

**ON-THE-MOVE – "The reality of free movement for young European citizens  
migrating in times of crisis"**

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**National Report**

Bulgaria



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## Summary

This national report, prepared by the Center for the Study of Democracy, based in Sofia, Bulgaria, aims to highlight the situation in the country and identify the prevailing trends in the movement of young people, the main challenges they are faced with, drivers, barriers, perceptions and other factors that affect their right to free movement.

The first part presents the situation of young people in Bulgaria, their movement patterns and trends, including main destinations, according to statistics, the profile of moving youth from and to Bulgaria and some ways in which young people react to current challenges and the economic crisis.

The second part analyses Bulgarian legislation implementing EU Parliament and Council Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States (hereafter 'the Free Movement Directive' or 'the Directive') and discusses other pieces of legislation relevant to the exercise of the right to free movement.

The third part presents the views and perceptions of young people who wish/plan to move from Bulgaria, as well as those who moved to other EU Member States and then returned. Drivers and barriers to exercising the right to free movement are discussed, relevant practices that promote or hinder that right are outlined and a number of suggestions are given as to how to facilitate free movement via more information and better work of relevant stakeholders. This part also presents the viewpoints of authorities interviewed as part of the empirical research: representatives of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, of the State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad and of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The views of two NGOs, working directly, respectively, with the Bulgarian community in London and with young Bulgarians moving abroad and returning to the country, are presented within the views of young people, as they give important insight about certain phenomena they talk about.

In the last part, devoted to analysis and recommendations, the views of young people are summarized and recommendations on improving the right to free movement are outlined.

## Part A: Situation of young people and migration patterns

### 1. Current situation and challenges for young people

Although Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007 significantly influenced migration flows and increased the country's attractiveness as a destination for living and working among EU citizens, it still falls into the category of being primarily a sending country rather than one receiving immigrants.

Leading Bulgarian migration specialists argue that migration was the first and most visible expression of freedom that post-communist citizens experienced, a process that opened the floodgates of the massive migration of Bulgarians to foreign countries.<sup>1</sup> According to Prof Anna Krasteva, the current structure of Bulgarian migration consists of five different types of migrants – the first and second concern the mobility of the two main minorities in the country, the Roma and the Turks, and the third one, seen as 'the worst example of forced migration in peaceful times', is modern-day-slavery in the form of human trafficking. The final two types of migrating Bulgarians are represented by the two contrasting forms of labour migration typical for the country, namely the so-called 'brain drain', which is the migration of highly-skilled and qualified individuals, and the low-skilled migration, which is also known as '3D – difficult, dirty, dangerous'.<sup>2</sup> High-skilled and low-skilled migration, as well as minority migration, are the prevailing types of migration at present.

A recent analysis by UNICEF Bulgaria on social entrepreneurship as an effective means of overcoming the lack of opportunities and social exclusion of vulnerable children and youth indicates that 23 per cent of vulnerable young people in Bulgaria between the age of 15 and 24 are neither employed, nor enrolled in any kind of educational institution.<sup>3</sup> The socio-demographic profile of those individuals shows that 63 per cent of them reside in small towns and villages in economically underdeveloped regions in Bulgaria and more than half of them (51 per cent) belong to one of the two main ethnic minorities in Bulgaria (the Roma minority and the Turkish minority).<sup>4</sup> However, UNICEF experts note that there is a rising tendency for

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<sup>1</sup> Krasteva, A., 'Bulgarian Migration Profile' (2013), available at: <https://annakrasteva.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/bulgarian-migration-profile/>

<sup>2</sup> Krasteva, A., 'Bulgarian Migration Profile' (2013), available at: <https://annakrasteva.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/bulgarian-migration-profile/>

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF Sofia, „Социалното предприемачество като възможност за обезкуражените млади хора? Анализ на средата за развитие на социално предприемачество в подкрепа на млади хора, които не учат, не работят и не се обучават в областите Шумен, Сливен, Монтана“ (2016), [‘Social Entrepreneurship as a Way of Empowering Young People? Analysis of the environment for developing social entrepreneurship on the territory of Shumen, Sliven and Montana in support of young people who do not work or study’], p 3, available at: [http://www.unicef.bg/assets/PDFs/2016/BCNL\\_Analysis\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.unicef.bg/assets/PDFs/2016/BCNL_Analysis_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Sofia, „Социалното предприемачество като възможност за обезкуражените млади хора? Анализ на средата за развитие на социално предприемачество в подкрепа на млади хора, които не учат, не работят и не се обучават в областите Шумен, Сливен, Монтана“ (2016), [‘Social Entrepreneurship as a Way of Empowering Young People? Analysis of the environment for developing social entrepreneurship on the territory of Shumen, Sliven and Montana in support of young people who do not work or study’], p 3, available at: [http://www.unicef.bg/assets/PDFs/2016/BCNL\\_Analysis\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.unicef.bg/assets/PDFs/2016/BCNL_Analysis_FINAL.pdf)

ethnic Bulgarians to be included in this group. Moreover, these vulnerable youths are also the ones forming a substantial part of the low-skilled migration as a result of a variety of factors contributing to the lack of social inclusion, failure of the educational system to meet their specific needs and resulting lack of economic opportunities to pursue a better life.

Roma migration is described as the most visible and widely publicised form of minority migration from Bulgaria in several EU countries, especially in France and Italy.<sup>5</sup>

Low-skilled migration of Bulgarians can take two forms – permanent and seasonal or temporary, with the latter being an increasingly attractive option in the last few years. Most of the Bulgarian migrants falling into this category are offered less paid, less secure and less attractive jobs, mainly in the field of construction, care chain, restaurant and hotel sectors.<sup>6</sup>

Another study conducted by the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council on the attitudes of migration among young secondary-school graduates indicates about 20 per cent migration potential among students finishing their secondary education with intentions to attempt to settle abroad within the next 2-3 years.<sup>7</sup> Intended countries of settlement are, above all, the UK, Germany and the US.<sup>8</sup> There is also a tendency among young university graduates from Bulgarian universities to move to other EU countries in pursuit of better-paid and more prestigious employment opportunities. This is primarily the group forming the high-skilled migration.

In the short-term, labour migration may lessen the pressure on the labour market and the unemployment level. Yet, as a recent economic development report points out, instead of experiencing the positive effect of low skilled migration raising its qualifications in the receiving countries and coming back home, Bulgaria rather exports individuals who, especially in their first years abroad, work on positions lower than their educational and skill level, yet better paid than in Bulgaria, and thus lose their qualifications and competitiveness on the market.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Krasteva, A., 'Bulgarian Migration Profile' (2013), available at: <https://annakrasteva.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/bulgarian-migration-profile/>

<sup>6</sup> Krasteva, A., 'Bulgarian Migration Profile' (2013), available at: <https://annakrasteva.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/bulgarian-migration-profile/>

<sup>7</sup> Economic and Social Council, Republic of Bulgaria (2015): Анализ на миграционните нагласи на завършващите средно образование младежи в България [Analysis of Migration Attitudes of Young People in Bulgaria Completing their Secondary Education], Sofia: Economic and Social Council, Republic of Bulgaria, p 6, available at: [www.esc.bg/bg/documents/category/3?download=272](http://www.esc.bg/bg/documents/category/3?download=272),

<sup>8</sup> Economic and Social Council, Republic of Bulgaria (2015): Анализ на миграционните нагласи на завършващите средно образование младежи в България [Analysis of Migration Attitudes of Young People in Bulgaria Completing their Secondary Education], Sofia: Economic and Social Council, Republic of Bulgaria, p 21, available at: [www.esc.bg/bg/documents/category/3?download=272](http://www.esc.bg/bg/documents/category/3?download=272),

<sup>9</sup> Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2016) "Икономическо развитие и политика в България: оценки и очаквания. Тема на фокус: Аграрният сектор като фактор за икономическото развитие на България" [Economic development and policy in Bulgaria: assessments and expectations. Focus topic: the land sector as factor for the economic development of Bulgaria], Sofia: Economic Research Institute, <http://www.iki.bas.bg/godishen-doklad-2016>, p. 114-115

Regarding immigrants in Bulgaria, two main types could be identified, excluding the dynamic group of asylum seekers. The first one is that of a self-employed person or one involved in a small family-owned business. The two major areas of employment for people falling in this group are the restaurant business and trade and both are mainly occupied by immigrants from China and the Middle East. A common characteristic is that the majority of them work for companies and businesses owned by other immigrants and not those owned by Bulgarians. The second immigrant profile in Bulgaria comprises investors, experts, managers, and consultants, primarily involved in the implementation of direct foreign investment.<sup>10</sup> This group is mainly filled with EU citizens. However, judging from the latest data by the National Statistical Institute, out of the 1,435 EU citizens who migrated to Bulgaria in 2015, only 210 were in the age group 25 – 34, while most of the other adults were older, showing that Bulgaria is not yet a country attracting many young EU citizens for purposes other than tourism.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Migration patterns and trends for young people

The number of Bulgarians migrating to other countries each year considerably exceeds that of the immigrants choosing to come and settle down in Bulgaria. In 2015, Bulgaria sent abroad 24,487 Bulgarian citizens and 4,983 non-Bulgarian citizens, out of whom 676 were EU citizens and 4,307 were non-EU citizens.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the country received only 10,722 Bulgarian citizens and 14,501 non-Bulgarian citizens, out of whom 1,435 were EU citizens and 13,066 were non-EU citizens.<sup>13</sup> According to the census of 2011, 8,444 EU

<sup>10</sup> 'Satisfying Labour Demand through Migration in Bulgaria, 2004 – 2009' (2011), p 5, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria\\_national\\_report\\_satisfying\\_labour\\_demand\\_through\\_migration\\_final\\_version\\_28january\\_2011.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria_national_report_satisfying_labour_demand_through_migration_final_version_28january_2011.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> National Institute of Statistics (2016) Външна миграция по възраст и гражданство на мигриралите лица през 2015 г. [Outward migration by age and citizenship of migrating persons in 2015], Sofia: National Institute of Statistics, available at: <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/13036/%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%BD%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D0%BE-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%B8-%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0>

<sup>12</sup> National Institute of Statistics (2016) Външна миграция по възраст и гражданство на мигриралите лица през 2015 г. [Outward migration by age and citizenship of migrating persons in 2015], Sofia: National Institute of Statistics, available at: <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/13036/%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%BD%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D0%BE-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%B8-%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0>

<sup>13</sup> National Institute of Statistics (2016) Външна миграция по възраст и гражданство на мигриралите лица през 2015 г. [Outward migration by age and citizenship of migrating persons in 2015], Sofia: National Institute of Statistics, available at: <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/13036/%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%BD%D1%88%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D0%BE-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%B7%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%B8-%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B6%D0%B4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B0>

citizens were living in Bulgaria, with the leading countries of origin being the United Kingdom, Greece and Poland.<sup>14</sup> According to data by Bulgarian diplomatic representations collected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and cited by Bulgarian migrant media, the four EU Member States receiving most Bulgarians as of 2011 were Greece with around 300,000 Bulgarians, Spain with around 250,000 Bulgarians and UK and Italy with around 100,000 Bulgarians each.<sup>15</sup>

According to official statistics, as of 31 December 2015, the total population of Bulgaria was 7,153,784 people.<sup>16</sup> In the second quarter of 2016, there were 265,600 unemployed persons residing in the country, which breaks down to an unemployment coefficient of 8 per cent.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, however, the National Institute of Statistics reports a higher youth unemployment coefficient of 10.9 per cent among persons of 15-29 years of age.<sup>18</sup> And the Employment Agency published a statistics pointing out that, as of 31 July 2016, there were 31,812 unemployed persons of up to 29 years of age.<sup>19</sup> The overall high unemployment rate and the even higher youth unemployment rate are among the main drivers motivating young Bulgarian nationals to migrate.

### 3. The ways young people are reacting to these challenges and to the economic crisis

Many studies on the topic have noted that, being a new migration country, the issue of Bulgaria's migration policy entered the high-priority governance

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[http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FullOpen/P\\_22\\_2011\\_T1\\_KN6.pdf](http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FullOpen/P_22_2011_T1_KN6.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> National Institute of Statistics (2012) Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 година том 1 Население, книга 2 Демографски и социални характеристики [Population and housing census of 2011, volume 1 Population, book 2 Demographic and social characteristics], Sofia: National Institute of Statistics, available at: [http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FullOpen/P\\_22\\_2011\\_T1\\_KN6.pdf](http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FullOpen/P_22_2011_T1_KN6.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Eurochicago.com (2012) Брой на българските граждани в чужбина (2011 г.) [Number of Bulgarian citizens abroad (2011)], available at: <http://www.eurochicago.com/2012/04/v-tchuzhbina/>

<sup>16</sup> National Institute of Statistics (2016) Население към 31.12.2015 г. по области, общини, местоживеене и пол [Population as of 31 Dec 2015 by regions, municipalities, residence and sex], Sofia: National Institute of Statistics, available at: <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/2975/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D0%BE-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB>

<sup>17</sup> National Institute of Statistics (2016) Основни резултати от наблюдението на работната сила през второто тримесечие на 2016 година [Main results from monitoring workforce in the second quarter of 2016], Sofia: National Institute of Statistics, available at: [http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/LFS2016q2\\_M9FWN2T.pdf](http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/LFS2016q2_M9FWN2T.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> National Institute of Statistics (2016) Основни резултати от наблюдението на работната сила през второто тримесечие на 2016 година [Main results from monitoring workforce in the second quarter of 2016], Sofia: National Institute of Statistics, available at: [http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/LFS2016q2\\_M9FWN2T.pdf](http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/LFS2016q2_M9FWN2T.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Employment Agency (2016) Месечна статистическа информация за регистрирани безработни младежи в бюрата по труда, юли 2016 г. [Monthly statistical information on registered unemployed youth in the labour bureaus, July 2016], Sofia: Employment Agency, available at: <https://www.az.government.bg/bg/stats/view/1/189/>



agenda rather late. For a long period of time, for example, there was a major lack of access to reliable up-to-date information and comparable annual statistics on migration.<sup>20</sup> Studies of 2011 note no established practice of evaluating the labour market with regards to immigrants in Bulgaria.<sup>21</sup> As a result, there is a lack of sufficient data on the situation of young EU citizens residing and working in Bulgaria, the challenges they experience and the ways they are reacting to them.

Nevertheless, a 2011 report by the European Commission, in cooperation with TNS Qual+, on the obstacles EU citizens face in the internal market collected a number of opinions of EU nationals from various states on the positive aspects of living and working in Bulgaria as well as on the real and perceived problems with the exercise of their right to free movement.<sup>22</sup> Among the key challenges EU citizens think they would face in Bulgaria, or have personally experienced, are the language barrier, concerns about safety and security, difficulties finding employment both for themselves and for members of their families, cultural differences and encountering difficulties in making friends and creating social links, recognition of professional qualifications (especially when it comes to recognising degrees obtained in another Member State in order to enrol for an advanced one at a Bulgarian university) and finding an appropriate school for their children.<sup>23</sup>

As for Bulgarians exercising their right to free movement within the EU, they report a number of positive factors such as the increased competition of other EU countries' markets and the greater access to goods and services of a higher quality, better standard of living, finding a job being relatively easy if one is well-qualified, etc.<sup>24</sup> Among the challenges encountered abroad, Bulgarian nationals consistently mention the language barrier, the non-recognition of diplomas and other educational qualifications, not being able to find a job relevant to their qualifications or being paid less than locals and the attitude of many destination countries towards foreign workers, in

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<sup>20</sup> 'Satisfying Labour Demand through Migration in Bulgaria, 2004 – 2009' (2011), p 9, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria\\_national\\_report\\_satisfying\\_labour\\_demand\\_through\\_migration\\_final\\_version\\_28january\\_2011.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria_national_report_satisfying_labour_demand_through_migration_final_version_28january_2011.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> 'Satisfying Labour Demand through Migration in Bulgaria, 2004 – 2009' (2011), p 7, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria\\_national\\_report\\_satisfying\\_labour\\_demand\\_through\\_migration\\_final\\_version\\_28january\\_2011.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria_national_report_satisfying_labour_demand_through_migration_final_version_28january_2011.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Eurobarometer Qualitative Studies, conducted by by TNS Qual+ at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market and Services and co-ordinated by Directorate-General for Communication, "Research and Speechwriting" Unit, [Obstacles Citizens Face in the Internal Market], September 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/quali/ql\\_obstacles\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/ql_obstacles_en.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Eurobarometer Qualitative Studies, conducted by by TNS Qual+ at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market and Services and co-ordinated by Directorate-General for Communication, "Research and Speechwriting" Unit, [Obstacles Citizens Face in the Internal Market], September 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/quali/ql\\_obstacles\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/ql_obstacles_en.pdf), pp 67 – 68

<sup>24</sup> Eurobarometer Qualitative Studies, conducted by by TNS Qual+ at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market and Services and co-ordinated by Directorate-General for Communication, "Research and Speechwriting" Unit, [Obstacles Citizens Face in the Internal Market], September 2011, pp 51, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/quali/ql\\_obstacles\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/ql_obstacles_en.pdf)

particular Bulgarians and Romanians.<sup>25</sup> The findings on the experiences of young Bulgarians planning to exercise or having exercised their right to free movement, elaborated upon below, confirm this short overview to a large extent.

#### 4. Interim findings

As a result of the massive outflow of both low-skilled and high-skilled citizens to other EU Member States (and the United States), shown by the statistics and analyses, cited above, Bulgaria experiences both the effects of the so called 'brain drain' – the flow of young highly skilled individuals abroad and a general shortage of workforce with increasingly negative effects on the economy. Besides decreasing the country's population, Bulgarians moving out of the country also contribute to exhausting the country's labour resources.<sup>26</sup> Diminishing labour resources would increasingly limit the country's economic growth and the shortage of labour force would reach 250-400 thousand people until 2030.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, as pointed out above, Bulgarians working abroad on positions lower than their education and skills level, bringing them more money than in Bulgaria, are not seen as developing human capital.<sup>28</sup> Professional continuity in the families and the attitudes towards professional development and training are also negatively affected.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, much is written about the money transfers movers make from abroad, mainly from Spain, Italy and Greece,<sup>30</sup> as a substantial monetary factor, reaching 1,3 billion Euro in 2015.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Eurobarometer Qualitative Studies, conducted by TNS Qual+ at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Internal Market and Services and co-ordinated by Directorate-General for Communication, "Research and Speechwriting" Unit, [Obstacles Citizens Face in the Internal Market], September 2011, pp 71 – 73, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/quali/ql\\_obstacles\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/ql_obstacles_en.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2016) "Икономическо развитие и политика в България: оценки и очаквания. Тема на фокус: Аграрният сектор като фактор за икономическото развитие на България" [Economic development and policy in Bulgaria: assessments and expectations. Focus topic: the land sector as factor for the economic development of Bulgaria], Sofia: Economic Research Institute, <http://www.iki.bas.bg/godishen-doklad-2016>, p. 112

<sup>27</sup> Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2016) "Икономическо развитие и политика в България: оценки и очаквания. Тема на фокус: Аграрният сектор като фактор за икономическото развитие на България" [Economic development and policy in Bulgaria: assessments and expectations. Focus topic: the land sector as factor for the economic development of Bulgaria], Sofia: Economic Research Institute, <http://www.iki.bas.bg/godishen-doklad-2016>, p. 113

<sup>28</sup> Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2016) "Икономическо развитие и политика в България: оценки и очаквания. Тема на фокус: Аграрният сектор като фактор за икономическото развитие на България" [Economic development and policy in Bulgaria: assessments and expectations. Focus topic: the land sector as factor for the economic development of Bulgaria], Sofia: Economic Research Institute, <http://www.iki.bas.bg/godishen-doklad-2016>, p. 114-115

<sup>29</sup> Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2016) "Икономическо развитие и политика в България: оценки и очаквания. Тема на фокус: Аграрният сектор като фактор за икономическото развитие на България" [Economic development and policy in Bulgaria: assessments and expectations. Focus topic: the land sector as factor for the economic development of Bulgaria], Sofia: Economic Research Institute, <http://www.iki.bas.bg/godishen-doklad-2016>, p. 117

<sup>30</sup> Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2016) "Икономическо развитие и политика в България: оценки и очаквания. Тема на фокус: Аграрният сектор като фактор за икономическото развитие на България" [Economic development and policy in Bulgaria: assessments and

## Part B: Policies and legislation

### 1. Legislation implementing the Directive - Law on the Entry, Residence and Departure of EU Citizens and Members of their Family

Bulgaria is one of the Member States that implemented the Free Movement Directive in one single legislative act – through the adoption of the Law on the Entry, Residence and Departure of EU Citizens and Members of their Family (hereafter 'LERD') which came into force in 2007.<sup>32</sup>

The Law regulates the conditions and order for EU citizens and their family members to enter, reside and leave the Republic of Bulgaria. It stipulates that EU citizens and their family members, who are not EU citizens, have all the rights and obligations under Bulgarian laws and applicable international treaties, excluding those for which Bulgarian citizenship is needed (Art. 3).

The right to enter and leave the territory of Bulgaria is regulated by chapter two of the Law (Art. 4-5). Chapter three of the Law (Art. 6-21) regulates the types and terms of residence for EU citizens – continuous, over 3 months and up to 5 years, and permanent – as well as the conditions to obtain and retain such residence. Chapter four of the Law (Art. 22-30) regulates the limitations of the right of entry and residence, which are imposed only by exception and for reasons, related to national security, public order and public health.

In terms of scholarly debate, a number of provisions in the Directive are deemed less than correctly or not fully transposed, which has caused either a too restrictive or too broad interpretation of some of its articles, thus creating legal uncertainty in comparison to the situation in other Member States, and which also resulted in numerous additions and amendments that LERD has been subjected to since its adoption.<sup>33</sup>

More notable amendments, directed towards fuller and more transposition of the EU act, include that of par. 1, item 1 of the Additional Provisions of LERD which was made in March 2012 and which transposes Article 2 (2) of the Free Movement Directive. It included not only ascendants and descendants of the husband or wife of a EU citizen in the definition of 'family member' but also

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expectations. Focus topic: the land sector as factor for the economic development of Bulgaria], Sofia: Economic Research Institute, <http://www.iki.bas.bg/godishen-doklad-2016>, p. 121

<sup>31</sup> Economic Research Institute, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2016) "Икономическо развитие и политика в България: оценки и очаквания. Тема на фокус: Аграрният сектор като фактор за икономическото развитие на България" [Economic development and policy in Bulgaria: assessments and expectations. Focus topic: the land sector as factor for the economic development of Bulgaria], Sofia: Economic Research Institute, <http://www.iki.bas.bg/godishen-doklad-2016>, p. 119

<sup>32</sup> Law on the Entry, Residence and Departure of EU citizens and Members of their Family, SG No 80 of 3 October 2006, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2006. In force as of 1 January 2007. Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135535758>

<sup>33</sup> Some of the latest amendments to LERD were adopted in October 2015 and concerned the keeping of right of continuous residence of the children or spouse of a EU citizen in case he/she has left or died, if the children are enrolled in schools or universities.

those of the partner of a EU citizen who were previously not covered by the Bulgarian law in clear contradiction with the Directive.<sup>34</sup>

Notably, probably due to the status of Bulgaria as mainly sending country, the hypothesis of Article 14 (4) (b) of the Free Movement Directive, where the Union citizens entered the territory of the host Member State in order to seek employment, has not been paid sufficient attention in Bulgarian legislation. Thus, the Directive's stipulation that, in this case, 'Union citizens and their family members may not be expelled for as long as they can provide evidence that they are continuing to seek employment and that they have a genuine chance of being engaged' has practically not been transposed in Bulgarian law. Therefore, this lack of a clear reference in LERD to a right of residence over 3 months of documented job-seekers results in such people having to comply with the conditions of Article 8 of the Law.<sup>35</sup> Unless job-seekers can meet those requirements, they will be subject to coercive action in accordance with the Bulgarian law.<sup>36</sup>

Although several national reports and studies by the EU over the past few years have noted many implementation problems in relation to sections of LERD, which were said to be out of line with the spirit of the Directive and create a barrier to the full enjoyment of the right to free movement,<sup>37</sup> Bulgaria has nevertheless made significant efforts to improve the transposition of the Directive and many inconsistencies have indeed been corrected. However, complete and successful transposition is yet to be achieved and a number of other problems with additional pieces of Bulgarian legislation bearing relevance to the right to free movement still persist.

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<sup>34</sup> Moreover, due to the dubious situation of factual partnership in Bulgarian legislation, the actual implementation of the respective provisions is also problematic. However, the amended provision seems to make the condition for qualifying as a family member broader than what is required by the Directive as it enlarges the scope of family members by omitting the word 'direct' when referring to both ascendants and descendants, which effectively includes grandparents and grandchildren in the scope of 'family members' who are not covered by Article 2 (2) of the Directive.<sup>34</sup> – see more in Dr Valeria Ilareva, Report on the Free Movement of Workers in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012-2013 (July 2013), p. 12, available at [http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def\\_bulgaria\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def_bulgaria_2013.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Article 8, Paragraph 1, Subparagraph 2 of LERD which states that in order for them to be able to continue living on the territory of Bulgaria they would have to have 'health insurance and the financial resources required for covering the expenses with regard to their residence and the members of their family, without being a burden to the social support system'.

<sup>36</sup> Dr Valeria Ilareva, Report on the Free Movement of Workers in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012-2013 (July 2013), p. 6, available at [http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def\\_bulgaria\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def_bulgaria_2013.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> European Parliament, Directorate General Internal Policies of the Union, 'Comparative Study on the Application of Directive 2004/38/EC of 29 April 2004 on the Right of Citizens of the Union and their Family Members to Move and Reside Freely Within the Territory of the Member States' (2009); Dr Valeria Ilareva, Report on the Free Movement of Workers in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012-2013 (July 2013), available at [http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def\\_bulgaria\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def_bulgaria_2013.pdf)

## 2. Other relevant legislation

### **Law on Higher Education**

The Law on Higher Education<sup>38</sup> contains several references, equating the regime of higher education of EU citizens with that of Bulgarians. Bachelor, master and PhD students from the EU enjoy the same regime of enrolment (Art. 68) and fee payment (Art. 95). They also enjoy state funded scholarship under the order, applicable to nationals (Art. 94 and Governmental Decree No .90 of 26 May 2000 on the conditions and the procedure for giving scholarships to students, PhD students and specialists from the state universities and scientific institutions).

### **Law on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility**

The main objective of the Law on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility<sup>39</sup> is to transpose the provisions on the free movement of workers within the European Union and the employment of third-country nationals which are contained in three recent EU Directives – Directive 2014/54/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 April 2014 on the measures to facilitate the exercise of the rights granted to workers in the context of freedom of movement of workers, Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions for entry and residence of third-country nationals for employment as seasonal workers and Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals within the intra-corporate transfer. It also came into force to codify the previously fragmented Bulgarian legislation in the area into one single legislative act and improve legal certainty for both EU nationals and nationals of third countries seeking employment in Bulgaria as well as Bulgarian nationals seeking employment abroad.

The initial provisions of the Law explicitly prohibit the application of any restrictions and privileges as well as direct or indirect discrimination towards non-Bulgarian persons seeking employment in Bulgaria.

A separate chapter of the law is dedicated to the equal treatment of non-Bulgarian workers – both EU citizens and TCNs. Article 49 (1) stipulates that non-Bulgarians who are exercising their right to free movement have the same set of rights as Bulgarian citizens with the only exception of positions specifically requiring Bulgarian citizenship.

Chapter Four of the Law regulates the free movement of workers within the EU. The provisions are in line with EU Regulation № 2011/492 on the Freedom

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<sup>38</sup> Law on Higher Education, SG No 115 of 27 December 1995, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2006. Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2133647361>

<sup>39</sup> Law on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility, SG No 33 of 26 April 2016; Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2016. Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/2136803084>

of Movement for Workers within the EU and Directive 2014/54/EU and transpose some of the norms contained in them, the aim being to provide sufficient safeguards for the protection of the rights of EU citizens working in Bulgaria as well as citizens of the European Economic Area and the Swiss Confederation, and members of their families. They can seek protection, if they have sustained damage as a result of unjustified limitations or hindrances to exercise their right to free movement or are affected by the failure to observe the principle of equal treatment towards them. The Law sets the legal grounds to second such citizens to Bulgaria and refers the exercise of regulated professions to the Law on Recognising Professional Qualifications. Such citizens may also use employment services.

An extra chapter on public authorities abroad dealing with labour issues and social security is added. In order to improve and promote the cooperation between the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and other countries' public authorities and institutions dealing with labour migration and labour mobility, the Law builds on the already existing regulations concerning the maintenance and development of a network of services for labour and social issues within various representations of the Republic of Bulgaria abroad.

### **Law on Social Assistance**

The Law on Social Assistance<sup>40</sup> can be seen as ambiguous with regards to the exercise of the right to free movement inasmuch as it makes no explicit reference to EU nationals as its potential beneficiaries. According to the list of persons eligible to receive social assistance in Article 2, Paragraphs 3 and 6 of the Law on Social Assistance, the right to social assistance is offered to Bulgarian citizens, foreign nationals with long-term or permanent residence in Bulgaria, refugees, asylum seekers as well as those persons for whom such assistance is prescribed in an international treaty to which Bulgaria is a party. It is thus not explicitly clear whether EU nationals qualify as 'foreigners with permanent residence' considering that Article 2 of the Law on Foreign Nationals in the Republic of Bulgaria defines 'foreign national' as a person who is not a Bulgarian citizen or a citizen of a EU member state, an EEA state or Switzerland, but nevertheless the Treaty on the Accession of Bulgaria to the European Union could be regarded as 'international treaty to which Bulgaria is a party'.<sup>41</sup> This is nevertheless considered a deficiency of the law, which can, for the time being, be remedied through correct interpretation.

### **Social Security Code**

The equal treatment in matters of social security has been ensured by the transposition of the Social Security Directive 79/7/EEC and other related acts into all Bulgarian legislation relating to social security, including the Social

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<sup>40</sup> Law on Social Assistance, promulgated in SG No 56 of 19 May 1998, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1998, available only in Bulgarian at <http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2134405633>

<sup>41</sup> See more in Dr Valeria Ilareva, Report on the Free Movement of Workers in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012-2013 (July 2013), p. 25, available at [http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def\\_bulgaria\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def_bulgaria_2013.pdf)



Security Code.<sup>42</sup> EU citizens and their family members residing in Bulgaria are entitled to the same social security rights and benefits as Bulgarian nationals under Art. 3, item 3 of the Code, containing the principle of equal treatment of all ensured persons.

### **Law on Health and Law on Health Insurance**

EU citizens and their family members enjoy the same rights with regards to health services as Bulgarian citizens. This is guaranteed by Article 2, item 1 of the Law on Health providing for equality in the use of health services.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, a non-discrimination clause with regards to the right of EU citizens and their family members to health insurance is included in Article 5, item 5 of the Law on Health Insurance.<sup>44</sup> Article 80b of this Law also provides for the issuing of a free European Health Insurance Card which can be used by Bulgarian citizens travelling abroad on a temporary basis or EU citizens coming to Bulgaria and which gives them equal access to state-provided medical services in accordance with the rules on co-ordination of social security systems.

### **Law on Recognising Professional Qualifications**

An important element of the right to free movement is the recognition of professional qualifications in order to exercise as employed or self-employed persons 'regulated professions', stipulated in the Bulgarian law under the same name.<sup>45</sup> It transposes in Bulgarian legislation Directive 2005/36/EC, recently amended by Directive 2013/55/EC. The Minister of Health is the body recognising medical professions, the Executive Director of the Bulgarian Agency for Food Safety recognises veterinarians, the chairs of chambers of architects and investment design engineers recognise the respective professions (Art. 4, par. 1). EU citizens having proof of professional qualifications, obtained in the EU, exercise regulated professions in accordance with Bulgarian laws and, upon recognition, under the same conditions as nationals (Art. 7, par. 1).

### **Law on Attorneys and Law on Notaries and Notarial Practice**

In 2010 and 2012, the Law on Attorneys<sup>46</sup> was gradually amended<sup>47</sup> in order to transpose Directive 98/5/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of

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<sup>42</sup> Social Security Code, SG No 110 of 17 December 1999, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1999. Available in Bulgarian at: <http://www.lex.bg/laws/ldoc/1597824512>

<sup>43</sup> Law on Health, SG No 70 of 10 August 2004, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2004. Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.lex.bg/laws/ldoc%20/2135489147>

<sup>44</sup> Law on Health Insurance, SG No 70 of 19 June 1998, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1998. Available at: <http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2134412800>

<sup>45</sup> Law on Recognising Professional Qualifications, SG No 13 of 8 February 2008, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2008, Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135579101>

<sup>46</sup> Law on Attorneys, SG No 55 of 25 June 2004, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2004. Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2135486731>

<sup>47</sup> State Gazette No. 53 of 13 July 2010

16 February 1998 to facilitate practice of the profession of lawyer on a permanent basis in a Member State other than that in which the qualification was obtained and respond to numerous criticisms by the European Commission and a pending infringement procedure for non-compliance with EU law. Currently, the Law contains a whole chapter on EU lawyers, regulating the exercise of the attorneys' profession by EU, EEA and Swiss citizens. When, under Bulgarian law, procedural representation is obligatorily done by an attorney, the EU attorney works together with a Bulgarian one. Temporary and permanent settlement of attorneys in Bulgaria is regulated, and permanently settled ones are entered into special registers. The procedure for becoming member of a local bar association is also stipulated.

The Law on Notaries and Notarial Practice<sup>48</sup> was amended in 2012 to include EU, EEA and Swiss citizens (Art. 8) and the way they can apply to become notaries (Art. 11).

### **Law on the Bulgarian Identity Documents**

A much debated issue with the implementation of EU legislation on free movement in Bulgaria has been the exit bans imposed on Bulgarian citizens and their conformity with EU law. Although in 2009 the Law on the Bulgarian Identity Documents<sup>49</sup> was amended to eliminate some grounds for enforcing exit bans that contradicted the relevant EU acts,<sup>50</sup> some unclear issues remained which have been an object of ruling by the Supreme Administrative Court in Bulgaria as well as by the Court of Justice of the European Union.<sup>51</sup>

Following a request by the Bulgarian Ombudsman, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria declared Article 75, Paragraphs 5 and 6 of the Law on the Bulgarian Identity Documents, concerning exit bans for non-payment of some public or private debts, as unconstitutional, stating that abolishing these provisions creates better conditions for the full and precise transposition of Article 27 of the Directive on the admissible grounds for limiting the free movement of EU citizens and their family members.<sup>52</sup> On 22 March 2011 the Supreme Administrative Court issued an Interpretative Judgment to the question as to whether the order for imposing a coercive measure under Article 75, Paragraph 6 of the Law on the Bulgarian Identity Documents is subject to repeal on the ground of contradiction to Directive 2004/38, to which it answered positively. The judgment made a comparative analysis between the Bulgarian national provision and the Directive as applicable to

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<sup>48</sup> Law on Notaries and Notarial Practice, SG No 104 of 6 December 1996, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1996, in force as of 7 January 1997, Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2133897733>

<sup>49</sup> Law on the Bulgarian Identity Documents, SG No 93 of 11 August 1998, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria. In force as of 1 April 1999. Available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2134424576>

<sup>50</sup> State Gazette No. 82 of 16 October 2009

<sup>51</sup> See more in Dr Valeria Ilareva, Report on the Free Movement of Workers in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012-2013 (July 2013), p. 10

<sup>52</sup> Judgment of 31 March 2011 in constitutional case No. 2 of 2011, Sofia: Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2011, available only in Bulgarian at <http://constcourt.bg/constcourt/ShowContent.aspx?ContentID=566>



Bulgarian citizens, stating that an individual approach should be taken in each case and the principle of proportionality should be applied.<sup>53</sup> Ultimately, in November 2011 the Court of Justice of the European Union issued a judgment in the *Byankov* case stating that 'EU law must be interpreted as precluding the application of a national provision which provides for the imposition of a restriction on the freedom of movement, within the European Union, of a national of a Member State, solely on the ground that he owes a legal person governed by private law a debt which exceeds a statutory threshold and is unsecured' and in case there is a breach of the EU law, the exit ban in question should be re-examined although it is non-contestable under national law.<sup>54</sup>

## Elections Code

The Bulgarian Constitution sets the nationality requirement for some highest positions in the public sector which remains reserved to Bulgarian nationals only – Members of Parliament, President, members of Council of Ministers.<sup>55</sup> Although there is no constitutional requirement for Bulgarian nationality when applying for the offices of mayors and members of municipal councils, the repealed Law on Municipal Elections stated that only a Bulgarian national could be elected as a mayor, while EU citizens could only be elected as municipal councilors. The current Elections Code of 2014<sup>56</sup> keeps this stance and gives EU citizens, under certain conditions, the right to elect mayors and municipal councilors, but to be elected only as municipal councilors (Art. 396-397). EU citizens may also elect and be elected as EU MPs (Art. 350-351).

### 3. Competent authorities

The main government institutions that have competence for free movement and youth issues on the territory of Bulgaria are the [Ministry of Labour and Social Policy](#), the [Ministry of Youth and Sports](#), the [Ministry of Interior](#), the

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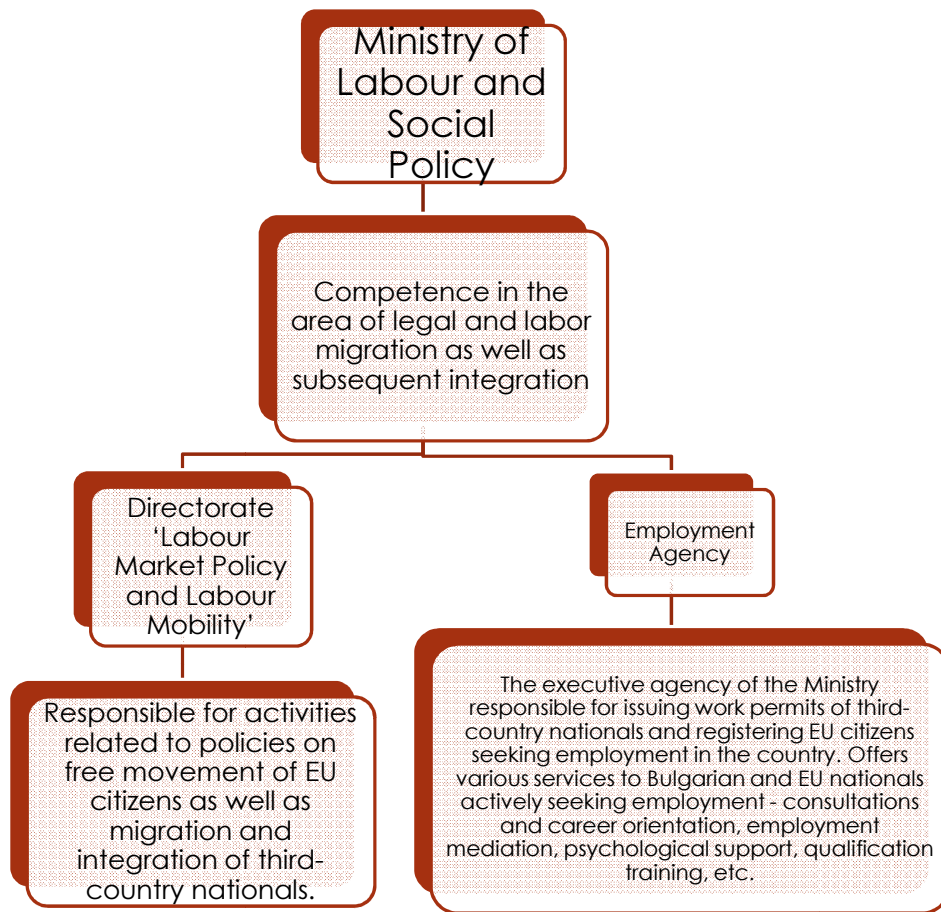
<sup>53</sup> Interpretative Decision N 2 of 22 March 2001, Sofia: Supreme Administrative Court of the Republic of Bulgaria, available only in Bulgarian at: [www.sac.government.bg/home.nsf/vPagesLookup/2011-interpretations-bq/\\$FILE/%D0%A2%D0%AA%D0%9B%D0%9A%D0%A3%D0%92%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%95%D0%9B%D0%9D%D0%9E%20%D0%A0%D0%95%D0%A8%D0%95%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%95%20%E2%84%96%2022.03.2011%20%D0%B3.doc](http://www.sac.government.bg/home.nsf/vPagesLookup/2011-interpretations-bq/$FILE/%D0%A2%D0%AA%D0%9B%D0%9A%D0%A3%D0%92%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%95%D0%9B%D0%9D%D0%9E%20%D0%A0%D0%95%D0%A8%D0%95%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%95%20%E2%84%96%2022.03.2011%20%D0%B3.doc); see analysis at: Dr Valeria Ilareva, Report on the Free Movement of Workers in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012-2013 (July 2013), p 10, available at [http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def\\_bulgaria\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def_bulgaria_2013.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> *Byankov* Case C-249/11, available at <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=128008&pageIndex=0&doclang=en&ode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=253702>

<sup>55</sup> Art. 65(1), Art. 93(2), Art. 110 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, promulgated SG No 56 of 13 July 1991, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1991, available in Bulgarian at: <http://www.lex.bg/bg/laws/ldoc/521957377>. The nationality requirement for some other posts, as those regulated in the Law on the Ministry of Interior, in the Law on the Judiciary and some of those in the Law on Administration is considered questionable as to its conformity with Article 45 (4) of the TFEU - Dr Valeria Ilareva, Report on the Free Movement of Workers in the Republic of Bulgaria in 2012-2013 (July 2013), p. 3, available at [http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def\\_bulgaria\\_2013.pdf](http://www.ru.nl/publish/pages/608499/def_bulgaria_2013.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Elections Code, promulgated in SG No 19 of 5 March 2014, Sofia: National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, 2014, in force as of 5 March 2014, available only in Bulgarian at <http://www.lex.bg/laws/ldoc/2136112596>

[Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), the [Economic and Social Council](#) and the [State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad](#).



## Ministry of Interior

Competence in the area of free movement and migration through the **Migration Directorate** - a specialised unit responsible for the administrative control of the residence of EU and foreign nationals in Bulgaria, as well as for the issuance, rejection/denial and deprivation of residence permits

28 Migration Regional Units - empowered to issue certificates for continuous and permanent residence of EU citizens and third-country nationals on the local level.

## Ministry of Youth and Sports

Supervising and regulating state policies and activities in the field of youth, sports and social tourism. The Youth Policies Directorate is responsible for the planning and implementation of the national youth policy and coordination with other government institutions

## Economic and Social Council

Acting as a 'bridge' between citizens and the state, its main function is to facilitate the relationship between government and society by communicating agreed statements and proposals submitted by its members to the executive and legislative authorities, adopting opinions, resolutions and analyses and organisation of public consultations on key economic, social, education, demographic, health or other issues

## State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad

Participates in the development and improvement of various laws and regulations on cultural integration, education and residence concerning Bulgarians living abroad. The agency collects and analyses information and raises awareness of problems on educational matters to the competent institutions - the Council of Ministers, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Education, Youth and Sports. It also creates a regulatory framework to facilitate the admission, monitoring, economic and social protection of Bulgarian emigrants returning home.

#### 4. Policies/programmes addressed at young people – migration and youth

##### Migration policies

Bulgarian migration policy has been characterised as having two major features: firstly, 'late entrance among governance priorities' and, secondly, 'a rapid increase of the process of developing strategic programmes' which occurred soon after the EU accession.<sup>57</sup> One of the first more recent government strategies for migration and integration was adopted in 2008.<sup>58</sup>

In 2011, the Council of Ministers adopted a new strategy for the period 2011 – 2020 in view of the country's having 'an effective integration policy aiming to successfully integrate the foreigners residing legally in the country by granting to them equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities'.<sup>59</sup> Through implementing the strategy, government's expectation was the return home of Bulgarian migrants who left the country in the past 20 years and the permanent establishment on Bulgarian territory of individuals of Bulgarian origin living outside Bulgaria.<sup>60</sup>

The government strategy 2011 – 2020 emphasised that Bulgarian integration policy should be supported by setting up and strengthening structures and instruments for information exchange and coordination with actors having competence in areas crucial to migration, such as employment, education and social integration. Moreover, the genuine and effective co-operation of all actors on the migration scene has been described as an essential way of ensuring the aims of the document: more efficient management of the processes of economic migration and integration and a necessary condition for making migration and mobility positive factors of economic and demographic development.<sup>61</sup>

Further to this, the government revised its National Strategy on Migration and Integration (2011 – 2020) and adopted a new one for the period 2015 –

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<sup>57</sup> 'Satisfying Labour Demand through Migration in Bulgaria, 2004 – 2009' (2011), p 4, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria\\_national\\_report\\_satisfying\\_labour\\_demand\\_throug\\_migration\\_final\\_version\\_28january\\_2011.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/labour-demand/03.bulgaria_national_report_satisfying_labour_demand_throug_migration_final_version_28january_2011.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Migration and Integration 2008-2015', available at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=462>

<sup>59</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011 – 2020)', available in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=670> and in English at: <https://www.mvr.bg/NR/ronlyres/EBCD864F-8E57-4ED9-9DE6-B31A0F0CE692/0/NationalStrategyintheFieldofMigrationAsylumandIntgrationENG.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011 – 2020)', available in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=670> and in English at: <https://www.mvr.bg/NR/ronlyres/EBCD864F-8E57-4ED9-9DE6-B31A0F0CE692/0/NationalStrategyintheFieldofMigrationAsylumandIntgrationENG.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011 – 2020)', available in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=670> and in English at: <https://www.mvr.bg/NR/ronlyres/EBCD864F-8E57-4ED9-9DE6-B31A0F0CE692/0/NationalStrategyintheFieldofMigrationAsylumandIntgrationENG.pdf>

2020.<sup>62</sup> The new strategy focuses on the need to strengthen the existing national policies in order to effectively manage national migration policies and synchronise them with the European Union Immigration Policy.<sup>63</sup> Similar to the previous strategy 2011 – 2020, it again aims to improve administrative capacity and create a policy framework for building a sustainable legal and institutional basis for the successful management of legal migration and integration of foreign nationals residing in Bulgaria. Yet, in response to the current migration crisis in Europe, it also strongly highlights the need to prevent and combat illegal migration and to provide adequate care for all people who seek or have already received international protection status, thus setting security, external EU border protection, counteraction of illegal migration and trafficking, and the fair and transparent application procedures for international protection as its top priority areas.<sup>64</sup> On national, as well as on EU level, it could be expected that the ongoing migration crisis could forestall efforts towards managing youth migration and decreasing 'brain drain' on a long-term basis.

As part of the efforts of the Bulgarian Ministry on Labour and Social Policy to improve the level of information of Bulgarians seeking employment abroad or foreigners wishing to migrate to Bulgaria, a network of Labour and Social Affairs Offices was established in 2006 in the Bulgarian embassies of several Member States and other European countries.<sup>65</sup> At present, Labour and Social Affairs Offices of the Ministry exist in Vienna, Bern, Athens, Nicosia, London, Dublin, Madrid and Berlin.<sup>66</sup> These offices are headed by 'labour attachés' whose responsibilities revolve around contributing to the successful implementation of the overall Bulgarian policy in the field of free movement of workers and the related coordination of the social security systems in the EU, as well as handling various other labour migration issues and protecting of the interests of Bulgarian citizens in the respective country. The mandate of each Labour and Social Affairs Office also covers EU nationals who would like to live and work in Bulgaria and need advice.<sup>67</sup>

In July 2014, the Council of Ministers also adopted a National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens and Bulgarian Communities Abroad.<sup>68</sup> The strategy creates

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<sup>62</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015 – 2020)', available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>

<sup>63</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015 – 2020)', p 5, available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>

<sup>64</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015 – 2020)', p 5, available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>

<sup>65</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Bulgaria [Labour and Social Affairs Offices], available only in Bulgarian: <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/index.php?section=POLICIES&lang=&l=266>

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of Bulgaria [Labour and Social Affairs Offices], available only in Bulgarian: <http://www.mlsp.government.bg/index.php?section=POLICIES&lang=&l=266>

<sup>67</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011 – 2020)', available in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=670> and in English at: <https://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/EBCD864F-8E57-4ED9-9DE6-B31A0F0CE692/0/NationalStrategyinthefieldofMigrationAsylumandIntegrationENG.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, [National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens and Bulgarian Communities Abroad (2014)], available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=938>

a framework for the establishment of a long-term integrated state policy for Bulgarian citizens living temporarily or on a permanent basis in EU and other countries, as well as for historic Bulgarian communities currently residing on the territory of the Russian Federation, Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, Greece and Turkey. Through a number of developed strategy mechanisms and policies, the government expects to achieve its strategic objectives of integrating and including these groups of people in the state and in the socio-political life in Bulgaria, developing and preserving the Bulgarian ethno-cultural space abroad, improving the migration balance in the country, establishing and maintaining a Bulgarian lobby abroad and promoting the positive image of Bulgaria abroad.<sup>69</sup>

### Youth policies

Between September 2009 and January 2010, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science organised a survey on the Draft National Youth Strategy formulated by them which involved 1418 young people from 61 different places of residence.<sup>70</sup> Following the results of the survey as well as abiding to the principles of the EU Youth Strategy 2010 – 2018, the official National Strategy on Youth was adopted by the Council of Ministers in Bulgaria.<sup>71</sup> The main purpose of Strategy 2010 – 2020 was to achieve the objectives and to implement the policy measures for young people set by the European Union. This means that, through its youth strategy, Bulgaria pledged to improve the opportunities for developing the knowledge and skills, mobility, employment and social inclusion of young Europeans between the age of 15 and 29. It was oriented 'towards building and implementing a unified, consistent and sustainable youth policy in Bulgaria, based on multi-sectoral approach, inter-sectoral collaboration and joint management with young people at national, regional, provincial, municipal level.'<sup>72</sup> The first action plan for the implementation of the National Youth Strategy (2010 – 2020) was developed in 2011 and subsequent action plans were adopted by the Council of Ministers for each following year.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, [National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens and Bulgarian Communities Abroad (2014)], available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&id=938>

<sup>70</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Youth Strategy (2010 – 2020)', available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&id=641> and Youth Partnership [Partnership Between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth], 'Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Bulgaria', p 9, available at: [http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668139/Country\\_sheets\\_information\\_Bulgaria\\_2012.pdf/5bf65c86-ef0f-4a9d-88c3-f700ac05f48c](http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668139/Country_sheets_information_Bulgaria_2012.pdf/5bf65c86-ef0f-4a9d-88c3-f700ac05f48c)

<sup>71</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Youth Strategy (2010 – 2020)', available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&id=641> and Youth Partnership [Partnership Between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth], 'Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Bulgaria', p 12, available at: [http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668139/Country\\_sheets\\_information\\_Bulgaria\\_2012.pdf/5bf65c86-ef0f-4a9d-88c3-f700ac05f48c](http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668139/Country_sheets_information_Bulgaria_2012.pdf/5bf65c86-ef0f-4a9d-88c3-f700ac05f48c)

<sup>72</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Youth Strategy (2010 – 2020)', available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&id=641>

<sup>73</sup> Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, 'National Youth Strategy (2010 – 2020)', available only in Bulgarian at: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&id=641> and Youth



In early 2016, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, based on the 2010 – 2020 Strategy, adopted the National Youth Programme 2016 – 2020, reiterating the Strategy's assessment of the needs of young people in the country.<sup>74</sup> The 2016 – 2020 strategic goals re-emphasise those of the Strategy – facilitating the access to information and quality services in support of young individuals' personal and social development, the promotion of economic activity and career development of young people, promoting healthy lifestyle, preventing social exclusion of young disadvantaged people, development of youth volunteering as a driving force for personal development, mobility, learning, competitiveness, social cohesion, solidarity between generations and the formation of citizenship, and supporting the development of young people in small towns and rural areas.<sup>75</sup> The Programme updates some of the priority areas in response to the reported new trends and changes with the situation of young people in Bulgaria.<sup>76</sup> It plans to continue supporting the work of the Youth Information and Counseling Centers, managed by local NGOs and operating on a project-basis, with each project lasting up to 24 months.<sup>77</sup> They provide free access to quality services, educational trainings and consultations to young citizens.<sup>78</sup>

Several employers' associations have also been active in promoting the goals of both the previous and current National Youth Strategies through developing and implementing a number of projects aimed at reducing youth unemployment and encouraging young citizens to remain in Bulgaria. Examples of current such projects by the Bulgarian Industrial Association include 'Quality Workforce – Stable Labour Market',<sup>79</sup> whose goal is providing quality training and education to young individuals in order to improve their employment chances, as well as 'Play4Guidance: A European Business Game to Train and Guide Students and Unemployed on Entrepreneurial, Transversal and Mathematical Skills'.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association is working on a programme aimed at integration of the unemployed population (in particular those belonging to vulnerable and

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Partnership [Partnership Between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the Field of Youth], 'Country Sheet on Youth Policy in Bulgaria', p 9, available at: [http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668139/Country\\_sheets\\_information\\_Bulgaria\\_2012.pdf/5bf65c86-ef0f-4a9d-88c3-f700ac05f48c](http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668139/Country_sheets_information_Bulgaria_2012.pdf/5bf65c86-ef0f-4a9d-88c3-f700ac05f48c)

<sup>74</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Bulgaria [National Youth Programme (2016 – 2020), p 1], available only in Bulgarian at: [http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Programs/2016/PM\(16\\_20\)/NPM\\_2016-2020.pdf](http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Programs/2016/PM(16_20)/NPM_2016-2020.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Bulgaria [National Youth Programme (2016 – 2020), p 3], available only in Bulgarian at: [http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Programs/2016/PM\(16\\_20\)/NPM\\_2016-2020.pdf](http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Programs/2016/PM(16_20)/NPM_2016-2020.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Bulgaria [National Youth Programme (2016 – 2020), pp 1-2], available only in Bulgarian at: [http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Programs/2016/PM\(16\\_20\)/NPM\\_2016-2020.pdf](http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Programs/2016/PM(16_20)/NPM_2016-2020.pdf)

<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sports [Draft Annex to the National Youth Strategy 2016 -2020, p 1], available only in Bulgarian at: [http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Projects/Proekt%20na%20NPM/Prilojenie\\_1-DRAFT.pdf](http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Projects/Proekt%20na%20NPM/Prilojenie_1-DRAFT.pdf)

<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Youth and Sports [Draft Annex to the National Youth Strategy 2016 -2020, p 1], available only in Bulgarian at: [http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Projects/Proekt%20na%20NPM/Prilojenie\\_1-DRAFT.pdf](http://mpes.government.bg/Documents/Projects/Proekt%20na%20NPM/Prilojenie_1-DRAFT.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> Bulgarian Industrial Association [Projects – Current Projects – Quality Workforce – Stable Labour Market], available at: <http://en.bia-bg.com/project/view/new/21808/>

<sup>80</sup> Bulgarian Industrial Association [Projects – Current Projects – Play4Guidance: A European Business Game to Train and Guide Students and Unemployed on Entrepreneurial, Transversal and Mathematical Skills], available at: <http://en.bia-bg.com/project/view/new/21138/>



marginalised groups) into the Bulgarian labour market by providing educational and vocational trainings and temporary employment opportunities in 17 regions in the country which have high unemployment rates.<sup>81</sup>

## 5. Interim findings

With Bulgaria being a newer EU Member State (as of 1 January 2007) and, with regard to free movement of EU citizens, mainly a sending country, legislative, and policy, attention to the situation of such citizens in Bulgaria is markedly scarce. Equal rights of EU citizens to those of Bulgarian nationals, unless a nationality requirement is in place, are universally proclaimed. However, regulation, including on the situation of young people, is fairly general, most probably due to the low number of EU nationals in Bulgaria and lack of representativeness of their experiences to point to legislative lacunae. For the same reason, problems pointed to are mainly subject to scholarly and policy debate in relation to the transposition of relevant EU acts.

At the same time, Bulgaria is relatively strongly affected by the recent migration crisis in the EU and the issues of free movement of Bulgarians and EU citizens throughout the Union remain outside the focus of current institutional attention. Policies and strategies on re-integrating Bulgarian communities abroad and providing young people good development opportunities do exist, but without profound institutional reforms and ongoing economic advancement they are remaining mainly on paper.

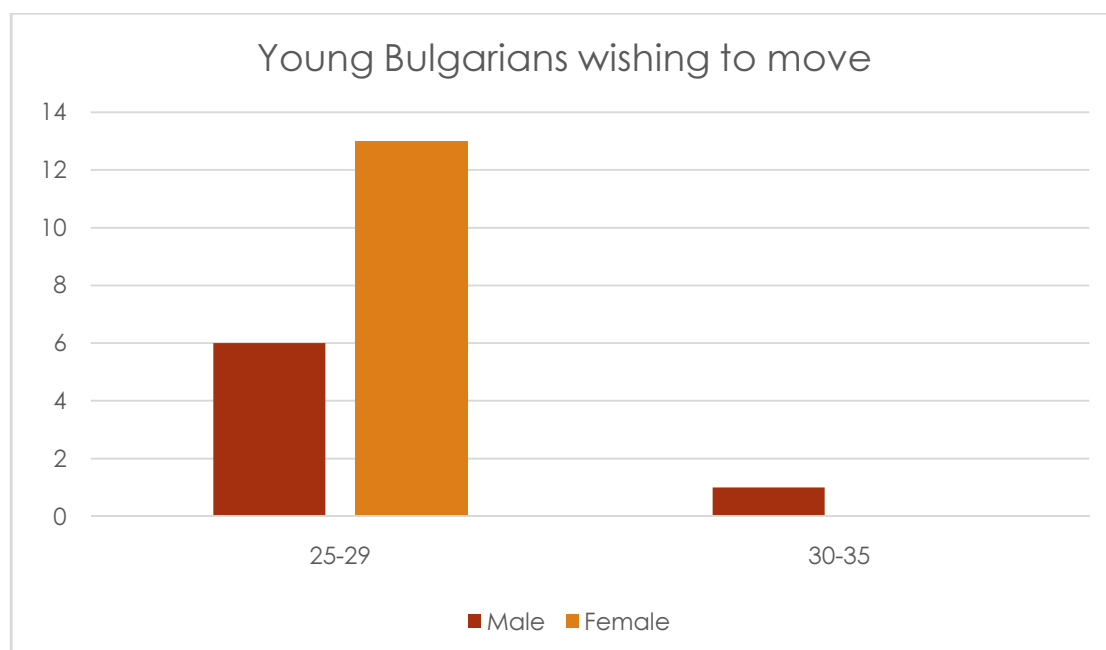
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<sup>81</sup> Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association [Useful Information on Projects and Programmes], available only in Bulgarian at: <http://bica-bg.org/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B8/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80/>

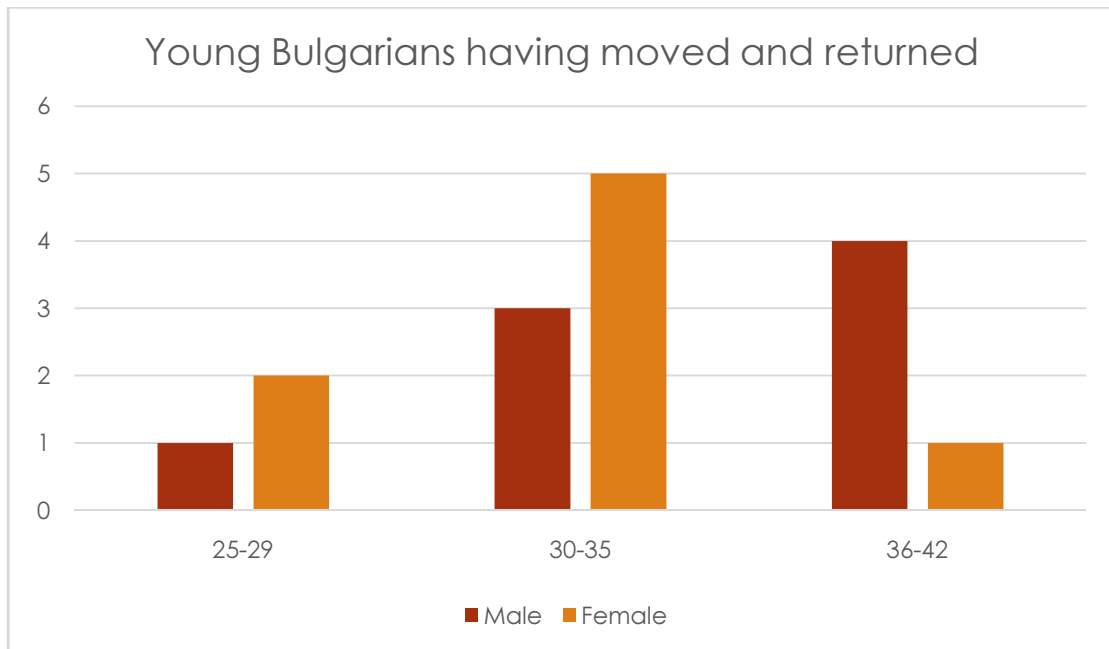
## Part C: Experiences of young people on free movement

### 1. Sample and method

The project team met with 20 young Bulgarians planning to exercise their right to free movement. The male to female ratio was, respectively, 7:13. All possessed university degrees and all, except for one, fell within the age range 25 – 29 which reflects the issue of “brain drain” noted in the desktop research often seen as the most dynamic migration pattern in Bulgaria since its accession to the EU.



Further, the project team met with 16 Bulgarians, having used their right to free movement and returned. The ratio between men and women was equal, 8:8, as well as, to a large extent, the ratio between the age range of 30-35 and 36-42 – 8:5. Due to the specifics of this target group, having used its right to free movement, only 3 people were in the age range of 25-29. All except for one possessed university degrees.



Most of the interviewees were recruited via personal and professional relations of the project team. For those wishing to move, 18 interviews were face-to-face, one was via telephone and one was via Skype. As for those having moved and returned, 13 interviews took place face to face, two were conducted via telephone and one via Skype.

For potential movers, the main difficulty experienced was identifying the degree of certainty to which young people wanted to move, since many of those with such firm desire had already executed their plans and were no longer in Bulgaria. For those having returned, the main difficulty were respondents' busy schedules.

The project team also met with 5 EU citizens, currently residing in Bulgaria – one female and four male; two French, two UK citizens and one Estonian; two in the age range 25-29 and three between 30 and 35 years of age. This fairly diverse, and unbalanced, sample can be explained by the fact that Bulgaria is a newer EU Member State, mainly a sending country and thus a destination, where EU citizens end up mostly by chance, or for personal reasons. Three interviews took place face-to-face and two were held via Skype.

## 2. Bulgarians planning to exercise their right to free movement

### 2.1. Previous experience and information about free movement

Bulgarians wishing/planning to move whom the project team interviewed exhibited various degrees and types of previous experience and corresponding information and views on free movement.

Nine of the respondents had no previous experience of living abroad, eight had resided in another EU Member State for longer than a year and three

had a limited experience of exercising their right to free movement – living abroad for a period of one to five months as part of a short internship or an Erasmus programme.

Six out of the eight respondents who had lived abroad before for a longer period of time had obtained their university degrees in foreign institutions and only two of them said they wish to move to the same country in which they had studied, namely England. The rest preferred to move to a different EU country with two of them, who had resided in England, pointing to the hostile attitude towards foreigners and the Anti-Bulgarian and Anti-Romanian campaign carried out by the British government in 2013 as the main reason for their decision, while the other two indicating the more cost-effective education and the better employment opportunities in Austria and France as opposed to England and Italy, accordingly. One of the two respondents who had lived abroad without studying in a foreign university moved for the purpose of doing a 5-month internship while the other was on one-year high-school exchange. Both of them were planning to move back to the same countries.

Eleven of the interviewees were relatively certain about their plans to move and had a specific destination country in mind, while the rest expressed more of an intention or a desire to move within the next few years and had two or three countries they were considering. Only one respondent did not mention a particular country, saying that he could live “anywhere but here” (BG31, male, 32 years, BG national).

The most popular destination countries among the respondents were Germany and the UK – nine were planning to move to Germany and seven to the UK (including those who were considering several EU Member States but indicated either the UK or Germany as their preferred option). It is worth noting, however, that all the interviews took place before the UK Brexit Referendum. Given the fact that a number of the respondents planning to move to the UK mentioned they were slightly worried about the anti-Bulgarian sentiment on the island, it is possible that the vote of the British people to leave the European Union and the subsequent uncertainty as to the status of EU citizens residing there might have an impact on their final decision.

Among the other mentioned countries were Austria, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Finland and Denmark (with the last three being referred to as one single destination, “some Scandinavian country”, by three of the respondents without indicating an exact preference).

## 2.2. Drivers

The answers given by the respondents as to the type of motivation and drivers they had for wanting to move to another EU country varied depending as much on their personal circumstances, ambitions and career goals as on their previous experience of living and working abroad or lack thereof.

The trend observed throughout the interviews was that those who had no experience of free movement whatsoever were largely driven by a desire to escape from the reality in Bulgaria, motivating their choice by describing an array of **problems they were facing on a daily basis in their home country (push-factors)** and the belief that moving abroad would eliminate a significant number of them. They seemed to have a more idealistic vision of what 'abroad' is like and to mention fewer external negative factors and problems they expected to face (apart from the initial language barrier and the process of adaptation which was a common concern amongst interviewees from both groups):

*"The thing is, even if I don't necessarily find the job that I want to do right away and even if I'm not working in the field I want to make a career in, I know I can do any kind of work there and I will be paid much better so I will also feel much better than I do here."* ( BG24, female, 27 years, BG national)

In comparison, those with some experience of living in a foreign country before and those who had spent a longer period of time abroad justified their choice by focusing on one or more **aspects of living in their selected destination country which they were attracted to (pull-factors)** as opposed to concentrating on the negatives of life in Bulgaria. They seemed to be moderately optimistic about their plans, acknowledging some of the advantages of residing in Bulgaria and discussing in more detail the 'external' difficulties they expect to face once they move abroad. Those are 'outside obstacles' related to finding accommodation, securing a job, life in a fast-paced environment, quality of life, possibility of facing discriminatory attitude, etc., not so much factors such as the language barrier or one's ability to integrate – which most interviewees described as largely dependent on themselves and their own approach:

*"I don't have a bad life here. I have an advantage being here – I live with my parents in our own flat and I basically pay no rent or bills. So I can afford to spend most of my money on other things... I really think that Sofia is a good place to live, you have many things to do here, you're close to the mountains, you're not far away from the seaside..."* ( BG33, female, 28 years, BG national)

*"I'm not 100% convinced that my quality of life will improve if I go there. But to be honest, I would never emigrate simply out of wanting to have a better quality of life... It will definitely be harder to find a place to specialise abroad than here. In Bulgaria you will always get a place in a hospital, yes, there is competition but if you have a list of three or four fields in medicine that you*

*have an interest in, you'll definitely secure a place in one of them. Whereas abroad, due to the language barrier or my lack of familiarity with their system, I think it would definitely be more difficult to find a place for specialisation..."*(BG41, male, 25 years, BG national)

Thus, while the pull-factors discussed below bear relevance to both the respondents with knowledge of 'life abroad' as well as those with little or no experience of free movement, the push-factors are more applicable to the latter.

### Push-factors

The susceptibility of both the public and private sectors to **corruption** was cited by six of the respondents as a major factor encouraging them to leave Bulgaria. Different views were expressed as to which the most problematic areas were, depending on the personal experience of each respondent. For instance, three of them referred to the political corruption in combination with the weak public institutions as their main reason for wanting to move with one of them, soon graduating from law school, pointing out that the slow pace of the judicial reform and his distrust in the functionality of the legal system in Bulgaria was his main motivation to move (BG40, male, 25 years, BG national). Another two, both final year medical students, cited widespread corruption at medical universities as yet another reason. The sixth respondent who brought up the issue of corruption, a fire-safety engineer (BG31, male, 32 years, BG national) explained that fire safety plans, developed by engineers for new construction projects and requiring substantial investments on the part of owners, were easy to scrape out by controlling authorities, if owners bribe them to avoid the investment, thus compromising public safety. Furthermore, he added that although Bulgaria has already embraced fire safety as part of its construction control policies and has harmonised its legislation with the EU legal framework, it is not complying with it. Thus, respondents seemed well aware of corruption dimensions in their (future) professional areas and displayed zero tolerance towards continuing to put up with them.

Another common theme in the interviews with the potential movers was the general **political instability** in Bulgaria, people's **lack of trust in government institutions** and the inefficiency and high levels of bureaucracy in the public sector.

As a reflection of a common debate on the psychology and attitude of Bulgarians, despite the opinion expressed by all of the interviewed foreign EU citizens living in Bulgaria who view Bulgarians as very positive, optimistic and welcoming people, a number of respondents planning to exercise their right to free movement talked about the overall **negativism of Bulgarians** stemming from their low standard of living and their dissatisfaction with the political and social environment, the lack of tolerance as well as the often hostile work environment.

*“The biggest obstacles here? Well, the way people live... not just me but everyone. You wake up in the morning, you go to work and you see how everyone is irritated or stressed out about something... most of the times this ‘something’ is the lack of money. I live well for now but I know I will be in the same situation in several years’ time when I decide to have children and the money will not be enough for me as well.”* (BG28, female, 25 years, BG national)

To sum up, the combination of corruption, dysfunctional government bodies, poor economic situation and prevailing negativity among people was the most frequently offered reason for the desire to move:

*“Everyone knows that the economic situation in Bulgaria is far from bright. There is a lot of corruption even at the highest levels... the mentality of people can also annoy me sometimes. The way everything is completely disorganised here, the huge bureaucracy and the fact that very few institutions are doing their job properly. These are perhaps some of the things I would like to get away from.”* (BG38, female, 25 years, BG national)

A curious observation was that only two of the twenty interviewees emphasised on the **high rates of unemployment** and the difficulty of young people to enter the labour market upon graduation as a factor. Both of them graduated with a degree which is ‘less typical’ and more difficult to apply, ‘Arts in Education’, and, in contrast to the rest of the respondents, did not speak any foreign language fluently which might explain their inability to find a well-paid permanent post and were instead forced to ‘jump’ from one seasonal job to another. The particular situation of those two respondents may be ground for further debate about the lacking practical orientation of Bulgarian higher education and the low labour skills some degrees give to those studying.

*“I have changed a lot of jobs since I graduated, most of them seasonal. What makes me want to leave Bulgaria is mainly the insecurity and the fear that you can get dismissed at any time.”* (BG24, female, 27 years, BG national)

*“After I graduated from university, I realised how important it is to know foreign languages in order to be able to find a good job related to your degree. For me, studying a foreign language in an environment where I don’t speak it on a daily basis is impossible. That’s why I decided that if go to work abroad for some time, it will be much easier for me to learn the language and catch up on everything that I’ve missed so far.”* (BG25, female, 27 years, BG national)

The usually **lower salaries** in Bulgaria were, perhaps again surprisingly, not among the primary motivations of the respondents to move with the exception of the two mentioned in the previous paragraph and another one who also worked as an electrical engineer and complained that although Bulgarian employers are starting to set “European requirements” for the quality and standard of work, “salaries remain Bulgarian” (BG39, male, 28 years, BG national).

All the other respondents seemed to accentuate the **lack of sufficient opportunities for professional development** in Bulgaria a lot more than delve on the money aspect. One way to explain this would be to mention that most of them admitted that they were completely aware of the fact that salaries abroad are higher but everything from food to accommodation to cost of transport is also much higher compared to Bulgaria:

*“The salary is not the definitive factor here. Yes, I am certain I would receive a higher salary there but I am also happy with my pay here – if it is enough for me taking into account how expensive the country is, then it’s perfectly fine for me even if it is not considered that high.”* ( BG27, male, 27 years, BG national)

With regards to the absence of sufficient opportunities for career growth, most respondents who expressed their concern about it were either those whose field is still new and not so popular and well-developed in Bulgaria (such as management consulting as pointed out by one interviewee), or those wishing to pursue a career in the non-profit sector:

*“As a sociology graduate involved in research and interested in working in the NGO sector, I think that England is a logical choice as London is one of the top destinations on the planet for this kind of work... I was going through a period of unemployment [in Bulgaria] a few years ago... and I can say that it’s definitely not easy here for all the people who wish to work something related to their qualifications. But the way I imagine things there [abroad] – when you graduate with a certain degree, it is expected of you to know how to do your job in this field... and I think such professionals in England are presented with a lot more opportunities to stand out in the crowd and show what they are capable of. And I think that I myself have a lot to offer.”* (BG32, male, 29 years, BG national)

### Pull-factors

The **higher salaries** were the most common factor motivating the would-be movers to leave Bulgaria. Due to Bulgaria’s generally lower income rate in comparison with other EU countries, all respondents, irrespective of their chosen destination country, were attracted by the thought of earning a much higher salary for the same, or at least similar, kind of work abroad.

*“I somehow don’t see a bright future for me in Bulgaria. When it comes to salary, people in a country like Germany or Austria receive five times the money I get here for doing the exact same work and having the exact same knowledge. I think this is rather unfair... I have even received job offers from big companies working in Bulgaria like, for example, Lufthansa, but I had to refuse because the money they were paying was laughable... In many such companies in Bulgaria, employers are trying to introduce the same work requirements, the same standards and the same work ethic like those in Western Europe. At the same time, however, the payment remains ‘Bulgarian’*



*and not 'European'. So I am working as a European but I am being paid like as a Bulgarian? I see it every day here – things are being done to benefit big companies and corporations, not the people working there or the ordinary citizen... This is what really drives me away from Bulgaria.”( BG39, male, 28 years, BG national)*

Having a **better quality of life and the higher standard of living** were the second most stated reason for leaving Bulgaria. However, it was observed that those with little or no experience of living abroad were convinced that their quality of life would improve significantly as a result of the higher salaries and higher standard of living.

*“I don't think that I will have a lower quality of life there. When you go to a grocery shop in Austria, you see that the prices there are basically the same like those in Bulgaria except that they are in euros. And the salaries there are much much higher so you realise that it might be expensive to be there as a tourist but not as a person who works there and receives a local salary.”( BG39, male, 28 years, BG national)*

However, as already mentioned in the previous section, those who had returned to Bulgaria after having spent some time in another country observed that they had no big expectations about their quality of life rising as prices abroad are also much higher and life is a lot busier and more stressful.

The existence of more opportunities for **professional development** was also a commonly cited reason for moving by the respondents. Many of them felt that they are not offered enough chance for career growth and development in their respective fields in Bulgaria.

*“There are a number of factors – it's just that the business is much more interesting abroad, there is a lot more investment, there are more projects I find interesting and that I can participate in if I am abroad. Of course the business sector is growing in Bulgaria as well, but it is not yet developed enough to make me want to stay and pursue my career here.”( BG34, female, 26 years, BG national)*

Moreover, while most of the interviewees referred to the higher salaries and better standard of living as a main factor and professional development as a secondary one, the two final-year medical students, probably due to the specificity of their chosen profession, pointed to career advancement as their primary motivation to seek employment abroad due to the state of the Bulgarian health care system:

*“If I go to specialise abroad, my expectations will be to see a much higher level of professionalism there and to learn a lot. I also expect to be able to continue working there even after my specialisation by being offered a good enough salary and good enough conditions to work in.”(BG41, male, 25 years, BG national)*

Similar to the case of the respondents who had already exercised their right to free movement, **education** proved to be a decisive factor when it comes

to potential movers as well. A number of them shared an intention to pursue some form of further education abroad in order to ensure they have better future employment prospects.

*"I won't leave with the idea of staying abroad forever. I won't just pack my stuff and leave without looking back... But it all depends on how things work out... I would also like to take advantage of the good-quality education abroad at some point... although I am applying for Master's degree programmes in Bulgaria at the moment, this doesn't exclude the possibility of education abroad... So I'm thinking of moving abroad and combining work and education."* (BG26, female, 26 years, BG national)

Another common theme among the respondents was **personal growth** and **sense of exploration** as yet another reasons for migrating. A number of other different and more personal pull-factors were highlighted throughout the interviews such as specific types of work fields and niches being greatly developed in a particular country (such as jobs in the field of management consulting, international trade law, jobs in NGOs, work in the field of EU law and politics) or the reliability of state institutions abroad, the specifics of the culture of the destination country and the more favourable climate. Better work morale, more rewarding atmosphere and better work conditions were cited as important factors by the two respondents who were final-year medical students.

### 2.3. Barriers

**Job competition** seemed to be the most common factor interviewees saw as an obstacle to moving to another EU Member State. Both the respondents with experience of living abroad and those with little or no such were anxious about the process of looking for and applying for jobs due to the bigger competition on the job markets in EU countries.

*"I think it is much easier to find a job in Bulgaria... the question, however, is what kind of job you will be willing to do. I was applying for job in England during the entire three weeks there and I did not receive any reply. At the same time, I got several calls from Bulgarian employers offering me jobs at the seaside just for the summer season."* (BG25, female, 27 years, BG national)

Some respondents mentioned they were worried that they might have to deal with **discrimination** when it comes to applying for jobs as a result of their nationality:

*"I think finding a job abroad is much more difficult than finding a job in Bulgaria. It is especially difficult when you are Bulgarian... I have talked with a lot of friends of mine living abroad and they tell me that it is simply too difficult sometimes for Westerners to accept you and treat you as an equal."* (BG28, female, 25 years, BG national)

Finding **accommodation** was another commonly cited barrier to the exercise of the right to free movement. Many expressed concern that the demand for accommodation abroad is too high which results in landlords both unreasonably inflating prices and being more selective as to who they choose as a tenant:

*"I have heard that finding accommodation in big European cities is extremely difficult – as difficult as looking for a job." ( BG35, female, 25 years, BG national)*

One respondent also mentioned the housing problem and the unsatisfactory quality of accommodation in the UK as an obstacle:

*"There is a huge housing problem both in London and Berlin. But when it comes to London, it is not so much because the city is big or because it is too expensive... the buildings themselves are horribly constructed... British people have still not discovered the double glazing... This never ceases to amaze me. How are they so advanced in so many aspects and yet lagging behind in so many others."( BG36, female, 25 years, BG national)*

**Cultural differences** and possibility of facing **discrimination** were among the other mentioned barriers to the right to free movement. However, there was difference of opinion with regards to this issue depending on the prior experience of the respondent or lack thereof. Most respondents who were planning to move for the first time in their lives were not worried about having to deal with racism, discrimination or any stark cultural differences:

*"I don't think there will be any stark cultural differences. After all, they are also Europeans, they are not Asians or Africans, and even if we come from Eastern Europe, I think we still share a lot of common beliefs and values."( BG40, male, 25 years, BG national)*

*"...Berlin is such a cosmopolitan city, for example, and hosts people from all around the world so I think those who live there are a bit more open and accepting towards foreigners. I don't really expect to face any discrimination there." (BG35, female, 25 years, BG national)*

On the other hand, those who have lived abroad before were more familiar with the stereotypes and cultural differences between ranging from one European country to another and predominantly mentioned that they would not be surprised if they came across discriminatory attitudes:

*"Austrians, just like Germans, are known not to be able to create and keep friendships very easily."( BG34, female, 26 years, BG national)*

*"I would not say I 'expect' to feel discriminated against or face negative attitude abroad. I don't expect it but I wouldn't be surprised if it happens."(BG41, male, 25 years, BG national)*

Among the other cited barriers were **administrative difficulties** and **language barrier**. Although the prevailing opinion was that foreign institutions are more organised, effective and do their work in a timely manner, a number of

respondents feared they might be faced with problems of a bureaucratic nature, such as the issuance of a national security number in the UK or registering as a permanent citizen at the Immigration Office of a respective foreign city.

#### 2.4. Practices and factors that promote or hinder the right to move freely

As the exercise of the right to free movement of those willing to move was only at the initial or advanced planning stage, they did not point to concrete practices that promote or hinder the exercise of that right. Nevertheless, two overwhelming factors were noticed beyond the push factors, related to the negatives of the reality at home, and the pull factors attracting Bulgarians to (Western) Europe for better pay and living standard.

The **language** played a huge role in the decision process of the interviewed people. Most of them chose their destination country based on the foreign language they speak. A few of them are planning to move to a country whose native language they do not speak but have a great desire to learn, thus partially justifying their choice of country with the eagerness to become fluent in a new language. One of the respondents even admitted her main motivation to move to England was get a better grasp of the language in its natural environment while working and saving money so that she could eventually return to Bulgaria and have better job prospects (BG25, female, 27 years, BG national). A few others based their choice of country on a number of factors unrelated to language (such as better job opportunities, higher salaries, sense of exploration) while not speaking the native language and perceiving this as a huge barrier. Nevertheless, they were determined to sign up for language courses and prepare themselves prior to leaving.

*"I am trying to develop myself constantly and I aim at reaching the highest step of the career ladder that I possibly can. But again, I don't speak German so I obviously don't expect to go there and be able to find the perfect job right away."* ( BG38, female, 25 years, BG national)

As for the other decisive factor beyond material and financial considerations, a number of interviewees said they would rather move in order to experience a **new culture**, broaden their horizons and immerse themselves in an unfamiliar, yet multicultural and multilingual environment rather than move abroad simply for earning more money.

*"My bare minimum is going there to expand my horizons, strengthen my CV and so on. I think to work there for some time will only be a plus... Even if I don't like it and I eventually decide to come back here, having this international experience on my CV will be a big advantage for me when looking for a good position in Bulgaria."* ( BG40, male, 25 years, BG national)

*"I love being challenged, I loved being in 'unfamiliar waters' ... simply meeting many new people and making new contacts, experiencing different things... I think it will take me quite a long time before I get bored living in a city abroad and before I start feeling nostalgic. And after all, Bulgaria is not that far away... just two and a half hours by flight."* (BG35, female, 25 years, BG national)

**Personal growth**, strong desire to feel as a **global citizen** and the opportunity to **expand one's horizons** by becoming acquainted with a new culture were also commonly stated reasons justifying the decisions of young Bulgarians to migrate to another EU State.

*"I am an urban person – I love huge cities, I love the diversity of people there... this is something that Sofia lacks... Another thing is the social environment. I have a lot of friends both in London and Berlin and I know that whichever one of these two I end up going to I know I will not feel alone or bored and I am sure that I will always have the support I need."*( BG36, female, 25 years, BG national)

*"I would consider moving to either Portugal or Spain as the climate there is really nice, the local languages are very euphonious and people are incredibly kind-hearted and approachable... expanding my horizons [...] is definitely the thing I am looking for when moving..."* (BG27, male, 27 years, BG national)

## 2.5. Suggestions

Respondents the project team met with were unanimous in advocating for **better and more structured information on the opportunities to exercise the right to free movement** in the form of offline or online information compendiums. Although they felt fairly informed about their options to exercise the right to free movement, information, especially official institutional data, was deemed scattered and difficult to collect and process. One respondent also mentioned lack of information, especially among marginalized groups, as factor for human trafficking.

For example, suggestions came out about agencies helping people planning to move to find employment while still in Bulgaria and assisting them with initial orientation, acquiring all necessary documents and advice on language courses. An online portal was also proposed where one could enter their professional qualifications and experience, choose an EU country and receive results on what kind of available opportunities there are in that country and what is involved in the process of applying. Mobile applications about job positions available throughout the Union were also mentioned.

Respondents also elaborated on more general factors for free movement like unified insurance systems and shared economy phenomena like Airbnb and Uber which often get obstructed by governments.

### 3. Bulgarians having moved and returned

It should be noted that, in contrast to Bulgarians intending to use their right to free movement, whose stories were fairly liable to summarizing and quantifiable in terms of push and pull factors, the experiences of young people having moved abroad and come back were a lot more diverse. Bulgaria's EU accession in 2007 was a strong dividing line, as well as the current anti-Bulgarian and anti-Romanian sentiments in the United Kingdom.<sup>82</sup> Skilled vs non-skilled workers also showed quite a different profile. Thus, the narrative below necessarily continues in a direction, a lot more influenced by the personal stories of the interviewees than by an attempt to measure their common and differing points into concrete pull and push factors.

#### 3.1. Previous experience and information about free movement

Bulgarians having used their right to free movement generally feel sufficiently informed about this right. Many pointed out **the Internet** as their main source of information, although the online world was considered lacking specific details (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national), about which another respondent admitted asking locals (BG15, female, 32 years, BG national). The Internet was also mentioned as an area, where authorities at least in some countries gave ample information (BG15, female, 32 years, BG national).

**Friends and acquaintances** – those who had already settled in the respective EU country, often from the same high school for those going to study – were also often cited as a source of information, especially in the times before the rapid development of the World Wide Web. The frequent mentioning of schoolmates, having settled abroad, also points to their role as an implicit motivating factor for respondents to use their right to free movement.

Interestingly, in the cases of France and Italy, the countries' **embassies and cultural institutes** were also mentioned as a major source of information. The two Member States' active cultural and educational presence in Bulgaria, and in respective language schools, can also be seen as a motivating factor for Bulgarians to choose to move specifically to them.

Bulgarians interviewed, especially moving at a young age, did not have a clear idea whether they want to settle in another EU country for good or rather gather experience and go back to Bulgaria. A number of them left their plans fluid:

*"In my case, moving abroad was never really for the purpose of long-term migration. Rather, it was dictated by a desire to get a university degree there and then move back to Bulgaria although this took more time than I thought."* (BG18, male, 35 years, BG national)

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<sup>82</sup> Interviews were taken before the Brexit referendum

*"I went with the plan to see, based on the time I spend, whether I want to stay... things were kind of undetermined... for a person of 22-23 years of age it is typical not to be able to take important decisions for a longer period of time ahead..."* (BG20, male, 40 years, BG national)

### 3.2. Drivers

#### The role of education

Although outside the strict scope of the initial research guidelines, education proves to be a decisive pull factor in Bulgarians' using their right to free movement. Respondents universally cite their **desire to obtain better education as a key motive to go abroad** and finding jobs and professional fulfilment only comes after obtaining some form of higher education.

*"My ambition to move abroad had to do with my environment, my educational background (French high school), my social environment (having a lot of friends who lived there), my desire for a better education..."* (BG13, female, 31 years, BG national)

One respondent started his foreign-based education already in high school, but the majority went to pursue university studies. Thus, a number of the jobs respondents held abroad in various EU Member States were temporary/part-time, in parallel with their studies.

An additional factor for staying abroad after completing university education in another EU Member State was the fear of respondents what they will do with their qualifications, i.e. **the perceived lower opportunities for qualified workforce in Bulgaria** and the need for personal connections in order to land at a good job.

*"I had absolutely no idea what options I had in Bulgaria... I didn't really know enough about the available opportunities in Bulgaria, what the labour market was and what I could do there with a qualification like mine... and it was just much easier for me to stay in Germany..."* (BG15, female, 32 years, BG national)

*"I had a degree in International Relations and I always thought I would work in an international environment... Moreover, I don't have any diplomats in my family to be able to say that I had a network of contacts in Bulgaria... I felt more like an outsider here but I considered the 'international system' to be open enough to accept people like me. Whereas here, most of my friends from university who had connections managed to start working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs... but I didn't have any connections..."* (BG10, female, 38 years, BG national)

Some respondents had pursued university studies in Bulgaria before they went to study in another EU country. In those cases, distinctly critical opinions were

given on home universities, thus making education a push factor for some as well. One respondent (BG6, female, 27 years, BG national) was speaking about students having to beg professors to deliver lectures, buy study books authored by professors to pass exams, etc. Another thought about higher education in Bulgaria as lacking practical orientation and giving students little practical experience (BG20, male, 40 years, BG national). Interestingly, however, no particular positive experiences were related, regarding foreign university studies – on the contrary, two respondents mentioned episodes of discriminatory attitude by university professors (see below). Despite this ostensible contradiction, most respondents nevertheless strived to obtain foreign education because they believed it gave them better professional prospects.

### Friends and family

Family ties played a varying push/pull role as a driver in respondents' decisions to move to another EU country. Family has been a factor in one respondent's decision, because she was unable to financially provide for it any more in Bulgaria (BG9, female, 34 years, BG national). Another cited her brother's connections and experience abroad as a beneficial factor in her dealings with landlords and institutions abroad (BG10, female, 38 years, BG national). A number of respondents, however, declared lack of family history of migration, so it can safely be supposed that for many Bulgarian families the period shortly before and after Bulgaria's EU accession was the moment of first attempt towards movement.

Friends and acquaintances who have already settled in the respective EU Member States were much more frequently cited as initial drivers and sources of support and thus a pull factor for settling in a number of countries. One respondent, who has closely worked with the overall Bulgarian community in the UK, clearly stated that new migrants usually get most support from their closest circle of friends (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national). Indeed, one respondent asked all her friends with jobs abroad what the best countries are and what to expect, before leaving (BG9, female, 34 years, BG national). Friends and classmates who already settled were a definite motive for another to go to the otherwise challenging city of Paris (BG13, female, 31 years, BG national), and friends again made a third respondent's return to the UK much smoother (BG16, male, 29 years, BG national).

*"My biggest issue, just like that of every other immigrant in England, was finding a job. there was very little information available and I didn't even know where to look for it. So I had to rely on friends who had lived there longer than me and had more experience."*( BG12, male, 37 years, BG national)

### Drivers to return to Bulgaria



Respondents' return to Bulgaria was provoked by a set of similar drivers, yet pulling them back to their home country. Respondents from a major Bulgarian organisation working with foreign-educated Bulgarians thought that people mainly return because of **the 'national' pull factor** –friends, family, culture, better balance between career and family life. Proactive people with entrepreneurial skills also find many market niches to develop. Some young people return to continue family businesses, while others return to care for sick parents/relatives.

Regarding **personal reasons**, parents' deteriorated health and the desire to get together with, or separate from, partners were cited among those motives. Children growing in Bulgaria were the leading motive of a couple having sought employment abroad at a lower qualified job (BG9, female, 34 years, BG national).

Apart from family ties, more than one respondent mentioned **homesickness**, while others presented **coming back as a challenge**. Again, more than one respondent was curious to see whether they would make a good living in Bulgaria, and another mentioned the greater impact one can have in their home country (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national). One respondent hoped that in Bulgaria he would find a much better job in a better respected area, despite a possibly lower salary (BG16, male, 29 years, BG national).

*"I thought if I don't come back now, I will always wonder if my life will not be better in Bulgaria. Plus, my heart was never really into what I was doing there, no matter what job I was having at the moment. As strange and emotional as it sounds, I always thought I could be doing the same things in Bulgaria and it would have a much greater impact here than it ever did there."*(BG11, female, 35 years, BG national)

A positive sense of global, pan-European development opportunities was sensed among more than one respondent. Apart from 'feeling better' in his home country, although without the typical home-sickness of movers, one respondent preferred to join one of the many German and Austrian companies stepping on the Bulgarian market, as in 2005-2006 it was already clear that Bulgaria would join the EU (BG20, male, 40 years, BG national).

*"In your own country no one sets limitations to your personal development and to what you can do with your life. As long as you want it, and you have enough determination and knowledge, you can become a minister or even a president, whereas the situation abroad is obviously not the same. There you can reach a certain level and that's it, there is simply no way you can go beyond it."*( BG18, male, 35 years, BG national)

On the negative side, **labour discrimination motives** were involved as a **push factor** for respondents to return to their home country. One respondent was disappointed at the way foreign university graduates in France were not given equal opportunities to enter the labour market. At some point, both he and his wife decided they felt humiliated continuing to struggle with finding a

job after having invested so much time, money and effort and started to consider moving back to Bulgaria and trying their luck here.

*"I left France with feelings of relief."* (BG21, male, 30 years, BG national)

### 3.3. Barriers

#### Settlement and integration – positives and negatives

In terms of initial, and further, settlement into their chosen EU Member State, finding **accommodation** was widely cited by respondents as probably the most upsetting barrier. In contrast to fairly succinct accounts of other obstacles, the issue of finding where to stay provoked on the part of respondents lengthy stories full of frustration over the usual hardships of finding accommodation in big Western capitals and criticism towards institutions' and landlords' (often discriminatory) attitudes. Accommodation in Brussels was seen as expensive, requiring substantial deposits and tying tenants for a long period of time (BG8, female, 29 years, BG national). Paris accommodation posed the often insurmountable requirement of finding a financial guarantor and the competition of up to 120 potential tenants per flat (BG13, female, 31 years, BG national). Finding where to stay in Milan took 2 months and 'two pairs of shoes' (BG18, male, 35 years, BG national). Discriminatory motives were seen in the hardships of finding a flat in London and in Paris as well as in Berlin.

*"The greatest challenge when looking for accommodation in France, if you are a student, is that landlords always require you to submit a copy of an employment contract showing that you work full-time there. At the same time, however, university students are not allowed to work more than 20 hours a week, or half-day..."* (BG13, female, 31 years, BG national)

**Relations with authorities** received somewhat contradictory assessments, much depending on the specific Member State respondents lived in. Positive opinions praised UK authorities' professionalism and the multitude of e-services for citizens (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national), Czech institutions' fair treatment in the case of the respondent's labour dispute (BG19, male, 41 years, BG national), as well as the information given and communication with German institutions (BG15, female, 32 years, BG national). Significantly, two respondents spoke of 'a process you can count on' and 'a framework that disciplines all', concerning, respectively, Germany (BG15, female, 32 years, BG national) and the UK (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national). On the other end of the spectrum, France was considered to have substantial bureaucracy, sending citizens back and forth with a pile of documents (BG21, male, 30 years, BG national) and Italian officials' qualifications were also subject of criticism (BG18, male, 35 years, BG national). The subject of institutional machinery inevitably provoked the inherent criticism of Bulgarians towards their home institutions, including those abroad. The Bulgarian

Embassy in London was mentioned as fairly ineffective and formalistic and Bulgarian institutions in general were considered slow and bureaucratic (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national). Improvement in the work of institutions, being, as outlined above, a substantial push factor for Bulgarians, was also among the main steps recommended to be taken to improve the life of citizens.

**The attitude of host communities** towards Bulgarians, having used their right to free movement, also received contradictory assessments, again depending on the specific Member State respondents lived in and their personal experience. Importantly, respondents consistently differentiated between the attitude of institutions and the attitude of people.

*"The fact that Brussels is such a cosmopolitan city made me feel like I could establish friendships easily... I didn't get to know that many local people but on the whole I felt good and I felt accepted in their society."* (BG8, female, 29 years, BG national)

In other words, discriminatory practices by institutions (landlords, employers) were not projected over the assessment of the attitude of society and, vice versa, discrimination on societal level did not mar the praise of the effective work of institutions. In addition, careful differentiation was made between the attitude of general population and the views of people, especially of higher educational level, presumably more open towards foreigners and less prone to discrimination.

As an example, one respondent clearly stated both the allegedly low qualification of Italian administration, the discrimination he faced in his working life and, on the contrary, the fact that he found some of his best friends among Italians of higher educational level, not holding prejudices against foreigners (BG18, male, 35 years, BG national). Another respondent also pointed out to occasional discrimination, many administrative barriers, but also a number of local friends he found in the UK (BG12, male, 37 years, BG national). On the other hand, there were those, who, despite respecting the attitude of institutions in the Czech Republic, found friends mainly among expats and found the local communities cold and reserved (BG19, male, 41 years, BG national). Germans were mentioned as difficult to make friends with, but also as direct and straightforward, contrasting to the 'politeness' of the British (BG15, female, 32 years, BG national).

On the contrary but still in a spirit of differentiation, people from lower paying jobs reported of good organisation of the work process, but (indirectly) discriminative attitude on the part of society who 'look at you with different eyes and don't consider you an equal' (BG9, female, 34 years, BG national).

Bulgarians living abroad, especially those having a higher language barrier, also encountered the phenomenon of 'closing in' their own national community. A respondent worked on a UK farm together with her spouse, but, due to the only basic English they spoke, they did not manage to socialize with locals and mainly communicated with Bulgarians and other Eastern

Europeans (BG9, female, 34 years, BG national). Others cited living among Bulgarians only as a first step in their adaptation and report a lot of foreign friendships later too. One respondent surrounded herself with Bulgarians to work towards strengthening the Bulgarian community in the UK (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national).

### Dimensions of discrimination

Bulgaria being one of the newest EU Member States and one of lower living standard, whose people are presumably poor and moving towards the West for economic reasons, respondents did report discrimination on many levels, especially in the period before the country's EU accession.

As mentioned above, discrimination was reported as 'early' in the life of respondents abroad, as **university**. One respondent tells about an Irish university professor, who consistently ignored hers and her Polish colleague's comments in class, but they raised the issue and remedial action was taken (BG17, female, 30 years, BG national). A professor in Spain also commented about foreigners better going home (BG6, female, 27 years, BG national). These reports from two EU Member States, seen as very different, combined with past experiences of project team members in a non-EU European country, may point to problems in the ethics frameworks of universities throughout Europe, which should be further explored in other research contexts.

Discriminatory motives were widely reported as part of the difficulties in **finding accommodation** in major European cities. One can see many motives behind such attitude – from suspicions that 'poor' Bulgarians will be bad tenants to fears to let them into natives' 'homes'. According to one respondent, among 50 candidates for a flat, Germans would not choose 'someone with a foreign name' just by instinct (BG15, female, 32 years, BG national). British landlords were also suspected of refusing to rent flats and houses to Bulgarians (BG14, male, 34 years, BG national), while allegedly a lot of landlords and agencies in Paris specified in their ads that they do not offer accommodation to foreigners (BG21, male, 30 years, BG national).

*"Finding accommodation in London is hard. It was hard 10 years ago but now it's even worse. I don't know why but London changed so much over a decade – it became incredibly, sometimes even impossibly, expensive. When they hear you come from Bulgaria, many landlords simply don't want to take you in as a tenant."* (BG14, male, 34 years, BG national)

Work discrimination was also elaborated upon. In Italy, for example, there were allegedly unwritten rules as to what labour each nation is suited to do. The respondent, a law graduate, also reported no reaction to his internship applications under his real name and a 'successful experiment' when he put a native colleague's name on his own CV.

*“As soon as I finished my law degree, I started sending out traineeship applications to law firms in Italy. I sent out more than 100 CVs and application forms but received zero calls – and we are speaking about an unpaid internship here, not even about an actual job. I was really frustrated and I decided to put the name of an Italian colleague of mine on all the documents without changing anything else, not even the part with my Bulgarian education. And after applying again for about 10 positions, I got a call from a firm I had previously applied to with the exact same application but under my real name. And this says a lot about how having a foreign name does not give you equal rights in Italy but only confines you to a certain type of lower-paying jobs.”*(BG18, male, 35 years, BG national)

There were discriminatory attitudes by French employers too (BG13, female, 31 years, BG national). One respondent felt discriminated even in the UK NGO world, where people with foreign names were difficultly accepted (BG10, female, 38 years, BG national).

Discrimination was also seen in lower-qualified and lower-paid jobs. British agricultural employers did not consider foreigners equal and allegedly always treated Romanians better than Bulgarians (BG9, female, 34 years, BG national). In addition, according to another respondent, they made them work longer hours during the week and on weekends without overtime pay (BG16, male, 29 years, BG national).

### Barriers upon returning to Bulgaria

Regarding barriers to free movement of returnees to Bulgaria, they were said to experience substantial problems in restoring their health insurance, social security, in having their work experience and foreign diplomas recognized.

Despite the positive features Bulgarian foreign graduates bring to Bulgarian work environments such as better language skills, contacts and intercultural experience, as well as proactiveness, they do not have a clear idea about Bulgarian reality and the Bulgarian language skills of some have deteriorated.

### The role of the economic crisis

The economic crisis, plaguing the European Union, was universally cited as one of the main reasons for the respondents' return to Bulgaria. One respondent contrasted the economic crisis in Italy with the many opportunities and market niches Bulgaria offered, which made him return (BG18, male, 35 years, BG national). Life in London turning more and more expensive and the omnipresent austerity measures made another respondent seek her luck in NGO work in Bulgaria. The related anti-Bulgarian and anti-Romanian campaign in the UK was also mentioned (BG10, female, 38 years, BG national). The economic crisis precluded a number of the opportunities one other respondent had and he returned to his home country (BG19, male,

41 years, BG national). The downfall of Spanish economy was also cited (BG6, female, 27 years, BG national).

*"I came back because I witnessed the way the economic crisis unfolded in Spain. From a country where people were going on holidays twice a year and a country that was the 9<sup>th</sup> strongest economy in the world, Spain became a completely different place when its economy crashed. And after spending four years living there, I started asking myself how much longer I wanted to be just a waitress there... Plus, I had already quenched my desire for Spain. I needed a bit of fresh air, I needed something different in my life and this is also partly why I came back to Bulgaria."* (BG6, female, 27 years, BG national)

### 3.4. Practices and factors that promote or hinder the right to free movement

#### Role of Bulgaria's EU accession – right to free movement before and after January 2007

The timeframe set by the project and the year of 2007, when Bulgaria joined the EU, sets some of the experiences of Bulgarians, having used their right to free movement and come back, into the period before Bulgaria's accession. This is a distinct particularity for both Bulgarians and Romanians and accounts for a number of stark differences between respondents' treatment pre- and post-2007 and an often painful process of adaptation of older Member States to their new rights and entitlements. In this relation, Bulgarians (and Romanians) faced restrictions to labour market access until several years after the country's EU accession, which the respondents also dwelt upon.

Prior to 2007, respondents faced all the difficulties usually encountered by third country nationals. One respondent spoke of difficulties with registration documents, lack of scholarships for Bulgarian students and no options for university accommodation in Italy (BG18, male, 35 years, BG national). Another cited substantial difficulties and differing procedures with work permits (BG13, female, 31 years, BG national). A third one points to accession as 'changing everything' and giving him 'more freedom' in all aspects and 'making his life easier':

*"Bulgaria becoming an EU member state changed everything. It was a huge deal for me. It gave me more freedom to work, more freedom to study, more freedom to travel around without restrictions. And it definitely made my life in London a lot easier."* (BG12, male, 37 years, BG national)

Another aspect, cited by respondents, is the little information Bulgarians had prior to the country's accession about the conditions and opportunities in EU Member States.

Difficulties remained also after Bulgaria's accession due to the restrictions to the labour market access which for some older Member States remained for quite a long time. One respondent dwelt upon the difficulties she had in the UK working as a freelancer due to Bulgarians' restricted access to the labour market (BG10, female, 38 years, BG national). France presented a case of 'confusion' as to what documents Bulgarians needed for work, which they often managed to benefit from. Confusion was even described in the UK upon the previous wave of accession in 2004 when nobody knew which countries exactly entered the Union and thought Bulgaria did too (BG12, male, 37 years, BG national). Administrative difficulties, surrounding Bulgarians' partial access to the labour market, also accounted for smaller firms not having the capacity to go through the process and consequently not hiring Bulgarians (BG20, male, 40 years, BG national). The anti-Bulgarian and anti-Romanian campaign in the UK, surrounding the two countries' residents' gaining full access to the labour market, was also mentioned more than once.

### Language schools and the strive towards foreign education

Most respondents cite the system of **language high schools** (kept after Soviet times), where a certain Western language is very actively studied and part of the curriculum is also taught in that language, as a definite factor in choosing which EU Member State to go to – usually such, where the language they studied is spoken. On a wider scale, however, language schools can also be safely pointed to as a factor in the overall decision to use one's right to free movement, since language tuition makes them hugely internationally oriented and they also have entrance exams, thus selecting higher achieving students later striving for better career prospects.

As pointed out above, foreign education, usually following language school graduation, is a universal aim among graduates. However, an organisation oriented towards working with and connecting Bulgarians, having studied and worked abroad, gave an interesting explanation about the current dimensions of the ongoing, and growing, strive towards foreign studies. In the view of the organisation's representatives, there is an unconditional trend of secondary school graduates, supported by the media, to go study in any foreign university, regardless of its ranking, without thinking what they want and what professional development they can expect. The respondents were critical about the activities of the various agencies, facilitating students' university applications, since, according to them, they present a twisted picture of the university landscape and mainly try to send students to universities of poorer ranking they work with. According to the organisation's experts, the flourishing of such agencies is due to the poor career orientation in secondary schools and students and parents' unwillingness or inability to collect information themselves. Thus, poor career orientation and the one-sided commercial activity of university application agencies can be seen as factors hindering the full-scale enjoyment of the right to free movement to the benefit of young Bulgarians:



*“Going to a British university does not guarantee you a better education unless you choose a good university... But the mentality of many young high school leavers in Bulgaria is that they should study abroad at all prices... I don't think that at 18 they realise the disadvantages of Bulgarian higher education but their decision is oftentimes dictated by their parents. And by the media, of course, which is constantly repeating the mantra ‘Everyone is leaving’. And when you hear this all the time, you start feeling like you won't be smart or worthy enough if you also don't leave.”*

### 3.5. Suggestions

Returnees to Bulgaria, just like those wishing to move, elaborated on the topic of giving **more information about the right to free movement**. One respondent imagines more platforms in Bulgaria offering advice and support to Bulgarians planning to migrate (BG16, male, 29 years, BG national). Another suggested accessible information platforms, both online and offline, since lack of information is the main reason for the low level of mobility (BG20, male, 40 years, BG national).

Being given the opportunity for suggestions and recommendations, a number of respondents assumed a **critical line towards home institutions**. One respondent, actively engaged with integration of Bulgarian communities abroad, advocated for more voting sections during elections for Bulgarians abroad. Bulgarian institutions, in addition, need to offer more e-consular services and a targeted policy to return Bulgarian migrants from abroad (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national). According to another, while the flow of young people out of Bulgaria is hardly stoppable and is not a negative phenomenon as such, the state treats them with hostility. As the respondent found himself coming back and starting to work for a state authority, the attitude of higher management was not positive, while his experience helped the work of the authority a lot. Thus, the state missed opportunities to generate gains for itself (BG19, male, 41 years, BG national).

Another bigger theme among respondents was the **status of Bulgarian communities abroad**. According to one respondent, Bulgarians' wider community needs to be more organised and visible, because there are a lot of people in need of getting connections. The community also needs to have a common voice in campaigns against Bulgarians and Romanians in the UK (BG11, female, 35 years, BG national).

On this theme, important insight came from the chair of an association, founded to facilitate the contacts of Bulgarians in London with the local communities and assist their adaptation and integration. The organisation's overall aim is to gradually create organisation so that Bulgarian community in London and the United Kingdom has a 'stronger voice'.<sup>83</sup> The activist sees

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<sup>83</sup> Some of the main activities of the association include: telling and informing people about London (e.g. organising walks through different London neighbourhoods and informing about famous Londoners that



increase and enrichment of information as the main avenue for improvement of the situation of Bulgarians, exercising their right to free movement. Also, Bulgarians still do not have the capacity to take part in the overall debates in British society, so, the respondent believes, in the near future a stronger organisation will be formed with opinion leaders, who can appear in the media and voice the concerns of the Bulgarian community:

*'We still do not have the capacity to take part in that debate... Bulgarians are newcomers to Britain and they do not have their serious organisation and established speakers – leaders who can appear in the media and present the position of Bulgarians in Britain'.*

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lived there); creating structures which hold events thus connecting Bulgarians with British people (e.g. handing out special tokens martenitsas to Londoners, telling locals about a London street, named after a Bulgarian city); holding events or assisting the participation of Bulgarians in events, held by other organisations (e.g. an upcoming event for 24 May, the Day of the Bulgarian alphabet and culture, in the Kensington Gardens).

## 4. EU citizens residing in Bulgaria

### 4.1. Previous experience and information about free movement

EU citizens interviewed came to Bulgaria from a **variety of backgrounds** and **different levels of previous international exposure**. One respondent described having previously lived in Spain, Morocco, Malaysia and Germany. Another described rich previous experience in 'former Socialist' countries like Poland and the Czech Republic. A third respondent referred to his rich previous working life, including business trips to 52 countries in 12 years.

*"I started working for a company that was paying better for travelling a lot and they were just sending me for a job here and a job there. And after travelling so much for 12 years and after I had my child, I decided I had to find a place to stay permanently."* (BG4, male, 35 years, FR national)

Before coming to Bulgaria, however, another respondent had never lived abroad, or travelled much around Europe:

*"The reason I decided to come to Bulgaria? Just a change of life. I had a friend who was living here and he messaged me one day saying 'there is a job out here that would suit you, would you like it?' and I said 'why not?' Before the job offer, I didn't even know where the country was. I thought it was close to Hungary... I had never lived abroad before. Before coming to Bulgaria I had not even left England for over 10 years... I really knew absolutely nothing of the country. It was only after I moved here that I found out it used to be under communism... and it was a culture shock for me, for sure."* (BG2, male, 34 years, UK national)

While most of the respondents hold jobs in '**modern**' **business sectors** like management, language teaching, IT and customer support, the project team also managed to capture the life story of a Western European who 'grew tired' of the business world and settled with a local partner in a newer Member State opening his own bar.

### 4.2. Drivers

**Proficiency in their native and other languages** played a decisive role in respondents' settlement and work in Bulgaria. One respondent thought that being a foreigner was in her favour when applying for jobs and so was the fact that she spoke four languages fluently (BG1, female, 25 years, FR national). Another respondent confirmed her views to a large extent:

*"It's not about the work. If you speak more than two foreign languages, it's easier to find a job. So you just pick a place and you look for a job afterwards."* (BG3, male, 28 years, EE national)

Moreover, another respondent's main occupation in Bulgaria is running his own language center, where students prepare for English proficiency exams (BG5, male, 35 years, UK national).

EU citizens living in Bulgaria generally find **Bulgarian people open and easy-going, as well as warm and welcoming.**

*"I spent a month in a gypsy village... and it was really hard to communicate with people there. They didn't speak any of the languages I speak, I didn't speak Bulgarian... and even their Bulgarian was not so good... but they were really welcoming people so that's what made me want to stay. I came here straight from London and I stayed in Sofia for a night and even on my first day I already met really good people. They took me by hand and walked me to my hostel... So I think people were the main reason for me to stay..."*

*I find Bulgarians to be great people. I got so much help from them. I was really surprised at how nice people are and how much they are willing to do for you."* ( BG3, male, 28 years, EE national)

For some, however, this discovery came after they spent some time in the country. One respondent thought Bulgarians can be a bit "closed and grumpy-looking" at first but found that after getting to know them, they were very friendly people who were always ready to help her (BG1, female, 25 years, FR national).

Respondents were also generally commendatory of the **quality of life in Bulgaria, despite much lower incomes.**

*"There is a reason why people from Western Europe are coming here. Prices are much much cheaper and the quality of life is good."* ( BG4, male, 35 years, FR national)

All EU citizens interviewed are well aware that, with substantially lower salaries, people in Bulgaria can still receive more satisfaction with a number of aspects of life, especially as prices are also much lower. As seen in sections above, this is an understanding of relativity that is also paving its way among those intending to use their right to free movement, but having had some previous foreign experience, as well as those who have moved abroad and come back.

*"From my perspective, my salary is a good salary for Bulgaria. It's not the best, it's not the worst... but I have a reasonable standard of living. I look at it on a relative scale where, for example, if you were earning 2000 pounds in the UK and you are earning 2000 leva in Bulgaria, you will have a slightly better standard of living here as for 500 leva a month you can get a much nicer apartment than for 500 pounds in the UK."* ( BG2, male, 34 years, UK national)

One aspect mentioned of living 'easier' in Bulgaria was also 'things happening more quickly' in every aspect of life and work due to the country being small and the substantial role of personal acquaintances (BG4, male, 35 years, FR national).

### 4.3. Barriers

Although all respondents described a **relatively smooth settlement**, it was not without certain common problems. For most, flat hunting was marked with property owners and real estate agents' **inflating prices when dealing with non-Bulgarians**, whom foreigners had to deal with in various ways, including with the help of Bulgarian friends.

**Language barrier** was an initial issue in that many institutions, even migration authorities, were not speaking foreign languages. One respondent mentioned language problems with health authorities as well.

*"For me it is a bit comical to work at an immigration centre and not to speak any English... it is not very welcome to foreigners."*(BG1, female, 25 years, FR national)

No EU citizen interviewed spared criticism towards some features of Bulgaria and Bulgarians, especially the **lack of customer orientation among businesses**.

*"One thing that always surprises me about Bulgaria is that you are not customer-oriented... People at restaurants, cafes and shops don't do enough for clients but I don't think it's because they are rude or mean but because they lack this business sense people in France have... Here, when I enter a shop, the lady is on her phone, she stays in her seat, she hardly says hello and she doesn't even make an effort to sell something... It's bad for the business."*(BG1, female, 25 years, FR national)

Government officials and service personnel are also found lacking customer skills. This may be seen as a re-formulation of the leading criticism of Bulgarians towards badly working institutions, although the customer emphasis was not put by natives.

No particular instances of **discrimination** were mentioned – in fact, one respondent explicitly said he had not felt discriminated in any way (BG2, male, 34 years, UK national). However, incidents of alleged police abuse of power were mentioned by one respondent – repetitive stops and searches of bags (BG3, male, 28 years, EE national) – as well as general bad attitude by police towards another respondent due to his looks – beard, piercings, tattoos, etc. (BG4, male, 35 years, FR national) This, at least in the views of respondents, puts under question the readiness of police to work in a multicultural society.

#### 4.4. Practices and factors that promote or hinder the right to move freely

The practice of landlords to inflate prices when they deal with presumably 'rich' foreigners was unanimously seen as a barrier and practice largely hindering the right to move freely as it puts EU citizens before a difficulty they can hardly surmount by formal means, but rather by getting help by sympathetic locals.

Another factor largely hindering the right to move freely is the insufficient language knowledge of institutional representatives and the related (although not mentioned by interviewees) availability of various important administrative information only in the Bulgarian language. Bulgaria being mainly a sending country, institutions seem in substantial difficulty dealing with non-nationals which often leaves them understanding insufficiently their rights and obligations.

#### 4.5. Suggestions

As suggested expressly by EU citizens interviewed, the improvement of the language proficiency and the overall capacity of national institutions to deal with non-nationals will be a substantial step in the country's readiness to facilitate the free movement of EU citizens. Officials should be able to speak foreign languages better and government websites should offer more structured information for newcomers.

EU citizens were also supportive of consolidated offline and online resources on rights and entitlements, related to free movement throughout the European Union. A specialised organization, like the Erasmus+ programme, aimed at EU citizens coming to live in Bulgaria was also advocated for to provide them with assistance during the first few months of their stay by helping them find accommodation or register at the Immigration Office, offering them Bulgarian language courses, organising trips around the country for them, etc.

Young people from the EU, residing in Bulgaria, also elaborated on more general societal factors like reducing the rates of youth unemployment and tackling security threats throughout the Union.

## 5. Views of representatives of authorities

The project team met with a **presidential secretary and an expert from her cabinet**. They were chosen due to the President's Administration's active involvement in youth issues and the opportunities given to young people with experience abroad, commonly cited by other stakeholders.

**The State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad (SABA)** is the government's body whose main duty is to communicate with Bulgarians and their communities abroad and to work towards preserving and further developing the Bulgarian ethno-cultural and historical heritage abroad. The project team met a respondent, responsible for developing lobbies representing Bulgarian interests and assisting Bulgarian citizens and Bulgarian communities, organisations and associations in various countries around the world in organising events and initiatives for the popularisation of Bulgarian culture and promotion of opportunities for immigrants in their home country.

The project team also met with a representative of the **Directorate for Youth Policies at the Ministry of Youth and Sports**. The Directorate is responsible for the planning and implementation of the national youth policy and for the coordination of the drafting and development of all strategies, programmes and legal acts in the area of youth policy. In addition, inter-ministerial working groups are established around different issues, including youth employment, professional qualifications, and the EU Structured Dialogue process.

### 5.1. Information about free movement

According to the **SABA's representative**, the information and statistics on the Bulgarian diaspora abroad is not accurate, especially with regards to Bulgarian youth leaving the country for the purposes of obtaining education in a foreign institution. Several years ago, the Agency conducted research in cooperation with an online job agency on the attitudes of young people abroad during which they surveyed more than 1,000 Bulgarians of whom only 3% expressed a definite desire to come back to live in Bulgaria and around 5% said they would consider moving back in the near future.

As for the information among young people about free movement, **the representative of the youth ministry** does not think there is any lack of information, just on the contrary. Young people in Bulgaria are generally very well-informed on the educational and employment opportunities available. However, most of the youth is concentrated in the bigger cities and those who live in smaller towns and villages in Bulgaria have no way of obtaining this information. The Ministry's main efforts are directed at reaching out to such groups of young individuals who neither study, nor work.

## 5.2. Drivers

In terms of drivers for free movement, **the representatives of the presidential administration** pointed out the **consequences of the overall crisis**, experienced in Bulgaria - feelings of insecurity, uncertainty and lack of a clear path forwards. In their view, the main factors in Bulgaria that drive young people to seek their luck abroad are the better-quality education offered by foreign higher educational institutions, the perceived lack of a good future if they decide to stay in Bulgaria, the demographic situation, the political and social climate and, finally, the 'illusion' that everything abroad is perfect and people there have no problems. Another reason given is the preference of many foreign firms with offices in Bulgaria for candidates with international experience. Another important area is the economic situation – it is very hard to compete with Western countries and to convince anyone to choose to return to/stay in Bulgaria when the economy is in the state it is today and when salaries here are much lower compared to most other places in Europe.

Also In the view of the **SABA's official**, the main driver for young Bulgarians moving to other EU countries is the **high-quality education** those countries offer as well as the better chances for professional and personal development. Recent migration trends show that the most popular destination country among young people is the United Kingdom<sup>84</sup> as opposed to Germany which used to be the preferred destination until 5-6 years ago. The Netherlands has also started hosting more Bulgarian students in the recent years. Nevertheless, Germany and Austria remain attractive options due to the low university fees there.

The view on **education** as main driver for young people to move abroad was largely shared by the representative of the youth ministry as well. In her view, the main motivation for young people to move is the better quality education they can obtain abroad as well as the higher starting salaries upon graduation. The reasons such a high percentage of the Bulgarian youth moves abroad have more to do with their desire for a better future and dissatisfaction with the Bulgarian reality rather than the economic situation.

As for **drivers for return**, according to SABA's study, mentioned above, the main factor making young people return to their home country is their families and friends and the certainty that they would easily find a job in an international company based in Bulgaria. Very few expressed a desire to work in the NGO sector, in government bodies, or in the field of research and academics.

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<sup>84</sup> Interview taken before the Brexit referendum



### 5.3. Barriers

In accordance with their general policy direction to keep young people in Bulgaria to serve as human potential for the country, authorities only mentioned few barriers Bulgarians experience abroad.

According to the representatives of the **President's Administration**, once abroad, young Bulgarians often become victims of their own stereotypes and encapsulate themselves in the Bulgarian communities in their respective destination country without making the necessary effort to integrate in the new society. In such cases, there is very little difference between continuing one's university education in Bulgaria and doing it abroad.

In the view of President's Administration's representatives, facing **discrimination** is another commonly experienced problem among the Bulgarian diaspora.

### 5.4. Practices and factors that promote or hinder the right to free movement

In their effort to promote their institutions' agendas, representatives of state authorities gave ample information about their practices, which promote the right to free movement, as well as about some related factors.

**Representatives of the presidential administration** recognised the fact that Bulgarians working abroad and sending money to their relatives at home are a major **'financial injection'** in the Bulgarian economy. In addition, studying and working abroad could turn into a **'period of transformation'** and could be hugely beneficial to many people who acquire an invaluable set of skills and an impressive work ethic that they could later apply in their jobs in Bulgaria.

As for the concrete initiatives of the Administration of the President, **working with and for the youth is one of its top priorities**. An example of this is the internship programme created in 2012 which offers a number of long- and short-term internships to university students studying both abroad and in Bulgaria. On the other hand, one of the main initiatives of the President's Office – the John Atanasoff Award - supports the personal achievements of young Bulgarian researchers working in the fields of informatics and information technology.

A substantial part of **SABA's** activity is directed towards the **associations of young Bulgarians abroad**. The first officially registered organisation of Bulgarians living in Germany was set up in Bonn in 2002. Since then, the Agency has been developing and working on a Programme for the Professional Realisation of Young Bulgarians Abroad. Agency's officials have also partnered up with a number of other similar youth organisations in Germany as well as with the umbrella organisation – the Association of Bulgarian Youth Organisations in Germany which was founded in 2007 and

commenced its work in 2008. Moreover, they have strong connections with registered youth organisations and associations in France and with a number of Bulgarian organisations in the United Kingdom.

Recently, the Agency has been focusing on is **providing up-to-date information on current events of interest in Bulgaria** and on all other types of information that a person abroad would find useful. For that purpose, three online portals have been developed – one strictly administrative which gives information on all administrative and legal services offered by the Agency; the second portal (<http://rodinabg.net>) contains information on current events in Bulgaria, such as details on elections, health care reforms, social policies, etc.; and the third one (<http://rodinaconsult.eu>) focuses on providing practical information and advice on procedures for buying property in Bulgaria, contractual obligations, etc.

**Youth policies** in Bulgaria are subject to inter-sectoral collaboration between the different ministries in the country. **The Ministry of Youth and Sports'** main focus is on encouraging young people to stay to pursue higher education and employment in Bulgaria. The institution funds a number of projects which are part of the National Youth Programme 2016 – 2020 and which are implemented by different NGOs. These projects focus on improving the access to information and quality services in support of young individuals' personal and social development, the development of youth volunteering and the encouragement and creation of a more favourable and supportive environment for quality professional development of young Bulgarians living in small town and rural areas.

One of the main priority areas of the National Youth Programme is to provide support to the work of the **Youth Information and Counselling Centres**, which are managed by local NGOs and which operate on a project-basis in 27 out of the 28 districts in Bulgaria, with each project lasting up to 24 months. Their purpose is to provide free access to quality services, educational trainings and consultations to young citizens.

## 5.5. Suggestions

According to the representatives of the presidential administration, there needs to be a **reform in the higher education system in Bulgaria** which could give hope to many young people and convince them to pursue their studies in the country rather than abroad and which could eventually prevent the demographic disaster Bulgaria is currently heading towards.

Moreover, there needs to be a **new set of criteria for the financing of public and private universities** in the country so that more priority is given to certain areas in which Bulgaria is lacking qualified professionals.

Finally, Bulgarian universities should be working harder towards **bridging the gap between the degrees taught and the professions they relate to** in the job market so that more graduates leave their institutions with a good training

and useful knowledge that they could later translate into practical solutions at the workplace. Thus, once young people start noticing that things in their home country are improving and they have realistic prospects of having a good future here, many of them will undoubtedly want to return.

According to the SABA, **a greater part of the State budget should be allocated** for supporting initiatives aimed at Bulgarians abroad and particularly for organising job fairs and forums with Bulgarian companies.

The respondent from the youth ministry thinks there is big ground for improvement in the youth policies in Bulgaria. She considers it essential to work towards **improving the quality of higher education in the country**, to stimulate young people to be active members of the civil society and including more youth in decision-making processes both on the local and national levels.

## 6. Interim findings

The project's qualitative research painted a diverse picture about young Bulgarians' desire to move to other EU countries, their experiences while on the move and their drivers to return back home. A partial, yet interesting, picture emerged about the experiences of young EU citizens in Bulgaria as well.

**Economic reasons** proved to be the decisive, both push and pull, factors for young Bulgarian people to leave their home country and try to work and settle in another EU Member State. Although not always mentioning higher salaries abroad, respondents were certain that (Western) Europe would give them better professional opportunities and better development options especially in the cases where their high professional skills would not get adequate remuneration at home (e.g. doctors).

At the same time, more general societal factors like **omnipresent corruption** and **quality of work of institutions** were also deliberated upon. Despite struggling with bureaucracy both at home and abroad, people liked to think that institutions work smoothly and impartially and there is a 'system' and 'process' one can believe in – a work mode they hardly found in Bulgaria.

**Personal factors** found their place both among the drivers for young people to leave their home country and among those to return. Respondents wanted to leave, and left, Bulgaria to seek for better personal growth and to be able to better provide for their families and they were often attracted by friends and acquaintances already settled throughout Europe. At the same time, parents, and family businesses, left behind and homesickness were often a decisive factor when respondents grew tired of living in a foreign country and decided to come back home.

The experiences of **EU citizens residing in Bulgaria** added to the relativity of Bulgaria's image already painted by young Bulgarians. Bureacracy and lack

of customer orientation of Bulgarian institutions were a universal barrier before the right to free movement and the lower salaries and general standard of living were reality obvious to all. At the same time, due to similarly lower expenses one was able to gain better quality of life in Bulgaria and, combined with the openness and hospitality of the local population, gain an overall better life satisfaction.

## Part D: Analysis and recommendations

### 1. Synthesis of results and conclusions

As outlined in the desktop research part of the present report, as a result of the massive outflow of both low-skilled and high-skilled citizens to other EU Member States (and the United States) Bulgaria experiences both the effects of the so called 'brain drain' – the flow of young highly skilled individuals abroad and a general shortage of workforce with increasingly negative effects on the economy. Besides decreasing the country's population, Bulgarians moving out of the country also contribute to exhausting the country's labour resources. Diminishing labour resources would increasingly limit the country's economic growth and the shortage of labour force would reach 250-400 thousand people until 2030.

The legal and institutional part of the report suggests that legislative, and policy, attention to the situation of EU citizens in Bulgaria is markedly scarce. Equal rights of EU citizens to those of Bulgarian nationals, unless a nationality requirement is in place, are universally proclaimed. However, regulation, including on the situation of young people, is fairly general, most probably due to the low number of EU nationals in Bulgaria and lack of representativeness of their experiences to point to legislative lacunae. At the same time, Bulgaria is relatively strongly affected by the recent migration crisis in the EU and the issues of free movement of Bulgarians and EU citizens throughout the Union remain outside the focus of current institutional attention. Policies and strategies on re-integrating Bulgarian communities abroad and providing young people good development opportunities do exist, but without profound institutional reforms and ongoing economic advancement they are remaining mainly on paper.

The project's qualitative research painted a diverse picture about young Bulgarians' desire to move to other EU countries, their experiences while on the move and their drivers to return back home. A partial, yet interesting, picture emerged about the experiences of young EU citizens in Bulgaria as well. Economic reasons proved to be the decisive, both push and pull, factors for young Bulgarian people to leave their home country and try to work and settle in another EU Member State. Respondents were certain that (Western) Europe would give them better professional opportunities and better development options especially in the cases where their high professional skills would not get adequate remuneration at home. At the same time, more general societal factors like omnipresent corruption and quality of work of institutions were also deliberated upon. Personal factors found their place both among the drivers for young people to leave their home country and among those to return. Respondents wanted to leave, and left, Bulgaria to seek for better personal growth and to be able to better provide for their families. At the same time, parents, and family businesses, left behind and

homesickness were often a decisive factor when respondents grew tired of living in a foreign country and decided to come back home.

## 2. Recommendations

**Reform of higher education** is a recommendation, seemingly unrelated to the right of free movement, but, as mentioned above, looking for better university education, together with seemingly better opportunities for qualified workforce in Western Europe, was a universal push factor for Bulgarians to leave the country and look for opportunities abroad. Bulgarian universities need to offer young high school graduates sound theoretical knowledge, combined with practical experience and sufficient international orientation to be an active part of the EU environment in each profession. In addition, higher education institutions should actively popularise their achievements in modernising their studies, as well as their international exposure. Without such measures, their real or perceived deficiencies would force young people away from the country, without leaving them space to make an informed choice as to where to pursue their studies and how to achieve much desired international experience.

**Career orientation** in high schools and universities also seems an aspect in need of improvement. Young people need continuous advice and support in finding their preferred career path, otherwise, again, their opportunities for an informed choice of studies and further steps seem to be limited and movement seems to have no alternative.

As regards Bulgarians' actual process of free movement to other EU Member States and back, **provision of structured information** is to be of crucial importance, both about countries of destination and about exercising civil rights. There seems to be a niche both for institutions and private companies to build up Internet portals, where, based on their personal circumstances, people can look at customized opportunities to study and work, as well as settle, abroad.

In this relation, **Bulgarian diplomatic representations abroad should strengthen their role** in providing both initial orientation to Bulgarians willing to or having settled in other EU Member States and facilitating the exercise of their civil rights and entitlements as Bulgarian citizens – health and social security, voting rights, etc.

**Opening** of Bulgarian business environment and especially institutions **towards foreign experience** gained by Bulgarian youth, both in study and work contexts, seems indispensable for young people to feel accepted back in their home country after the process of gathering experience in another EU Member State, having brought them much personal and professional benefit.

**Long-awaited reforms and curbing of corruption** are also required so that business and institutional environment are improved and highly qualified young Bulgarians, including in highly regulated fields such as law and medicine, are able to gather international experience freely and bring it back to their home country.

**Institutions** in both predominantly sending and receiving countries need to **strengthen their capacity in dealing with the needs of freely moving EU citizens** – both language and substance-wise in their initial orientation and further settlement in their ‘new’ countries. Information and trainings should be available so that officials are able to navigate all types of complicated cross-border cases of social security, health insurance, work and personal relations. In particular, **accommodation, social security and health insurance systems for young Europeans** should be kept under close scrutiny to not allow excessive administrative burden or discrimination on any ground.

A number of respondents hinted at **discrimination/prejudice in different aspects of life in EU Member States**, although few spoke of ‘systematic’ nature of such attitudes. This means that, despite ever strengthening legal and institutional framework on combating discrimination, its more or less subtle forms continue plaguing aspects of life of freely moving EU citizens such as police attitude, university studies, career prospects, etc. Thus, targeted effort is needed to uproot such acts and their causes in institutional structures and policies. Further awareness raising among EU citizens is also needed so that zero tolerance towards acts of prejudice and discrimination is displayed.

Continuing special attention should be given to the **equal treatment of EU citizens**, intending to use or having used their right to free movement, **in the context of landmark tendencies and events like the migration crisis and the Brexit referendum**. Led by strong ‘us and them’ sentiments, societies can be easily led by populist movements and sensational media to see all non-nationals, and especially those coming from poorer EU Member States, as a threat and to raise their level of hostility and discrimination.



## Annex 1: Sample table – young Europeans

Young Europeans - Sample Table			Organisation					Country			
Interviewee No.	Gender (M: Male; F: Female; N/A: Prefer not to say)	Age group (A: 25-29; B: 30-35)	Nationality	Family situation		Level of education	Employment status Employed? – Profession – Job – Title / Function Unemployed? Self-employed	Country of residence – place of residence	Country of birth	Interview conducted face-to-face Yes/No (how)	Date of interview
				Married/Co-habiting/Civil Partnership? Y/N	Dependent Children Y/N						
BG1, female, 25 years, FR national	F	A: 25 – 29 (25)	French	Married	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	France	Yes	25.05.2016
BG2, male, 34 years, UK national	M	A: 30 – 35 (34)	English	In a relationship	Y (1)	University degree	Employed – IT sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	England	No (Skype)	15.05.2016
BG3, male, 28 years, EE national	M	A: 25 – 29 (28)	Estonian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – IT sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Estonia	Yes	24.05.2016

BG4, male, 35 years, FR national	M	B: 30 – 35 (35)	French	Cohabiting	Y (1)	University degree	Self-employed (bar owner)	Sofia, Bulgaria	France	Yes	06.05.2016
BG5, male, 35 years, UK national	M	B: 30 – 35 (35)	Scottish	Single	N	University degree	Employed – English language teacher + has his own business	Sofia, Bulgaria	Scotland	No (Skype)	07.05.2016
BG6, female, 27 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (27)	Bulgarian	In a relationship	N	University degree	Employed	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	09.05.2016
BG7, male, 39 years, BG national	M	(39)	Bulgarian	Married	N	University degree	Employed – NGO sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	03.06.2016
BG8, female, 29 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (29)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	26.05.2016
BG9, female, 34 years, BG national	F	B: 30 – 35 (34)	Bulgarian	Married	Y (2)	High school	Self-employed (Retail)	Plovdiv, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	No (telephone)	22.05.2016
BG10, female, 38 years, BG national	F	(38)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – NGO	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	18.05.2016
BG11, female, 35 years, BG national	F	B: 30 – 35 (35)	Bulgarian	Married	N	University degree	Employed - NGO	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	27.04.2016

BG12, male, 37 years, BG national	M	(37)	Bulgarian	Cohabiting	N	University degree	Employed	Plovdiv, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	No (Skype)	10.06.2016
BG13, female, 31 years, BG national	F	B: 30 – 35 (31)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – architecture	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	19.05.2016
BG14, male, 34 years, BG national	M	B: 30 – 35 (34)	Bulgarian	In a relationship	N	University degree	Self-employed (photo studio)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	01.06.2016
BG15, female, 32 years, BG national	F	B: 30 – 35 (32)	Bulgarian	In a relationship	N	University degree	Employed – NGO sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	27.05.2016
BG16, male, 29 years, BG national	M	A: 25 – 29 (29)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Unemployed	Pazardzhik, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	No (telephone)	10.05.2016
BG17, female, 30 years, BG national	F	B: 30 – 35 (30)	Bulgarian	Married	N	University degree	Employed – NGO field	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	17.05.2016
BG18, male, 35 years, BG national	M	B: 30 – 35	Bulgarian	Married		University degree	Employed	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	10.05.2016
BG19, male, 41 years, BG national	M	(41)	Bulgaria	In a relationship	Y	University degree	Freelancer	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	20.06.2016

BG20, male, 40 years, BG national	M	(40)	Bulgarian	Married	Y	University degree	Employed	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	08.06.2016
BG21, male, 30 years, BG national	M	B: 30 – 35 (30)	Bulgarian	Married	N	University degree	Employed – international affairs	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	02.06.2016
BG22, male, 25 years, BG national	M	A: 25 – 29 (25)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed (intern) – NGO field	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	04.05.2016
BG23, female, 27 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (27)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – NGO (Intern)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	20.05.2016
BG24, female, 27 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (27)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Unemployed	Batak, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	02.05.2016
BG25, female, 27 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (27)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Unemployed	Stara Zagora, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	No (telephone)	23.05.2016
BG26, female, 26 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (26)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – NGO sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	01.06.2016
BG27, male, 27 years, BG national	M	A: 25 – 29 (27)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – software engineer	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	05.05.2016

BG28, female, 25 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (25)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector (logistics)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	17.05.2016
BG29, female, 26 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (26)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector (logistics)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	08.05.2016
BG30, female, 25 years, BG national	F	A: 25 - 29 (25)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Nurse	Plovdiv, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	02.05.2016
BG31, male, 32 years, BG national	M	B: 30 – 35 (32)	Bulgarian	In a relationship	Y (2)	University degree	Self-employed	Ruse, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	11.05.2016
BG32, male, 29 years, BG national	M	A: 25 – 29 (29)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	16.05.2016
BG33, female, 28 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (28)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – NGO sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	25.05.2016
BG34, female, 26 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (26)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector (tax consulting)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	19.05.2016
BG35, female, 25 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (25)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – business sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	21.05.2016

BG36, female, 25 years, BG national	F	AL 25 – 29 (25)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector (management consulting)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	No (Skype)	18.05.2016
BG37, female, 29 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (29)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector (logistics)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	26.05.2016
BG38, female, 25 years, BG national	F	A: 25 – 29 (25)	Bulgarian	In a relationship	N	University degree	Employed – Business sector (accounting)	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	17.05.2016
BG39, male, 28 years, BG national	M	A: 25 – 29 (28)	Bulgarian	Single	N	University degree	Employed – construction	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	02.06.2016
BG40, male, 25 years, BG national	M	A: 25 - 29 (25)	Bulgarian	In a relationship	N	University degree	Employed – legal sector	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	05.06.2016
BG41, male, 25 years, BG national	M	A: 25 – 29 (25)	Bulgarian	In a relationship	N	Studying towards a university degree	Unemployed	Sofia, Bulgaria	Bulgaria	Yes	07.06.2016

## Annex 2: Sample table – authorities and NGOs

Representatives of National Authorities / NGOs		Country	
Interviewee No	Authority / NGO	Position	Years of Relevant Professional Experience
1.	London Bulgarian Association	Chair	10
2.	State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad	Head of the Department for Bulgarian Communities & Information Activities	20
3.	Tuk-Tam	Project Manager Co-founder	5 10
4.	Ministry of Youth and Sports	Expert at the Directorate for Youth Policies	9
5.	Administration of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria	Secretary for Healthcare and Innovations Expert at the Secretariat for Healthcare and Innovations	5 5

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