

THE IMPACT OF EMIGRATION ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF BULGARIA

In the economic literature the effects of emigration are associated mainly with its impact on the labour market, money transfers, family environment and child care. This article examines these effects in Bulgaria during the last twenty-five years. On the basis of statistical data and sociological findings the author outlines both the positive and the negative effects of the Bulgarian emigration on the labour market, economic development and the family environment. He also studies some main trends of development of Bulgaria's migration policy, contributing to its activation.

JEL: J11; J13; J61

In the context of on-going intensive emigration flows, today the issues relating to immigrants and emigrants and the consequences for the socio-economic development of the sender and of the receiver country are particularly relevant.

The problem has been a subject to lively discussions in the international, European and national space.¹ But the observations and investigations on the impact of emigration in the receiver country is more systematically and thoroughly studied and examined, compared to the assessments of the countries, sending emigrants. Regardless of the unsystematic characteristics of these studies, most researchers conclude that emigration influences the socio-economic development of the sender country in three main aspects: through changes in the demographic balance and the impact over the labour market, through money transfers and through changes in the social and family environment, in which the children of the emigrants are raised.

Bulgaria is a country with a significant emigration outflow, which changes over the years, both in terms of its intensity and structure, yet remains sustainable over time. According to the experts' assessments the number of Bulgarian emigrants over the last last twenty five years varies in a wide range between 800 thousands to over 1 million people. Hence, the debate about the impacts of emigration over the socio-economic development is important from the standpoint not solely of the intensity of the phenomenon, but also of the reasons for it, and particularly, of its impact. The analysis of the effects, which emigration has over socio-economic development, faces serious informational challenges, since there are no systematized observations of these processes in Bulgaria. This requires the use of available national and international statistics as well as data from studies, conducted in the country and abroad. The goal of the present study is to confirm or reject the effects, commonly accepted in economic literature, of emigration on the sender country with regard to Bulgarian emigration during the new millennium.

¹ See Boubtane and Dumont, 2013; Gagnon, 2014; Adams, 2005; Rangelova, 2013; Christova-Balkanska, 2013; Zareva, 2013.

Review of the impact of emigration over the socio-economic development of the sender country

In the scientific literature there are a series of studies on this issue. According to one such study, which includes 22 OECD countries and covers a period of twenty years (1986-2006) the contribution of net migration to the economic development of the host country is positive, but minimal. Hence, the study concludes that the movement of human capital as a result of migration has a minimal impact on economic growth, while that impact mainly boils down to the mechanical growth of labour resources. The conclusions from the elaborated and tested model indicate that the increase in the share of the population within working age as a result of migration is inversely correlated with the growth of labour productivity and is directly proportional to the growth rate of investments in physical capital. While an increase of one percentage point in net migration does not produce a uniform effect in all 22 countries, the authors assume that given a 50% increase in net migration and given that all other parameters remain constant, the changes in the productivity of labour for all analyzed countries are insignificant. However, when taking into consideration the qualities of that labour, such as education and qualification, the impact of migration as a newly included labour resource over economic growth is undoubtedly stronger. Hence, conducting a highly selective immigration policy is recommended in some countries as an element of their emigration policy (Boubtane and Dumont, 2013, p. 17).

In the economic literature there is a consensus that the main benefits from emigration for the sender country consist of the *remittances, that they send to their home country*. These money transfers support economic development mainly by stimulating consumption and, to a smaller extend, by supporting the treasure and the investments (see Kerr and Kerr, 2011). According to a study of the World Bank, these remittances are of significant importance for the developing countries, since they exceed by three times the amount of official financial support, provided for the purposes of their development, which is more than USD 315 million in 2009 (see Mohapatra, Ratha and Scheja, 2010).

The role of the remittances, sent by emigrants to their countries, is linked to *their effect on reducing poverty*. According to a study, covering 71 developing countries, given a 10% increase in official transfers from emigrants per capita, the share of persons, living in poverty decreases by 3.5% (Adams, 2005). However, the interpretation of these results should be based on a careful assessment of the characteristics of poverty and of the factors that condition it. It is natural for the impact of money transfers to be much stronger in countries with a very low level of economic development and a developed natural economy in comparison to other countries, where the source of poverty is different. In Bulgaria, where poverty is conditioned by the unsuccessful transformation of the economic and social system during the years of transition and the accumulated imbalances therein, the increasingly predominant opinion is that “the remittances from abroad are becoming an increasingly important

instrument for decreasing poverty in Bulgaria, since 80 percent of the transfers are utilized for consumption”.²

Another thesis, which is subject to research and assessment is that *the labour activity of the emigrants supports the development of the human capital of the sender country*. When accepting this thesis one should keep in mind that it is only valid when the emigrants carry out labour activities that make use of their qualification and professional skills and that in the process of performing labour they develop these skills and expand their knowledge. However, in many cases this is not valid for Bulgarian emigrants, which carry out activities, requiring low levels of qualification, in some cases considerably lower than the ones, associated with the profession or professional qualification they possess. Further, the benefits from the increased quality of human capital for the sender country would generate real economic and social returns if the emigrants return to their home country and apply their higher professional competences. This was the case in Ireland, during the period of its economic renaissance in the end of the previous and the beginning of the current century, when the country took back thousands of emigrants, whose knowledge and skills supported the innovative development of the country.

The negative consequences of emigration for the labour market of the sender country are most directly visible when it comes to the issue of losing labour resources, of people with specific professional skills and professions. If such people do not emigrate and live and work in their country, they would contribute to an increase in the production of public goods and to the reproduction of labour resources and, via that, to the development of the country. By living and working in their home country, emigrants would contribute to an increase in consumption and thereby to an increase in the volume of production; they would pay taxes and other fees and would hence contribute to the development of those spheres of public life, such as infrastructure, healthcare, education, culture, security and others.

From a social perspective emigration also has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages mainly relate to the enrichment of the culture and worldview of the emigrants, since they become acquainted with other nations and cultures. On the other hand, however, a series of negative social consequences are evidenced. They stem from the separation of families, the breaking of family ties, the distancing of children from their parents and worsening of the upbringing of youngsters, etc.

In summary, the *benefits from emigration* for the sender country, identified by the economic literature, are as follows:

- money transfers into the country from the remittances emigrants send to their families;
- increase in investments in education and access to social and healthcare services in cases when the transferred resources are utilized for these purposes;

² See <http://www.dw.com/bg/ползата-от-българите-в-чужбина-а-17451967>, 23.02.2014.

- decrease in unemployment due to a decrease in the pressure over the labour market by the supply of labour;
- investments in the economy by returning emigrants or by the Bulgarian diaspora abroad;
- improvement of the quality of human capital for some of the emigrants.

The identified *negative aspects* are as follows:

- loss of highly qualified labour force and, as a consequence, decreasing growth rate of labour productivity;
- decreasing quality and quantity of services, provided by the individual sectors – for example, medical and social services, education;
- outflow of labour force from the labour market as a result of replacement of income from remittances;
- progressive aging of the population and increase in the dependency ratio;
- pressure to increase wages for some professions due to shortage of labour supply;
- decrease in the quality of care for children, whose parents have left the country;
- decrease in the study results and school attendance rate of such children;
- disintegration of families (Rangelova, 2013).

In the context of these very general terms, the balance between what Bulgaria wins and what it loses from the de facto emigration from the country during the last twenty five years, should be subject to public debate, since the process is on-going and is not characterized by tendencies towards reversal of its dynamic. The identification of the effects of emigration on socio-economic development is a signal to assume a more active position and a course of action aimed at changing the environment, which motivates the Bulgarian population to emigrate.

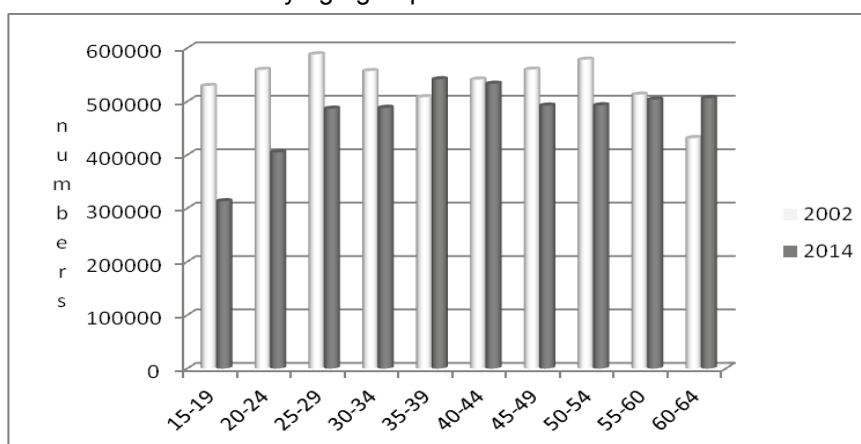
Short-term and long-term impacts of emigration over the labour market

While the effects of remittances on the socio-economic development of Bulgaria are largely reflected by consumption and, to a lesser extent, by savings and investments, the effects of emigration on the labour market are more direct, clearly discernible and visible in the short-term, with a very sustainable negative effect in medium- and long-term horizon.

• *Emigration contributes to a decrease in the population of the country and continuously exhausts the country's labour resources.* During the period 2002-2014 the population within the age group of 15-64 years has decreased by 602429 persons and amounts to 4763673 persons as of 2014. The data indicate that population growth is only registered in two age groups – the first of the persons aged 35-39 (33 546 persons) and the second of the persons aged 60-64 (75 thousand persons). In all other age groups the population number decreases, *particularly in the three youth groups* – for the age group 15-19 the decrease amounts to 216 thousand persons; for the age group 20-24 – the decrease amounts to 154 thousand persons and for the age group 25-29 the decrease amounts to 101 thousand persons (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Changes in the number of the population within working age by age groups 2014 vs. 2002



Source. NSI. Demographic and social statistics, www.nsi.bg

The lack of systematized statistical information does not allow for the quantification of the contribution of emigration to the decrease in the population within working age, but if one bears in mind that the population number varies depending on birth rate (positive effects), mortality rate and emigration (both with negative effects) it can be assumed that the significant decrease of the Bulgarian population in the three youngest age groups is due to the emigration incl. the emigration of children who leave the country with their parents. The increase in the population from the highest age group indicates that higher number of people from previous generations had entered this age group in the last 10 years and the lower emigration activity of this age group. This process reflects the aging of the population, the decrease in the mortality rate and the increase of the average life span.

The rates of decrease in the labour force are exceptionally high, which indicates that in the near future, *growth in Bulgaria will face an increasing number of restrictions, stemming from that decrease in available labour resources*. Our previous research indicates that at an unemployment level of 5% and under the two scenarios for the level of economic activity of 75 and 80% respectively, the labour force shortage will reach 250-440 thousand persons in 2030 (see Dimitrov et al., 2015, p. 74).

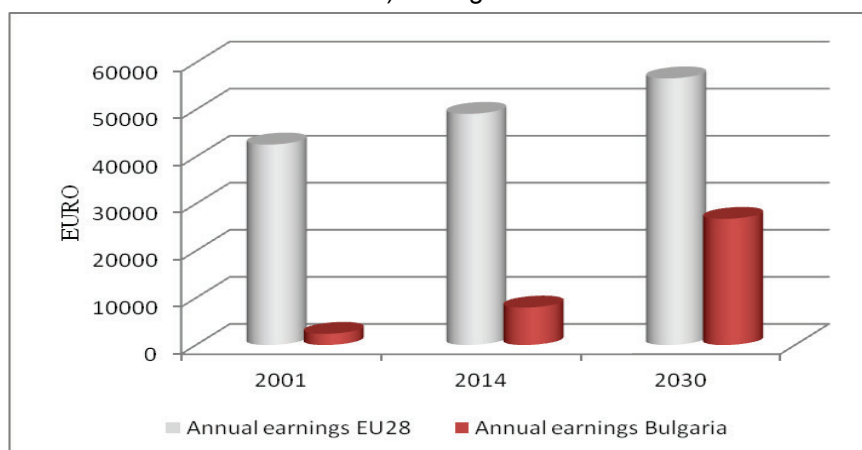
While job opportunities and higher incomes are ever more likely to remain the main reason to emigrate, it is reasonable to consider the foreseeable perspective, in which the significance of this factor can be expected to decrease.

The data in Figure 2 indicate that in 2001 the level of net earnings of a family of two adults employed full-time and two children in Bulgaria had been 19 times lower in comparison to the average European level for the same type of family. In 2014, this ratio decreases to 6.2 times i.e. for this fifteen-year period there is a clearly outlined

process of catching up with regard to the earnings. This catching up process could be due to some extent to the delayed net earning growth in the EU because of the new members that joined the Union (the registered increase is 15%), but it also reflects the dynamics of net earnings in Bulgaria (216%). Despite that, as of 2014 the net level of earning in Bulgaria comprises less than one fifth of the EU-28 average. If we assume that these rates of increase will remain unchanged, then in 2030 the average level of earning in Bulgaria will comprise nearly 50% of the EU-28 average. In that sense, there are no realistic chances for this factor, which motivates emigration, to disappear in the foreseeable future.

Figure 2

Annual net earnings (a household with two adults employed full-time and two children) in Bulgaria and in EU-28



Source. Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, Annual net earnings [earn_nt_net] Last update: 18-12-2015 (last date of access: 6.01.2016).

Another important aspect of the effects of *emigration on the labour market is linked to the quality of human capital*. It was already mentioned that the role of emigration towards increasing the quality of human capital and its effectiveness requires as an additional condition the return of the emigrants to their home country and continue to work there.

In the scientific literature the positive effect of emigration on the labour force is associated with *an increase in the quality of the labour force* and an increase in the level of income they receive. This statement is only valid in cases, when low skilled labour force emigrates, receives education and increases its qualification in the accepted country and returns to its home country as more highly qualified. The reality of the matter for Bulgarian emigrants indicates that a significant part of them, during the first few years upon emigration, perform labour, which requires lower qualification than the educational and professional level, they attained in their home country. For some of

the emigrants this practice remains valid throughout their entire professional lives; they lose qualification and competitive positions on specific labour markets. Studies conducted amongst Bulgarian emigrants indicate that “among the so-called cyclical migrants there are also people with higher qualification, such as teachers, engineers and medical workers, while the main factor, which drives them to leave their home country, is higher remuneration abroad, even at positions, requiring lower qualification. As a means to find temporary employment, they are forced to take the positions of unqualified workers”.³

Marina Richter, PhD indicates that a study amongst Bulgarian emigrants in Switzerland, incl. a wide range of professional profiles – from agricultural workers to the musicians playing in the philharmonic, highlights cases, in which highly qualified Bulgarian specialists take the jobs of low-skilled personnel. Not only does this discontinue the process of their professional development, but it also conditions a decrease in their income. Besides the fact that their development stops, the remittances that they send to their home country, are smaller in comparison to the ones of the Bulgarians, working in the same area of expertise”.⁴ Beatrice Kner - economics professor at the University of Kassel indicates that Germany is amongst the favorite destinations for Bulgarian specialists. “We urgently need highly qualified specialists – mathematicians, engineers, programmers, chemists, because our progress is built on innovations. The need for foreign workers is further due to the fact that many of the German specialists leave the country to work in other countries, such as Switzerland, Great Britain and the USA, because of higher salaries”. However, Prof. Kner underlines the fact that: “A problem for Germany stems from the fact that, for example, the doctors and nurses, who come in to replace our specialists do not always speak German well.”⁵

The analysis of the positions (previous and current), assumed by Bulgarian emigrants in Spain allows several authors to conclude that “a considerable share of Bulgarian emigrants in Spain lose their qualification”. The comparison of the previous (prior to emigration) assumed position within the overall job structure with the one assumed following emigration indicates that the majority of employees work in the service sector, as vendors and in agriculture, 24% are low-qualified workers, while qualified workers in the industry as machine operators. Clerks, comprise around 18%) (Zareva, 2012, p. 398, 400).

The presented examples are only a part of the multitude of facts, which can be presented in support of the thesis that *the emigration of the Bulgarian labour force does not lead to its development as human capital. On the other hand, the emigrants receive higher labour remuneration in comparison to the one they would receive in Bulgaria*. This is due to the higher price of labour in the EU countries, USA and Canada and the higher standard of living. Hence, it can be anticipated that catching up to the

³ See <http://www.dw.com/bg/ползата-от-българите-в-чужбина-а-17451967>, 23.02.2014.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

average level of earnings of the EU would play the role of a factor, which decreases the stimuli for emigration.

● *In the short-term emigration contributes to a decrease in the pressure over the labour market and towards a decrease in the unemployment level.* Bulgaria has felt this impact on numerous occasions during different periods from its development, when for one reason or another (economic reforms or crisis periods) emigration saved the country from severe social crises, but stripped the labour market from the supply labour by specific professions.

In the early years of the transition period, when the initial reforms began (price liberalization, liquidation of inefficient enterprises, privatization) and a number of sectors carried out mass lay-offs of the labour force (mechanical engineering, steel production, cement industry), the emigration of highly qualified labour resources, such as designers, engineers, technicians, chemists, was their sole alternative if they were to continue their working life. This was also the initial wave of outflow from employment of the qualified labour force and of specific specialists. Twenty years later the demand for labour in the country is faced with a shortage of engineers, medium technical personnel, welders, fitters, etc. Consequently, depending on which sectors were privatized (frequently privatization was a step towards liquidation) mass emigration occurred in other professional fields, while one of the last waves in recent years was that of doctors, nurses and other medical personnel. This disrupts the balances between the supply and demand for labour of individual labour markets - for example, healthcare, education, construction, the electronic industry, mechanical engineering and others. The outflow of the segment of the labour force with medium qualification further strongly disrupted the process of transmission of management decisions and practices from the managerial module towards the executive one and contributed to a decrease in the effectiveness of the on-going economic and social changes.

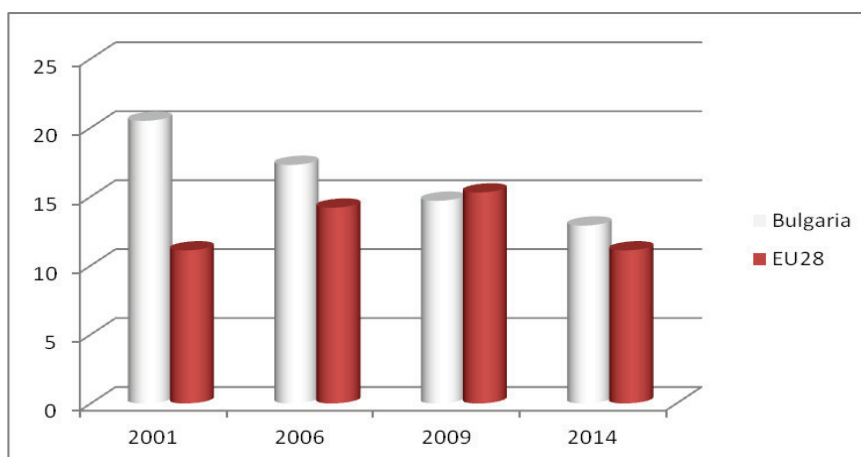
In the short-term emigration decreases social tension and the overloading of the unemployment benefit system, but in the medium- and long-term the consequences from emigration for the supply of labour are negative, since they further the imbalance in the professional structure of the labour market and cause the subsequent deficit of certain specialists on the labour market.

● *Emigration decreases the size of the labour force.* During the period 1992-2001 this decrease amounts to 22 thousand persons per annum according to 2011 census data. Since the beginning of the XXI century, this process continues at lower levels, but covers important groups from the population, which are of structure-determining significance for the labour force – the youth (boys and girls) and segments from labour force with a medium level of qualification. In this way, Bulgaria also loses part of its qualitative fertile contingents (future mothers) as well as part of the qualitative youth work force, which would otherwise implement the technological transfer of the Bulgarian economy to the industry and the development of the services. The loss of labour resources restricts the development of modern technologies and the technological reequipping of the economy.

●The fact that emigrants abroad assume positions, which require low qualification, but provide higher wages, *disrupts the professional continuity in families and discourages the professional development of the children*. Finding work abroad, which requires lower qualification, but earns a higher salary, decreases the motivation for career development and training amongst the members of the families. Furthermore, parents who work abroad show their children a practice that they should follow, demonstrating that by working abroad they too can receive a higher level of remuneration than in Bulgaria, without having to study or further develop as professionals. The remittances, sent by emigrants, discourage the professional development and economic activity of the members of the families that have remained in the country, incl. of the children. In the long-term, a significant problem is not as much posed by the quantitative effect of emigration on the labour, but rather the *structural effect on the population and the labour resources*. More and more attention is being paid to this fact not only in economic studies, but also in the public space it is an indisputable fact that emigration contributes to a decrease in the intellectual and academic potential, to an outflow of a considerable part of the middle class as well as to a continued outflow of some of the best adolescent students and pupils.⁶ The ethnic structure of the population changes; the share of the illiterate, the uneducated and the persons with low education and qualification increases. The data indicate that the number of children, who left school increases over the years and is higher in comparison to the average European level.

Figure 3

Relative share of early school leavers in Bulgaria and EU-28
(% of total number of children in school)



Source. Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (last entry 6.04.2016).

⁶ See <http://www.assa-m.com/katalog1111.php>

Since emigration is a worldwide phenomenon and a process, developing towards the establishment of closer links between labour markets, one should not even ponder on restricting the opportunities of people to live and work where they feel would be best for them. However, this process is subject to external impacts and some of the EU countries have elaborated a long-term vision about the types of emigrants they welcome into their countries. The massive refugee wave, which swept over Europe in 2015 and 2016, clearly highlighted the national policies of some countries: for example, Germany, which welcomes young people from the East as a means to support the aging German nation and to ensure the availability of a qualified labour force in the future; the selective policy for other European countries and even the protectionist policy of yet a third group of countries (such as Hungary). Unfortunately, in this respect, *Bulgaria does not have a clear and coherent* vision and policy, nor a system for selection of immigrants in the country. There are no policies, aimed at encouraging the more qualitative segment of the labour force to settle in the country, nor stimuli to keep this labour force in the country, which uses Bulgarian citizenship as a document, granting access to the Schengen area.

These and a series of other questions need to be raised and subject to public debate in both the scientific circles and amongst politicians so that they may receive clear answers and reasonable courses of action not only in the short-term, but also in the long-term perspective.

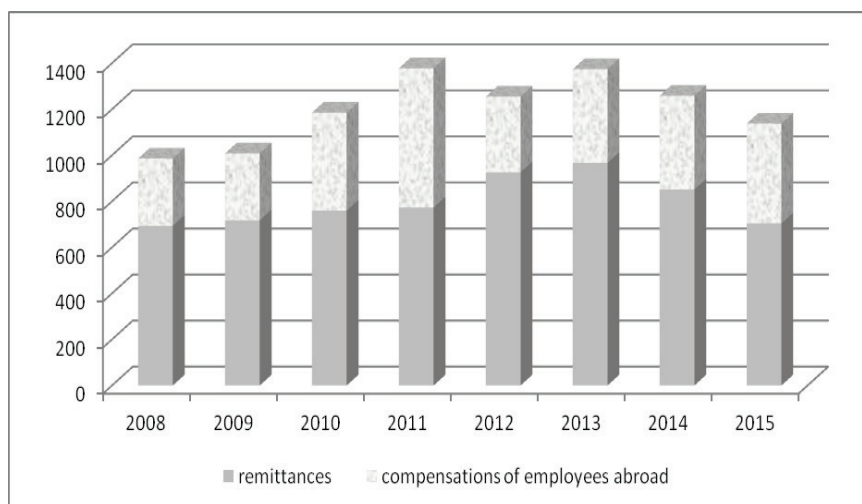
Remittances of emigrants in Bulgaria as a source to support household budgets and private consumption

As a socio-economic phenomenon emigration is not new for Bulgaria. However, in the period of changes in the socio-economic system in the end of the twentieth century, it possesses specific characteristics, which highlight its sustainability and dynamics. In this context, the practice of sending remittances is characterized by increasing sustainability and a tendency towards increase. The development of a statistical system, capable for more fully encompassing and registering remittances further contributes to this development. Despite the likelihood that a part of these transfers remain "hidden" from the public, in the period after 1998 transfers from abroad increase from USD 230.1 million to more than USD 1200 million in 2011 (see NSI, 2001, p. 90).

As of 2000 the money transfers to Bulgaria by individuals from abroad amount to about EUR 300 million and increase to EUR 600 million in 2007 and to more than EUR 1300 million in 2015 (Balance of payments of the Bulgarian National Bank). The tendency towards increase in remittances as a percentage of GDP is clearly pronounced: 2.7% in 2008; 3.2% in 2011; 5.2% in 2012 and 5.7% in 2013. These data illustrate the fact that emigration from Bulgaria and working abroad with the aim of supporting the household budgets is now characterized by a sustainable tendency and increasingly *being transformed from a model for "survival" of Bulgarian families into a model for employment abroad* (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Remittances from abroad by Bulgarians and employee compensations for the period 2008-2015* (EUR millions)



*2015 data until October, inclusive.

Source. BNB, balance of payments, www.bnb.bg

The role the money transfers from abroad by Bulgarian emigrants towards the socio-economic development of the country is also due to the fact that the *share of these resources in the key macroeconomic indicators constantly increases*. According to assessments of several authors, during the period 1998-2003 remittances, as a share of the country's exports, increase by more than 3.2 times and reach 6.5%; as a percentage of imports they increase by 3.2 times reaching 5.5%, while as a percentage of foreign direct investments, they increase from 36 to 49% (Kostadinova, 2005, p. 6).

This trend is not only characteristic of Bulgaria, but also of other countries from Central and Eastern Europe with comparable socio-economic transformations and that these transfers play a significant role towards their economic development. For example, in Romania the share of money transfers by emigrants as a percentage of foreign direct investments exceeds 90% in 2003.

The remittances, transferred by Bulgarian emigrants, undoubtedly have a *stabilizing effect on incomes*, both at the macro-level and at the level of household budgets. This effect is particularly clearly pronounced during the period after the crisis of 2008, when the money, received from the emigrants, partially or entirely covered the wage lost as a result of the crisis. For numerous households the remittances became a sole source of income. The public space and the mass media commented numerous times on the fact that not only individual households, but also entire families have made a living with the money, sent by their members, who had emigrated abroad.

Another effect of remittances of emigrants is associated with the *dynamics of savings* and their use as *investment capital*. No systematic studies of this field have been conducted in Bulgaria. The analysis of the amount of resources, which are being sent, indicates that they cannot have a strong impact over savings. A study from the beginning of the century indicates that 43% of the emigrants, who return to our country, invest their saving into developing their own business, while other 31% from them use these savings for the purchase of real estate (see Vladimirov et al., 2000, p. 98-99). About ten years later another study reported that investment intentions are insignificant amongst Bulgarian emigrants (see Christova-Balkanska, 2013, p. 350-352). Taking into consideration the motivation of the emigrants (mainly to make money to feed their families and fund the education of their children), their investment intentions clearly remain in the background. Furthermore, it should be noted that over time some of the emigrants decide to permanently settle in the receiver country and take their family with them. With that, such emigrants practically give up any investment intentions or business initiatives in their home country, if they had any to begin with.

In support of the conclusions presented above comes the analysis of the amounts and destinations of the sums, transferred by the emigrants. The majority of money transfers of Bulgarians are from Spain, Italy and Greece. According to data from a study of Bulgarian emigrants in Spain, the average transferred sums amount to 500-600 EUR per month, while the share of total earnings that they transfer home varies significantly – from half of total earnings (7% of respondents) to a quarter of total labour income (73% of respondents). More than half of the emigrants in Spain, interviewed in 2011, state that they do not send any money to their home country (see Christova-Balkanska, 2013, p. 349). The discontinuation of these money transfers indicates that over time most Bulgarians settle abroad with their entire families and spend money on necessities there.

This author also reported that the intended uses of the resources, transferred from Spain, are as follows: for consumption (71%), for education (11%), for savings (6%), for purchase of real estate (5%), for medical needs (3%). The more detailed data indicate that the money sent to relatives are used to cover current monetary needs, such as loans (according to 10.2% of interviewed emigrants), for the education of a family member (according to 9.4% of male respondents and 12% of female respondents), for healthcare (according to 16.7% of male respondents and 35% of female respondents).

The presented data highlight the *consumption characteristic of money transfers, sent mainly for the purposes of meeting basic necessities, educational and healthcare needs and a low level of investment intentions*. This observation contrasts aforementioned conclusions from a study by Vladimirov et al. (2000), according to which, during the new millennium, nearly 40% of emigrants have declared investment intentions, while, in 2011 just 1% of men and 0.6% of women had such investment intentions. One of the reasons for this could be the unsuccessful development of small- and medium-sized businesses in Bulgaria and, above all, the lack of competitiveness and transparency of the market.

Other socio-economic effects and impacts of emigration - family problems, the links “parents - children” and “education - emigration”

The topic of the children from families, in which a parent (either one or both) has emigrated is becoming increasingly relevant in the public space and provokes in-depth debate, both due to the fact that migration flows intensify in recent years and because of the fact that the consequences from the separation of children from their parents as a result of emigration began to manifest more drastically.

The children from families with emigrating parents are exposed to specific risks that do not affect children from families without emigrants. Despite the fact emigration is motivated by the possibility for improvement of the well-being of the family, according to researchers the separation of families and the departure of a family member for the purposes of living and working in another country is a major emotional shock (D'Emilio et al., 2007). The studies identify effects of erosion of the family structures and relationships, fragmentation of the social network and psychological stress. These negative impacts are much more commonly evidenced in poorer families, where the other members of the family cannot afford to leave their home country and are particularly strongly pronounced when the so-called “circular migration” occurs.

As a result of various studies it has been determined that the longer the period of separation of parents and children, the higher the risk for the children to lose the “authority figure” that is the parent as a head of a family, and another family member or relative to replace “the father” as the authority in the life of the family. Sometimes children assume those functions themselves and in such cases the feelings of abandonment and rejection cannot be compensated by gifts or money sent from abroad, nor by maintaining social contacts from a distance (the so-called “transnational” families) (see UNDP, 2009, p. 79).

The studies of the growing problems among children of emigrants identify two types of risks, depending on whether the children accompany their parents or whether they remain far away. In the first case, the children are subjected to an abrupt change in the socio-economic environment, in which they live, as well as their surroundings and, in numerous cases, their entire lifestyle. In the second case, the children remain in the same socio-economic environment, but are separated from their emigrant parents, while the responsibilities and care relating to their upbringing are assumed by their relatives. Since the proportions of these two occurrences increase not only in Europe, but also in Bulgaria, the attention of the general public, including of the scientific circles, are being focused on uncovering the actual and potential consequences from emigration and the separation of families for society, for the families and for individuals.

In the context of the on-going emigration processes in Bulgaria, the researches are concentrated on the children, left in the country by their parents at the care of friends and relatives. The reasons for the rising interest in this problem are its dynamics and sustainability as a socio-economic phenomenon as well as the growing need for a reaction from the public and the state. A prevailing opinion, voiced in

discussions in the public space, is that children of emigrants, who have been left in the country at the care of other people can be characterized as “children at risk”, since they are subjected to additional stress factors, due to the disconnected link “children-parents”, due to the emigration of their parents, and of the link “children-familiar environment and friends” in cases when the children emigrated together with their parents (Diamandieva, 2014).

Information and data about the growing problems of this newly formed risk group are provided by the State Agency for Child Protection (SACP) as well as by the MLSP, via the provided social services (by settlements), the Departments for Child Protection (DPA) as well as by the studies conducted on that topic by non-governmental organizations.

The conducted study indicates that there are 267 753 children from families of emigrants out of the total number of children in Bulgaria (1 191 221) (Foundation “Partners-Bulgaria”, 2015, p. 11.). Hence, nearly a quarter, or 22.5%, of all children below the age of 18 live and are being raised in an environment, from which their emigrant parents are physically absent. The conducted study, which is based on research, interviews and focus groups, identifies the regions and settlements, which are particularly symptomatic in this respect, such as the Eastern Rhodopi, the North Central and the North-western region. It is estimated that in these regions around 60% of the children do not live with their parents, but rather with other relatives. For example, the children of emigrants comprise 25% of all children in Lovech municipality (Svilen Andreev, team leader of project “The other generation”, 2016). In Nedelino municipality, around 670 women from the municipality work in Spain, while the total number of people doing work abroad (in Germany, England, the Netherlands) is around 2000.⁷

Since there are no official statistics relating to this phenomenon, all available data need to be accepted conditionally. However, existing opinions about the elaboration of a register of children of emigrants should not be supported.

The summary of the results from the conducted studies indicates that the main problems relate to mental health and social ties (see Foundation “Partners – Bulgaria”, 2015). The mental health of the children “left behind” is characterized as more volatile; they are more vulnerable, less emotionally stable and sometimes fall into states of depression. Therefore, the negative socio-economic consequences can manifest on all levels – individual, school, social institutions. The higher sensitivity and loneliness of the children of emigrants result in more severe states of depression, worsening of their performance at school or refusal to attend school, addiction to drugs and alcohol, early pregnancy, engagement in illegal activities, etc.

All of this, give reason to researchers and responsible organizations to characterize this group of children as a high risk one. Local media and sociological studies both report such problems, drawing attention to specific examples of dropping out of school or antisocial behaviour. It is evident from the above, that the children of emigrants often exhibit hostility and the reason does not stem from their relationships

⁷ See dariknews.bg, 14.05.2014.

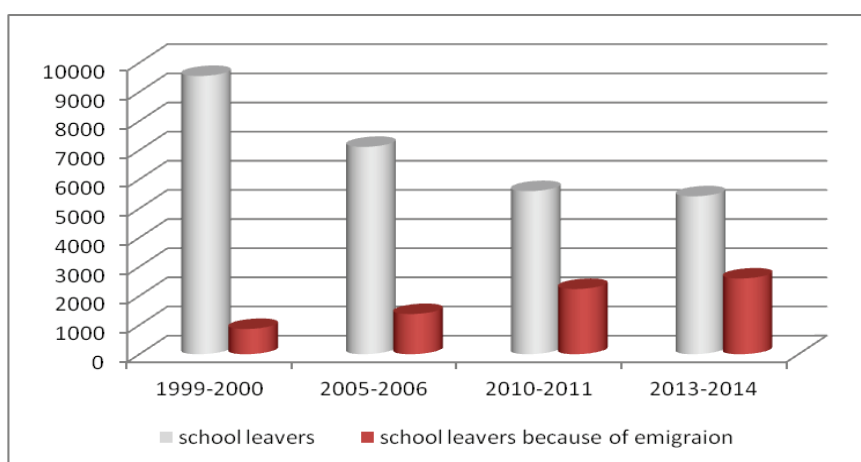
with peers, but rather because they feel hurt by their parents, who abandoned them. Ultimately, some children engage in illegal activities.⁸

With the framework of project “The School as a Centre of the Community”, presented by the National Network for Children at the forum of UNICEF Bulgaria “Effects on children, left by parents, who work and live abroad”, it was determined that the largest share of children “at risk” live in the North-western region (44% of all pupils in the region).⁹ According to the conclusions drawn by the research team, this group of pupils is associated with the highest risk of dropping out of school, health problems, social stigmatization and other forms of marginalization. Considering the low economic development of this region, the above-mentioned consequences demonstrate once again, that the main motive for emigration is to look for a well-paid job.

One of the deficits of the Bulgarian legislation stems from the fact that there is no adequate legal framework for guardianship and custody to regulate the status and the relations between parents and the relatives, who take care of the children while their parents are away. The procedures are slow and strenuous and in the absence of custody, the children could in fact be deprived of healthcare and education, legal defence and financial security as well as other services, which require the presence and consent of the parents.

Figure 5

Number of school leavers between I - IV grade in Bulgaria by reasons



Source. NSI. Demographic and social statistics, education, <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/3435> (last entry 30.12.2015)

⁸ “The inability to share personal worries with my mother makes me feel unfulfilled, so I often shut myself down” (says Tedi of 16 years, whose parents have lived in the Netherlands for the last 10 years). “Sometimes I cry, because I do not have my parents next to me; there are even times when I hate them”. (See http://rodopi24.blogspot.bg/2015/07/blog-post_419.html).

⁹ <http://nmd.bg/kakav-e-efektat-varhu-detsata-tchiyto-roditeli-rabotyat-v-tchuzhbina/>

The tendency, evidenced in recent years, is towards an increase in the number of parents, who leave to work abroad, and take their children with them. Since the beginning of the XXI century the evidenced tendency is towards decrease in the total number of children, who drop out of school. However, this does not apply to the share of the children, who drop out of school during the I - IV grade period as a result of leaving the country – their number increases from 866 children during the school year 1999-2000 to 2598 children during the school year 2013-2014 (see Figure 5).

According to a psychologist from the Care Centre for Children and Families at the Youth Centre in Dupnitsa, “the share of the illiterate children and of the children, who have difficulties in reading and understanding Bulgarian increases and one of the reasons for that is that more and more children, mainly from families from the Roma and Turkish communities, are left by their parents to be raised by relatives, who do not speak Bulgarian. Hence, the children learn the language, which is spoken by the family (Turkish or Roma) and by grandparent, who do not speak Bulgarian. As a result such children have difficulties in assimilating the training material and fail to develop habits of studying at home. Another aspect of the problem, which is also evidenced among Bulgarian children, is dropping out of the school system. The absence of one or both parents strongly discourages children from regular school attendance. The study conducted by the Care Centre for Children and Families at the Youth Centre in Dupnitsa as well as their regular activities indicate that there are cases, in which children, left predominately at the care of the mother, while the father works abroad, refuse to attend school regularly”.¹⁰

According to data from General Directorate “Control over the Rights of the Child” at the State Agency for Child Protection, in 2013 the agency has taken measures to bring back 75 children from abroad, who have emigrated with their parents, but have not attended school and have lived in miserable conditions. The director of the directorate states that currently there is no obligation for the parent to inform the institutions in the country in whose care they place their children while they work abroad. The first to identify the absence of a parent are the teachers, followed by the public commissions for combating delinquency of minors. Currently, the sanctions, enforced under the Child Protection Acts are extremely high in amount, but it is perhaps necessary to envisage other mechanisms for sanctioning of parents as a means to abolish irresponsible behaviour.¹¹

Conclusion

The following conclusions could be made from the analysis of the impacts of emigration over the socio-economic development of Bulgaria:

The significant emigration from Bulgaria during the last twenty five years and the continuous emigration intentions requires the general public’s attention to be focused

¹⁰ <http://www.dennews.bg/news/2015/1/28/22006>, 26.01.2015.

¹¹ See dariknews.bg, 14.05.2014.

on the reasons, which condition the process and on the negative effects it has on the labour market and the environment, in which the children of emigrants are being raised and educated. The change in the economic environment and, above all, the increase in the number of available jobs and the improvement of the quality of employment and the quality of life should be supported, since they are means to keep human capital and labour resources in Bulgaria. The designation of a clear conception for management of such issues is also necessary.

Bulgaria lacks a clear and consistent vision and policy as well as a system for selection of immigrants in the country, such that would allow the country to compensate for the loss of labour resources due to emigration and to balance the demand and supply of labour. This makes the country insufficiently prepared to address the increased migration pressure in a way that would be best for the needs of the country.

It should be pointed out that all analyses and assessments are based on episodic studies and are not the result of systematic observations. Therefore the analyses and the conclusions drawn on that basis are characterized by a certain degree of conditionality. The need for systematic observations is rather pressing and hence the elaboration and introduction of a system for regular monitoring of migration processes should be recommended.

The remittances sent by emigrants to their home country, in this case to Bulgaria, mainly contribute to supporting household incomes and consumption, while their contribution towards an increase in investments and savings is insignificant.

Regarding the impact of emigration on the labour market, the existing assessments are predominantly negative and boil down to a decrease in the population number, incl. of the population within working age, to worsening of the reproductive capability of the population and to negative structural changes. As a result of the emigration, labour resources decrease significantly, incl. of the more qualitative segments of the labour force – the youth, qualified labour resources. Emigration does not contribute to an increase in the quality of the labour force for many Bulgarians, because aboard they take jobs, requiring lower qualification in comparison to the one they have acquired and to the profession they had in Bulgaria. In other words, there is an on-going process of de-qualification of the labour force and if such people were to return to the country, they would, as a part of the labour force, have worsened qualitative parameters.

The emigration of the parents has lasting negative consequences for the children from those families, including breakage of the direct links “children-parents”, succession and authority, sustainability and stability of the development of the children.

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