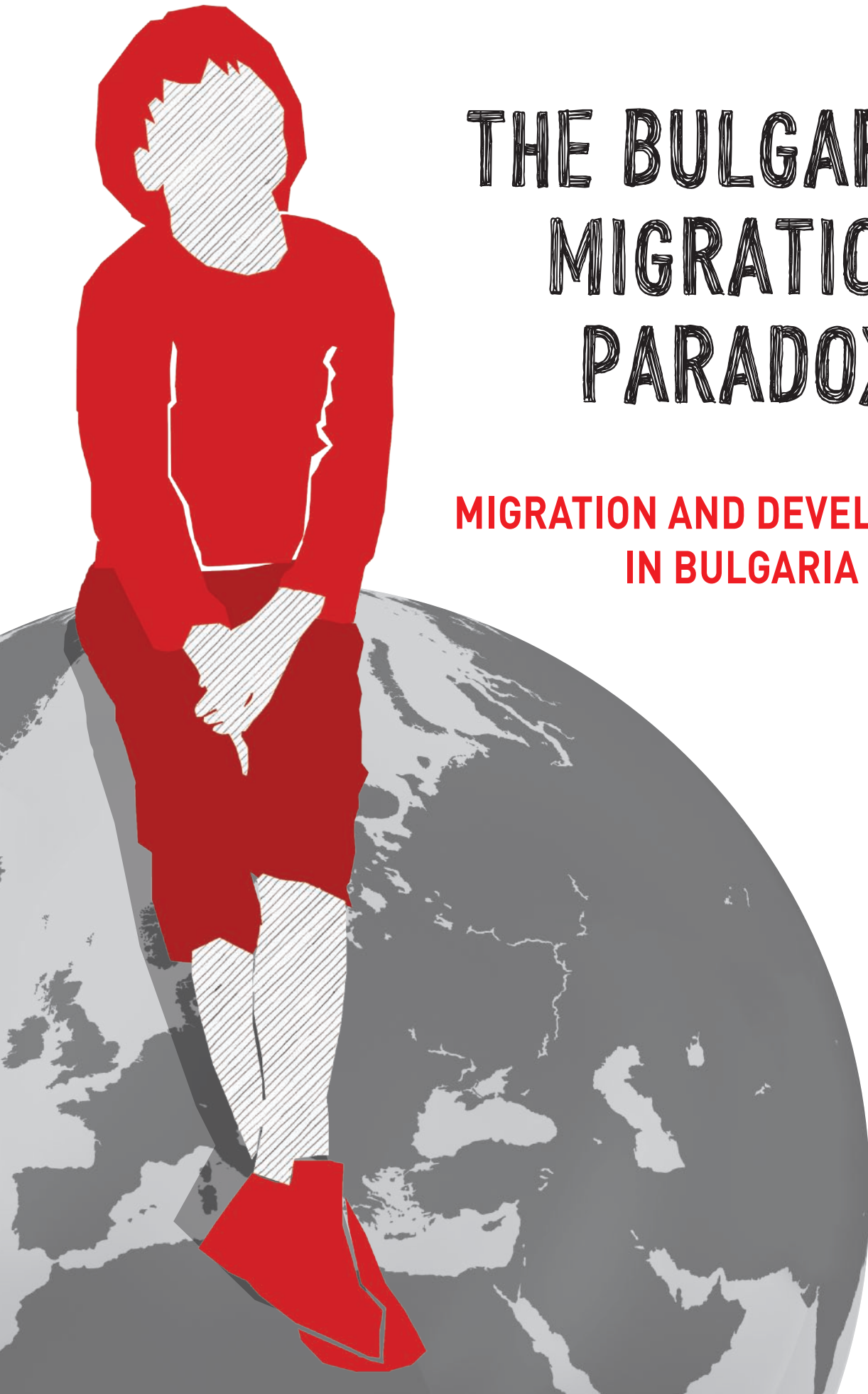


THE BULGARIAN MIGRATION PARADOX

**MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
IN BULGARIA**



The MIND Project (Migration. Interconnectedness. Development) is a three-year knowledge-building, advocacy and campaigning project seeking to contribute to a European society that understands the complexities of migration; responds to the challenges with humanity and respect; and values the contribution of everyone working together to have a positive effect on our lives, community and place.

The MIND project partners include Caritas organizations in 11 EU member countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden as well as Caritas Europa.

Integral to the MIND project is the research and preparation of eleven national and one European publication. These publications will serve as advocacy tools for promoting the engagement of European actors and contain recommendations on migration and development at national and EU levels drawing on a solid knowledge and evidence base based on Christian and universal values.

For more information about MIND follow the campaign:



This publication was authored by **Prof. Anna Krasteva** with the support of Cáritas, the Global Migration Policy Associates (GMPA) and Caritas Europa.

Proofread by Molly O’Keffe and Nadine Croizard
Graphic design by Vanden Broele Group with the support of Leticia Lozano (Caritas Europa)
Cover illustration by Jean Bernard Boulnois

Published by Cáritas Bulgaria, 9 Oborishte Str., 1504 Sofia, Bulgaria, May 2019.



The MIND project is financed by the European Commission, DG DEVCO under the Development education and awareness raising (DEAR) funding programme of the EU.

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- CHAPTER 1 -

FOREWORD

Whether in search of a better life and opportunities, escaping poverty, hunger, exploitation and unfair distribution of the world's resources, or fleeing warfare and persecution, people are forced to migrate. Because of the lack of security and development opportunities, people flee their places of origin, leaving behind their homes, friends, family and memories.

Bulgarian society is not unified in terms of its reception of migrants and the notion of supporting and facilitating their integration. We are witnessing the expression of highly negative attitudes by small groups of people who react loudly and ferociously to every occurrence of migrants, and yet such isolated incidents cannot be taken as a characteristic of the entire society.

The presence of people enduring the experience of migration is an opportunity for human development, interaction and intercultural dialogue. The fact that migrants often speak a different language and are carriers of a different culture does not mean we cannot find ways to live together. By getting to know each other better and by being able to experience, feel, and understand what the other is going through, we begin to realise that we can be of help.

In that context, Caritas' priorities are aimed at supporting the facilitation of the processes of integration and advocacy, particularly in terms of developing a responsible policy that provides support mechanisms easing the inclusion of migrants into Bulgarian society.

Our organisation supports people forced to migrate so that they can get back on their feet, enrol their children in school, learn Bulgarian, find a job, care and provide for their family and fulfil all responsibilities that are also shared by Bulgarian citizens. Migration is a phenomenon that is an integral part of human history, a phenomenon that is increasingly affected by globalisation, economic and social development. Let us, as Pope Francis calls us to do, "be reasonably open to the complex phenomenon of migration and facilitate integration that involves migrants duly respecting the rule of law of the host state, and propel a renewed commitment of society to a genuine culture of reception

and solidarity, so that everyone can be loved as a child and feel at home in the great human family", that is, in our "Common Home".

Alongside another 11 Caritas organisations from 11 EU Member States, Caritas Bulgaria is participating in the three-year initiative "Migration, Interaction, Development" (MIND). The different events we organise in Bulgaria within the framework of the initiative aim to contribute to raising public awareness. The project also aims to sharpen the wider sensitivity and understanding of the interlink between migration and development, the root causes of migration, the role of host societies and the contribution of migrants to local development and developing countries, more generally.

An important part of the MIND initiative is the report "The Bulgarian Migration Paradox - Positive Integration and Negative Political Discourse", which we would like to present to you via this publication and which, together with the Caritas reports from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden will make up the Common Home Special Edition. I would especially like to thank Professor Anna Krasteva for her research work on the report and to all those who have contributed to the preparation of this publication.

1. I hope that through this publication, and all other initiatives related to the theme of "Migration and Development", we will be able to contribute to sharpening awareness of the subject, to shedding more light on the need to consider migration, socio-economic development and human rights in a concerted fashion. This publication will illustrate the need to plan and implement policies that involve an integrative approach for addressing development issues and targeting migration as a management option, in order to bring about migration which is safe and voluntary, rather than deadly or forced.

**Emanuil Patashev,
Secretary General
May 2019**



СВЕТЪТ

#whatishome

- CHAPTER 2 -

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bulgarian migration experience is highly interesting from the perspective of the relationship between migration and development. This relationship is associated with three paradoxes. First and foremost, Bulgaria has experienced extremely high emigration over the last three decades, which – coupled with very low fertility and very low immigration – has deprived the country of the skills and labour force needed to sustain the economy and further the development of the country. The second paradox is that in postcommunist Bulgaria, a country with little experience of migration and absolutely no experience in democratic migration policy, there are high levels of immigrant integration in terms of labour market participation, and linguistic, cultural, and social integration. The third paradox is that in European Bulgaria, which did not experience a significant increase in migrant stocks during and after the so called “migration crisis,” there is an increase in securitarian and restrictive discourses and policies which create negative attitudes towards migrants and impede necessary immigration and integration.

Four groups of migrant communities are key to the migration & development nexus in Bulgaria: refugees, immigrants, Bulgarian emigrants and the Bulgarian diaspora more broadly. These groups differ greatly in number. The number of refugees with international protection status who have settled in Bulgaria is very low: 1,000–2,000. The number of immigrants in Bulgaria is approximately 150,000. The number of Bulgarians who have emigrated abroad is approximately 1.3 million overall. Regarding the Bulgarian diaspora more broadly, while no reliable statistical data exists, figures from countries around the world indicate that the number of people with Bulgarian ancestry worldwide is well over 2 million. This huge emigration of Bulgarians, particularly since 1989, is a loss of demographic, social, educational and democratic capital, but also contributes to the country’s development through significant remittances. Remittances from Bulgarian emigrants exceed foreign direct investment: 1152,6 million euros vs 901,9 million euros.⁽¹⁾

Yet today, Bulgaria’s relatively small population size of just over 7 million, its working age population (15-64 years old) of 4.8 million, and its high emigration contrasted with very low immigration, undermine the viability of Bulgaria’s economy and its capacity to provide for the welfare of its population.

Immigrants in Bulgaria are few in number, around 2% of the population. They are well-integrated in terms of labour market participation, linguistic, cultural and social integration. The refugee community is characterised by a big difference between the number of those who have been granted international protection status – 25,075 – and the number of those who have settled in Bulgaria, which is estimated at no more than 2,000. For refugees, Bulgaria is and will continue to be a transit country.

The migratory context outlines Bulgaria’s profile as an emigration country in terms of both flows and stocks. The dynamics of migration flows are characterised by three trends. First of all, emigration exceeds immigration, and the net migration is negative. Secondly, the fluctuations in net migration are significant, varying between –24,190 and –1,108. Thirdly, regardless of the fluctuations, after peaking at –24,190 in 2010, the negative net migration has been significantly lower, ranging from approximately –1,000 to –10,000.

The contribution of migrants and refugees is examined along several lines. The first is integration through work and entrepreneurship. A positive trend is emerging of NGOs and institutions employing migrants and refugees as interpreters/translators, social workers and mediators, which allows them to contribute to the integration of new waves of refugees. The overall contribution of refugees and migrants to the intercultural picture of Sofia and other big cities is growing.

The obstacles to refugee integration are several. The first is non-implementation of the refugee integration programme on the part of state institutions. While a deputy prime minister responsible for integration has not been designated yet, the state has shifted the responsibility for integration to municipalities, a shift for which neither the local government nor the local population was prepared. Furthermore, xeno-

¹ For 2017.

phobic anti-immigrant discourse is intensifying, along with overt hostility against migrants and refugees. The specificity of the Bulgarian case must be emphasised: anti-migration discourses, politics and attitudes are due neither to an increase in the number of migrants and refugees in the country – on the contrary, their overall number and percentage of the population remain very low – nor to any negative experience of Bulgarian citizens, the overwhelming majority of whom do not personally know any migrants/refugees. The responsibility for the increasingly negative environment, which undermines integration policies, lies with the political elite from both nationalist parties in governmental coalition and some opposition parties.

Opportunities for enhancing migrants' own development and contribution to development are analysed with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, integration policies and effective grassroots practices of integration. Bulgaria's policy in the light of the UN's Global Goals for Sustainable Development can be summarised by two opposite trends. The first trend is positive: the long-term commitment to implement the "International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Issues" Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whereby Bulgaria is contributing towards addressing the root causes of migration, such as conflict, poverty, non-development, and humanitarian disasters. The second trend is negative: Bulgaria's retreat from the principles of multilateralism. Bulgaria has not ratified to date any international convention on protection of migrants and migration governance. It did not endorse the Global Compact for Migration at the end of 2018. Another concern is the high level of Bulgarian arms exports, a large portion of which is said to end up in hands of armed bands in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, where armed conflict is displacing many people – some of whom arrive in Bulgaria.

Bulgaria's European integration is a key factor for harmonising legislation in the sphere of migration and integration. A series of amendments to the Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act, adopted in 2018, have eased access to the Bulgarian labour market for third-country nationals.

In the decade after 2008, several national strategies on migration, asylum and integration were adopted, thus illustrating the prioritisation of these policies. The National Strategy for the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014–2020) has redefined Bulgaria's refugee integration policy. Until 2013 this policy was centralised and implemented by the State Agency for Refugees, whereas the new strategy introduced a decentralised approach in which municipalities have the leading role. The approach regarding active inclusion of local government in refugee integration is positive; its realisation requires increasing the administrative capacity of municipalities and overcoming the apprehensions of the local population. Civil society is an active actor for integration with innovative practices of social entrepreneurship, integration and intercultural activities.

The recommendations are grouped under several categories: on integration policies, access to the labour market, advocacy and raising public awareness, and art and sport for intercultural dialogue. Among the most important and urgent: designating a deputy prime minister responsible for coordinating integration policies, introducing the One-Stop Shop approach, encouraging social entrepreneurship and providing incentives for companies employing refugees, and creating a Migration Observatory.



Photo: Caritas Sofia

- CHAPTER 3 -

THE COMMON HOME VISION AND VALUES: MIGRATION, DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'* – On care for our common home, Pope Francis (2015) reminded us that the Earth is “our common home,” and that we need to address economic, social, political and environmental challenges together in an integrated manner (CAFOD et al. 2018). Exclusion and poverty, warfare, global inequalities, climate change, unsustainable consumption and growth – as well as forced displacement and migration – demand our utmost attention and engagement. The encyclical quickly became a reference document for Catholic social services as well as for development agencies worldwide, drawing attention both inside and outside the Catholic Church. With the national and European “Common Home” publications, Caritas draws on this message to explore the complex interconnectedness between migration and development with its faith-based ethical framework respecting human rights and dignity.

For Caritas, a human-centred, ethical and rights-based approach is fundamental to law, policy, and practice. Thus, an ethical interpretation of the relationship between migration, development and the human person is essential to frame the vision and the objectives of the “Common Home publication.” Caritas’ vision, actions and views are rooted in legal and political instruments and sources, and fundamentally in Christian and Roman Catholic Church values and teaching. These values and teachings have, in common with international legal instruments and policy frameworks, an affirmation of human dignity, equality for all, and the inalienability of human rights as key moral principles to ensure the peaceful coexistence and basic well-being of all persons and peoples on the planet. International legal instruments and policy frameworks include: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and eight fundamental United Nations human rights covenants and conventions;⁽²⁾ the

1951 Refugee Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; and the International Labour Standards defining principles and rights for decent work. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda are especially relevant global policy frameworks. Catholic Social Teaching (CST), the doctrine developed by the Catholic Church on matters of social and economic justice, and fundamental Christian values are the foundations for Caritas views and action.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis (2015:12) has argued that “the urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development.” Moreover, the Pope has called for a dialogue including everyone about “how we are shaping the future of our planet” (2015:12), questioning the current model of development and the present condition of global society where injustice is commonplace, and more and more people are deprived of their fundamental human rights. This means “prioritising the weakest members of society as a way of measuring progress” (CAFOD et al. 2018:16). Human rights can be defined as the protection of individuals and groups, guaranteed under international law, against interferences with fundamental freedoms and human dignity. Human rights are inalienable and cannot be denied or relinquished by any human being, regardless of any reason including legal or immigration status. They are universal in that they apply to everyone, everywhere. Human rights encompass civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and are indivisible, meaning that the different sets of rights are all equally important for the full development of human beings and their well-being. Human rights instruments and customary international law generate three overarching obligations for States, namely: to respect, to protect, and to fulfil those rights.

² The International Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Racial Discrimination (1965), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).



Photo: Caritas Sofia

A. Migration

Migration is a major feature of today's globalised world. In broad terms, migration is the movement of people from one place of residence to another. While the term migration covers population movement internal to a country – rural to urban or from one locality to another in a different jurisdiction – the MIND project addresses international migration. International migration is a distinct legal, political and social category, as people move from a nation-state in which they are citizens, with the rights and protections citizenship normally confers, to other countries where rights and protections of nationality, of access to social protection and of common identity often do not apply, and where social and cultural paradigms may be significantly different.

While there is no international normative definition for migration, international conventions provide definitions for *refugees* and *migrant workers and members of their families*; the latter applicable to nearly all international migrants. The definition of a refugee in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol on the Status of Refugees is: “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” All EU member States have ratified both the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) states that: “The term ‘migrant worker’ refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.”³ That convention recognises frontier workers, seasonal workers, seafarers, offshore workers, itinerant workers and other specific categories of migrant workers as covered under its provisions. The ICRMW iterates that all basic human rights cover family members present with and dependent on migrant workers. Data from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) shows that nearly all international migrants, whatever their reasons for migration or admission, end up economically active – employed, self-employed or otherwise engaged in a remunerative activity.

Specific definition and statistical standards to obtain reliable and comparable data on international migrants have been agreed under UN auspices and are used by most governments. For statistical purposes, an international migrant is defined as “a person who has resided in a country other than that of birth or citizenship for one year or more, irrespective of the causes or motivations for movement and of legal status in the country of residence.” There are an estimated

³ See full text at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cmw.aspx>

260 million foreign-born people residing today in countries other than where they were born or held original citizenship.⁴ However, this figure does not include persons visiting a country for short periods such as tourists, nor commercial or transport workers who have not changed their place of established residence. Many other persons in temporary, short-term or seasonal employment and/or residence situations are not counted in UN and other statistics on migrants when their sojourn is less than a year and/or if they retain formal residency in their home or another country – even though they may fit the definition of a migrant worker. For an accurate analysis of the interconnectedness of migration and development, Caritas uses a broad understanding of migration, inclusive of all those who are refugees and asylum seekers as well as migrant workers and members of their families.

B. Development

The pledge to leave no one behind and to ensure human rights for all is a cornerstone of the Resolution by the UN General Assembly 70/1 “Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” that contains the Declaration and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 119 sustainable development targets, adopted on 25 September 2015. This document, endorsed by all 193 UN Member States, expresses their shared vision of and commitment to a “world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.”⁵

The 2030 Agenda has led to paradigm shifts in the perception of development. Development and sustainable development concern all countries on the planet; environmental protection and tackling inequalities are considered among key development goals; peace and social justice are seen as integral components of the universal development agenda; and the need for the commitment and participation of all groups within all societies and states is emphasised in order to achieve development for all. The new worldwide consensus on development is grounded in the Universal Declara-

tion of Human Rights and all human rights treaties; therefore, if states do not make progress on the actual realization of human rights for all, the SDGs cannot be reached.

The term development encapsulates the elaboration of productive means, forces, capacities, organisation and output of goods, services, technology and knowledge to meet human needs for sustenance and well-being. It comprises building the means for: the extraction and transformation of resources; the production of goods, services and knowledge; constructing infrastructure for production, transportation and distribution; reproducing capital as well as skills and labour; and providing for human welfare/well-being in terms of housing, nutrition, healthcare, education, social protection and culture in its broad sense (Taran 2012).

Caritas uses the concept of integral human development, which places the human person at the centre of the development process. It may be defined as an all-embracing approach that takes into consideration the well-being of the person and of all people, in seven different dimensions. First, the *social dimension*, which focuses on quality of life in terms of nutrition, health, education, employment, social protection and social participation, as well as equality of treatment and non-discrimination on any grounds. Second, the *work and economic activity* dimension as the main means of self and family sustenance, of socio-economic engagement and of direct contribution to development for most adults in all populations. Third, the *ecological dimension* which refers to respect for the goods of creation and to ensuring the quality of life for future generations without ignoring this generation’s cry for justice. Fourth, the *political dimension*, which includes issues such as: the existence of the rule of law; respect for civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights; democracy, in particular, as a representative and above all participatory tool. Fifth, the *economic dimension* which relates to the level of GDP and the distribution of income and wealth, the sustainability of economic growth, the structure of the economy and employment, the degree of industrialisation, the level of high-tech ICT, and the state’s capacity to obtain revenue for human services and social protection, among other considerations. Sixth, the *cultural dimension* which addresses the identity and cultural expression of communities and peoples, as well as the capacity for intercultural dialogue and respectful engagement between cultures and identities, and seventh, the *spiritual dimension*. Together, these dimensions underpin an integral approach to development (Caritas Europa 2010). According to Catholic Social Teaching (CST), social inequalities demand coordinated action from all people, the whole of society, and the whole of government in all countries for the sake of humanity, based on two premises: 1) social questions are global, and 2) socio-economic inequalities are a danger for peace and social cohesion. In this sense, development of our own country and that of others must be a concern for us all – the human community.

⁴ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 8.

⁵ Extrapolated from UNDESA (2017). As noted in UNDESA estimates, “The estimates are based on official statistics on the foreign-born or the foreign population, classified by sex, age and country of origin. Most of the statistics utilised to estimate the international migrant stock were obtained from population censuses. Additionally, population registers and nationally representative surveys provided information on the number and composition of international migrants.”

C. Migration and development

How development is linked to migration is a centuries old legal, political and practical question. Vast forced and voluntary population movements from the 17th century onwards populated both North and South America, as well as emerging European nation states. Since the end of World War II, migration and development has been the subject of intense discussions among policy-makers, academics, civil society and the public. Pope Pius XII dedicated an encyclical on “migrants, aliens and refugees of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land” (Exsul Familia 1952), reaffirming that migrants and refugees have a right to a life with dignity, and therefore a right to migrate.

Migration has become a fundamental pillar of development across several regions under regional integration and development projects, notably the European Economic Community succeeded by the European Union. Since the 1970s, migration has been essential to development through regional free movement systems in Central, East and West Africa. From the 1920s, large population movements – some forced – in the (former) Soviet Union underpinned industrial and agricultural development across the twelve USSR republics.

Spurred by geopolitical events that have greatly affected human mobility on a global scale, the relationship between migration and development has become central to contemporary political, economic and social policy debates. The first global development framework to recognize the role of migration and its immense contribution to sustainable development worldwide was the Declaration and Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo in 1994.⁶ The overarching contemporary framework is the above-mentioned 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its Sustainable Development Goals. While explicit reference to migration and development is laid out in SDG target 10.7 on “safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility,” more than 44 SDG targets across 16 of the 17 SDGs apply to migrants, refugees, migration and/or migration-compelling situations (Taran et al. 2016). The New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito in October 2015 provides even more explicit attention to migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons in its global development and governance framework for cities – where most migrants and refugees reside.

⁶ The ICPD was the biggest conference ever held on population, migration and development with 11,000 delegates from 179 countries and some 4,000 participants in the parallel NGO Forum. Two of the ten chapters of the Programme of Action were entirely about migration and development. Adopted by all 179 States/governments participating, the ICPD Declaration and the 20-year Programme of Action (extended in 2010) continues to serve as a comprehensive guide to people-centred development progress. <https://www.unfpa.org/fr/node/9038>

In 2016, in the wake of severe and protracted conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia and the collapse of effective protection for refugees in neighbouring countries, UN Member States adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, calling for improved global governance of migration and for the recognition of international migration as a driver for development both in countries of origin and countries of destination. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), adopted at an inter-governmental conference in Marrakech, Morocco in November 2018. The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) elaborated on those principles and proposed ways of implementing them through political dialogue and non-binding commitments. Both compacts were adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2018.

Caritas recognises that a growing number of people are forced to leave their countries of origin not only because of conflict and persecution but also because of other existential threats. These threats include poverty, hunger, unemployment and absence of decent work, lack of good governance, lack of access to education and healthcare, as well as the consequences of climate change. *Forced migration* for Caritas encompasses all migratory movements where an element of coercion exists. People fleeing conflict and persecution naturally have a specific claim and right to international refugee protection. Caritas also recognizes that the overwhelming proportion of migration within and to Europe reflects most EU member countries’ objective need for “foreign” labour and skills to maintain viable work forces capable of sustaining their own development. This demand is a result of rapidly evolving technologies, changes in the organisation and location of work, and declining native work forces due to population ageing and declining fertility.

In Caritas’ view both people who migrate and those who remain – whether in a country of origin or in a country of residence – have the right to find, wherever they call home, the economic, political, environmental and social conditions to live in dignity and achieve a full life. Regardless of their legal status in a country, all migrants and refugees possess inherent human dignity and human rights that must be respected, protected and implemented by all States at all times. Caritas calls for a human response of solidarity and cooperation to assume responsibility for integral human development worldwide and for the protection and participation of people on the move – migrants and refugees. Migration contributes to the integral human development of migrants and of members of their countries of residence. Such a vision implies the recognition that migration, regardless of its drivers, is an opportunity for our societies to build a more prosperous, global “Common Home,” where everyone can contribute and live in dignity.

- CHAPTER 4 -

INTRODUCTION

The following report provides an in-depth analysis of the current situation, policies and debates in Bulgaria related to migration and development. Firstly, it describes the national migratory context, moving then to a development-based framing of migration and underlining the key contributions contemporary migration, immigrants and emigrants brings for the economy, society, labour market, culture and people. Secondly, it identifies key obstacles that impede migrants' full contributions to development, as well as opportunities for facilitating and enhancing migrants' own development, the contributions of migration to development, and shared responsibility and accountability. Finally, it presents conclusions and a set of recommendations to steer Caritas and other relevant stakeholders in their future advocacy work towards protecting the rights of migrants, promoting migrants' inclusion in Bulgarian society and addressing the migration & development nexus particularly from the perspective of migrants and their contribution to integral human development.

The report develops knowledge, evidence and analysis to answer the following guiding question: *How, and under what conditions, can migrants contribute to integral human development, their own and in terms of societies of origin, residence and transit?* The report supports enhancing the development potential of migration, ensuring policy coherence and maximising the benefits of immigration for both migrants and society at large.

This report follows a mixed research methodology which had to account for two limitations: the limited availability of reliable quantitative and qualitative information regarding migration, asylum and development; related to the first point, the relatively small size of the migrant and refugee populations living in Bulgaria. The empirical information was collected on the basis of three clusters of field observations: interviews with stakeholders and migrants; multiple and regular contacts for information and assessments with experts representing institutions and the civic sector⁽⁷⁾⁸, and migration workshops and forums with representatives of numerous responsible institutions; analytical studies carried over a long period of time and related publications of the author, who is a professor of migration policy (Krašteva 2018a, 2018b, 2015, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2013, 2012, 2008, 2007, 2005). The report also draws on available academic literature, policy papers, statistical data, as well as up-to-date journalistic/media articles. Because of the focused interest of Caritas Bulgaria in refugees as a key target of its humanitarian and integration activities, the issue of refugees is discussed as a priority issue in this report.

⁷ Within the framework of the Academic Council at UNHCR Bulgaria and of the Board of the Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of which this author is a member.



Photo: Ivelina Berova

- CHAPTER 5 -

THE BULGARIAN MIGRATION PHENOMENON⁽⁸⁾

The Bulgarian migration experience is highly interesting from the perspective of the relationship between migration and development. This relationship is associated with three paradoxes. First and foremost, is that Bulgaria has experienced extremely high emigration rates over the last three decades, which – coupled with very low fertility and very low rates of immigration – , has deprived the country of the skills and labour force needed to sustain the economy and further the development of the country. The second paradox is that in postcommunist Bulgaria, a country with little experience of migration and absolutely no experience in democratic migration policy, there are high levels of immigrant integration in terms of labour market participation, and linguistic, cultural, and social integration, among others. The third paradox is that in European Bulgaria, which did not experience a significant increase in migrant numbers stocks during and after the so called “migration crisis,” there is an increase in securitarian and restrictive discourses and policies which create negative attitudes towards migrants and impede necessary needed immigration and integration. These two paradoxes will be examined and argued in the course of this study, the first mainly in the section titled “How migrants and migration contribute to development,” and the second in “Obstacles.”

Migration is a highly politicised topic that is directly related to national security and national identity, as well as economic growth (Krasteva 2014a). The quantity and quality of the workforce and emigration of a young and highly productive workforce from the country has a direct impact on economic growth. (Todorov and Durova 2016: 33). In Bulgaria, three different groups of migrants support and facilitate, in a specific way, the migration & development nexus: immigrants, who are few in number and well-(self)integrated; Bulgarian emigrants abroad, who are many in number and selflessly help their home country; and, a small number of refugees, who require integration support from institutions and NGOs. This positive picture is distorted by a xenophobic anti-immigrant political discourse and hostile actions that have been intensifying in recent years. In other European countries, the migration & development nexus is associated more closely with high levels of immigration.

“If we have a place to live in and a job to feed ourselves, why would we leave Bulgaria? The country is beautiful and the people are very good.”

**Refugee woman from Syria
(NHCR Bulgaria)**

The methodology (with emphasis on quantitative data) and the structure of the Common Home analysis are conceived for immigration countries with long and numerous immigration. The analysis of the Bulgarian case follows the methodology and structure of Common home as much as possible, adapting them to the specifics of migration in Bulgaria - a relatively new and not numerous immigration, as well as a new and extremely small group of refugees who, after receiving the status, remain in the country. Due to Caritas-Bulgaria’s focused interest on refugees as a key target of its humanitarian and integration work, they are dealt with as a matter of priority whenever possible.

The specificity of a not numerous immigrant community and a small refugee group determines the relative applicability of some of the quantitative indicators and supports the validity of qualitative analyses. Empirical information has been gathered on the basis of three clusters field observations: -interviews with stakeholders and migrants from the beginning of the Common Home Project; numerous regular contacts for information and assessments with experts, representatives of institutions and the civil sector within the framework of the UNHCR Academic Council and the Board of the Diplomatic Institute at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to which the author is a member, of migrant workshops and forums with representatives of many responsible institutions, the research, studies and publications of the author - professor of migration policy (Krasteva 2018, 2018a, 2015, 2014, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2012, 2011, 2008, 2007, 2005).

⁸ Many thanks to Stefani Bogomilova and Marina Kisuyova for their valuable help in compiling the background information.

A. From (post)communism to (post)crisis – periods and trends of migration policy

The construction of the Bulgarian migration phenomenon will be analysed through the periodisation of the main stages in its formation after the Second World War, as well as through an analysis of the Bulgarian migration profile. Five periods can be identified in the formation of the contemporary Bulgarian migration phenomenon: *communist, postcommunist, European, migrant/refugee crisis, and post-crisis*.

- *Communist period:* the post-war period to 1989. This period is characterised by strong politicisation of migration policy and very strong control over both emigration and immigration. The communist regime called emigrants “defectors,” deprived them of the right to return, and confiscated their property. This policy of closeness had several exceptions: students from the so-called Third World; citizens of the Soviet Union, above all of Russia and Ukraine, some of whom came to Bulgaria to work as specialists in industry and education, and others – the majority – came as spouses of Bulgarian citizens; and Vietnamese migrant workers – 15,000 worked at construction sites and in various enterprises (Krasteva 2014a: 369).
- *Postcommunist period:* the 1990s to the early 2010s. The transition from a closed to an open society was marked by massive emigration. The state retreated from its hypertrophied role as the alpha and omega of migration, thus providing space for the formation of the postcommunist citizen as a migrant. This “shrinking” of the state began on the eve of the democratic change with an amendment to the Foreign Travel Passports Act passed in 1989, which read: “Every citizen of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria shall have the right to leave the country and to return to it with a Bulgarian foreign-travel passport or a substitute document.”⁹ The second significant change was the abolition of exit visas. Immigration was freed of the dominant political logic and became driven by markets and globalisation. Then, in 1993, Bulgaria signed the Geneva Convention and began to accept refugees.

- *European period:* the mid-2010s to the migrant/refugee crisis. Bulgaria’s accession to the EU ensured Bulgarian nationals visa-free travel to some 150 countries in the world in 2007, and free access to the EU labour market as of 2014 (Angelov and Lessenski 2017: 1). With regard to emigration, the European period was characterised by four trends. The most motivated migrants had already left Bulgaria, and the first trend was associated with legalising the status of those who were residing irregularly in EU countries. Second was the passage of Bulgarian nationals who had chosen to live and work in other EU countries, into a new migration category – they were entitled to free movement of persons as EU citizens. The dynamics of emigration flows followed, above all, an economic logic, which was especially manifest in a situation of economic crisis. The third trend was that of emigrants returning to Bulgaria. The last trend has started in the previous period: the increased number of applications for Bulgarian citizenship related to the growing attractiveness of Bulgarian passports because of Bulgaria’s EU membership.

- *Period of migrant/refugee crisis:* 2014–2016. This period was characterised by a migrational change and a political change. First of all, because of the huge migration pressure towards Europe, Bulgaria became more clearly aware of its role as an external border of the EU, situated at one of the entry points of migration from Syria and the Near/Middle East to the EU, and part of the Balkan migration route. More significantly, there was the change in political discourse, which formulated the refugees not as a humanitarian but as a securitarian issue.

- *Period of post-migrant crisis:* 2017–present. Paradoxically, this period has not changed the political trends of the previous period, but it has deepened them. The most profound change, which has invariably continued and is intensifying, regardless of the significant decrease in migration flows, is populist securitisation and its adoption by mainstream parties.

⁹ Promulgated in State Gazette, No. 38, 19 May 1989; effective as of 1 September 1989.

B. Asymmetrical tripolar migration profile – numerous emigration, much less numerous immigration and very low number of refugees

Bulgaria is a typical emigration country. The number of emigrants is almost ten times (8.6 times) that of immigrants: in 2017, 1,290,000 people born in Bulgaria were living in other countries and 150,000 people living in Bulgaria were born abroad, as shown in Chart 1 (PRC 2017).

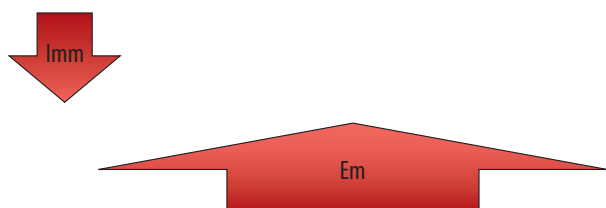


Chart 1: Emigration profile with a strong imbalance between large emigration and small immigration

Source: Chart drawn by the author based on PRC 2017.

The dynamics of the present migration flows show the same picture as in the case of stocks: in 2017, the number of emigrants, 31,586, exceeded that of immigrants, 25,597, and net migration was negative, –5,989.

Mass emigration has had a strong impact on the demographic dynamics of Bulgaria's population. This impact is negative; the population is ageing and decreasing. This demographic effect has placed emigration at the centre of debates about the future of the nation in demographic, generational and social terms, and regarding its links to national sovereignty and national security.

Contrary to widespread opinion and misperception that emigration has been growing constantly, Table 1 shows the opposite: a steady decline of emigration flows from Bulgaria (Angelov and Lessenski 2017). The largest number of emigrants – 465,000 or a 5.2% decrease in the population – was in the years immediately before and after the beginning of the democratic changes in Bulgaria. This was due to two opposite reasons: the involuntary departure of one-third of the community of Bulgarian Turks under pressure from the communist regime, and the first wave of emigration as an expression of post-communist freedom and a desire for self-realisation in terms of employment, career and education.

Period	Number of emigrants
1985–1992	465,000
1992–2001	217,000
2001–2011	175,244
2011–2016	24,103
Total	882,156

Table 1: Emigration in the period 1985–2016, according to Bulgarian statistical data

Source: Angelov and Lessenski 2017: 6.

Nevertheless, emigration as well as depopulation remain issues of concern in the case of Bulgaria. Between 1985 and 2016, Bulgaria's population declined by 1.85 million. According to the National Statistical Institute (NSI), more than half (over 52%) of this decline was due to negative natural increase (the difference between birth and death rates), while almost 48% was due to net emigration. Almost half of the net emigration was due to the expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks at the end of communism. Those two factors carried different weight in different periods. Between 1985 and 1992 the population declined entirely because of emigration, while in the next periods it did so mostly because of the negative natural increase. The share of net migration in the population decline decreased to 39% in the period between 1992 and 2001, 31% in the period between 2001 and 2011, and under 10% in the period between 2011 and 2016 (Angelov and Lessenski 2017: 3–4).

Bulgarian emigration is directed towards several clusters of countries. Germany is a powerful pole of attraction because of its strong economy and demand for both low-skilled and high-skilled workers. Mediterranean countries such as Greece, Spain and Italy are also very attractive for Bulgarian emigrants. The classic immigration countries – the US and Canada – are still magnets today, too (Eurostat 2018a). The case of Turkey is more specific. The large Bulgarian immigrant community in Turkey formed primarily because of the expulsion of more than 350,000 Bulgarian Turks by the communist regime in the summer of 1989. Part of this flow returned to Bulgaria after the establishment of democracy there, but Bulgarian Turks have continued to migrate to Turkey for economic reasons throughout the democratic period.

The Eurostat⁽¹⁰⁾ data show a complex picture of the occupations of Bulgarian employees in the EU. They range from high-skilled executive and expert positions (managers, professionals) to high-skilled workers (technicians, plant and machine operators and assemblers) to workers in services and sales, and other sectors. If we analyse the emigration and immigration flows⁽¹¹⁾ since the beginning of this decade, we can identify three trends:

- Throughout the period, emigration exceeds immigration and the net migration rate is negative.
- The fluctuations in net migration are significant, varying between –24,190 and –1,108.
- Regardless of the fluctuations, after peaking at –24,190 in 2010 the negative net migration has been significantly lower, ranging from approximately –1,000 to –10,000.

Migration increase	Total	Male	Female
2010	–24,190	–10,697	–13,493
2011	–4,795	–2,058	–2,737
2012	–2,512	–654	–1,858
2013	–1,108	655	–1,763
2014	–2,112	–1,035	–1,077
2015	–4,247	–1,867	–2,380
2016	–9,329	–4,452	–4,877
2017	–5,989	–3,575	–2,414

Table 2: Net migration and distribution by age and gender in the period 2010–2017

Source: NSI, International migration by age and sex.

The economic crisis of 2008 intensified emigration and led to the vast gap between emigration and immigration in 2010. The small difference between emigration and immigration flows, –1,108 in 2013, made Bulgaria closer to, but still different from, the Mediterranean migration model.

¹⁰ Employees by migration status, educational attainment level, occupation and working time (http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfso_14lecow&clang=en)

¹¹ According to NSI data.

The next table, from the study of Angelov and Lessenski (2017), summarises the balance between emigration and immigration in the last three decades. It illustrates the trend towards narrowing the gap between emigration and immigration – from 66,429 at the end of the 20th century to 4,000 in recent years. The trend has gone through two major transitions:

- From large involuntary emigration at the end of the communist period, not balanced by immigration, to large voluntary emigration, increasingly balanced by immigration;
- From large negative net migration to decreasing net migration.

Period	Net migration
1985–1992	66,429
1992–2001	22,226
2001–2011	17,524
2011–2016	4,017

Table 3: Average annual net migration from Bulgaria

Source: Angelov and Lessenski 2017: 5.

	Men	Women	Total
Emigration	98,290	95,581	193,871
Immigration	74,607	64,982	139,589

Table 4: Emigration and immigration by gender (2010–2017)

Source: Table drawn up by the author based on data from NSI, International migration by age and sex.

The analysis from a gender perspective reveals interesting similarities and differences between immigration and emigration. In the 2010–2017 period, men outnumbered women in both migration flows. The difference between the two genders, 2,709, was comparatively small in the case of emigration, where men numbered 98,290 and women numbered 95,581. The difference between the two genders reached almost 10,000 (9,625) in the case of immigration, where men and women numbered 74,607 and 64,982, respectively.

The two kinds of migration had their own dynamics regarding the male/female ratio in migration flows. In the case of immigration, the differences between the two genders fluctuated.

tuated from several hundred (1,910 men and 1,608 women in 2010) to several thousand (10,496 men and 8,074 women in 2013). The year 2017 was an exception, as women outnumbered men – there were 13,126 women and 12,471 men. It is still too early to say whether this is a new trend. The number of women in the different migrant communities varies greatly – women are the majority in the Russian community, whereas they tend to be an exception in the African community (Krasteva 2014a).

In the case of emigration, men outnumbered women throughout the period 2010–2017, but in some years they were almost equal in number – for example, in 2013, 9,841 of Bulgarian emigrants were men and 9,837 were women. The Bulgarian case illustrates the global trend towards feminisation of migrations in both quantitative and qualitative terms: regarding migration flows, where the number of female migrants is growing and has become almost equal to that of male migrants; and regarding agency and authorship of the migration project. Some women accompany their husbands, parents or relatives, but many women plan and realise their migration project on their own.

The distribution by age shows that emigrants nowadays are relatively younger than immigrants: 78.4% of emigrants are of active age (20–59 years), as compared to 63.1% of immi-

grants. The 60+ age group is almost 2.5 times larger among immigrants: 16.3% of immigrants as compared to 6.9% of emigrants. Those age ratios can change because the share of children and adolescents (aged 0–19) among immigrants is higher than that among emigrants: 20.5% as compared to 14.6%.

The data on (im)migrant stock numbers¹² vary between 145,000 according to Eurostat, 150,000 according to the Pew Research Centre, and 154,000 according to the International Migration Report (2017). The variations in statistical sources are not significant, and they outline a similar panorama: the immigrant proportion is low, at 2% of the population (Eurostat. Migration and Migrant Population Statistics). The majority of immigrants are from non-EU countries – 93,200 were born in non-member countries, while 52,200 were born in other EU member states.

¹² For 2017.

Age	0–19		20–59		60+		Total
	number	%	number	%	number	%	
Immigrants	5,256	20.5%	16,162	63.1%	4,179	16.3%	25,597
Emigrants	4,625	14.6%	24,766	78.4%	2,195	6.9%	31,586

Table 5: Emigration and immigration by age (2017)

Source: Table drawn up by the author based on data from NSI, International migration by age and sex.

Gender Age	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017	
	iM	eM	iM	eM	iM	eM	iM	eM	iM	eM	iM	eM	iM	eM	iM	eM
Total	3,518	27,708	4,722	9,517	14,103	16,615	18,570	19,678	26,615	28,727	25,223	29,470	21,241	30,570	25,597	31,586
Male	1,910	12,607	2,402	4,460	8,182	8,836	10,496	9,841	14,712	15,747	13,493	15,360	10,941	15,393	12,471	16,046
Female	1,608	15,101	2,320	5,057	5,921	7,779	8,074	9,837	11,903	12,980	11,730	14,110	10,300	15,177	13,126	15,540

Table 6: Emigration and immigration in the period 2010 – 2017 by gender

Source: NSI data, International migration by age and sex.

Table 7 from Eurostat gives an idea about some of the most characteristic immigrant communities in Bulgaria. The largest immigrant community is from the former Soviet Union and it is represented in the table by the citizens of Russia and Ukraine. The Russian community is one of the oldest immigrant communities in Bulgaria. The second largest immigrant community is from the Near and Middle East. Unlike the educational mobility during the communist period, after the democratic changes most of the new immigrants from the Near and Middle East come to Bulgaria with plans to start a business. The Syrian community was the largest Arab community in Bulgaria even

before the military conflict in Syria, which led to an increase in the number of Syrian refugees. Bulgaria and Turkey are a migration pair formed as a result of historical ties and geographic proximity. The British represent the latest wave. The latter consists of citizens of EU member states and comprises two main groups: experts of different nationalities who work in Sofia and the big cities; and Britons who settle mostly in villages and small towns. The Chinese are not statistically significant, but they are interesting as a new group that began migrating to Bulgaria in the post-communist period, which illustrates Bulgaria's inclusion in the global labour migration flows.

Bulgaria					
Citizens of	(1000)	(%)	Born in	(1000)	(%)
Russia	20.9	26.4	Russia	27.7	19.0
Syrian Arab Republic	11.5	14.5	Syrian Arab Republic	12.3	8.5
Turkey	10.7	13.4	Turkey	10.2	7.0
Ukraine	5.3	6.6	Ukraine	8.8	6.1
United Kingdom	4.0	5.1	United Kingdom	8.7	6.0
Other	27.0	34.1	Other	77.7	53.4

Table 7: Main countries of citizenship and birth of the foreign/foreign-born population, 1 January 2017

Source: Eurostat. Migration and Migrant Population Statistics.

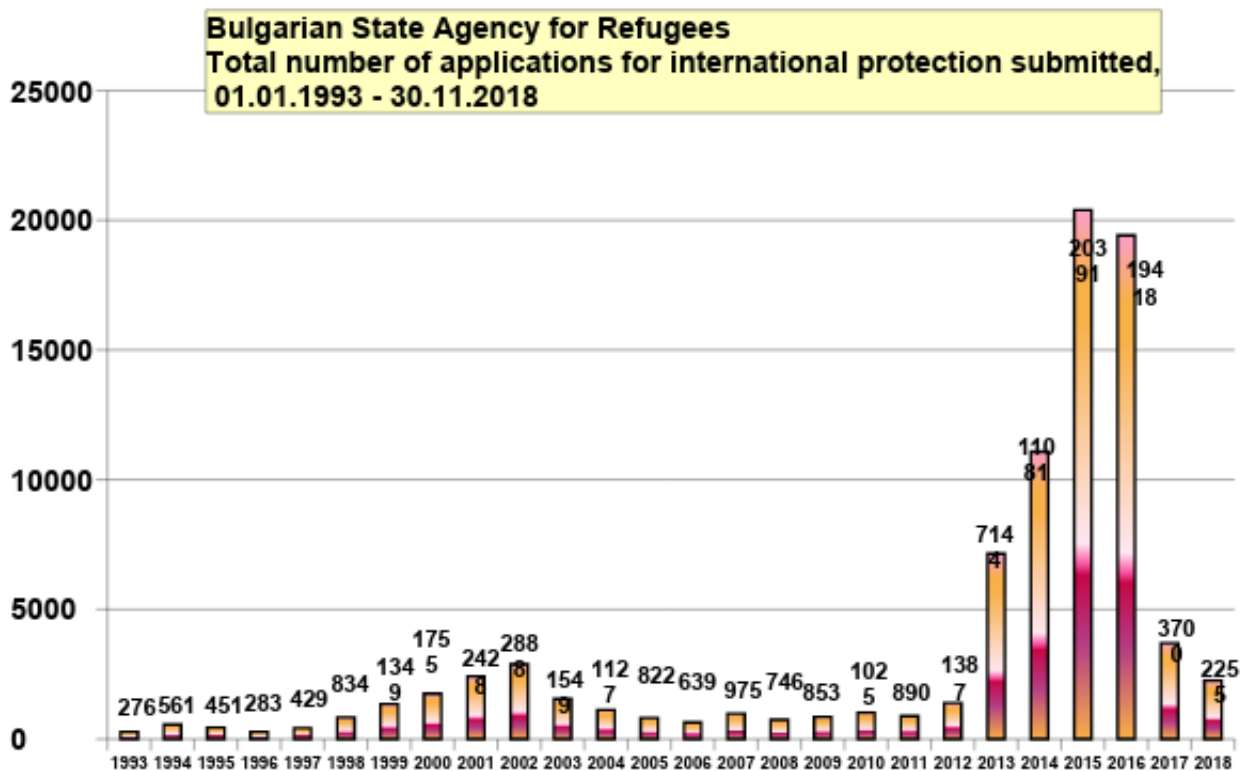


Chart 2. Total number of applications for international protection submitted, 01.01.1993 – 30.11.2018.

Source: State Agency for Refugees.

Another interesting group consists of immigrants who have been granted Bulgarian citizenship. In the period from 2012 to June 2018, more than 60,000 people were granted Bulgarian passports (Andonova 2018): more than half of them, 37,133, on the basis of Bulgarian origin. The largest number of new Bulgarian citizens, 26,108, is from Macedonia, followed by Albania and Kosovo.

Bulgaria has a historical track record of accepting refugees. The two most significant instances of humanitarian hospitality in Bulgarian history were towards the Armenians seeking to escape the genocide in Turkey, and towards the White Guard Russians fleeing the Bolshevik revolution. Those two waves of refugees date from the period between the two World Wars. In the postcommunist period, Bulgaria signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol in May 1993 and institutionalised, in the same year, an asylum-management policy by establishing the State Agency for Refugees (SAR). There are four periods of refugee flows to Bulgaria in the last quarter of a century:

- *Period I:* 1993–1998. Initial period with a low number of asylum applications – under 1,000 a year.
- *Period II:* 1999–2012. Period of fluctuations, with small peaks of 2,428 asylum applications in 2001 and 2,888 in 2002, followed by a decrease in number to around or under 1,000 a year.
- *Period III:* 2014–2016. Refugee crisis, with an unprecedented 20,391 asylum applications in 2015 and 19,418 in 2016.
- *Period IV:* 2017 – present. Post-crisis period, with a sharp decline in the number of asylum applications – down to 3,700 in 2017 and 1,906 in 2018 (until 30 November 2018).

The total number of applications for international protection submitted in Bulgaria in the period from 1 January 1993 to 30 November 2018 was 85,256. Of them, 25,075 were approved – 13,454 to be granted refugee status and 11,671 for humanitarian status.

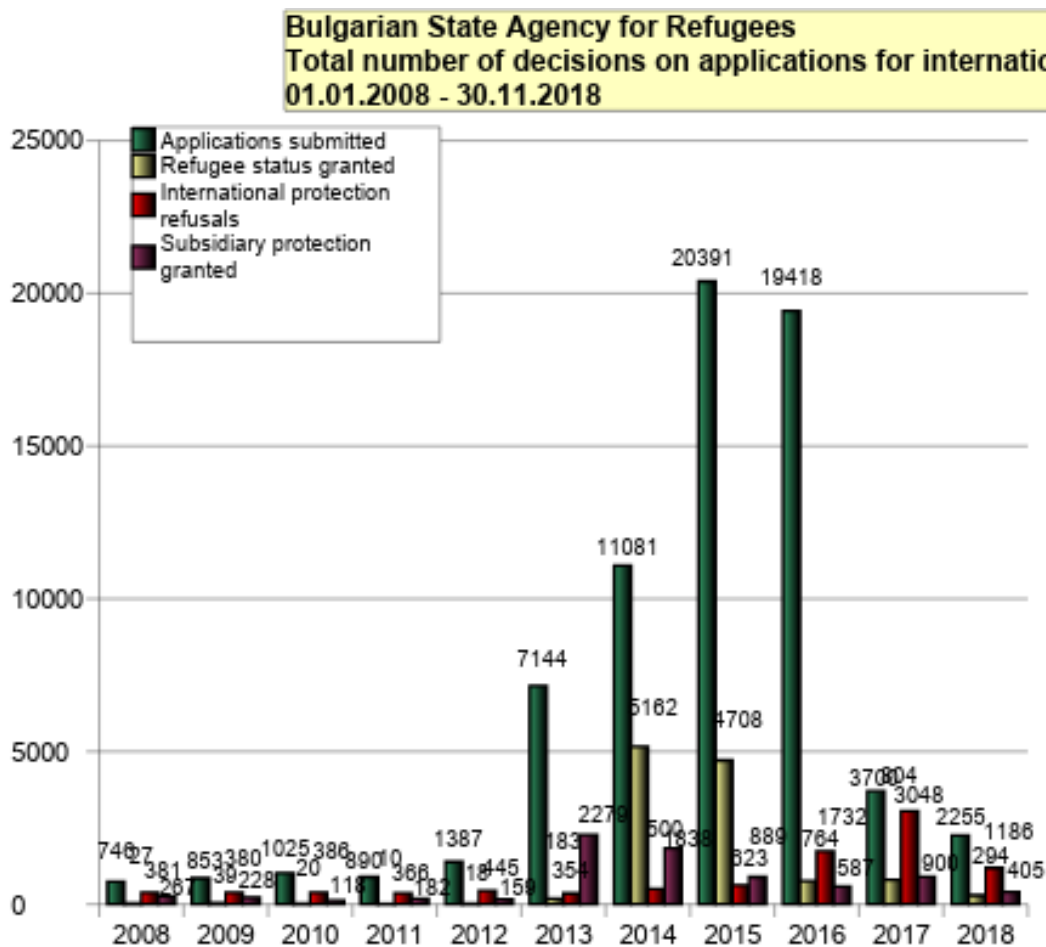


Chart 3. Total number of decisions on applications for international protection 01.01.2008 – 30.11.2018

Source: State Agency for Refugees.

There are no official data about the number of people granted refugee status who have remained in Bulgaria. In the unanimous opinion both of experts and of representatives of institutions, Bulgaria is not a final destination for refugees – the majority prefer to continue their migration journey to more developed Western countries, where often other members of their large families are waiting for them. The UNHCR representative in Bulgaria estimates that the refugees and humanitarian status holders who live in Bulgaria at present are approximately 1,000–2,000 in number.

Afghanistan	26,325
Syria	21,575
Iraq	20,032
Pakistan	3,168
Stateless	2,138

Table 8: Top five asylum seeker countries of origin (1 January 1993 – 30 November 2018)

Source: State Agency for Refugees.

In terms of country of origin, the profile of asylum seekers in Bulgaria reflects the global refugee flows, in which the top three countries of origin are Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq. There has been a certain change in refugee flows to Bulgaria

in recent years: in 2015, the majority of asylum seekers were Syrians who were fleeing from the military conflict in their country and who were granted international protection. In 2016 and 2017, the largest share of international protection seekers in Bulgaria were citizens of Afghanistan, who “motivate their refugee history with socio-economic factors” (EMN 2018a: 20). It is important to note that the asylum seekers from the top countries of origin – Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis, Pakistanis and Palestinians – have immigrant communities in Bulgaria, which (with the exception of Pakistanis) are also among the largest immigrant communities from the Near and Middle East in the country.

In terms of gender, there are certain imbalances as well as specific characteristics of the different national groups and waves. While Syrian migration during the crisis was mostly made up of families, the post-crisis refugee flow is predominantly male: in 2018, women (6%) were outnumbered almost ten times by men (56%).

To sum up, Bulgaria remains an emigration country, but emigration has not increased since the country’s EU accession and the increasing recognition of Bulgarian passports, which now can provide visa-free access to some 150 countries (Angelov & Lessenski 2017: 4–5). The gap between emigration and immigration is narrowing, but immigration remains at low levels – under 2% of Bulgaria’s population.



- CHAPTER 6 -

MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT – THE POSITIVE NEXUS

To answer the question of “how migrants and migration contribute to development”, this report articulates the positive paradox of migration in the first decades of Bulgaria’s democratic development. Immigrants are well-integrated into the labour market as well as in terms of linguistic, cultural and social integration, regardless of the comparatively late prioritisation of integration policy – it was not until 2008 that the first National Strategy on Migration and Integration was adopted. In this part, the specificity of the Bulgarian case is most evident: small immigration and large emigration. The contribution of the small number of immigrants in Bulgaria is considerably more difficult to quantify than that of the many Bulgarian emigrants.

A. Immigrants’ strategies for integration

The title summarizes two main messages: immigrants in Bulgaria are well integrated, and this integration is the result not so much of government integration policies but rather of their own integration projects and practices. There are no marginalized groups of immigrants, no ghettos – immigrants are relatively well included in the labor market and social life.

1. Entrepreneurial and labor integration

Labor market integration will be analyzed from three perspectives: the specificities of individual national groups as well as the different categories of migrants – third-country nationals, nationals of other EU Member States, refugees; main areas of employment and ethnic niches.

Migrant integration strategies have national specificities. On the basis of long-standing research (Krasteva 2018b, 2015, 2014a, 2012, 2005), the characteristics and differences in the labour integration of the most characteristic immigrant communities in Bulgaria can be sketched: Russians, immi-



grants from the Near and Middle East, Chinese, Africans, Britons, and skilled managers, professionals and technical workers from EU member countries. A more detailed and in-depth analysis would identify specific characteristics also in the separate waves of migration of the respective communities, but this is beyond the goals and scope of this study.

Ethnic niches – a practice of migrant inclusion in employment throughout the world – exist in Bulgaria, too. They attract, above all, migrants from the Near and Middle East, and China. The ethnic niches themselves are in the restaurant industry – Chinese, Lebanese, Indian and other restaurants, and many Arab kebab shops – and in retail: the large Ilievski market in Sofia, which provides jobs for many migrants and employees, is typical in this regard (Krasteva 2012, 2005).

It is very important to note that the majority of immigrants in Bulgaria are self-employed and own small, medium-sized or large businesses (Krasteva 2005, 2007, 2012, 2014a, 2014b).¹³ A second significant characteristic is that the

¹³ As well as retirement migrants and leisure migrants from other countries – Italy, the Netherlands, France, etc.

number of Bulgarians who work in migrant-owned companies is larger than that of migrants working in Bulgarian-owned companies. A Chinese businessman who has recently invested BGN 3 million in the vine and wine business said that he is ready and willing to employ more people but there is an insufficient labour supply. A businessman from Afghanistan pointed out in an interview that not all migrant businesspersons had successfully weathered the economic crisis: the crisis hit migrant-owned small and medium-sized businesses especially hard, which was reflected in two changes: shrinking of the business from middle to small or re-emigration, most often to Western Europe or the US.

The labour integration of Russians is the most varied and diversified (Krasteva 2018b). Unlike most other immigrant communities in Bulgaria – who are employed primarily in the private sector – first, second and third-generation Russian immigrants are employed in public administration, media, and education at all levels. There is also a new wave of Russians who have invested in property on the Black Sea coast which they use for holidays and rent out, without settling permanently in Bulgaria.

The African community in Bulgaria is very small. In the last decade, call centres – where fluency in French and English is highly appreciated – have provided the chance and impetus for their labour integration (Krasteva 2005).

EU nationals work as managers, experts or technical workers in companies of their countries, which invest in Bulgaria, and as advisors to institutions and organisations. Britons¹⁴ illustrate another category whose migration project is not necessarily aimed at labour integration, insofar as some of them are retirees and settle in spa and small villages and towns. Some of them start small businesses – for example, as real estate brokers for compatriots interested in buying houses in Bulgaria, intermediaries or investors in health/dental tourism, etc. (Krasteva 2018, 2014, 2015, 2014, 2012, 2005).

The gender specificities of labour integration in the different immigrant communities are also interesting. Skilled immigrant women from Russia, China, and other EU-member states have a labour profile that is similar to that of Bulgarian women – they work for a large part of their lives. Arab and Afghan women more often devote themselves primarily to their family and children. When they go into employment, it is usually in the family business (Krasteva 2011).

¹⁴ This applies to the immigration, not to refugees, but the latter, as explained, are of very limited number.

(a) Refugees

A small number of refugees and humanitarian status holders have work contracts registered at the National Revenue Agency: in 2015, 175 men and 17 women; in 2016, 136 men and 26 women (Iliev 2017: 8). The actual number of those who work is bigger: approximately 60% of asylum seekers and refugees work without a contract, which exposes them to great risk of exploitation (Iliev 2017: 9).

Sector of employment	2015	2016
Food and & gastronomy	71	45
Sales	69	33
Production	22	10
Beauty, tourism & and social care	13	16
Construction	7	12
IT & and call centres	10	10
Others	12	10

Table 9: Numbers of refugees and humanitarian status holders with work contracts (registered at the National Revenue Agency) by sector of employment (2015–2016)

Source: Table compiled by the author based on Iliev (2017: 9).

The study on employment and attitudes towards employment among asylum seekers and refugees identified two trends. Many refugees prefer to work in the area of their expertise. Another significant group of refugees also display a willingness to accept jobs that are characteristic of the Bulgarian labour market, such as translation services for refugee-oriented NGOs, call centres, and factory work (Iliev 2017: 10).



(b) Third-country nationals

According to data of the Bulgarian trade unions (Podkrepa 2018), in 2017 a total of 5,156 third-country nationals were employed in Bulgaria, of them almost 4,000 in seasonal jobs or seconded for up to 90 days. “During the last two years the majority (more than 80%) of these workers were occupied as seasonal workers in tourism” (EMN 2018b: 12).

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	June 2018
Number of third-country nationals	657	618	748	5,156	756

Table 10: Number of third-country nationals gaining access to the Bulgarian labour market, 2014 – June 2018

Source: Table compiled by the author based on data from EMN 2018a for 2014–2016, and from the Bulgarian trade unions (<http://podkrepa.org/wp-content/uploads/file-15.pdf>) for 2017.

The data on the last five years can be summarised in two trends:

- Increase in the number of third-country nationals – from 657 in 2014 to 5,156 in 2017;
- Sharp rise in 2017, when eight times as many third-country nationals received access to the Bulgarian labour market than in 2014.

These trends were the result of two factors:

- Rising demand for labour in a situation of economic growth after the economic crisis, which could not be met by local labour resources;
- Growing attractiveness of the Bulgarian labour market for foreign workers.

In the last two years, according to the Employment Agency, third-country nationals were employed predominantly in tourism, services, manufacturing and education, and in the whole five-year period, in these sectors plus construction and commerce. For comparison, in the same period Bulgarian nationals were employed predominantly in manufacturing, commerce and construction (EMN 2018b: 14–15).

Employment had a distinct gender dimension: the male/female proportion of employed third-country nationals was 80% to 20% (EMN 2018b: 15). There are still no good in-

depth studies to explain the complex reasons for this gender imbalance. It is important to note that this applies to employment of third-country nationals in recent years, and not to the whole Bulgarian immigrant community.

2. Contribution to welfare system and to sustaining viable national social security systems

The majority of immigrants engaged in business and jobs pay social security contributions, thus contributing to Bulgaria's welfare system. There are no concrete aggregate data for two reasons:

- The relatively small total number of immigrants and the very small number of refugees;
- The diverse status of immigrants, some of whom have been granted Bulgarian citizenship and do not figure in separate statistics.

3. Contribution to community, social, cultural, and economic development

In Sofia there are several special places where the presence and contribution of migrant communities is the most visible. One is the huge Ilientsi market, where many immigrant companies, mainly Chinese and Arab, sell goods at accessible prices and provide jobs to immigrants and refugees. The other well-known intercultural area is the neighbourhood around the so-called Women's Market (Zhenski Pazar) in the centre of Sofia, where there are many shops, restaurants and barber shops mostly owned by Arabs. Sofia's mosque, a religious centre of Muslims among both Bulgarian nationals and immigrants, is also in this neighbourhood.

In January 2019, Sofia City Library named Khairi Hamdan, a Palestinian poet, writer and translator, as its Translator of the Month. Hamdan is an iconic figure of Bulgarian cultural life, who writes in both Arabic and Bulgarian and translates literature to and from both languages, building beautiful bridges of art between migrants and the host society. When asked by the author how he decides which language to write in, Hamdan responded poetically: “I write during the day in the language I dream in at night.” Similarly, the Chinese artist Zhao Jianfey has been living and working in Bulgaria for years now: he has had numerous exhibitions, and some of his paintings are displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sofia. In an interview with the author, he said he had decided to remain in Sofia because of the city's vibrant cul-

tural life. Immigrants contribute to Sofia’s intercultural dynamics. Other examples are discussed in “Opportunities.”

The immigrant groups in Bulgaria have an active community life. The Russians have a Russian Cultural and Information Centre,⁽¹⁵⁾ housed in a big building in central Sofia. It is engaged in various activities in the following fields: promotion of Russian culture and the Russian language; support for Russians in Bulgaria; public diplomacy; preservation of historical memory; education and science. Most Arab communities – such as the Palestinian and the Syrian ones – have their own associations. Among the most active is the Association of the Syrian Community, which has a club where its members meet on holidays as well as to socialise with fellow Syrians. This author’s interviews with activists of the Syrian and Palestinian communities showed their engagement in humanitarian relief especially during the refugee crisis. Among the refugees, women are the most organised, and they have their own association with rich and diverse activities – it is presented in “Opportunities.”

Members of the immigrant and refugee communities actively contribute to the integration of refugees. A positive trend, especially in the last few years, is the appointment of immigrants as interpreters/translators and social workers. A migrant from Africa said in an interview that he felt a deep joy and satisfaction from working with refugee children and migrants.

B. Diaspora as “wings of development”

In the last few decades, the potential of diasporas has been conceived by some authors as “wings of development” and “heroes of development” (Khadria 2008) in the light of strengthening the relations of the state with the diaspora (Gamlen 2008). Remittances can generate output growth either by increasing consumption or by increasing investment. Developing a road map for engaging diasporas in development, the IOM has identified six focus areas: making private money work for the common good; direct investment: finding and attracting investors in the diaspora; from “return of talent” to “brain circulation” to “virtual return”: evolving

¹⁵ More information about activities at the center can be found at: <http://bgr.rs.gov.ru/ru>.

ideas on the transfer of human capital; philanthropic contributions; capital market investments; and diaspora tourism (IOM 2012). These conceptualisations articulate a positive understanding of emigration/diaspora, which is central to this study as well. The contribution to the development of the countries of origin will be analyzed in relation to three groups of migrants: immigrants in Bulgaria, Bulgarian emigrants, and Bulgarian returnees.

1. Remittances from Bulgaria to other countries

The World Bank provides data on remittances from Bulgaria in two perspectives: general flows and the country specifications.

The trend of remittances flows from Bulgaria is fluctuating. It decreased in the years of the economic crisis; in 2013 it returned to its 2008 levels – \$ 162 million – and today continues to grow slightly, not reaching particularly high levels – \$ 221 million in 2018, which, according to the World Bank, is 0.3% of GDP. The data for the destination countries (in US dollars, in April 2018) are as follows: \$1 million are sent to Albania, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Cyprus, Egypt, Georgia, Iceland, India, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Macedonia, Nigeria, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey; \$2 million to Azerbaijan, Greece, Poland; \$3 million - to Armenia, Hungary, the United Kingdom, the United States, Vietnam; \$4 million to Italy, Moldova; \$5 million to China; six million to Lebanon; \$7 million to the Czech Republic; \$8 million to Belgium, Ukraine; \$9 million to Germany, Romania; \$14 million in Russia, Spain. It is worth noting the lack of remittances flows to Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq – countries which have immigrant communities in Bulgaria. The analysis of the data collection methodology goes beyond the scope of the present study and its fieldwork gives light to their interpretation. A Chinese respondent explains in an interview that often transfers are made informally, mainly in the following scheme: the immigrant in Bulgaria gives to the mediator money in Bulgarian leva, and the mediator as a rule does not transfer them but spends them in Bulgaria, and upon return to China gives to immigrants’ relatives the equivalent in Chinese currency.

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
162	101	90	105	107	162	169	151	167	199	221

Table 11: Outward migrant remittances flows from Bulgaria (millions of dollars)

Source: World Bank. Outward migrant remittances flows

2. Remittances of the Bulgarian Diaspora – monetary, social, democratic

(a) Monetary remittances

Remittances of Bulgarian emigrants are a bridge between them and their homeland. This bridge has significant visibility in public and within the family. For the families remittances are an important “safety net” and help to overcome poverty, health care, education, and investment in real estate or small business. The public visibility of the remittances as a bridge is due to the huge media attention: the media regularly and thoroughly informs the public about all new data and thus maintains the link between emigrants and their native country beyond the family circle.

The total amount of personal remittances received in Bulgaria in 2017 was 1.953 billion euros, mostly (1.518 billion) from elsewhere in the EU. The total amount of personal remittances sent out from Bulgaria in 2017 was 0.176 billion, of which 0.103 billion was to other EU member countries (Eurostat 2018). The World Bank (2018) provides approximately equivalent figures in U.S. dollars for the same year, 2017. Remittance inflows to Bulgaria in 2017: 2.205 billion US dollars. Remittance outflows from Bulgaria in the same year: 0.199 billion US dollars. The Bulgarian National Bank gives considerably lower figures; according to its reporting in 2017, Bulgarians working abroad sent home more than 1.15 billion euros¹⁶ in remittances. That is 284 million euros more than in 2016, when Bulgaria received a total of 869 million euros in remittances, according to BNB data. Actual

¹⁶ In analysing these data, one should bear in mind that the Bulgarian National Bank (BNB) reports only transfers that are over EUR 2,500.

remittances were higher than the official data of the BNB. The BNB itself conducted a survey of 1,609 Bulgarians working abroad, which found that 36.9% send remittances through official channels, while half as many, 15.4%, prefer informal channels. About half of the Bulgarian migrants, 47.7%, do not send remittances (BNB 2018).

In the last decade, remittances have been increasing steadily, reaching 1,152.6 million euros in 2017,¹⁷ or almost double those in 2007, which totalled 634.7 million euros. One of the reasons for this upward trend is that the beginning of the decade (2007) coincided with the economic crisis, while the following years coincided with its gradual overcoming and post-crisis economic recovery. The top six countries from which Bulgarian emigrants send the most remittances are the US, Spain, Germany, Greece, Italy and the UK.

According to the latest WB data, remittances represent 3.8% of GDP. These are moderate figures against the backdrop of significantly higher rates in the Western Balkans – 9.1% for Serbia, 9.6% for Albania, and 11% for Bosnia and Herzegovina (Nikolova 2019). Bulgaria is closer to the Baltic States with this indicator: 3.7% for Latvia and 2.6% for Lithuania (Nikolova 2019). This comparison illustrates that Bulgaria is relatively less dependent and less exposed to the risk of sudden changes in cash flow.

Crucial in the Bulgarian public debate on the key factors for development is the comparison between remittances and foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows. In 2017, FDI in Bulgaria totalled 901.9 million euros, up by 36.7% year-on-year – but less than emigrant remittances. In the last decade (2007–2017), according to data of the Bulgarian Industrial

¹⁷ The latest whole year for which data are available.

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018 (Jan-Sep)	Total 2007-2018 (Jan-Sep)
Germany	39.7	41.6	42.2	44.7	48.1	49.6	51.2	52.7	54.7	56.8	266.5	208.3	956.3
Greece	47.8	50.0	50.7	53.8	57.8	59.7	61.6	63.4	65.8	68.4	91.7	71.7	742.4
Italy	69.2	72.5	73.5	48.7	52.4	60.8	62.8	57.5	57.3	64.9	67.6	52.8	740.0
Spain	122.1	155.4	166.4	174.3	187.4	190.7	166.6	169.3	168.6	154.2	152.0	118.9	1926.0
UK	45.8	48.0	48.6	51.6	55.4	57.2	59.0	60.8	63.0	65.5	77.9	60.9	693.6
US	140.4	147.1	149.1	158.1	169.9	175.3	181.0	186.4	193.3	200.9	208.8	163.3	2073.6
Total from all sending countries	634.7	693.8	717.8	718.4	770.1	800.1	850.5	825.1	848.1	869.0	1152.6	901.1	9781.3

Table 12: Migrant remittances by top six sending countries, 1 January 2007 – 30 September 2018 in EUR mln

Source: Table drawn up by the author based on data from BNB 2018.

Association (BIA), the annual FDI flow decreased 10 times in absolute terms and 14 times as a percentage of GDP, reaching a record low in 2017 of BGN 1.858 million or 1.9% of GDP. FDI dropped from BGN 17.7 billion in 2007 to BGN 1.8 billion in 2017, or from 28% of GDP in 2007 to 2% in 2017 (BIA, 2018). The conclusion of the BIA analysis is in harmony with the thesis of this study regarding the positive impact of emigration in the form of remittances on the development of Bulgaria: “[F]unds from emigrants are more than FDI” (BIA, 2018). Another specific characteristic of FDI also reduces their positive effect on the Bulgarian economy – most FDI are in the form of debt instruments, which means that they are short-term and do not have a long-term development prospect (Peicheva 2018). The public debate highlights the key importance of remittances and their stronger contribution to development in comparison to FDI. Remittances have a positive impact on the well-being of emigrants’ families and initiate entrepreneurship: they contribute to poverty alleviation and improve the standard of living of emigrants’ families by covering current expenses, as well as expenses on healthcare, education, loan payment, starting small and family businesses.

(b) Social and democratic remittances

The positive effect of diaspora engagement and returnees’ activities on development will be analysed here with regard to two kinds of transfer – of social and of democratic capital.

Transfer of social capital:

Two NGOs are both a result of and actors for transfer of social capital: Tuk-Tam (Here and There) and Back2Bg. They are presented in “Opportunities.”

Transfer of democratic capital

The transfer of democratic capital will be illustrated by “the year of citizen discontent.” The year 2013 has gone down in Bulgaria’s contemporary history as the longest-lasting period of civic protests. The protests of Bulgarians in many European cities – parallel to and synchronised with the mobilisations in Bulgaria – built the image of an active, dynamic, engaged diaspora. During the Christmas 2013 holidays, when the crowds of protesters had retreated from the squares but Bulgarian migrants had returned home, mobilisations of Bulgarian emigrants in Bulgarian cities showed their commitment to the cause of the anti-government protests. Many more examples can be given, but what is more important is the civic transformation of Bulgarian emigration from *exit into voice*. Traditionally, the Bulgarian diaspora is thought

of in terms of language and culture, and its ties to the home country are woven by two central institutions – the family and the state. Social media and the protests are the construct of a new type of diaspora whose ties are built by a trans-boundary, active and engaged citizenship. Its solidarity is no longer with the state but with citizens against state capture (Krasteva 2016).

C. Returnees – the most desired migrants

From migration with no return to migration with return (actual or potential) – that is how one of the most profound changes in postcommunist migration policies and practices can be summed up. Communist migration policy had ruled out the possibility of returning. The very few who succeeded in escaping from the regime were declared to be ‘non-returners’. One of the major democratic migration discoveries was migration with (the possibility of) returning. This new democratic freedom is very highly appreciated by emigrants, even by those who do not intend to take advantage of it (Krasteva 2014a). Returning is important both to migrants and to the authorities. The latter justifiably regard it as a test for Bulgaria’s economic and political prospects. Just as under communism, the return of migrants is a very sensitive political issue in the postcommunist era also, but now its practice has changed radically and positively. Policies seek to encourage it, and public opinion values the return of migrants, which citizens translate existentially as the joy of children, parents and loved ones reuniting with their families. Migrants take advantage of the double freedom – the freedom to return, where their return is not necessarily final but is open to a new migration/mobility project.²⁰ In the last few years there has been growing interest in the return of migrants among researchers as shown by numerous publications on the subject (Ruspini et al. 2016; Richter et al. 2017; Ivanov and Naydenov 2018; Nonchev and Encheva 2012; Krasteva 2014a).

Year	Emigration	Return	Net addition to population
2012	13,640	4,964	-8,676
2013	16,036	4,682	-11,354
2014	23,849	9,502	-14,347
2015	24,487	10,722	-13,765
2016	25,795	9,254	-16,541

Table 13: Number of emigrants and returnees, 2012-2016

Source: NSI

The number of returning migrants is lower than the expectations of the elites and the public, but is growing gradually: “In the last three years, around 10,000 people born in Bulgaria have been returning to this country every year. This is twice more in comparison with 2013, when the number of returnees was 4,771. Thus, in the period 2013–2016 almost 35,000 Bulgarian migrants returned to Bulgaria. This in-flow is still lower than the out-flow, but shows the beginning of a process of homecoming migration and return to Bulgaria” (EMN 2018a: 13, translation modified).

Return migration to Bulgaria has been analysed from two perspectives: “why” and “what impact,” (Bakalova and Misheva 2018), and what is the level of returning migrants’ integration in the labour market (Zareva 2018a). An in-depth analysis of the reasons for returning is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to note that they are an asymmetric mix of non-economic and economic reasons, with the former more prevalent (Bakalova and Misheva 2018). The change in type of migration project is even more significant: at the beginning of the democratic changes, Bulgarian emigrants sought to settle and integrate permanently in the destination country, whereas today their migration project is more often short-term or with a planned duration. Fourteen of the 100 Bulgarian returnees interviewed by Maria Bakalova and Mihaela Misheva had a short-term migration project (seasonal employment or an employment contract with a fixed term), which made returning to Bulgaria a predictable and desired part of that project (Bakalova and Misheva 2018: 91).

The following table illustrates the interesting dynamics of migrants’ labour market integration prior to their departure, in the first foreign country, and upon their return.

Work status	Prior to departure	In the first foreign country	Upon return
Hired full-time	52.0	72.8	47.0
Hired part-time	3.3	14.6	3.5
Student	7.1	1.2	2.5
Retired	5.1	0.8	11.9
Own business	2.0	0.7	5.8
Self-employed	1.7	2.8	3.5
Unemployed	27.8	6.1	25.2
Total sample size			

Table 14: Employment status of migrants prior to their departure and upon their return (%)

Source: Zareva 2018a: 109.

The positive impact of the return of migrants on their labour market integration shown above can be summarised in several points:

- The number of those who start their own business has increased about three times, even though it remains very low.
- The number of self-employed has doubled, but it is still very low.
- The number of those hired full-time and part-time has decreased slightly. This decrease is balanced by the more than double increase of retirees: for 6.8% the return to Bulgaria means the end of working life abroad and the beginning of a well-earned retirement at home.
- The number of unemployed has decreased, although by a small margin.

It is important to note that the employment rate during emigration is very high, 87.4%, which attests to the Bulgarian migrants’ ability to integrate into the labour market. Part of the returnees, 5.8%, has started their own business, two thirds of them being newcomers to entrepreneurship. The following table illustrates the size of the businesses started by returnees.

Number of hired employees	Share
One	11.9
Two	11.9
Three	2.4
Four	4.8
Five	7.8
Six	4.8
Seven	2.4
Twelve	2.4
Working alone / no hired employees	52.4

Table 15: How many employees have you currently hired? (%)

Source: Zareva 2018a: 109.

These data can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, returnees have developed a preference for entrepreneurship and an ability to take risks. Secondly, however, their savings do not allow them to start a larger-scale business: “The majority of those with an own business (52.4%) are working alone/ have no hired employees and about a quarter of them have

hired one or two employees. The amount of savings, accumulated from working abroad, of a considerable share of the migrants, is not sufficient for starting a business of a larger scale” (Zareva 2018a: 109).

In the first National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Migration and Integration (2008–2015) the return of migrants is understood in two senses, both narrow and broad – as the return of new emigrants and as the attraction of the historical diaspora. These cover “permanent return to the country of persons with Bulgarian citizenship living on the territory of other countries” and “permanent attraction and settlement in the country of persons of Bulgarian ancestry with foreign citizenship.” (National Strategy...2008-2015).

The legislative basis for encouraging the return of Bulgarian migrants is provided by the Law on Bulgarians Living Outside the Republic of Bulgaria (promulgated in *State Gazette*, No. 30, 11 April 2000). Chapter Three⁽¹⁸⁾ contains provisions designed to support the return of migrants. According to Article 15: “(1) Bulgarians living outside the Republic of Bulgaria who wish to settle in the Republic of Bulgaria shall be issued permanent residence permits under simplified terms and conditions. (2) The state bodies and the bodies of local self-government and the local administration shall render assistance to the persons under Paragraph (1) and shall provide material and other support for their settlement under conditions and by a procedure, determined by the Council of Ministers.”

Among the few examples of good institutional practices encouraging the return of Bulgarian migrants, researchers highlight the network of Employment and Social Issues Services at the diplomatic missions of the Republic of Bulgaria in European countries with large Bulgarian communities, initiated in 2006 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Three of their goals are relevant for this analysis: a) to render assistance in connection with the labour mobility and integration of migrant workers by providing information on issues related to legal employment and consultations with regard to EU labour and social legislation in the respective countries; and, b) to develop bilateral cooperation in the field of labour and social policy; c) to provide information on the terms and conditions for returning to Bulgaria, for employment, and for starting a personal business (Zareva 2018b: 77). The Bulgarian trade unions evaluate the policies for encouraging the return of migrants very positively, as a measure dealing with the labour shortage and securing the workforce required for the development of the Bulgarian economy (Podkrepa 2018).

An interview with a female migrant who returned to Bulgaria and then later emigrated again shows an interesting dynamic. This female migrant, who had emigrated to Ireland, was satisfied with her job there, but she returned to Bulgaria when the economic crisis seriously affected the company she was working for. Upon return, she joined a family business. After some time, her former company offered her professional contacts in another European country, to which she re-emigrated successfully. Both individual and characteristic, this case shows significant trends: returnees are a very mobile category and, in a number of cases, are ready to re-emigrate; migration experience and networks are important social capital which speeds up and facilitates re-emigration even when it is to a new destination; and, re-emigrants are empowered individuals who assume the authorship of their migration project.



Photo: Slam Clouding

¹⁸ ‘A large part of the returning migrants state that they would like to go back abroad. These are primarily persons under the age of 40, with secondary vocational and higher education’ (Zareva 2018a: 114).

- CHAPTER 7 -

INTEGRATION – CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

A. Difficulties and policies that do not work

The first and foremost obstacle to for migrants' contributions to Bulgaria is the small number of immigration compounded by absence of immigration-encouraging policy and unwelcoming immigration attitudes and behaviour across the government and public. As summarized by an authoritative report "The Labour Market in Bulgaria" by the Trade Commissioner Service (TCS), Embassy of Canada to Romania, Bulgaria and the Republic of Moldova (2018):

Businesses face increasing difficulties sourcing suitable labour within Bulgaria. The country has a declining population as a result of emigration, low fertility rates and an ageing labour force, contributing to a shrinking labour pool that is also becoming less productive as it is dominated by older workers. The labour market is not augmented by a large migrant population, as despite membership of the EU easing the immigration process, firms face difficulties attracting foreign workers to Bulgaria. In addition, the availability of vocationally skilled labour with formal work experience is restricted by low employment rates, the dominance of the agricultural sector in providing jobs... As the labour market ages, productivity losses will be a key risk due to the inadequate state of the public healthcare system, which is not capable of dealing with higher patient numbers. In addition, the employment rate is poor and limiting the range and diversity of recruitment options available to businesses. Bulgaria has a relatively small population size of just 7.05 mn in 2018, with a working age population (15-64 years old) of 4.8mn, meaning there is a relatively small pool of potential employees.

This part of the study also analyses reasons for the failure of some integration policies and practices as well as the absence

of immigration policy. Specifically in the Bulgarian case, problems come not so much from a lack of legislation or from a concrete policy – such as a policy for providing access to education or business opportunities – but from the political context of populist securitisation which undermines the possibility of immigration and integration policies and forms a negative public opinion.

The observations of foreign analysts on Bulgaria's migration and integration policy are polarised. At the positive pole is the European Migration Network (EMN): "The integration policy is an inseparable part of the state policy for legal migration and the balance between rights and obligations of migrants in Bulgaria is guaranteed" (EMN 2018b: 16). At the critical pole is the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX): "Immigrant integration is still not a priority for the Bulgarian government. Therefore, little has changed since the first MIPEX evaluation of Bulgaria in 2010" (MIPEX Bulgaria 2015). The structure of this report, which follows the logic of SWOT analysis, allows for a more balanced and nuanced approach. The effective policies and practices are analysed in "Opportunities," while in this section criticism is focused on the imbalances in integration policies and the reasons for their inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Those issues can be summarised as follows: difficulties in and obstacles to refugees' access to the Bulgarian labour market; ineffective refugee integration policies; lack of continuity in migration and integration strategies and policies; institutional deficits; negative impact of mainstreamed anti-migration political discourses on policies of integration, such as the trade unions' discourse on the risk of labour dumping; hostile public opinion. These obstacles apply most of all to the two main targets of this study, refugees and immigrants.

1. Difficulties in and obstacles to refugees' access to the Bulgarian labour market

MIPEX evaluates the access of migrants to the labour market as favourable, emphasising: general access to the labour market continues to be favourable for long-term residents and open to immigrant entrepreneurs; long-term residents and their family members are not delayed in their access to the labour market, as in 23 other countries (MIPEX Bulgaria). For this reason, the analysis of this study is focused on refugees, who are a more vulnerable group. Persons granted refugee status have the same rights as Bulgarian citizens, except the right to vote. However, they are significantly more vulnerable for several reasons which impede their access to the Bulgarian labour market:

- Lack of Bulgarian language skills;
- Low educational background of some of the beneficiaries of international protection;
- Difficulties for highly skilled refugees to prove their formal education documentation: “In Bulgaria, the legalisation and accreditation process for educational degrees is extremely long and complicated, including high fees and additional costs such as translations and notary fees. Oftentimes, persons do not have their original documents nor can they obtain the original documents from the respective educational institutions at home. Even if the documents are available at home, refugees will generally be unwilling to contact their diplomatic representations for the purposes of legalisation of their diplomas and qualifications. This can jeopardise their security and that of their relatives in the country of origin. Moreover, such a contact may be considered, under the Law for Asylum and Refugees, grounds for termination of their international protection” (Iliev 2017: 11);
- Less developed social support networks, and more difficult orientation in the new environment.

There are also specific difficulties in hiring asylum seekers: “They have the right to work, but only three months after their application for asylum. ... Temporary ID cards of asylum seekers are administratively extended every three months and physically renewed every nine months. ... However, most companies are not willing to sign a contract for longer than the date on the asylum seeker's document. Therefore, in practice, companies would renew the working contract every three months, which poses a big administrative burden” (Iliev 2017: 15). One of the main difficulties for companies is the mobility of refugees. Bulgaria is a transit country for refugees and “at least 80–90% of people ap-

plying for asylum in Bulgaria move on or plan to move on to Western countries” (Iliev 2017: 17). The company Convoy, based in the town of Novi Iskar, is an example in this regard: of twenty people hired originally, one refugee woman and two men remained in the company (Iliev 2017: 16). A similar example is that of Pirin Tex, a company whose production facilities are in the town of Gotse Delchev: of the ten refugees it hired, some of whom decided to move on to other countries, just one young man decided to stay and settle in Gotse Delchev because he was able to build connections in the community (Iliev 2017: 12). Lack of knowledge on the part of companies about the administrative procedures for hiring refugees is a commonplace difficulty: three quarters of the businesses are not aware what documentation would be needed when hiring refugees (Iliev 2017: 12). An interview with a Chinese businessman illustrates a similar picture – lack of knowledge and will to invest time in specific administrative procedures.

2. Ineffective refugee integration policies

“When we speak of refugee integration, we have in mind a small number of people against the background of all asylum seekers. These are the so-called ‘recognised’ refugees whose applications for international protection have been checked extensively by the competent bodies and who have been officially recognised as having a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm in their country of origin” (Ilieva 2017). This quote is very familiar to experts because of two political paradoxes. The first is that the political discourse of many leaders, parties and MPs in Bulgaria completely ignores refugees' state-recognised grounds for being in the country and represents refugees as a threat to Bulgaria's national security. This political discourse and its negative effects on integration will be analysed below. The second paradox is that the group of recognised refugees in Bulgaria is small, fewer than 2,000, which is in stark contrast to the many deficits and obstacles to their integration.

On 12 August 2016 the Council of Ministers issued a decree on the adoption of an Ordinance on the Terms and Procedure for Concluding, Implementing, and Terminating an Integration Agreement for Foreigners Granted Asylum or International Protection.¹⁹ On 31 March 2017 the Ordinance was repealed. On 19 July 2017 the government adopted a new Ordinance on the Terms and Procedure for Concluding, Implementing, and Terminating the Integration Agreement for Foreigners Granted Asylum or Interna-

¹⁹ Full text can be found here: <http://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/showMaterialDV.jsp?idMat=106769>.

tional Protection.⁽²⁰⁾ This new integration policy shifted the focus to local government – mayors and municipalities. Why is this Ordinance on refugee integration not enumerated among the effective best practices, but identified instead as an ineffective policy? The many reasons are analysed in this study, but can be summed up in brief as lack of interest and even refusal of municipalities to undertake the integration of even a very small number of refugees. For a long time, not even a single municipality wanted to accept refugees and take advantage of the funding allocated for them.

The UNHCR welcomed the new Ordinance, but also formulated several key criticisms and recommendations:

- Institutions and local government need to have an active role: “The new ordinance preserves the principle that integration support is based on an agreement between the refugee and the municipality. While municipalities are not willing to participate and contribute to this process, such a system cannot be effective.” (UNHCR Bulgaria 2017)
- Concerns about access to housing: “The UNHCR regrets that the Ordinance does not fill gaps in refugee access to social housing and family benefits for children, which the law currently does not allow. This creates a significant risk of homelessness among recognised refugees.” (UNHCR Bulgaria 2017)
- Lack of activities of state institutions to prepare the local population: “The new Ordinance does not foresee any activities to inform the local population about refugee issues and integration principles. Awareness-raising campaigns, run by municipalities together with civil society and the private sector, are needed to create a favourable environment for the integration of refugees.” (UNHCR Bulgaria 2017)

Refugee rights lawyer Valeria Ilareva expanded upon the criticism of the deficits in the Ordinance and its implementation by adding further legal and political arguments. The most significant one is “the missing link in Bulgaria’s refugee integration policy. The lack of political will to take responsibility at the state level, the shifting of this responsibility onto the local authorities without the preparation necessary for that, is the fundamental problem” (Ilareva 2017). Ilareva adds that the local authorities are not prepared to assume the responsibility for informing and persuading the local population, as well as for organising the integration process. The second group of arguments is related to the refusal of towns like Elin Pelin and Belene to register recognised refugees. Lawyer Ilareva underlines that address registration is “the key to access to all other rights – EGN [Personal Identification Number], ID document, health insurance, registration at labour offices, etc.” (Ilareva 2017).

²⁰ Full text can be found here: <http://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/showMaterialDV.jsp?idMat=116399>

3. Lack of coherence in migration and integration strategies and policies

The paradoxes and discontinuities in Bulgaria’s migration and integration policies can be summarised in several points:⁽²¹⁾

- Late inclusion into government priorities: migration was assigned the status of a public policy, on which the state has a strategic vision, almost two decades after the beginning of the transition. It was not until 2008 that the first strategy for migration and integration was adopted.
- Abrupt, unclear and unexplained discontinuities: in 2010, at the very beginning of the implementation of the first strategy for migration and integration, and without public information about the grounds for revision, work began on the elaboration of a new strategy, which entered into force in 2011. Less than halfway through the planned timeline, a third strategy entered into force in 2015.
- Redefinition of the main priorities in migration policy: if the main focus of the 2008 Strategy was on economic emigration and integration of third-country nationals, the 2011 Strategy focused mainly on (in)security issues.
- Lack of continuity in policy implementation: in 2011, action plans for implementation of the 2011–2020 Strategy stopped being adopted, and then the Strategy itself was repealed without a public debate (Krašteva 2014a: 618–619). The 2015–2020 Strategy was left for a long time without an Action Plan – it was not until 2018 that such a plan was adopted.

The same discontinuities and inconsistencies can be found with regard to refugee integration. Representatives of the NGO sector, such as the Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants (BCRM 2014) and lawyer Valeria Ilareva (2017) describe the integrational and institutional vacuum between one integration programme that was no longer functioning and a new one which was not yet adopted: “The year 2014 can be defined as a ‘year of zero integration,’ as it was for the first time ever since 2005 – when the first National Programme for the Integration of Refugees in the Republic of Bulgaria (NPIRRB) was developed – that the beneficiaries of international protection in Bulgaria had been left on their own, without being provided with specific integration measures for initial integration, including access to targeted financial aid for covering costs related to health insurance and accommodation outside the Registration-and-Reception Centres with the State Agency for Refugees (RRCs with SAR). This resulted in an extremely difficult access to basic social, labour and health rights for these individuals in 2014,

²¹ For a more detailed analysis, see Krašteva (2014a: 618–663).

while their wish to permanently settle on the territory of Bulgaria was minimised, according to the feedback from the interviews” (BCRM 2014).

The National Strategy for the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014–2020) illustrates the same tendency of drastic and unjustified changes: “Without a broad public debate, Bulgaria’s national policy was changed in 2014–15. Instead of adopting a new three-year programme plan according to the established model of the Integration Programme, the government adopted two national strategies, in 2014 and 2015 respectively, which shift the responsibility for refugee integration from the SAR onto municipalities” (Ilareva 2017). The BCRM’s assessment is in the same critical vein: “The drafting of the [new] Strategy was not preceded by a publicly available assessment of either the NPIRRBs implemented till the end of 2013 and the outcomes therefrom or of the arguments for introducing the new approach [quoted as an example of successful integration in the region]” (BCRM 2014).

In the Action Plan for 2018 for Implementation of the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015–2020), ten of the 44 strategic goals are related to beneficiaries of international protection. Some of them are formulated in such general terms that they are unlikely to have a real effect – for example, Goal 4, “Supporting the employment and integration of refugees” with activities such as information meetings at the SAR centres, and even more unspecified goals such as “initiating joint actions with the Bulgarian business community for employing beneficiaries of international protection” (NCMI 2018: 27). In itself, the Action Plan is a positive fact because any strategy that is not updated and specified remains a strategy on paper only. However, it was also criticised on a number of points by local experts and representatives of international migration organisations:⁽²²⁾ it appeared too late, towards the end of the Strategy’s five-year term; the measures regarding refugees are not associated with the Ordinance on refugee integration; solid, adequate funding has not been provided.

The lack of clear commitment on the part of central government and the assignment of responsibility for refugee integration solely to the authorities at the local level is a significant reason for the unsatisfactory situation regarding the integration of beneficiaries of international protection in Bulgarian society. The effective realisation of integration strategies and programmes is undermined when they are adopted without active commitment on the part of the state to explain their goals and conditions of implementation, without support from the local authorities and without adequately informing public opinion.

²² Discussion with members of the Academic Council at UNHCR Bulgaria, 30 January 2019.

4. Institutional deficits

A key deficit of Bulgaria’s migration and integration policies is the absence of a deputy prime minister responsible for the coordination of these policies at the top government level. The National Council on Migration and Integration (NCMI) was established in 2015 as a collective consultative body for elaboration and coordination of the implementation of state policies in the field of migration and integration of persons who are seeking or have been granted international protection in the Republic of Bulgaria. Public information about its activities is sparse. On the NCMI website⁽²³⁾ there is information about four meetings of the NCMI in 2015 and one on 1 April 2016. The website has not been updated in the last two years. Foreign observers are better informed and the EMN Report (2018a: 9) informs us about five meetings of the NCMI. The question remains why the NCMI website does not provide public information about its activities.

The National Council on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility (NCLMLM)⁽²⁴⁾ was established in 2008 with an ambitious programme of nine functions. The public information about the results of its implementation is also extremely sparse – two meetings in 2013 are reported on the NCLMLM website. The lack of accessible information can be interpreted as a lack of sufficiently intensive and efficient activities⁽²⁵⁾ or as a systemic unwillingness for transparency.

In the case of both councils, there is an obvious lack of accountability and public visibility of their activities which supports the conclusion that there are institutional deficits and a lack of a consistent policy to inform citizens.

5. Negative impact of mainstreamed anti-immigration political discourse on policies of integration

Eurosceptic MEP Angel Dzhabazki summarised the year 2018 as a year of two victories – the rejection of both the Global Compact for Migration and the Istanbul Convention.⁽²⁶⁾ These victories of the far right and their crystallisation in government policies are indeed impressive, as they

²³ More detailed information can be found here: http://www.saveti.government.bg/web/cc_1603/1.

²⁴ More detailed information can be found here: http://www.saveti.government.bg/web/cc_1801/1.

²⁵ An assessment shared by some members of the Academic Council at UNHCR Bulgaria.

²⁶ Angel Dzhabazki: “The rejection of the Istanbul Convention and the Compact for Migration are [2018’s] events for Bulgaria.” Interview (in Bulgarian) of the MEP on Bulgaria on Air television (29 December 2018) posted on the website of VMRO.

have occurred in the absence of a migrant crisis and of immigration pressure. This is clearly illustrated by another political action of Angel Dzhambazki: in the summer of 2018 he wrote an open letter⁽²⁷⁾ to the Council of Ministers proposing that the centres for refugees in Sofia be closed down. The style is in the affective-extremist genre: “As a result of the heavy pressure on the border and the inrush of a significant number of illegal immigrants, Sofia was flooded by thousands of aliens. The city faced a dangerous social phenomenon – crowds of people who had illegally entered into Bulgarian territory. ... Entire neighbourhoods were subjected to terror by young men – migrants...” (Mitov 2018) This case is notable among the many fake news stories of the Bulgarian far right, because, paradoxically, in this case the fake news was exposed not by investigative journalists or competent analysts, but by the leader of VMRO himself, Deputy Prime Minister Krasimir Karakachanov: “I checked through the Agency for Refugees – the capacity of migrant camps is only 11% full. There have been no new admissions to the camps, unlike in 2016 when their capacity was 103% full.” (Mitov 2018)

What is significant for this analysis is that the anti-immigration discourses are used by many political actors both from the far right and from mainstream parties. Among the most outspoken speakers of anti-migrant discourses are Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) leader Kornelia Ninova (Krasteva 2018a) and President Rumen Radev. One of the popular slogans of his presidential campaign in 2016 was the refugee crisis, with strong anti-immigration messages: refugees are not a humanitarian but a securitarian issue;⁽²⁸⁾ refugees threaten a change in the ethnic and religious composition of the Bulgarian people;⁽²⁹⁾ and anti-EU rhetoric.⁽³⁰⁾ The negative impact of anti-immigration politics on the sustainability of integration policy was vividly illustrated by the caretaker government of newly sworn-in President Rumen Radev, which, in the spirit of his campaign, repealed the Ordinance on refugee integration. The paradox is that soon after that, this same government adopted a new Ordinance, similar to the repealed one – showing that Bulgaria’s European commitments as an EU member country have corrected some of the major governmental deficiencies. The second paradox is that the incumbent, third-term government of GERB, whose second government adopted the initial Ordinance, has been

²⁷ Together with Sofia municipal councillor Carlos Contrera, also a VMRO member.

²⁸ “Young migrants with no families have been entering our country. During my tour around Sofia, I’ve seen locations where people are afraid to go after dark because of the migrants’ presence.” “We need more urgent measures for extraditing foreigners.”

²⁹ “Our children leave for Europe, the ruling parties replace them with refugees.”

³⁰ “We must know if there is a scenario for the lasting settlement of refugees, for funding additional refugee camps with EU money. Can our demographic situation be solved by importing foreigners?”

doing nothing substantial to implement the new one at the local level, even though many mayors are from this same party. The third political paradox is that even when there are breakthroughs and some municipalities accept individual refugees, this is not announced as a good practice. In fact, these actions are kept secret. During an interview with representatives of the State Agency for Refugees, they mentioned that some municipalities are interested in accepting refugees but did not specify which ones. At a workshop organised by UNHCR Bulgaria at the end of 2018, this information was confirmed: two Sofia municipalities had accepted refugees, but did not want this to be made public. The aggressive, loud, public anti-immigrant discourse and the invisibility of the rare cases of good practices of integration will long continue to delay and impede refugee integration in Bulgaria.

6. Trade unions on the risk of labour dumping

In addition to a number of political parties, the trade unions are also a collective actor with a reserved stance on deregulated migration leading to social dumping. On 2 January 2018 the two biggest Bulgarian trade unions, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria and the Podkrepa Confederation of Labour, sent to the National Assembly a joint Opinion on Bill N802-01-1 to Amend and Supplement the Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act. The trade unions declared⁽³¹⁾ that they would categorically oppose all attempts at labour and social dumping in Bulgaria. They declared they were against:

An increase in the percentage of third-country workers employed in an enterprise from 10% to 20% for large enterprises, and to 35% for small and medium-sized enterprises. We remind you that small and medium-sized companies make up 99.8% of all Bulgarian enterprises! In addition, there is no proven need to take such a step. Statistics show that in the last 18 months only 10 employers have requested to hire third-country nationals above the lawful 10%. These queries are from 9 micro-sized companies (fewer than 10 workers), and a single small company with a staff of 40.⁽³²⁾

³¹ Full text can be found here: <http://podkrepa.org/wp-content/uploads/file-15.pdf>

³² Full text can be found here: <http://podkrepa.org/wp-content/uploads/file-15.pdf>

7. Hostile public opinion

Mainstream anti-immigration discourse has proven to be extremely effective, as it forms public attitudes. Bulgarians have won a sad first place as the most intolerant in the whole EU (Dnes 2018): while an average of 57% of people in the EU have nothing against working with and knowing migrants, in Bulgaria just 15% would accept a migrant as their colleague, doctor, neighbour, or family member. An important indicator of these negative attitudes is the discrepancy between the actual percentage of migrants in Bulgaria's population and the representations of the presence of migrants in the country. Bulgaria is one of the countries with the lowest percentage of immigrants in the EU, but the Bulgarians are among those who have exaggerated this percentage the most – they believe that 11% of Bulgaria's population are immigrants, while the percentage is actually less than 2%. (Dnes 2018). To put it otherwise, the Bulgarians interpret the “crowds of migrants,” the “refugee waves” and all other apocalyptic discursive figures of the anti-immigrant discourse as reality. Such a substantial discrepancy between reality and attitudes is due to the plethora of fake news as well as two other factors that are skillfully manipulated by the political discourse – lack of contact and lack of information. The overwhelming majority of Bulgarian citizens, 90%,⁽³³⁾ do not know any migrants personally, and have never met or spoken with a migrant. There is no effort or wish to compensate for the lack of experience with knowledge – on the contrary, just 17% know something about the matter. Those two factors have crystallised in another key negative phenomenon: the fear of migrants. 70% of Bulgarian citizens are convinced that migrants will become a burden on the social security system and increase crime in the country; 51% are afraid that foreigners will take their jobs.⁽³⁴⁾ The slogans of populist discourse about the many dangers posed by migration has resulted in the conviction that migrants are permanently on the side of the problem. Just one-third of Bulgarian citizens think that migrants are a possible answer to the labour shortage.

The most serious dimension of this hostility is actual behaviour and violence against migrants and refugees, ranging from physical attacks resulting in injuries and deaths to widespread use of abusive detention to the mobilizing of what international human rights institutions refer to as vigilante “migrant hunter” groups patrolling borders and physically intimidating and illegally detaining refugees and mi-

grants crossing the border.⁽³⁵⁾ As an Amnesty International report on Bulgaria for 2017-2018 highlighted “hate speech and hate crimes continued, directed at minority groups, including Turks and Roma; refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants remained vulnerable to violence and harassment.”⁽³⁶⁾ The report also highlighted:

- Abusive behaviour by authorities and ill-treatment of migrants and refugees in detention, generally unjustifiable administrative detention in non-criminal circumstances: “The number of refugees and migrants entering Bulgaria declined, but reports of frequent pushbacks, excessive use of force and theft by border police continued. Irregular border crossing remained criminalized resulting in administrative detention of migrants and refugees, including unaccompanied children, who arrived in greater numbers. Human rights organizations documented numerous allegations of ill-treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers and substandard conditions in detention facilities.”⁽³⁷⁾
- Concerns about the treatment of unaccompanied migrant and refugee children: “Reception conditions for unaccompanied refugee and migrant children remained inadequate. Children were routinely denied adequate access to legal representation, translation, health services and psychosocial support. Basic education was not available in the centres and most children were not enrolled in local schools. Limited social and educational activities were available several days a week and organized exclusively by NGOs and humanitarian organizations.”⁽³⁸⁾

The list of obstacles can be continued, however, the problem is not in their number but in the change in the overall picture: a country with few and well-integrated immigrants, Bulgaria is increasingly turning into a country hostile to migrants/refugees. It is important to understand the specificity of the Bulgarian case: anti-migration discourses, politics and attitudes are due neither to an increase in the number of migrants and refugees in the country – on the contrary, their absolute number and percentage of the population remain very low – nor to any negative experience of Bulgarian citizens, the overwhelming majority of whom do not know any migrants/refugees. The responsibility for the increasingly negative environment, which undermines integration policies, lies with the political elites – both the ruling and the opposition ones.

³³ A UNHCR Bulgaria study (presented at a workshop in November 2018) on the attitudes of Bulgarian society towards refugees has found the same huge imbalance: just 7% of Bulgarian citizens have met a refugee or asylum seeker, while 93% have not.

³⁴ See note 32.

³⁵ See OHCHR “Human rights experts: Unchecked atmosphere of anti-migrant discourse results in abuses” - Bulgaria. Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. 5 September 2016. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/MigrationXenophobiaRacismInBulgaria.aspx>

³⁶ Amnesty International. “Bulgaria 2017/2018” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/bulgaria/report-bulgaria/>

³⁷ See note 35.

³⁸ See note 27.

B. Conflict, lack of rule of law, poor governance, corruption, decent work deficits, unemployment in countries of origin

The analysis of the difficulties and obstacles in the countries of origin is asymmetrically smaller than analysis of the country of destination for two reasons. The first is the specificity of immigration in Bulgaria. A substantial number of immigrants in Bulgaria are not marginalized or socially weak in their homeland or in Bulgaria, and migrate not so much because of major difficulties in the country of origin but because of opportunities in Bulgaria – for (small) business, employment, educational, family and other projects. This important positive characteristic is typical for EU citizens, Russian immigrants, small businessmen from the Near and Middle East, and China. Immigrant communities in Bulgaria, as the first part of this study has shown, consist of well-integrated workers and entrepreneurs, and have been formed not so much as a result of adverse economic-political conditions in their countries of origin but as a result of pull factors attracting migrants to Bulgaria. Bulgaria became an attractive destination at the beginning of the 1990s because of the possibility to start a business with relatively small capital.

The refugee communities in Bulgaria have been formed as a result of the military conflict in Syria, and by the unstable political situation, lack of rule of law and good governance in Afghanistan and Iraq, among others. To those factors, asylum seekers have added in recent years, as noted in the first part of this study, economic reasons – unemployment, absence of decent work and options for sustenance.

Difficulties in the country of origin as root causes of migration and asylum vary both across migrant communities and types of migration within the migrant communities. A good example is the Syrian community in Bulgaria, whose immigration was driven in the 1970s and 1980s by education, in the 1990s by entrepreneurship and work, and following the start of the recent conflict by the search for asylum.

It must be acknowledged that Bulgarian arms exports constitute a serious obstacle to migrant and refugee contributions in their home countries. Indeed, they are implicated in situations destroying development and forcibly displacing people in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. As reported by The Defense Post, a US based online news journal (2018):

Bulgaria's booming arms trade continued to grow in 2017 with arms and ammunitions exports topping €1.2 billion (\$1.4 billion), an official report showed on Wednesday, October 31 (2018). Conflicts in the Middle East have boosted Bulgaria's arms sales in recent years to levels not seen since the fall of communism in 1989. Arms exports in 2017 reached €1.219 billion, up more than 20 percent on 2016, when Bulgaria sold €1 billion worth of arms to other nations, according to data from the annual report of the country's export control committee. Saudi Arabia, India, the U.S. and Iraq remained the main buyers of Bulgarian-made munitions and light weaponry. Experts believe that many of the weapons sold to Saudi Arabia and the U.S. have ended up in Syria and Yemen in the hands of armed groups backed by those countries.





Photo: Caritas

- CHAPTER 8 -

MIGRATION & DEVELOPMENT NEXUS AS SHARED RESPONSIBILITY – POLICIES, LEGISLATION, PRACTICES

What are the actors and factors of the establishment of migration and development nexus as the core of migration and integration policies? The analysis in the last chapter will seek answers in three directions - Bulgaria's foreign policy; migration legislation; the role of civil society and the activism of both Bulgarian citizens and immigrants.

A. The foreign policy of Bulgaria – between cooperation for development and withdrawal from multilateralism

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an ambitious political programme adopted by the UN in 2015, on the occasion of its 70th anniversary. Five ideas from this complex and detailed document are directly and significantly relevant to this study:

- The concept of people-centred development;
- Recognition of the positive contribution of migrants;
- Affirmation of the values and principles of human rights and non-discrimination;
- Underlining of the importance of tolerance and intercultural understanding;
- Support of multilateralism and cooperation as a key condition for achieving global goals.

Bulgaria's policy in the light of the UN's Global Goals for Sustainable Development can be summarised in two opposite trends. The first one is positive and consists of the long-term commitment to implement the "International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Issues" Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The MFA is currently implementing the Mid-Term Programme for Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid of the Republic of Bulgaria for the Period 2016–2019. According to information from an MFA official, the elaboration of a new mid-term programme is at an advanced stage. The key

elements in the present mid-term programme which are related to this study can be articulated in five groups:

- Cooperation for development assistance and humanitarian aid are an inseparable part of Bulgaria's foreign policy. With its accession to the EU, Bulgaria has committed itself to assisting underdeveloped countries.
- Bulgaria's policy is aligned with the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.
- Bulgaria's efforts are focused above all on sharing its experience in effecting a democratic and market transition with countries of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership.
- The thematic priorities of Bulgaria's partnership with other countries are: support for democratic and responsible institutions; human rights protection; building capacity and support for security and development. It is important to note that one of the priorities fully corresponds to the subject of this study – migration and development.
- The geographical priorities are: the Western Balkans, the Black Sea region, the Near East and North Africa, and cooperation with the least developed countries.

The Action Plan for 2018 for Implementation of the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015–2020) formulates the following as a strategic goal: "Realisation of migration and development policies within the framework of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility and its initiatives, such as the Global Forum on

Migration and Development, the Eastern Partnership and Euromed.” The concrete activities in implementing this strategic goal in 2018 were three bilateral agreements regulating labour migration, concluded with Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine (NCMI 2018: 21, Strategic Goal 28). “These bilateral agreements shall apply for migrant workers who have signed an individual labour contract under these Agreements and are provided with the necessary residence permit on the territory of the receiving country. The possibility for exchange of seasonal workers between the contracting countries for up to 9 months per year is also envisaged” (EMN 2018b: 20).

The amount allocated in the MFA budget for the policy of development assistance and humanitarian aid in 2018 was BGN 6.160 million.³⁹ Within the framework of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2018 (January–June), the MFA organised a Meeting of the Working Party on Development Cooperation (CODEV) and the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid (COHAFA) (18–20 March 2018, Borovetz), at which this author delivered a plenary paper on a subject close to the MIND Project: “Re/De/Constructing the Development & Migration Nexus.” These facts illustrate Bulgaria’s commitment to contributing to addressing the root causes of migration, such as conflicts – lasting, new or frozen ones – poverty, non-development, humanitarian disasters, etc.

The second trend is negative: Bulgaria’s retreat from the principles of multilateralism and the global approach to migration management. The most eloquent example of this was Bulgaria’s refusal to support the Global Compact for Migration at the end of 2018. Initially, Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva declared that the Compact “contains issues of primary importance for our country, such as the clearer distinction between legal and illegal migrants, the possibility of enforcing liability (including criminal liability) for illegal border crossing, reconfirmation of the sovereign right of states to determine whom to admit to their territory, the noting of the negative effect of illegal migration, etc.” (*Capital* 2018). Then, the Compact was subjected to a furious political attack by two different political forces, the opposition as represented by BSP leader Kornelia Ninova, and the government’s coalition partner, the nationalist United Patriots, whose most active speaker, Angel Dzhambazki, said that “under the cover of ‘legal migration,’ the door is being widely opened to millions of Islamists and economic migrants who will flood Europe, while Bulgaria, because of its geopolitical location, will be obligated to create regular migration routes.” According to Ninova, the secret goal of the Compact was to “stimulate higher migration and classify

the latter as a good and inevitable phenomenon” (*Capital* 2018). President Rumen Radev also declared he was against the Compact (Lalov 2018). Without any attempt by the ruling GERB party to defend its own position, on 12 November 2018 the government declared that it would not support the UN Compact for Migration. The European Commission supported the Compact, stressing that it was not legally binding and aimed at taking a complex approach to migration. Regardless of the EC’s position, Bulgaria remained in the camp of countries like Austria, Poland and others which did not support the Compact.

It is an indicative politico-governmental paradox that the Action Plan for 2018 for Implementation of the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015–2020) formulates an opposite strategic goal: “Contribution of Bulgaria to the efforts to reach a coordinated position of EU Member States in the process of elaborating the UN’s Global Compact for Migration” (NCMI 2018: 21, Strategic Goal 27). This paradox illustrates three long-standing trends in Bulgaria’s migration policy:

- Lack of continuity; radical change of positions.
- Growing securitisation of Bulgaria’s migration policy, which treats migration not as a factor of development but as a threat and “preparation for global migration of peoples” (Deputy Prime Minister Krasimir Karakachanov) (Lalov 2018).
- Rejection of multilateralism and of coordinated efforts to address the root causes and consequences of migration.



Photo: Caritas Sofia

³⁹ MFA budget for 2018. Indicators on budget programmes by policy field and budget programme (in Bulgarian). <https://www.mfa.bg/bg/ministerstvo/dokumenti/budget-mvnr>.

B. Legislation and strategies for European standards in labor migration and integration

1. Legislation

Bulgarian legislation has been harmonised with the acquis: “Current national asylum legislation is in line with the EU law ensuring fair procedures for examining applications for international protection” (EMN 2018a: 21). The EMN’s assessment of the general legal framework in the sphere of integration and rights is also positive: “In the field of integration, Bulgaria has modern, well-developed and effective legislation in the area of equal opportunities, social inclusion and non-discrimination, which is in line with EU standards” (EMN 2018a: 2). The last few years have seen progress in developing legislation on labour migration and mobility. The Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act (LMLMA) (promulgated in *State Gazette*, No. 33, 26 April 2016) has played a key role in easing access of third-country nationals to the Bulgarian labour market. The LMLMA regulates all types of access of third-country nationals to the Bulgarian labour market: single work permit; EU Blue Card; work permit for intra-corporate transfer; work permit for seasonal workers; registration of the employment of students and researchers (EMN 2018b: 11). The LMLMA has been amended twice (*State Gazette*, No. 97/2017 and No. 24/2018) to reduce administrative burdens for employers to hire migrant workers. Of the many provisions easing procedures for access to the Bulgarian labour market, the following are the most notable:

- The limitation on the number of third-country workers employed in Bulgarian enterprises has been increased from 10% of their average size in the previous 12 months to 20% for large enterprises, and 35% for small and medium-sized enterprises.
- The opportunity has been provided for third-country nationals of Bulgarian origin to work without permission, after registration in the Employment Agency, until obtaining the residence permit.
- The introduction of equal treatment of researchers, trainees, students and volunteers, as well as family members of Bulgarian, European and foreign citizens, including asylum seekers or beneficiaries of international protection (EMN 2018b: 12–13).

Among the other legislative amendments easing access to the Bulgarian labour market, it is also important to note those added to the Recognition of Professional Qualifications Act (promulgated in *State Gazette*, No. 13, 8 February 2008, last

amended by *State Gazette* No. 85, 24 October 2017). “This Act regulates the terms and procedure for recognition of professional qualifications acquired in other EU Member States and in third countries, with the aim of access to and practice of regulated professions in Bulgaria, as well as the terms and procedure for partial access to practice of a regulated profession and recognition of length of service for mastering the profession in another Member State” (Zareva 2018b: 72).

Bulgaria has not ratified the 1990 International Convention on Migrant Workers⁴⁰. The reasons are explained by the Bulgarian government in Bulgaria’s response to the 2010 UN Review, as follows: “Bulgaria cannot accept the recommendation and notes that Bulgarian legislation already guarantees most of the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families. Bulgaria can’t ratify the proposed act as it does not distinguish between legal and illegal migrant workers, and its ratification requires consensus with our EU partners due to the fact that most of the provisions of the Convention fall within the The European Union.” (Response of the Government of Bulgaria... 12.11.10)

The Bulgarian position is similar to that of the European Commission, formulated in a Communication to the European Parliament of 21.05.13 on Optimizing the Impact of Migration on Development – The EU Contribution to the UN High Level Dialogue and the next steps to strengthen the link between development and migration: “The EU Member States have not signed the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The insufficient distinction in the convention between economic and social the rights of legal and illegal migrant workers are not in line with national and EU policies and has therefore become a major obstacle. However, in substance, EU instruments provide significant protection for both legal and illegal migrants, and guarantees which are often more extensive than those specified in the Convention.” (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament 21.05.13) Bulgaria has also not ratified the two ILO migrant-specific Conventions and has no preparation in the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy nor public debate about the possibility of their ratification.

⁴⁰ Many thanks to Radostina Pavlova from Voice in Bulgaria NGO for the information and comment on the International Convention on Migrant Workers.

2. Migration and integration strategies

“In the area of migration and development, the national policy follows the EU’s priorities in this area” (EMN 2018a: 3). The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Migration and Integration (2008–2015)⁽⁴¹⁾ is the first comprehensive document in which the Bulgarian state formulated its vision about an optimal migration profile. A central focus was the permanent return of new emigrants and attraction of foreign citizens of Bulgarian origin. The document defined two strategic goals:

- To attract persons with Bulgarian citizenship living on the territory of other countries, as well as of persons of Bulgarian origin with foreign citizenship – for permanent return and settlement in the Republic of Bulgaria.
- Elaboration and implementation of an adequate policy on acceptance and integration of foreigners, and exercise of efficient control of migration processes (Krasteva 2014a: 619).

The Strategy also defined the key economic migrant groups which it prioritised: workforce from other Member States of the EU, EEA and Switzerland; foreigners of Bulgarian origin; students, researchers and highly qualified specialists who have been educated and have graduated in Bulgaria (Krasteva 2014a: 621).

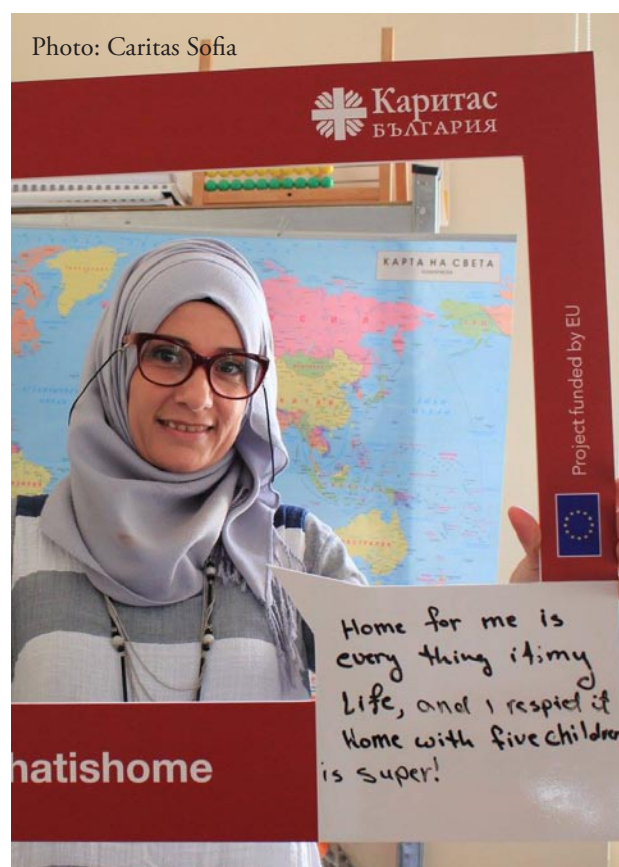
The latest National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015–2020) formulates a priority in the spirit of the MIND Project: “transforming migration and mobility into positive factors for development in demographic and economic terms,” which it expounds in the section on “Policies in the field of migration, development, integration.” In line with the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, the Strategy envisages cooperation with countries of origin and transit, and promotion of Mobility Partnerships: “Until now, Bulgaria has placed the main emphasis in these policies on the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy and, accordingly, we have identified as our partners the Eastern Partnership countries. Considering, however, the events in recent years and the significant diversification of the migration flows connected to the Middle East and the Mediterranean region and along the Silk Road, Bulgaria ought to take steps to identify possible areas of higher cooperation with potential partners identified among countries with which the EU is conducting dialogue and applying some of the instruments of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility.”⁽⁴²⁾

⁴¹ More information can be found here: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=462>

⁴² More information can be found here: <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=963>

The Action Plan for Implementation of the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration (2015–2020), adopted in 2018, articulates through activities and implementation indicators 44 strategic goals, of which 10 are related to beneficiaries of international protection. This Action Plan has been discussed in various relevant places in this study.

The National Strategy for the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014–2020) replaced the refugee integration policy conducted until 2013 on the basis of three-year national programmes. In the pre-2013 integration policy, the central role was played by the State Agency for Refugees, which covered a comparatively limited number of refugees, some 60 per year. The new Strategy has introduced a decentralised approach, in which the leading role is assigned to municipalities. The arguments for this are that in the event of a growing flow of refugees, the SAR will not have sufficient capacity, and that European good policies and practices mobilise local government in refugee integration. This Strategy has been almost ineffective to date, the reasons for which are analysed in “Obstacles.”



C. Civil society – the most committed actor of the migration/integration & development nexus

The purpose of this part of the report is to supplement the analysis of grassroots/CSOs/diaspora organisations in order to enrich the top-down institutional perspective with the bottom-up perspective. The scope of this report does not allow an exhaustive analysis of the entire civic sector engaged in integration. Nevertheless, a few positive examples affirming the nexus between migration and development will be presented across several categories: organisations for intercultural dialogue, migrant and refugee integration and rights; international organisations for international standards in humanitarian and integration activities; good grassroots practices of integration.

1. Organisations for intercultural dialogue, migrant and refugee integration and rights

It is important to note that all organisations engaged in integration contribute to the intercultural dialogue. The diverse and rich activities of several different organisations are briefly summarised here. The criteria for selecting them are three: they have a track record of about ten years or more; they have many and different projects and activities; they are recognisable to Bulgarian and international partners. It must be noted that they have been founded and are headed by outstanding, well-known and recognised leaders.

- The **Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria** (crw-bg.org) is among the best-known organisations; it was founded and is managed by refugee women. The Council helps refugees and asylum seekers in the process of adapting and integrating into Bulgarian society. The Council is a respected partner of Bulgarian institutions and international organisations, and an active participant in humanitarian, international and intercultural forums and initiatives.
- **MultiKulti** (multikulti.bg) has realised the original idea of a map of ethnic restaurants in Sofia as a symbolic connection of the loci of culinary intercultural dialogue. It organises a large number of multicultural events, monitors integration policies.
- **CERMES** (cermes-bg.com) is the first and only academic centre in Bulgaria specialised exclusively in migration studies. Founded and headed by this author, it has rich experience in European and national projects. Together with the Red House Centre for Culture and Debate, CERMES has

organised the first intercultural festivals in Bulgaria; during the refugee crisis, it realised several initiatives with refugee children; in 2018, during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, it co-organised with the Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria a large migration forum with the participation of Mrs Iliyana Yotova, Vice President of the Republic of Bulgaria, and representatives of institutions, international organisations, NGOs and academic centres.

- The **Center for Legal Aid – Voice in Bulgaria** (www.centerforlegalaid.com) is one of the few organisations in Bulgaria offering free legal aid to migrants and refugees. The work of the Center involves direct administrative representation and litigation of individual cases of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in front of administrative authorities and courts on the territory of Bulgaria and Europe. The CLA is very active in advocacy and awareness-raising.
- The **Foundation for Access to Rights – FAR** (<http://www.farbg.eu>) provides legal aid to asylum seekers and migrants in line with its mission of establishing effective mechanisms to guarantee access to rights in practice and effective protection against arbitrary deprivation of rights. Another highly valued activity of FAR are its training courses in refugee law for representatives of the judiciary – for example, a training course for lawyers in conducting proceedings in immigrant detention cases.
- **Marginalia** (www.marginalia.bg) is a human rights online media outlet that covers the topic of migrants and refugees, offering a variety of positive analytical perspectives: of experts, integration actors and migrants.

2. International organisations for international standards in humanitarian and integration activities

The Bulgarian branches of **Caritas**, the **IOM** and the **UNHCR** are very active. Their activities are publicly visible, appreciated and respected. Numerous representatives of institutions engaged in refugee, migration and integration policies have stressed their participation in various forums and training courses organised by the Bulgarian branches of these three international organisations, as well as the positive impact of their newly acquired knowledge on their work.

3. Good grassroots practices of integration

The examples in this section are not meant to be exhaustive, but to outline various areas in which effective initiatives and new practices have been undertaken.

- **Business community engagement in refugee integration.** Business initiatives on refugee integration are still few in number, but it is important to note three types of business actors engaged in this field: Bulgarian companies, companies of migrant entrepreneurs, and innovative forms of social entrepreneurship.

- **TELUS International Europe** (a business process outsourcing and information technology outsourcing provider) is an interesting example of a Bulgarian company that employs 100 refugees and humanitarian status holders. In addition to work, the company offers a wide range of social services as well as cultural, sporting and other events for its employees (Iliev 2017: 18).

- Among migrant businesspersons, the best known for his humanitarian and integration activities is the Syrian-born entrepreneur Aladin. Representatives of his company, **Aladin Foods**, visit the RRC-Harmanli every two or three months and offer employment to men and women, as well as free-of-charge accommodation in a well-furnished house. Most of the refugees and humanitarian status holders stay in the house for five to seven months and leave Bulgaria, heading for Western Europe (BCRM 2014: 43). Aladin has also funded the higher education of one of his refugee employees.

- **MultiKulti** develops innovative practices of social entrepreneurship, such as multicultural catering and culinary courses and events, in which it engages small migrant food and restaurant companies. It operates in Sofia and six other big cities in Bulgaria.

- Another interesting form of social entrepreneurship is a social project in Sofia which trains refugees and offers them an opportunity to work in the IT field.

- **Consolidation of the stakeholder community** is an important condition for successful integration policies. A recent example is the two-day workshop organised by UNHCR Bulgaria in November 2018 with representatives of responsible institutions, NGOs and the academic sector. The results of this forum, as well as of many other similar ones, can be summarised in three groups: getting to know one another, building trust and consolidating networks of

stakeholders; sharing new examples of good practices; brainstorming and collective efforts to find innovative solutions.

- **Labour exchanges** and other forms are used by Caritas Bulgaria to facilitate access to the labour market by preparing profiles of job seekers, contacting companies offering jobs, etc. Interviews with representatives of Caritas Bulgaria point to intensive activity: the Career Centre has offered advice to 231 people and found jobs for 128. Caritas Bulgaria maintains contacts with 45 employers in different spheres – call centres, restaurants, hair salons, factories, and auto repair shops. A curious fact is the demand for barbers/hairdressers from the Near and Middle East, who know techniques that are in line with recent fashion trends in Europe.

- **Studying the needs of refugees** with a view to adapting integration policies. A good example in this regard is the last study of the needs of asylum seekers and refugees in Bulgaria, conducted by UNHCR Bulgaria in 2018 on the basis of rich fieldwork of 33 focus groups. One of the results of the study is directly relevant to the subject of the Common Home Project: 40%⁽⁴³⁾ are working or want to work.⁽⁴⁴⁾ In 2018, a PhD thesis⁽⁴⁵⁾ which took the innovative approach of making a comparative analysis of integration of refugees and Roma through the labour market was defended successfully.

- **Activities for empowerment⁽⁴⁶⁾ of children.** With the efforts of volunteers, NGOs and refugees themselves, an Afghan school has been set up at the refugee centre in Harmanli. Another form of empowerment of children is the membership of a refugee child in the National Council of Children, established by the State Agency for Child Protection.

- **Art for intercultural dialogue.** November 2018, “Refugee Month,” featured a rich programme of many different events at various locations in Sofia. Especially interesting were the initiatives that gave refugees/migrants a “face” – the opportunity for people to sit down and talk with a refugee about his or her migration route, plans, wishes.

The good initiatives and practices enabling better integration of and contribution by refugees and migrants can be summarised in several points:

- **Affirming a positive understanding of migration as a development factor.** At the above-mentioned UNHCR Bulgaria workshop, special attention was paid to the Recommendations of the Global Summit of Refugees in Geneva

⁴³ Of 108 interviewed persons

⁴⁴ Ten persons are hired workers or have their own business, 33 want to work

⁴⁵ Of Stana Iliev, under the supervision of Prof. Anna Krasteva.

⁴⁶ Educational integration of refugee and migrant children is an extremely important issue (Krasteva 2013), but it is beyond the scope of this study.

(25–26 June 2018): inclusion of refugees in the planning and implementation of refugee support projects; utilisation and development of refugees' skills, and encouragement of community projects and initiatives.

- **Realising innovative initiatives with multiple participants.** An example of this is the “Meeting in the Park” (16 June 2018): a celebration of World Refugee Day at a central Sofia park, organised by UNHCR Bulgaria, with the participation of refugees, NGOs, stakeholders and volunteers.
- **Diversifying the forms of intercultural dialogue and getting to know one another,** which is especially necessary in the era of hate speech in political discourse. Thanks to the IOM, Bulgaria was included in the Global Migration Film Festival. The festival is not confined only to traditional cinema; it sets out to connect with various audiences. For a second year in a row, CERMES was a partner of the festival, and each time the debates with students and professors were intense and interesting. Among the multiplying excellent examples of art forums about and with migrants, the performance around the wonderful Bulgarian-language edition of Khaled Hosseini's *Sea Prayer* with the participation of refugee musicians and singers at the (inter)cultural club Knigata (*The Book*) in Sofia is notable.

4. Returnee migrants for successful professional reintegration

Finally, civic initiatives on the third target of the migration & development nexus, emigrants and returnees, should be noted. The most active promoters of successful professional (re)integration of returnee migrants are the returnees themselves, through two active and innovative organisations, Tuk-Tam (Here and There) and Back2Bg. Studies (Zareva 2018a) have shown that it is not state policies, but precisely returnee initiatives that have catalysed the decision of some emigrants to return.

- **Tuk-Tam** (<https://tuk-tam.bg/>) has the self-confidence of being the largest organisation of “Bulgarians who have experience abroad and who believe in Bulgaria.” They define their mission as “creating a community of enterprising, inspiring and able Bulgarians with experience of the whole world.” They are active in several fields: developing communities of students and professionals abroad, who are engaged with Bulgaria, by organising events promoting Bulgarian culture; supporting the career development of returnees in Bulgaria. They illustrate their results with several figures: 438,489 people are aware of Tuk-Tam's activities, and BGN 84,600 has been donated for scholarships. The organisation has 453 donors and 90 partners.

- **Back2bg** (<http://back2bg.com/>) has a more concrete focus and has established itself as the largest career forum. For more than a decade now, Tuk-Tam and Back2bg have been organising an annual forum titled “Career in Bulgaria. Why not?”⁽⁴⁷⁾ connects Bulgarians with experience abroad and employers looking for professionals. Every year more than 1,500 Bulgarians with international experience – students, specialists, entrepreneurs – visit the forum. More than 100 companies offering career opportunities in Bulgaria take part.⁽⁴⁸⁾

The contribution of these two organisations can be summarised in three points:

- Maintaining live and active contacts between Bulgarians abroad and Bulgaria;
- Helping returnees to adapt and to (re)integrate both in the labour market and in communities of other Bulgarians with educational and professional experience abroad;
- Affirming a positive image of emigrants and returnees as “enterprising, inspiring and able Bulgarians with experience of the whole world.”

It is important to add a small case study of reintegration and empowerment to the overall analysis of good practice. This case involves members of the Roma community in a medium-sized city after returning from migration, and is based on an interview with a Roma activist, himself a returnee migrant, and on the author's observations. The positive effect of migration can be summarised in several points. Most returnees reintegrate successfully into the labour market. Some transform their social remittances, their acquired professional skills and experience, into small business start-ups – opening a kebab shop or forming a small construction team, for example. Returnees reintegrate through entrepreneurship and through housing – some leave the Roma neighbourhood and buy a home in other neighbourhoods with their savings. Social remittances do not always have a concrete quantifiable form, but they have a potentially long-term democratic impact. The Roma activist who was interviewed observed that employment and a decent income make the members of this marginalized community in Bulgaria more resistant to offers to buy their votes during elections.

The analysis of the two organisations of returnees as well as the mini-case study of returnee migrants from the Roma minority can be summed up in two conclusions: empowerment of returnees and taking the matter of (re)integration in Bulgaria into their own hands.

⁴⁷ The 11th edition of the forum was held on 20 September 2018.

⁴⁸ For more information: Kariervbulgaria.com

#whatishome

What is
HOME?

Каритас
БЪЛГАРИЯ

#whatishome

Когато са хората,
които
ОБИЗГАМ

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

Bulgaria has been a country of migration – both emigration and immigration – for centuries. However, today, migration underpins huge challenges to Bulgaria's economy and society. Bulgaria's relatively small population size of just over 7 million in 2018, its working age population (15-64 years old) of 4.8 million (in the country), and its high emigration contrasted with very low immigration undermine the viability of Bulgaria's economy and its capacity to provide for the welfare of its population. More than ten times as many Bulgarians reside abroad, about 1.3 million, as immigrants in Bulgaria, about 150,000.

The exodus of skilled persons combined with very low fertility rates and rapidly ageing population paint a bleak picture for current and future economic prospects, in particular starting and maintaining viable enterprises in productive sectors. Businesses face increasing difficulties sourcing suitable labour within Bulgaria as consequences of emigration and the ageing labour force becoming less productive in the absence of significant immigration. The relatively small and ageing pool of potential employees is deterring investors in labour intensive industries. Trends of increased anti-migrant and anti-refugee public discourse and open xenophobic hostility against migrants and migration are seriously undermining the immediate solution for sustaining the country's economic and social viability: immigration. The data on refugee-asylum seekers indicates that refugees and some immigrants are fleeing the country instead of arriving and staying.

Major *challenges* include absence of an informed, coherent and strategic government response. Instead, the existing response is piecemeal policy statements. The government appears to be ignoring the dangers to the economic future of the country of high emigration contrasted with relatively small immigration and is not doing enough towards the encouraging immigration of people at all skills levels. Rather, the discourse by government and political parties identifies that solution as, instead, a big problem for the country.

Bulgarians have a historical memory of a hospitable refugee policy and protection of minorities and they are proud of having saved their Jewish community during the Second World War and of having accepted *White Guard* Russians and Armenian refugees. Paradoxically, today, when Bulgaria is much more developed and has a small *refugee community*, the levels of negative attitudes are high. Bulgaria's refugee dilemma is punctuated by the reality that very few refugees who received refugee status stay in Bulgaria. The refugee community is characterised by a huge difference between the number of those who received international protection status, 25,075⁽⁴⁹⁾, and the number of those who have settled in Bulgaria, which is estimated at no more than 2,000. For refugees, Bulgaria is and will continue to be a *transit country*. The reasons are complex, but two reasons are economic and political. In 2017, Bulgaria was the Member State with the lowest GDP per capita, at 51 % below the EU average (Eurostat). Also, there is no effective and efficient policy of refugee integration nor a clear, consistent political will for its implementation.

Concerning immigrants and migrants from the EU and neighbouring European countries, integration is relatively easy. Immigrants remain few in number – approximately 150,000 or 2% of Bulgaria's population. They are well-integrated in terms of labour market participation and linguistic, cultural and social integration. An important sub-group are emigrant returnees. Their reintegration is, nonetheless, largely the result of their own efforts as well as of the activity of organisations of returnees, and significantly less a result of state policies. The return from emigration is not always final and is not infrequently followed by re-emigration. The politico-governmental paradox is between high levels of integration – for most immigrants – on the one hand, and the lack of efficient integration policy. The first governmental strategy on migration and integration was adopted only in 2008, two decades after the transition starting in 1989. This paradox is also reflected in the inability or lack of political will to brand integration and

⁴⁹ 13,454 received refugee status, and 11,671 received humanitarian status.

to better communicate and promote need for integration along with positive examples and good practices.

The numerous and varied forms of the *contributions of migrants and refugees to development in Bulgaria* can be summarised in several directions. While huge emigration is a loss of demographic, social, educational and democratic capital, it does contribute to the country's development through significant remittances. *Bulgarian emigrants* remittances exceed foreign direct investment. Migrant work and entrepreneurship is manifested in active individual strategies for labour market integration and for establishment of family or larger companies, especially among migrants from the Near and Middle East as well as China. It is significant that migrant-owned companies employ both Bulgarians and other migrants. Additionally, more migrants and refugees are being employed by institutions and NGOs as interpreters/translators, social workers and mediators, which allows them to actively contribute to the integration of the newly arriving migrants and refugees. Refugees and migrants are contributing increasingly to the intercultural picture of Sofia and other big cities, and to cultural life in Bulgaria through the activities of artists, musicians and writers who create works both in their native languages and in Bulgarian.

The obstacles to integration of migrants and refugees are varied. Perhaps most prominently is the intensifying xenophobic anti-immigrant discourse and behaviour towards migrants and refugees. This discourse and behaviour represents both refugees and migrants as a threat, not as subjects of humanitarian support and integration policy. The xenophobic political rhetoric of many politicians, not just from extremist parties but also from mainstream parties, is also responsible for an increasingly hostile public opinion. Furthermore, they may be considered as factors inciting violence against migrants, and such phenomena as vigilante “migrant hunters” who detain migrants crossing borders – without legal authority to do so. The specificity of the Bulgarian case must be underlined: anti-migration discourses, politics, attitudes and actions are due neither to an increase in the number of migrants and refugees in the country – on the contrary, their absolute number and percentage of the population remain very low – nor to any negative experience of Bulgarian citizens, the overwhelming majority of whom do not know any migrants/refugees. The responsibility for the increasingly negative environment, which undermines integration policies, lies with the political elites – from both the ruling and the opposition parties. The non-implementation of the existing refugee integration programme on the part of state institutions is another obstacle, along with absence of a coherent approach to integration for immigrants, returning Bulgarians and other migrants such as posted workers. No high level governmental post has been established, such as the proposed deputy prime minister responsible for integration. Instead, the State has taken measures to shift the responsibility for integration to municipalities, while

preparing neither the local government nor the local population for that shift. A particular obstacle to development related to migration is the consequence of Bulgarian arms exports. Many Bulgarian-made weapons are reported to end up in hands of armed factions in countries suffering warfare in the Middle East, conflicts which are destroying development and forcibly displacing millions of people – some of whom end up arriving in Bulgaria to seek refugee protection.

Opportunities for enhancing migrants' own development and their contributions to development are bound up with realizing the Sustainable Development Goals, and in particular, effective integration policies and effective grassroots practices of integration. Bulgaria's policy in the light of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda can be summarised in two opposite trends. The first, positive approach is the long-term commitment to implement the “International Cooperation for Development and Humanitarian Issues” Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whereby Bulgaria is contributing towards addressing the root causes of migration, including conflict resolution, alleviating poverty, supporting development and responding to disasters with humanitarian assistance. However, the counter trend is Bulgaria's retreat from multilateralism and its non-implementation of international standards: it has not ratified to date any international convention on protection of migrants and migration governance. It did not endorse the intergovernmental Global Compact for Migration at the end of 2018. Bulgaria's integration in the European Union is a key impetus for harmonising legislation in the sphere of migration and integration. Amendments to the Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act, adopted in 2018, have eased access to the Bulgarian labour market for third-country nationals. In the decade after 2008, several national strategies on migration, asylum and integration were adopted, offering opportunities for enhancing migrant and refugee contributions to development if they are implemented. The National Strategy for the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014–2020) redefined Bulgaria's refugee integration policy. While until 2013 this policy was centralised and was implemented by the State Agency for Refugees, the new strategy introduced a decentralised approach in which municipalities have the leading role. Actively including local government in refugee integration is positive in principle, but its unsuccessful introduction in practice to date was noted in “Obstacles.” Still, examples of effective grassroots practices of integration outline the profile of an active civil society with several groups of actors: civic activists, and active representatives of the migrant and refugee communities. While still few in number, initiatives of social entrepreneurs and businesspersons contributing to employment integration of refugees and migrants offer particularly important opportunities. A major challenge for Bulgaria is the lack of reliable data and the dearth of scientifically sound research on migration and related concerns – employment, skills, education, social protection, etc.

B. Recommendations

The recommendations formulated here can serve as signposts and priorities in the advocacy and programmatic activities of Caritas Bulgaria and its partners in the fields of refugee, migration and integration law, policies and practice.

1. Define, establish and implement a comprehensive national pro-immigration law, policy and practice framework

- Establish a proper *rule of law* legislative foundation by ratifying core international conventions on migration governance and migrant protection: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families; ILO Convention 97 on migration for employment; ILO Convention 143 on migrant workers; and ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.
- Ensure of government engagement including all relevant ministries and departments.
- Define a strategic implementation programme.
- Incorporate the relevant measures recommended below.

2. Change the narrative in public discourse, in news media coverage and in social media.

- Highlight migrants' contributions and migrants' rights – and the interdependence between contributions and protecting rights.
- Stress the urgent need for immigration to sustain Bulgarian business and the viability of the Bulgarian economy, in the face of huge and still increasing absence of skills and labour force.
- Articulate a “welcoming” narrative and discourse, both nationally and at local, municipal levels.
- Promote migrant and refugee voices speaking for themselves about their role and contributions to Bulgaria.

3. Vigorously combat discrimination and xenophobic discourse and action; conduct proactive advocacy and public awareness raising.

- Repress citizen initiative policing actions that are outside the law.
- Actively counter toxic narratives and fake news in public discourses through information about formulation, results and good practices of evidence-based policies.
- Promote partnerships with media outlets open to migration/refugee issues, such as Bulgarian National Radio, Dnevnik, Darik Radio, etc.

- Organise activities targeting young people for e-engagement against anti-migrant and anti-refugee xenophobia on social media.
- Propose partnership initiatives with human rights organizations and media outlets such as *Marginalia* for permanent coverage and dedicated rubrics on migration, migrants and refugees.
- Organise a large annual conference with high-level representatives of government and local institutions, international organisations, academic centres, social partners, NGOs and migrant and refugee associations, to identify and analyse trends and achievements on immigration, refugee protection, emigration and integration and engage discussion on *obstacles* and *opportunities*.
- “Give a face” to refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and other migrants in public discourse, debates and communication through diverse and creative forms:
 - (a) Debates on “Migration and Development” with students, envisaged by Caritas Bulgaria.
 - (b) Intercultural initiatives with schools where migrants share their experiences and stories.

4. Address education and skills training needs for Bulgarians and immigrants with skills needed for employment today and tomorrow.

- Multiply and regularise forms of continuous training of migrants and refugees in fields of labour shortage/demand.
- Ensure coordinated efforts among the National Employment Agency, training institutions, employers/businesses, trade unions, Caritas Bulgaria, UNHCR Bulgaria and NGOs.

5. Ensure full protection for migrants at work and rapid integration in employment for immigrants and refugees.

- Review ratification and application of *up to date* International Labour Standards in Bulgaria, to promote ratification and implementation of relevant instruments non-ratified to date.
- Ensure that labour inspection in Bulgaria has the mandate, resources and training to reach all workplaces where migrants (and nationals) are employed to ensure compliance with decent work and occupational safety and health standards.
- Encourage and support social entrepreneurship for migrants and refugees.
- Provide incentives for companies employing migrants and refugees, for example by utilising funds from the

“Human Resources Development” Programme for training and employment of unemployed migrants and refugees.

- Introduce a *One-Stop Shop* approach – an information unit or contact person providing advice to employers about the legal framework for hiring refugees and asylum seekers, as well as a regularly updated database on the qualifications and competences of job seekers.
- Regularise career forums for direct meetings between employers, migrants and refugees looking for jobs, and representatives of institutions and NGOs engaged in integration.

6. Elaborate a coherent and effective integration policy and strategy, with enabling legislation covering refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, posted workers and returning Bulgarians.

- Promote and provide inputs and guidance to elaboration of the national strategy.
- Ensure government leadership and engagement in its implementation by designating a focal point office/official, such as a proposed deputy prime minister post for integration policies.
- Establish a whole of local government cooperation under-girded by national support.
- Enable *whole of society* engagement by social partners (worker unions and employer associations), civil society organisations, faith based organisations, and migrant and refugee associations.
- Promote the notion and initiatives of *Art and sport for intercultural dialogue*.
- Multiply forms, participants and audiences of participatory cultural practices: performances, workshops, art initiatives, etc.
- Extend the form of the Global Migration Film Festival now regularly held in Bulgaria, by including migrants/refugees in debates.
- Promote and facilitate sports competitions, trips, shared holidays, especially at the local level and for young people, for direct and festive intercultural sharing and learning.

7. Strengthen Bulgarian development cooperation to address forced migration and to support integral human development elsewhere.

- Promote implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on enhancing livelihood security (SDG 1, 2, 6, 11, 13), access to basic services and income (SDG 3, 4, 8), gender equality (SDG 5), peace (SDG

16) and reducing inequality within and among countries (SDG 10) in Bulgarian domestic and international policy.

- Respect international commitments by allocating 0.7% of Gross National Income to Official Development Assistance (ODA) without counting reception costs of asylum seekers as ODA.
- Ensure that all ODA follows strictly the objective of supporting sustainable development as enumerated in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Increase allocations of development and humanitarian assistance to the countries in the Global South hosting large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Immediately stop Bulgarian arms sales and exports that go directly or indirectly to countries experiencing armed conflict and/or widespread violations of human rights.

8. Enhance data, knowledge and research and policy application.

- Ensure that policy-makers in Bulgaria rely on collection and analysis of gender and age-disaggregated migration data covering the situation and conditions of employment, education, health and social protection of migrants and refugees as well as their economic, cultural, social and civic contributions, in designing and implementing migration, asylum and integration policies.
- Provide publicly accessible quantitative and qualitative information about migration, conditions and situations of migrants, and integration in Bulgaria, including critical analysis of migration statistics from national and international sources.
- Ensure regular monitoring of migration, asylum and integration policies and inform stakeholders, media and public opinion with the aim of increasing the accountability of institutions and catalysing the successful implementation of law and policy.
- Encourage and support relevant migration/refugee research by Bulgarian universities, research institutions and competent social partner and civil society bodies in order to support good law, policy and practice on migration in a targeted and sustainable way.
- Document, evaluate, share and promote information about projects, initiatives and engagement in the area of migration, integration and development, to support others to learn and improve their work, generate more knowledge and learn from experience.
- Create a national *Migration Observatory* to promote, support, and engage in the above activities.

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Annexes

A1. Abbreviations

BCRM – Bulgarian Council on Refugees and Migrants
BNB – Bulgarian National Bank
EMN – European Migration Network
FDI – foreign direct investment
IOM – International Organisation for Migration
LMLMA – Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act
MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIPEX – Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX)
NCLMLM – National Council on Labour Migration and Labour Mobility
NCMI – National Council on Migration and Integration
NSI – National Statistical Institute
PRC – Pew Research Centre
RRC – Registration-and-Reception Centre
SAR – State Agency for Refugees
SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

A2: Interview list

Interview with a deputy chairman and heads of departments of the SAR, 12 June 2018.
Interview with an integration expert in an executive position at Caritas Bulgaria, 19 December 2018.
Interview with an integration expert at Caritas Bulgaria, 19 December 2018.
Interview with a Roma activist from a medium-sized city, 3 January 2019.
Interview with a Chinese entrepreneur, 4 January 2019.
Interview with an African migrant who is a social worker and mediator, 5 January 2019.
Interview with a Chinese artist, 5 January 2019.
Interview with an Afghan businessman, 6 January 2019.
Interview with an activist from the Syrian community, 8 January 2019.
Interview with a Palestinian businessman, 10 January 2019.
Interview with a migrant who is a translator and writer, 12 January 2019.
Interview (on Skype) with a Bulgarian emigrant who re-emigrated soon after returning to Bulgaria, 15 January 2019.
Interview (by phone) with an expert at the MFA, 30 January 2019.

This study is also based on the author's interviews with refugees, migrants and representatives of NGOs done in the course of her long-standing research on refugee, migration and integration policies, especially interviews in the last few years.

Acknowledgements

Cordial thanks to:

- Stefani Bogomilova and Marina Kisiova for their valuable help in compiling the background information.
- Radotina Pavlova for the consultation on the (non)ratification of international Conventions on labor migration.
- prof. Vesselin Minchev for the consultation on conflicting statistics of the Bulgarian emigration



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This publication was produced in the framework of the MIND project, which has received financial support from the DEAR Programme of the European Union. The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Union.