of education (De Haas, Fokkema, 2011; Bonifazi, Paparuso, 2018). In some studies, education is considered as one of the many migrants’ background characteristics (Bonifazi, Paparuso, 2018).

The issue of the education of migrants (potential returnees) and its connection to the motivation is a central focus in some studies. A specific empirical survey of this connection analyses the education level, its type and the country, where it is received. An important educational variable, which influences the return migration, is the quite advanced education: the migrants, who work below their education level, express stronger intentions to return back home, and the education, acquired in the receiving country, improves the outlook for subsequent socialisation in the home country (Pungas, et al., 2012). Similarly, in some surveys, the emphasis is placed on professional and work qualifications and it is

claimed that migrants of higher qualification are more likely to return than the less qualified ones (Aydemir, Robinson, 2008, cited in Gittins, Fink, 2015).

Other studies show that returnees have a higher education than those who remain in the country, and what has been originally a “brain drain” can become a “brain gain”, when skills and knowledge acquired abroad can increase human capital at home (UNDP, 2007; Kovács, et al., 2013; Dustmann, et al., 2011, cited in Gittins, Fink, 2015). Such a statement builds on the following understanding: the return to the homeland after studying abroad reveals that the increase of education abroad can be highly valued in the country of origin and in this sense, can become a motivating factor for the return (Borjas, Bratsberg, 1996, cited in Pungas, et al., 2012, p. 4; Îçduygu, 2009, cited in Biligli, Siegel, 2014). Re-migration projects by students developing forms of career migration with the ambition to capitalise on their foreign education are one of the features of the so-called “liquid migration” – a phrase coined to capture newer, more flexible and less predictable forms of mobility (Domínguez-Mujica, Díaz-Hernández, 2019).

Some studies focus specifically on the return of highly educated and qualified migrants to their homeland. For example, a study of the motivation and decisions of academic scientists in hard sciences (chemistry) to return to their country of origin estimates that only 9% of immigrant scientists in the USA return home while developing a professional career, while the most successful scientists (also understood in terms of strong publication records) are less likely to return. At the same time, the data from this study show that for those scientists who decide to return to their homeland, return migration seems to have no negative effect on their scientific productivity after an adjustment period at home (Gaulé, 2011). Another study within the transnationalism paradigm addresses the return of skilled young Spaniards to Spain following the outward migration during the 2008 economic crises. Building on the concept of a “liquid migration”, which captures “more fluid schemes of mobility from the perspectives of return dilemma”, the authors link re-migration to transnational political activism and the feelings of belonging, and conclude that new transnational communities have appeared, being “an example of the interactive role that Spanish international migration has taken on during the crisis” (Domínguez-Mujica, Díaz-Hernández, 2019).

Closely related to the focus of the current analysis is a study of the return intentions of Estonian migrants to Finland, which focuses on education as a central variable. The results show that education level is not associated with the intention to return, while working below one’s training (i.e. over-education) leads to higher intentions to return back home. At the same time, education obtained in the host country improves the socialisation prospects in the host society later on and thus reduces intentions for re-emigration (Pungas, et al., 2012).

In Bulgaria, the issues of return of highly qualified migrants are considered from several points of view: return policies and their tools, professional trajectories of returnees, problems of reintegration and sustainability of return (Krasteva, 2014; Ivanova, 2015; Ivanova, 2020).

Methodology and Data

The current article analyses data from a qualitative and quantitative empirical sociological survey (ESS), conducted in 2017 within the research project “*Returning migrants: Segmentation and Stratification of Economic Mobility*”.³ Within the project, a nationally representative survey of returning migrants is conducted among adult Bulgarian citizens (aged 18+) who have been at least once abroad for a minimum period of 3 months during the last 10 years prior to the survey (2008-2017) and whose return to Bulgaria is permanent or who periodically return to Bulgaria (i.e. they are not back for holidays, family meetings, medical treatment or alike). The survey is conducted in 9 regions of the country, located in all administrative regions and in different types of settlements (capital, district centre, town, small town, and village). The number of people surveyed in each area is proportional to the number of the adult population in them. The planned sample size is 600 individuals and the completed sample includes 604 respondents distributed in 60 units with 10 persons interviewed in each. The data collection method is a face-to-face interview at the respondent’s home. The fieldwork is completed in the period October 28th – November 20th, 2017.⁴ The qualitative study consists of 100 in-depth interviews with returned migrants who meet the same conditions as the respondents to the representative survey. This study also covers different types of settlements throughout the country. Respondents of different ages, sex, education and length of stay (both abroad and in Bulgaria after return) are interviewed.

The current article analyses the survey data related to the relation between education and (re)migration. These are the quantitative and qualitative data on whether the goal of the outgoing migration is to increase migrants’ education, as well as the main reasons for their return to Bulgaria. Subjective assessments of return are also analysed, including perception-related difficulties and problems and the need for support. Another relevant question is about the occupation of the remigrants after their return, as well as plans for their subsequent departure. Attention is paid to the answers related to the knowledge and evaluation of policies and measures supporting return. The analysis is illustrated and supported by specific answers to the above questions from the in-depth interviews, and the citations are indicated by a number in square brackets, which shows the sequence number of the respective in-depth interview in the whole set of interviews. The Appendix lists the interviews from which quotations are used, the respondents being presented according to their sex, age (at the time of the interview), level of education and country of education, and host country.

³ The project is funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund (Contract No. DN 05/6 of 14.12.2016), is implemented by University of National and World Economy and Economic Research Institute of Bulgarian Academy of Science. Coordinator of the research team is Assoc. Prof. Andrey Nonchev. For the methodology and parameters of the research, see <http://remigrants.tys-software.com/>.

⁴ For more information of the national representative survey conducted within the project see Nonchev, Hristova, 2018.

Education as a Factor for Initial Migration and Return

Young and educated Bulgarians should be among the country's most desirable returnees and hence they should figure prominently in the overall picture of in-flow returnees. However, surveys show a different picture – most returnees have a higher average age and lower education than the country's population. Data from the national survey show that less than 5% of returnees to Bulgaria are under 30 years old and with higher education (Nonchev, et al., 2020, p. 338). In comparison, other studies of return in Eastern European countries find that “except Romania, all countries appear to attract returnees who have received more years of formal education than non-migrants” (Martin, Radu, 2011, cited in Lang, 2013, p. 22).

Education as a factor of return is in direct inverse dependence on education as a factor for initial migration. The National Statistical Institute's Infostat data reveal an upward line of emigration of the age groups 20-24 and 25-30 years for the 10-year period prior to the survey (Table 1). These are the age groups associated with acquiring higher education in an average lifecycle. The beginning of this period coincides with Bulgaria's accession to the EU. The increase of outgoing migration in these two age groups is related to the opening of new opportunities in the educational market outside Bulgaria. The last two columns of Table 1 show that the number of returnees from these two age groups is consistently lower than that of those leaving. Since part of the outgoing migration in these two age groups is undoubtedly related to receiving education abroad, the fewer returnees can also be interpreted as non-return after receiving study abroad.

Table 1
Outgoing and incoming migration by age – total for the country* (number)

Year	Outgoing		Incoming	
	20-24 years old	25-29 years old	20-24 years old	25-29 years old
2007	340	584	94	120
2008	239	422	89	121
2009	1670	2963	400	383
2010	1768	3406	128	246
2011	888	1516	426	477
2012	2386	2674	1475	1224
2013	3333	3425	2580	2071
2014	4263	4342	2340	2594
2015	3643	3817	2044	2235
2016	4701	4653	1450	1807
2017	5064	4972	1862	2312

* Includes only the persons who have declared to the administrative authorities a change of their domicile due to relocation abroad or relocation back home.

Source: National Statistical Institute (<https://infostat.nsi.bg>).

This general picture is reaffirmed and further precisioned by the data from the conducted ESS. First of all, the data show that, in general, the educational structure of the returning migrants is relatively stable and is not significantly influenced by accomplished migration movements. The share of returning migrants with higher education is slightly increased

(from 19.4% to 22%) and the share of people with a scientific degree doubles (from 0.5% to 1.2%). These are mostly the people whose main motive for migration is to increase their education (4%) (Nonchev, Hristova, 2020, p. 120-121).

Correlation of the results with the answers to the questions about the three primary economic and the three primary non-economic reasons for a return show that reasons for return can be the completion of education, search for better career realisation or impossibility for professional realisation abroad, willingness to contribute to the development of the Bulgarian economy and society, nostalgia for home and family, and others. According to the results of the quantitative survey within the conducted project, only 3.47% of returned migrants place the provision of better education among the top 3 most important reasons for the initial outgoing migration, and only 1.6% put the provision of better education first. As a consequence, the share of respondents answering “I improved my education” to the question “What skills did you acquire abroad?” is only 2.5%. The data can be taken as indirect indications that outgoing migration for education “stays out” and does not return. Regarding the sustainability of return, the share of returnees with higher education among the respondents who prefer to stay in the home country for good (“the stayers”) is lower than their share in the total sample (Minchev, Boshnakov, 2018, p. 52).

The results of the qualitative research support similar conclusions, though they reveal a richer and more diverse picture of the education factor in the entire migration cycle. It should be noted that in almost half of the in-depth interviews, education has nothing to do with the respondents’ migration projects and migration trajectories. This can also be considered as indirect support for the claim that there is no mass return of emigrants who have gone abroad for education. Among the other returnees, several categories can be distinguished (apart from migrants who have received education abroad and then return to Bulgaria).

Return FOR EDUCATION in Bulgaria: This is part of the group of returnees who leave for fixed short periods with the main purpose of earning money and a clear intention to return to Bulgaria. In this sub-group (13 in-depth interviews) are people in the age group 20-25 years, who are students in Bulgaria and leave short-term for some seasonal work abroad. This group is differentiated by the explicit relation between the goals of migration and education – the achievement of the financial goals of the migration project enables the returnee to support financially his/her education. The answers to the questions “Why did you leave?”, “Why did you return?”, and “What did you invest in?” are of the type:

What I had gone for was accomplished ... for these 3-4 months, I succeeded to earn the money I needed. ... I voluntarily returned to Bulgaria because I had to finish my higher education (Appendix, [12]).

I needed funds to continue my education and to support myself. I was studying for a Bachelor degree in higher education (Appendix, [6]).

I saved a small amount of money that I invested in my higher education in Bulgaria (Appendix, [1]).

The investment I made was mainly in my education. The money helped me to continue my studies without financial worries (Appendix, [6]).

Usually, for the remigrants from this group, the return does not pose serious challenges – the stay abroad is short, pre-fixed as time, the return is specified in advance and in many cases, it is clear what comes next. In other words, reintegration is not a problem. However, in this group – due to the relatively young age and the acquired migration experience – potential future emigrants can also be sought, including those who seek to continue their education abroad (for example, a Master's degree abroad after completing a Bachelor degree in Bulgaria). Then the initial migration becomes a *reconnaissance*: *The purpose of my emigration was to investigate the situation, to get acquainted with life in the country and to explore the options for education there* (Appendix, [17]).

Return of graduates AFTER WORK ABROAD: The study shows that less than 1/4 of Bulgarian migrants are with college (3.8%) and higher education (19.9%), prior to their initial departure for abroad (Zareva, 2018b, p. 104-105). According to the nature of work abroad, there are two main groups in this category.

Return of graduates after low-skilled work abroad: In this group (10 in-depth interviews) are people with higher education, whose main goal of emigration is financial and material and stems from financial constraints and inability to meet important needs of family and children in Bulgaria. Their main goals are to financially support themselves and their families, to repay loans, to provide funds for the education of children. Abroad, they engage in low-skilled but better paid (compared to Bulgaria) work – caring for sick and elderly people, house cleaning or agricultural work for women, construction and repair work and agricultural work for men. They return after achieving the migration goals or when it is impossible to continue working abroad.

This group can be further differentiated according to the age of the migrants. Although the specifics of the migration experience and the success of the migration project are of major importance, in the lower age groups of graduates working abroad under their qualification and education is not perceived as humiliating and harmful to their self-respect:

The work was hard and difficult – I was a general worker in a company for external insulation of buildings. I received a salary of 1200 EUR. ... At the end of 2011 there you less work in the company, respectively my salary went down and I temporarily looked for additional work. I delivered brochures and catalogues to several companies ... for a monthly salary of 450 EUR. ... In Germany I acquired skills as a general construction worker, no matter that I am an engineer. ... During my stay in Germany I learned everything – it was something like doing for again my compulsory military service. My expectations for work and high income came true. Overall, I'm happy with my work there (Appendix, [48]).

For older graduates (aged 50+) who, despite their education, cannot find a well-paid job in Bulgaria, the combination of education, relatively older age (and hence lower adaptability), and the need to engage in low-skilled labour leads to some of the most bitter assessments:

I was looking forward to beginning work there. I worked in two large houses, with many rooms and stairs ... difficult to clean. I was very tired, I was 53 years old and I could already feel my age. I have discopathy, my lower back and legs are constantly hurting. The owners were kind, they paid well. But I couldn't stand it. It wasn't the job for me. My strength is in accounting, not cleaning. I have studied, I have invested in education, courses, advanced training. I have gained a lot of knowledge, experience and skills in this field. And

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now where am I – cleaning houses. I felt offended. Money is not everything. A person has also dignity, a person should respect oneself (Appendix, [3]).

In this group, the problems after return are basically the same as the problems that have provoked the departure in the first place, namely finding a job and providing sufficient income. Difficulties in this regard lead to the search for subsequent emigration abroad, even if one would want to stay in Bulgaria:

It is all about money. Salaries are very low. And that's why people go back to other countries. There are women who return from Greece to Bulgaria, stay here for several months. They find a job, but it is low-paid. This does not satisfy them and they go to Greece again, even if they have said that they no longer want to go there (Appendix, [91]).

Return of graduates after work that matches one's educational background or other skilled work abroad: This group of returnees is very small in the overall set of in-depth interviews. These are people who have acquired various degrees of higher education in Bulgaria and go abroad for a good job that adequately matches their educational background or to perform other qualified work. The motivation to leave is related to opportunities to gain specific experience, to work on a specific project of interest. This is the group of more mobile migrants – with education, in a relatively low age range, mostly single, with a desire for professional development and often – with a job in Bulgaria before leaving:

The motives for leaving... I was offered a job related to my education, which was a perfect opportunity for professional development. In addition, that was an opportunity for experience in large oil and gas companies in which I worked. Such an opportunity could not possibly be missed. There were some things that were vague, uncertain, but I made my mind ... I was young and I had to take risks and pursue my career and development (Appendix, [51]).

I worked in our Sofia center and then our manager decided to promote me and another colleague and we had to move to the central office in Manchester. In fact, that's why I left then. ... It was not a business trip type, as I left the Bulgarian office and signed a new contract in the office in England, because there were two different registered companies. ... In fact, the promotion and the new responsibilities I would have with the new position seemed very interesting to me. ... Many of my seasoned colleagues worked in the office in England and I wanted to learn more from them about the profession itself. ... I wanted to gain as much experience there as possible, no matter how many years it would take. ... First, I learned to do this type of research and, second, I learned a lot about a new industry that I may one day decide to work in and then I would be more prepared on how to do it, what to expect and where to focus in the industry itself (Appendix, [55]).

I went to improve my language skills and look for possible job opportunities for a longer period of time outside the country... My expectations were to gain new knowledge and skills, exchange experience with colleagues from other countries and generally to find a different perspective on my work ... I saw my stay in Germany as a chance for a longer stay abroad. ... I trained young people in the field of civic education (Appendix, [80]).

The return occurs at the expiration of the agreed work engagement or project and/or for other (family, personal) reasons:

The internship was over. I was able to keep my place in the Ministry of Youth [and Sports]. And I was given the opportunity to apply the skills [I acquired abroad] back to the national level (Appendix, [21]).

In fact, the most important and major reason I came back was that I applied again to a university that was completely different from the one I had studied before, for a program that was different from anything I had ever done. In Bulgaria it would have been much easier for me financially to get the degree I wanted. In England I had to take extra courses. I also had to obtain another degree they required in order to apply to their university and study in that particular program. The second important reason is that I had almost no social circle there, I had no friends there... I didn't need much help, because it's easier to go back to where you have already lived than to go to a new place (Appendix, [55]).

I had decided when my son began school to be in a Bulgarian school... My wife was called to work in Bulgaria. I went to several interviews in Sofia. Before I returned, I received an offer that suited me, and we quickly decided to return (Appendix, [74]).

When there is a willingness to return and the return is planned, reintegration in Bulgaria and finding a job after return are not perceived as problematic. In cases where the return is due to inability to find another project or work abroad, and the migrant's aspiration is to stay abroad, the return may be perceived as problematic in some respects:

The stay was successful. I accomplished the project I had left for. I acquired new skills and got acquainted with interesting practices. I adapted there without a problem [but] My expectations for a longer stay there did not come true [this is unrelated to the organisation in which she worked]... After my return, I had more difficulties due to the lack of a specific plan for professional realisation in Bulgaria, as my original plan was to stay in Germany for a longer period (Appendix, [80]).

The second time I spent about a year or so in Canada. I worked as a research assistant, research activity. [I found the job] Through a conference I visited on the spot and met one of the professors and he literally created this position for me. ... Excellent relationships; I can't complain about anything. The point is that there was work during the project and there was funding; after it was over, there was no more work. ... As I could not find another job, I returned (Appendix, [62]).

Return AFTER EDUCATION ABROAD: Undoubtedly, this is the most interesting category of remigrants – those who initially emigrated in order to receive education abroad, and after fulfilling the goal of migration – return to Bulgaria. This group includes 1/10 of the interviewed. Within this group, different profiles can be outlined according to the preliminary attitudes and motivation for return, the migration (including educational) trajectory and the realisation in Bulgaria after the return.

An interesting distinction is made when the answer to the question of the initial willingness and intention to return of emigrants for education is taken into account. On the one hand, there is a clearly drawn profile of the educational emigrant of the type "I'm going abroad to study and to stay there". Preliminary plans for returning to Bulgaria after graduation are always conditional, but in some cases, there is a clear desire to stay abroad after graduation and for professional realisation there:

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I did not link the departure only with education. Abroad, education often means further development. I.e. my motivation was also not to return to Bulgaria, because I was somewhat sure that when I went to study, I would find a job there and I would be able to settle there (Appendix, [100]).

I had no intention of returning to Bulgaria. My goal was to get an education there, find a job according to my education and settle in the Netherlands (Appendix, [101]).

I had no intention of returning to Bulgaria. But I succeeded in finding an internship for my educational background, which by coincidence was in Sofia (Appendix, [21]).

It can be expected that, under equal other conditions, the return – when the original goal is to stay abroad after graduation and is not changed over time – is perceived as a failure of the migration project:

I was simply forced to return. Personally, I did not want to return and I do not want to be in Bulgaria (Appendix, [99]).

In other cases, the options are more open and uncertain, and the aspiration for permanent emigration is not absolute:

I left to study. My expectations were to get a good education, to gain valuable experience and eventually to get a realisation in professional terms – whether there or back in Bulgaria. I have never seen myself as a person who goes to emigrate 100%. I had no such idea of myself. It is always an option – you study, you work, you stay (Appendix, [65]).

I cannot answer with certainty whether I initially had the intention of returning to Bulgaria, because at that stage, it all depended on whether I would find a job after graduating in Turkey... I had no intention or rather I was not aware of when and whether I would return to Bulgaria (Appendix, [87]).

The initial plan was to get an education and possibly find a job, but this possible finding of a job was a bit delayed on my part. ... Yes, I intended ... in fact, I don't really think I had decided it for most of my stay there. Maybe last year I thought about returning to Bulgaria and looking for a professional career here (Appendix, [78]).

It's hard to say... it's rather an "yes", I thought that one day I would return if I found a lucrative job in my academic field of political science. But I realised that everything depends on the development of things in a purely academic plan. Mostly I wanted to get an education in a country with a good reputation in terms of the quality of education, but I was counting on to return to Bulgaria one day (Appendix, [63]).

In some cases, from the very beginning, migration was seen as a project with a fixed deadline set by the completion of the relevant educational program:

I did not intend to stay there, I planned to return after the end of the program (Appendix, [62]).

The migration trajectories of educational migrants are also very diverse. Among them are those who, after completing their education abroad, work abroad for a certain (sometimes quite long) period before returning to Bulgaria:

In the Netherlands, I was first a student and worked to support myself. Then I worked in accordance to my educational background – as a programmer – for 5 years. It was

originally like an organised internship from the university. In the third year we had to be interns for about 6 months, and after the internship, I stayed to work there. Then I developed my own business for two years (Appendix, [100]).

From Germany, where I graduated, I went to Belgium... I had interests in the field of the European project and I wanted to get acquainted with it from the inside, so I started looking for a job related to the European institutions. ... I went to work there and to gain professional experience with the idea to find a realisation as an economist in this field. ... I worked for the European Parliament as an economic adviser to a Bulgarian MEP. I was involved in the work of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs of the European Parliament, of which the MEP I was advising was a member (Appendix, [65]).

In some cases, the educational emigrant has the opportunity to work abroad, but does not take advantage of it and goes home:

After graduating, I had the opportunity to start working on a job that matched my education. I could certainly start work. It's about working professionally, not some general work. This did not in any way affect my assessment [of returning to Bulgaria] (Appendix, [78]).

With regard to migration trajectories, an interesting (and rare for returnees) category of “educational nomad” can be distinguished, who travels around different countries for the purpose of education and acquires different degrees:

In 2003, after finishing 10th grade, I went to Canada, where I spent another 2 years in high school and then studied for another Bachelor degree for another year on an exchange basis in Germany, Tübingen. So between 2003-2007 in Canada; then 2007-2008 – in Germany, and in 2008-2009 I completed my studies in Canada and received a Bachelor degree... a 1-year Master's degree in the Netherlands (2009-2010)... and then a PhD study at the University of Bath, UK (Appendix, [63]).

Given the different preconceptions regarding return and diversity in migration trajectories (see also Nonchev, Hristova, 2018), the motivation for the return of educational emigrants is predictably complex and multilayered. On the one hand, there are the rational motives related to the impossibility to find a job abroad and respectively the opportunity to work in Bulgaria:

I did not [achieve my goals] when it came to finding a permanent job. I couldn't find a permanent job and that was one of the reasons I came back (Appendix, [62]).

I returned because of the career opportunity that was given to me. I sat at an interview for a car designer [in Bulgaria] and I got the job (Appendix, [75]).

I was certain that with the experience I gained there, it would be easier for me to find a job here. Indeed, I got a job from there before I came home (Appendix, [101]).

Very often, however, rational motives are strongly intertwined with personal and family considerations for return (Bakalova, Misheva, 2018). From the words of the interviewed, it is sometimes difficult to understand what was leading:

I returned to Bulgaria immediately after graduation. I decided to return because being with my family was a priority for me. I didn't find a realisation after I graduated. My education

was in an area where I needed more support from local leaders. After all, I was a foreigner, so the graduates who were Turkish citizens had a better chance (Appendix, [87]).

Mainly economic reasons – I did not have the funds to buy a house, and renting a flat without income was also quite expensive. There were also family reasons – I realised that my father and mother would be happy to have me near them, to be in Bulgaria again. ... Rather voluntarily, I really wanted to go home, but to some extent I was pressured by the circumstances, because given that I could not find a job quickly, it was not a good idea to stay there for a long time (Appendix, [63]).

I came back for two reasons. The first was for love. He has a serious profession here, and it was not reasonable for him to wait and to begin looking for realisation abroad. The other reason was that after completing the state-sponsored Master's program, the sponsorship stopped, and I could not afford to search for work even a month without additional income because my family could no longer help me. For purely financial reasons, I had to return (Appendix, [99]).

I came back mainly because I missed my family, I missed Bulgaria. In the Netherlands we did not have many social contacts or any social life outside of work and this prompted me to think about returning [after 10 years there]... I want to try to realise myself professionally in Bulgaria. ... The idea of being in the IT sector was reassuring. I knew I would find a job. If I had no confidence that I would find a professional realisation here, I would not have returned at all (Appendix, [100]).

The post-return professional realisation also shows large differences among educational migrants. There are those who have returned because of a job offer or those who very soon after their return are able to find a job related to their educational background and with good pay:

Senior car designer. I have a team that I work with. My work is related to the organisation of the process (Appendix, [75]).

No, I have not encountered any problems at all. For a person with my educational background, there are lots of job offers in Sofia. I have not experienced any difficulties. ... I currently work as a contract programmer in a software company. I found it through jobs.bg after I was already in Bulgaria (Appendix, [78]).

It should be noted that most returnees in this category have a technical or IT/programmer education (Minchev, Boshnakov, 2018). For this group of educational migrants, assessments of return are generally positive:

It [the return] can't be considered a backslide, because since I came back to Bulgaria and for the last 8 years, my life has been developing in an upward direction. I wouldn't say that it's because of some external intervention or effort, but rather because of my targeted action in this direction (Appendix, [65]).

At the same time, after studying abroad and upon their return to Bulgaria, some of the returnees cannot find quickly a job that matches their educational background and are forced to work below their qualifications and education. Understandably, in these cases, the subjective assessments of the return are negative and it is perceived as a professional regress:

As a professional regress – I could not find a job quickly, and the work I found at first was not better and was paid less. ... Translator, as self-employed, legal work (Appendix, [62]).

I see it as a step back, because little is known in Bulgaria about my field of studies, I cannot work with my education at all in the private sector, possibly I could work in the public sector, but what I learned from my stay here is that if you want to be appointed to a government job on a position that is related to international criminal law and international humanitarian law, you need to have very strong connections everywhere. Positions in international organisations also pass through political appointment (Appendix, [99]).

Negative assessments are found even from respondents who have not had a problem finding a well-paid job matching their education, but perceive the environment and the opportunities it provides as less favourable:

From a professional point of view, it's a step back in terms of opportunities for professional development and satisfaction with what you're doing. In this country, the Bulgarian is a little rigid in his views – we know everything, we can do everything, without even looking slightly elsewhere (Appendix, [101]).

Naturally, educated returnees who have difficulty finding work point this as the main type of support they have needed after returning:

[I needed] Assistance in finding a job. Assistance for professional realisation in the field of my education (Appendix, [87]).

[I needed support] Especially with finding a job, psychological support for adaptation to Bulgarian realities (Appendix, [62]).

The following relation can also be deduced – the greater the educational experience abroad, the more laborious and slow the integration after the return. The above mentioned “educational nomad”, who travels to different countries for education and receives different degrees, finds it difficult to find a job upon his return:

I did not need financial support, as well as support for housing. I needed mostly psychological support and support in finding a job. Because I still had no experience on the labour market, all my experience revolved around studying... I was worried about finding a job (despite my good education) (Appendix, [63]).

Even those who have not had a problem finding a job tend to point out the administrative difficulties and obstacles in the reintegration process in Bulgaria:

The same ones [problems and obstacles] that I encounter to this day. ... Administrative ones, the administration is somewhat obsolete (Appendix, [65]).

Since we had been abroad for many years, I expected that the return to Bulgaria would be associated with fewer quarrels and chores, which is not the case (Appendix, [100]).

A specific issue of return, mentioned *en masse* by the representatives of the group of “returning after studying abroad”, is the recognition and legalisation of foreign diplomas in Bulgaria (Zareva, 2018a, p. 77), which is problematic both in terms of time and cumbersomeness of the procedure and in terms of the inadequacy of the legalisation criteria:

For example, when legalising my diploma – it was extremely annoying that a university that is known throughout Europe and America here had to be acknowledged by a simple official who had to seal and approve my diploma. It took several months. Apostilles..., people in Germany were involved to go to consulates to put some stamps on my papers. And the only reason was that I was interested in working in the sphere of macroeconomics and banking and I wanted to work at the BNB. For that, the diploma must be legalised. For every other normal employer – you give him a diploma and you start working. [But] because people are reasonable to some extent in the BNB and I am not the first with a foreign diploma to go there, they allowed me to start with the commitment that within some period, I will present the legalised diploma (Appendix, [65]).

I did not even try to legalise my diploma. In the private sector, it is not necessary... In IT there are some technologies that are used here and there. For such type of education, the legalisation of diplomas should be much easier than it actually is (Appendix, [100]).

There are also cases where the recognition of diplomas is not only difficult and slow as a procedure, but is problematic from a substantive point of view. Thus, due to an insufficiently well-defined classifier of specialities, the education received abroad cannot be adequately translated in Bulgaria:

It was explained to me that because I graduated in law in the Netherlands and it is not Bulgarian law, my diploma can be recognised here as a diploma in public administration. And what I have studied has nothing to do with public administration (Appendix, [99]).

Intentions and plans for re-emigration: The results of the quantitative study show that the highest share among the individuals with attitudes to leave temporarily or for good belong to persons with secondary vocational and higher education (Zareva, 2018b, p. 113). Qualitative research shows that the intentions of highly educated returnees for re-migration vary significantly and depend on many factors of personal and professional nature, such as the possibility of professional realisation, family, living conditions, etc. Good professional realisation and good living conditions of the family can be considered as serious restraining factors:

I have not thought of going abroad again. My family has positioned itself in a not very big city, we are satisfied with the environment, with the social services we receive, and most of all with our child's education, and I am personally satisfied with my work (Appendix, [87]).

On the other hand, highly educated returnees from lower age groups, and especially those who have not yet started a family, do not rule out the possibility of emigrating again:

Yes, I intend to leave to study and work abroad. Nothing permanent, though. I just intend to move ... not to linger too long in one place (Appendix, [62]).

For this category, the main factor is the availability of work:

[Whether I will emigrate again] Depends on the job opportunities... (Appendix, [62]).

The role of return policies: The issue of the impact of policies and specific measures for the return of highly educated migrants is part of the more general question on the availability and effectiveness of the return policies. Data from both quantitative and qualitative research show that such policies and measures, even if they exist, are not

effective. They are not known to returnees and hence have in no way influenced their decision to return (Bakalova, Misheva, 2018, p. 97). To the question “Can you indicate any specific measures of the Bulgarian state that have influenced your decision to return?”, 90% of the respondents in the survey answer “I can’t point out”. This picture is also confirmed by the answers in the in-depth interviews. The answers to the questions “Are you aware of policies, measures and initiatives – national or regional, supporting returnees? Did they have any influence on your adaptation after your return?” are mostly negative. Particularly indicative is the presence of negative answers to these questions by the highly educated returnees, who are presumably more interested and more acquainted and looking for this type of information. Not only is the need for return policies explicitly noted, but also the issue of the awareness and familiarity of relevant target groups, as well as the differentiation of measures according to the different categories of remigrants are specifically addressed:

Weaknesses of the policies – I don’t know if they exist at all, i.e. the society is not sufficiently informed about such policies. I have no idea how they inform the people who are potential clients of such policies, i.e. people living abroad... whether they are sufficiently segmented and sufficiently well-targeted... whether there are specific tools or it is just talk about this. These are things that can be thought about and worked on. However, the bottom-line should not be the creation of a Facebook page or some antediluvian site of this Agency [for Bulgarians abroad]. You can’t be attractive to someone working on a construction site or picking strawberries abroad (although those people are also important to you because our economy is low-tech and there is a shortage of qualified staff in low-tech activities), and at the same time be attractive to someone who speaks several languages and has qualification and education. Such people should also return so they can initiate the elevation to the next level, so that those who are below can uplift to a higher category (Appendix, [65]).

This long quote, on the one hand, is a collective expression of frustration among the highly educated returnees due to the lack of adequate policies of the Bulgarian state, but it is also indicative of their commitment to the issue.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the data from the quantitative and qualitative research, conducted in 2017 under the “Returning Migrants: Segmentation and Stratification of Economic Mobility” Project, shows that the education factor is not central to the return to Bulgaria. When present in migration projects, education as a factor has different manifestations and significance both in emigration and re-migration. The return of highly educated migrants back to Bulgaria is rather an exception to the overall picture of return, especially when it comes to migrants educated abroad. In other words, outgoing migration for education tends to “stay out” and does not return. Such findings run counter to the findings of other studies, according to which migrants with higher qualification are more likely to return than the less qualified ones (Aydemir, Robinson, 2008, quoted in Gittins, Fink, 2015).

The return of highly educated migrants to Bulgaria and especially those educated abroad is due to various reasons and factors. Along with personal and family reasons for return, the rational dichotomy of “push” from the country of immigration (impossibility to find a job

there) and “pull” to the homeland (availability of work in Bulgaria) stands out. The specificity, however, is that, within the set of highly educated (including those educated abroad), the “push” and “pull” factors act differently depending on the field and the specifics of the educational background. The data draw a picture which shows that for graduates in certain fields of academic studies (technical, engineering, IT), the opportunities are greater and finding a job is not a problem neither there, nor here. Such educated migrants can afford to return, driven by personal, family and social motives, but with the clear knowledge that finding a job in Bulgaria would not be a problem for them.

In other areas of education, however, the picture is different. When it comes to education abroad in the field of social sciences, humanities, or law, it is the difficulties in finding a job *there* (abroad) that lead to return to Bulgaria (although personal and family motives cannot be ruled out either). In these cases, the analyses of data from 2017 survey in Bulgaria refutes the conclusions of other studies that the education acquired in the receiving country improves the outlook for subsequent socialisation in the home country (Pungas, et al., 2012). When such Bulgarians educated abroad cannot find an adequate professional realisation for their education in Bulgaria, they remain open and look for new opportunities for outgoing migration. Therefore, it can be concluded that higher or good education does not in itself lead to more successful migration or re-migration. Moreover, professional realisation and finding a job are to a much greater extent determined by the field of educational background, and not so much by the educational and scientific degree.

The study shows that, unlike other CEE and SEE countries (Kovács, et al., 2013), Bulgaria has not developed an effective policy, that returnees are aware of and which stimulates the return of highly educated and qualified migrants. The findings also indicate that the development of policies for “brain gain” should be focused and consistent with the educational profile of the highly educated migrants.

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APPENDIX

List of interviews from which quotations are used in the text⁵

- [1] – male, 28, short-term leave for Canada in 2009, higher education in Bulgaria upon return;
- [3] – female, 56, higher education in Bulgaria, finance and accounting, short-term leave for New Zealand;
- [6] – female, 25, seasonal work in the UK in 2013, BA degree in “Social work” upon return to Bulgaria;
- [12] – female, 27, seasonal work in Cyprus, BA degree upon return to Bulgaria;
- [17] – female, 24, twice in Germany for short-time work, studies in a BA program in Bulgaria;
- [21] – male, 27; 1.5 years in England for education, 5 months in Belgium for internship;
- [48] – male, 40, higher education in Bulgaria (engineering), 3 years unqualified work in Germany;
- [51] – male, 27, BA and MA in Bulgaria (engineer – Automation, information and control equipment), considerable work experience abroad (in Italy and Kazakhstan);
- [55] – female, 26, BA in Bulgaria, works for 9 months in the UK (qualified works that matches her educational background);
- [62] – female, 36, BA in Bulgaria, 12 months in Canada for MA studies, then 9 months in Canada as project researcher;
- [63] – male, 30, over 10 years of educational experience abroad (BA, MA and PhD studies in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK);
- [65] – male, 35, BA and MA studies in Germany; 2 years qualified work in Belgium;
- [74] – male, 39, BA in Bulgaria (IT and programming); 3 years qualified work in Spain;
- [75] – male, 24; 12 months studies in Programming in the UK; 12 months work as a program designer in the Netherlands;
- [78] – male, 24; 5 years in Scotland, completed degree studies in Computer Science and Informatics;
- [80] – female, 31, higher education in Bulgaria, 6 months qualified work in Germany;
- [87] – male, 38; 10 years for degree studies in Turkey;
- [91] – female, 63, MA in Pedagogy from a Bulgarian university, 3 years in Greece and 1 year in England for unqualified work;
- [99] – female, 29; 6 years in the Netherlands for degree studies in International Law;
- [100] – male, 31; 10 years in the Netherlands (degree studies in Computer Programming and qualified work);
- [101] – female, 28; 8 years in the Netherlands (degree studies in Law and qualified work).

⁵ In square brackets is the sequence number of the respective in-depth interview in the whole set of interviews, followed by respondent's gender, age (at the time of the interview), level of education, country of education, receiving country and type of work.