

# COSTS OF BULGARIAN LABOUR MIGRATION AND LABOUR MOBILITY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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## **Abstract**

The opening of the borders after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union in 2007 created better job and life opportunities abroad for many Bulgarians, but caused a demographic decline in the country. The extensive out-migration over the last 30 years reduced Bulgaria's population from 8,987,000 in 1989 to 6,981,047 in 2019 and created a profound impact on the country and on its economy. As a consequence, the nation is in a demographic crisis as the most depopulating one in Europe, facing issues such as brain-drain, slowdown of population growth, and reduction of the working-age population.

The impact of labor migration and the resulting unfavorable long-term demographic trends lead to a series of negative consequences for family size, family composition, and intergenerational transfers. Alongside the negative consequences for the Bulgarian state and the economy, labor migration also had a positive economic impact. On the one hand, for the migrants themselves due to the opportunities for higher wages in the host countries, for achieving social stability as well as acquiring new professional and social experience. On the other hand, for the Bulgarian state due to the transfer of skills, knowledge and remittances.

## **Keywords**

Remittances; labor mobility; labor migration; Bulgarian economy; demographic decline



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# ИЗДЕРЖКИ БОЛГАРСКОЙ ТРУДОВОЙ МИГРАЦИИ И МОБИЛЬНОСТИ РАБОЧЕЙ СИЛЫ: ВЫЗОВЫ И ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ

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## Аннотация

Открытие границ после падения Берлинской стены и вступление Болгарии в Европейский Союз в 2007 году создали лучшие возможности для трудоустройства и жизни за рубежом для многих болгар, но вызвали в стране демографический спад. Масштабная миграция населения за последние 30 лет привела к сокращению численности населения Болгарии с 8 987 000 человек в 1989 г. до 6 981 047 человек в 2019 г. и оказала глубокое воздействие на страну и ее экономику. Как следствие, страна переживает демографический кризис как самый депопуляционный в Европе, сталкиваясь с такими проблемами, как утечка мозгов, замедление роста населения и сокращение численности трудоспособного населения.

Трудовая миграция и обусловленные ею неблагоприятные долгосрочные демографические тенденции приводят к негативным последствиям, сказывающимся на размерах семьи, составе семьи и трансфертах между поколениями. Наряду с негативными последствиями для болгарского государства и экономики, трудовая миграция также оказала положительное экономическое влияние. С одной стороны, для самих мигрантов это связано с возможностями получения более высокой заработной платы в принимающих странах, достижением социальной стабильности, а также приобретением нового профессионального и социального опыта. С другой стороны, для болгарского государства это связано с передачей профессиональных навыков, знаний и денежными переводами.

## Ключевые слова

Денежные переводы; трудовая мобильность; трудовая миграция; болгарская экономика; демографический спад



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## **INTRODUCTION**

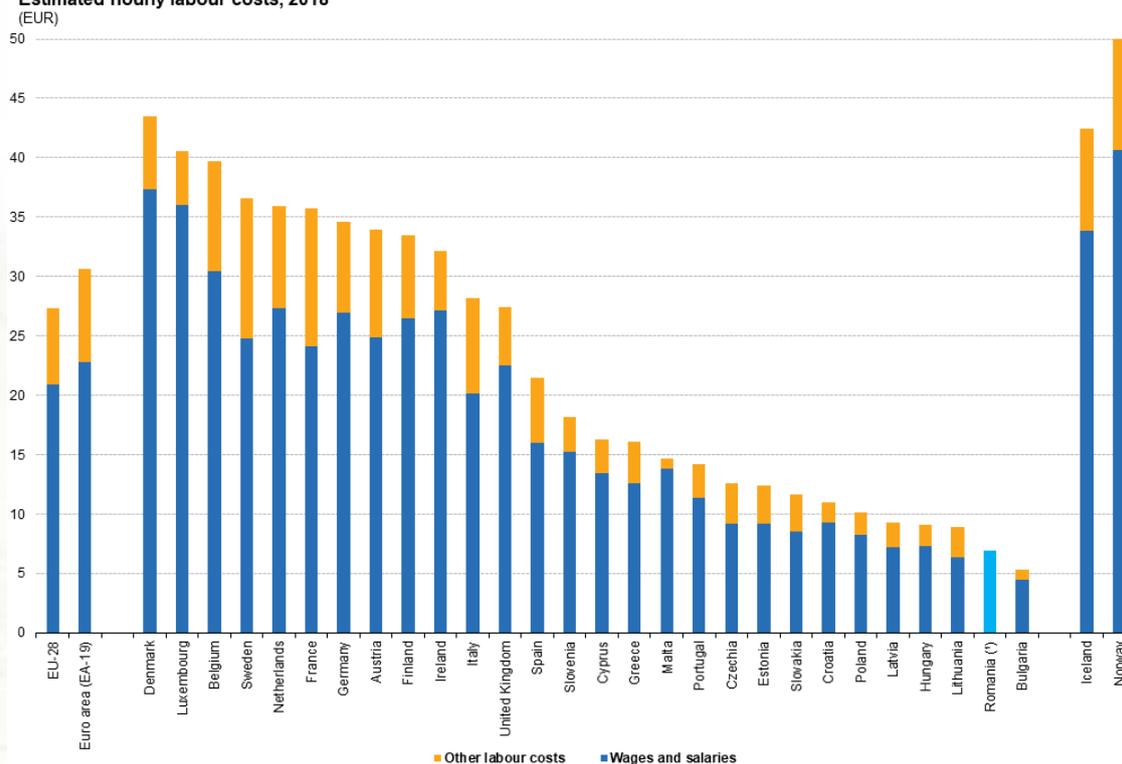
When the Berlin Wall, built in August 1961 by the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and named by them the “Anti-Fascist Protection Wall”, was demolished on 9 November 1989, millions of Eastern Europeans, who had lived behind the “iron curtain” started to head to the bigger cities in their countries or abroad. Bulgarians were not an exception in this powerful out-migration wave. Some of the reasons that triggered their migration were the search for means of subsistence and the hope to raise their general living standards. Search for employment, better remuneration, new professional opportunities and higher professional growth were also among the decisive factors. Led by these key drivers, millions of Bulgarians left their home country and migrated abroad, especially after Bulgaria’s EU accession on 1 January 2007.

## **LABOUR MIGRATION AS A CHALLENGE**

In the labor migration debate in Bulgaria, factors such as tight labor market, high unemployment rate, disadvantageous conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises in the country, search for better social security and professional opportunities, etc. are considered the causes for migration. Last but not least, the low wage level in Bulgaria compared with the other EU Member States is regarded as one of the main motives. According to the Eurostat, the average hourly labor cost in 2018 was estimated at EUR 27.4 in the EU-28 and at EUR 30.6 in the Euro area (EA-19). However, there are significant differences between EU Member States, for example the hourly labor costs in Denmark are EUR 43.5, while in Bulgaria they are eight times lower at EUR 5.4. (Source: EUROSTAT, Estimated hourly labor costs, 2018). On the basis of these inequalities, the expectation for the number of 2 million Bulgarians, who live and work abroad, to grow is more than realistic.



**Estimated hourly labour costs, 2018**



Notes: whole economy (excluding agriculture and public administration); in enterprises with 10 or more employees. Provisional data.  
 (\*) Only the total hourly labour cost is displayed. The wage and salary/non-wage breakdown is not published for 2018 as estimates are not comparable with previous years due to changes in national legislation.  
 Source: Eurostat (online data code: lc\_lci\_lev)



**Fig. 1. Source: Eurostat**

The statistical data on migration of the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute show that 33,225 people emigrated from the country in 2018, while 29,559 immigrated to Bulgaria, which represents an increase of -3,666.

Sex Age	Immigrants in the country	Emigrants from the country	Migration increase
<b>Total</b>	<b>29 559</b>	<b>33 225</b>	<b>-3 666</b>
0 - 4	2 474	787	1 687
5 - 9	1 215	1 083	132
10 - 14	715	1 191	-476
15 - 19	1 201	2 204	-1 003
20 - 24	2 090	4 260	-2 170
25 - 29	2 636	4 375	-1 739

30 - 34	3 031	4 184	-1 153
35 - 39	2 727	3 606	-879
40 - 44	2 380	3 169	-789
45 - 49	1 947	2 357	-410
50 - 54	1 900	1 646	254
55 - 59	1 941	1 295	646
60 - 64	2 028	1 016	1 012
65 - 69	1 907	860	1 047
70 - 74	794	616	178
75 - 79	359	388	-29
80 +	214	188	26
<b>Male</b>	<b>14 586</b>	<b>17 071</b>	<b>-2 485</b>
0 - 4	1 241	401	840
5 - 9	633	561	72
10 - 14	379	611	-232
15 - 19	576	1 069	-493
20 - 24	965	2 189	-1 224
25 - 29	1 112	2 211	-1 099
30 - 34	1 344	2 112	-768
35 - 39	1 276	1 866	-590
40 - 44	1 273	1 704	-431
45 - 49	1 112	1 344	-232
50 - 54	1 054	893	161
55 - 59	960	662	298
60 - 64	962	519	443
65 - 69	990	401	589
70 - 74	434	277	157
75 - 79	180	170	10
80 +	95	81	14
<b>Female</b>	<b>14 973</b>	<b>16 154</b>	<b>-1 181</b>
0 - 4	1 233	386	847



5 - 9	582	522	60
10 - 14	336	580	-244
15 - 19	625	1 135	-510
20 - 24	1 125	2 071	-946
25 - 29	1 524	2 164	-640
30 - 34	1 687	2 072	-385
35 - 39	1 451	1 740	-289
40 - 44	1 107	1 465	-358
45 - 49	835	1 013	-178
50 - 54	846	753	93
55 - 59	981	633	348
60 - 64	1 066	497	569
65 - 69	917	459	458
70 - 74	360	339	21
75 - 79	179	218	-39
80 +	119	107	12

**Table 1. International Migration\* By Age And Sex In 2018<sup>1</sup>**

The same source gives information that in 2018 from the total number of 33,225 emigrants from Bulgaria, 31,263 were Bulgarians, 1,962 were others, of which 156 EU citizens, 1,806 non-EU citizens (third country nationals, stateless persons and unknown citizenship are included). From the total number of 29,559 immigrants to Bulgaria, 16,169 of them were Bulgarians, 13,390 were others, of which 1,038 were EU, and 12,352 non-EU citizens (\* Third country nationals, stateless persons and unknown citizenship are included )

<sup>1</sup> Data on international migration include persons who have declared change of their present address in the country with a new one outside it or change of an address abroad with a new one in the country. (Number). Source of the table: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute

Age in complete d years	Immigrants					Emigrants				
	Total	Bulgaria n	Other	of which		Total	Bulgaria n	Othe r	of which	
				EU	Non - EU*				E U	Non - EU*
<b>Total</b>	<b>29 559</b>	<b>16 169</b>	<b>13 390</b>	<b>1 038</b>	<b>12 352</b>	<b>33 225</b>	<b>31 263</b>	<b>1 962</b>	<b>15 6</b>	<b>1 806</b>
0-4	2 474	2 079	395	12	383	787	757	30	0	30
5-9	1 215	839	376	14	362	1 083	1 034	49	3	46
10-14	715	363	352	8	344	1 191	1 143	48	0	48
15-19	1 201	519	682	50	632	2 204	2 166	38	5	33
20-24	2 090	911	1 179	59	1 120	4 260	4 043	217	21	196
25-29	2 636	1 679	957	59	898	4 375	4 117	258	18	240
30-34	3 031	1 860	1 171	77	1 094	4 184	3 996	188	14	174
35-39	2 727	1 671	1 056	79	977	3 606	3 418	188	14	174
40-44	2 380	1 190	1 190	98	1 092	3 169	2 992	177	21	156
45-49	1 947	802	1 145	100	1 045	2 357	2 171	186	15	171
50-54	1 900	763	1 137	121	1 016	1 646	1 538	108	9	99
55-59	1 941	885	1 056	100	956	1 295	1 191	104	13	91
60-64	2 028	1 005	1 023	74	949	1 016	894	122	11	111
65-69	1 907	1 077	830	95	735	860	756	104	6	98
70+	1 367	526	841	92	749	1 192	1 047	145	6	139

**Table 2. Source of the table: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute Source of the table: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute**



One of the biggest consequences of labor migration for the Bulgarian state is depopulation. Depopulation is caused by the demographic processes related to the natural change of the generations, as well as by the migratory movements that are relevant to Bulgaria in recent decades. According to UN, in late 2011, the world's population exceeded the 7 billion mark and it is currently growing by an additional 82 million persons every year (United Nations 2013a). According to the same source, by 2050, the world's population is likely to reach an unprecedented size between 8.3 billion and 10.9 billion people. The same forecast predicts that most of the future population growth will occur in the developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries.

In contrast, the demographic situation and the trends on the European continent are diametrically opposed. Many societies, particularly those in Eastern Europe suffer from this problem. Bulgaria is not an exception to this trend – the population decline has been a steady trend since 1990, and in regard to the population structure, it is aging. According to the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute, as of 31 December 2018, the population of Bulgaria is 7,000,039.

Total			Urban residence			Rural residence		
Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
7 000 039	3 395 701	3 604 338	5 159 129	2 481 128	2 678 001	1 840 910	914 573	926 337

**Table 3. Population by Place of Residence and Sex as of 31.12.2018. Source of the table: Bulgarian National Statistical Institute**

Comparing to 2012, the population decreased by 282,002 people: as of 31 December 2012, Bulgaria's population was 7,282,041<sup>1</sup>.

According to EUROSTAT, the current (2019) population of Bulgaria is 7,202,198 which represented 1.42% of the population of the European Union and placed the country in 16<sup>th</sup> place by population after Austria (8,576,261 people) and before Denmark (5,659,715 people).

Population by country (Total EU population : 508 450 856)

<sup>1</sup> [https://nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Population2012\\_IZXIDOM.pdf](https://nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Population2012_IZXIDOM.pdf)



<b>Country</b>	<b>Total population</b>	<b>Population %</b>
Malta	429344	0,08%
Luxembourg	562958	0,11%
Cyprus	847008	0,17%
Estonia	1313271	0,26%
Latvia	1986096	0,39%
Slovenia	2062874	0,41%
Lithuania	2921262	0,57%
Croatia	4225316	0,83%
Ireland	4628949	0,91%
Slovakia	5421349	1,07%
Finland	5471753	1,08%
Denmark	5659715	1,11%
Bulgaria	7202198	1,42%
Austria	8576261	1,69%
Sweden	9747355	1,92%
Hungary	9855571	1,94%
Portugal	10374822	2,04%
Czech Republic	10538275	2,07%
Greece	10858018	2,14%



Belgium	11258434	2,21%
Netherlands	16900726	3,32%
Romania	19870647	3,91%
Poland	38005614	7,47%
Spain	46449565	9,14%
Italy	60795612	11,96%
United Kingdom	64875165	12,76%
France	66415161	13,06%
Germany	81197537	15,97%
Total population	508450856	100%

**Table 4. Source of the table: EUROSTAT<sup>1</sup>**

Comparing 2012 and 2011 (Census reference moment is midnight of 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011), in 2011 the population was 7,364,570, <sup>2</sup> which shows that it decreased by 82,529 people. According to UN projections, Bulgaria is among the Top 10 countries (the others are Latvia, Moldova, Ukraine, Croatia, Lithuania, Romania, Serbia, Poland, Hungary) with the fastest shrinking populations, which are estimated to see their population shrink by 15% or more by 2050.<sup>3</sup>

The issues directly related to demographic challenges are brain-drain and labour shortage. For the Bulgarian state the emigration of highly educated and qualified people is a loss, which causes a need to import labor for many industries. Therefore, it will not be surprising at all for Bulgaria to turn from a sending country to a host country for migration in the next ten years. With regard to the shortage of a skilled labor force, at present foreign workers, who mostly come to Bulgaria are from Turkey, Ukraine and Russia, but they do not represent a threat for local employment because

<sup>1</sup> [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/living\\_en#tab-1-1](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/figures/living_en#tab-1-1)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Census2011final.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/Probabilistic/POP/TOT/100>

they are low-skilled, and their work is mainly seasonal, without work contracts. In such a situation, the Bulgarian government should have a better targeted policy of attracting ethnic Bulgarians from the Bulgarian historical diasporas in Moldova, Ukraine, Northern Dobruja (within the borders of Romania), in historical region of Banat<sup>1</sup> (formed as a result of the collapse of Austro-Hungary) , Republic of North Macedonia, Albania, Greece<sup>2</sup>, Turkey<sup>3</sup> to move to the country. Most of the people of Bulgarian origin, who obtained a Bulgarian passport, do not stay to live and work in Bulgaria; they search better opportunities in another EU country. The reason is that there is not a single state mechanism to support young people from the historical Bulgarian diasporas, who graduated in Bulgaria, with access to internships, job opportunities, etc.. Therefore, Bulgaria as a state should develop its comprehensive national policy with Bulgarian-speakers abroad. Ways to address these issues include a change in the legal framework. The three legal acts – Bulgarian Citizenship Act, Law Regarding the Bulgarians Living Outside the Republic of Bulgaria, and Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act should be changed, because their provisions contradict each other. Changes in the Bulgarian Citizenship Act should include a mandatory level of proficiency in Bulgarian, as well as a requirement for a permanent residence in Bulgaria.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria runs Bulgarian cultural institutes in many countries, but this is not enough. The need for the establishment of a public Bulgarian cultural foundation, following the example of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, British Council, or Goethe Institute, is pressing. The objectives of such a future foundation should popularise the Bulgarian language, Bulgarian culture, and support programmes for learning the Bulgarian language in Bulgaria and abroad.

The low-paid labour force is a big gain for the developed countries. They could benefit of it by tackling the shortage of local low-skilled labour force, and by paying less to the migrants, as compared to the wages paid to the local employees for the same work. The interest is mutual – many low-qualified Bulgarians, who were jobless or even retired in their home country and who cannot survive with their low pensions, use the work opportunity in the conditions of a free movement of people in the EU. Sometimes there is a discriminatory attitude of the host countries to them, such as the less than appropriate work conditions, having in mind that the illegal and/or low-skilled migrants from Bulgaria or other Eastern

<sup>1</sup> There is a Bulgarian community in the Romanian and Serbian Banat.

<sup>2</sup> There is a compact community of Bulgarian Pomak population in Western Thrace.

<sup>3</sup> There are referring the Muslims who emigrated from Bulgaria after the Liberation War of 1878 and after the Balkan wars of 1912 – 1913, not the displaced Bulgarian Turks during the so-called "revival process" in 1989.



European countries will do the low-wage work (very heavy work, with risks of accidents, low-paid, without any social and health insurance or contracts), which local employees would not accept under any circumstances, and whose participation in informal employment will not create competition with the local employees. The opportunities for realization of both low-skilled and highly-skilled employees in the host country labor market depend on the migration policy of the host country and the country of origin, as well as on the historical relationships and contemporary international relations (an aggregation of diplomatic, legal, political, economic relations) between states, and as well between folks of the sending and the receiving countries.

The migration process should not be considered only from the labor market perspective, but in the sociocultural context, because “every migrant brings a different socio-cultural background from a homeland, and meets a different sociocultural environment in a host country” (Bódi and Savova, 2011, p.187). The issues concerning the cultural and civilization aspects of the labor migration need more public attention. What are the cultural and social values that migrants “transfer” to the destination countries? The labor migration could be a disadvantage for the migrants due to losing or changing their identity in the host country. Considering this, it is important to discuss what is/what will be the migration policy of the host country regarding the labor migrants, who will choose those countries as their future home. What kind of state mechanisms will function there – for integration into the host society or for assimilation? Will the migrants preserve their original identity, or will they accept a new one? The migration issue includes many questions, waiting for adequate answers and far-sighted state policies addressing these social problems. The focus should be changed from the negative effects of the labor migration and to be put on seeking better state mechanisms to address the causes of it.

### **LABOR MIGRATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY**

International labor migration is an integral part of the larger process of international migration: it is one of the channels for the implementation of modern globalisation processes and it established itself as one of the directions of economic globalisation (Marinov 2007, p.1). Labor migration is an advantage for the host country as immigrants contribute to the economy of the state through their work, they spend their salaries and income in the host countries and legal migrants pay their taxes there. At the same time, the host country profits from the use of cheaper labor compared to the domestic labor force.

Labor migration is also an advantage for the migrants due to managing unemployment issues in their home countries, getting higher salaries, achieving social security, gaining international work and social experience. For the highly educated Bulgarians emigration creates good chances for using their knowledge and skills effectively for better-paid EU-jobs, accumulating new work experience as well as collecting the returns to investment in education and training in Bulgaria.

The labor migration is also a huge advantage for the home country due to the migrants' remittances, which can help their relatives in Bulgaria or create conditions for small investments in their places of origin, thus contributing to their development and Bulgaria's economic growth. "Remittances represent household income from foreign economies arising mainly from the temporary or permanent movement of people to those economies. Remittances include cash and noncash items that flow through formal channels, such as via electronic wire, or through informal channels, such as money or goods carried across borders. They largely consist of funds and noncash items sent or given by individuals who have migrated to a new economy and become residents there, and the net compensation of border, seasonal, or other short-term workers who are employed in an economy in which they are not resident" (IMF, 2009, p. 272).<sup>1</sup> The remittances of Bulgarian migrants, who work abroad, have a strong positive impact on reducing poverty in the home country. It is especially beneficial to help families in the more backward regions of Bulgaria where unemployment is high. The transferred money is spent on household consumption – for filling in holes in the family budgets, for running costs, current expenses, health care, education, repayment of debts, reimbursement of credits, establishing a small family business. Besides the household consumption, the money sent by the Bulgarian migrants to their families is used for buying real estate in Bulgaria as a form of family investments in property. The transferred money, saved in the banks is used, as well as investments in different sectors, for example in tourism and in trade, or as a bank credit guarantee for business purposes.

According to the World Bank Migration and Remittances Data<sup>2</sup>, for the period from 2012 to 2017, excluding 2015, the migrant remittances inflow (in USD in million) to Bulgaria is increasing from year to year: in 2012 it was 1,149, in 2013 1,667, in 2014: 1,685, in 2015: 1,495, in 2016: 1,666, in 2017: 2,205.

<sup>1</sup> Balance of Payments and International Investment Position Manual (2009) Appendix 5 Remittances. Economic Concept of Remittances and Why They Are Important, page 272 <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/bop/2007/pdf/bpm6.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>



Migrant remittance inflows (US\$ million)	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018e	Remittances as a share of GDP in 2018 (%)
Bulgaria	1,449	1,667	1,685	1,495	1,666	2,205	2,395	3.8%

**Fig 2. Source of the table: World Bank Annual Remittance Data (updated as of Apr. 2019) Inflows<sup>1</sup>**

There is a significant difference between the outward migrant remittance flows (USD in million) before and after 2000. Starting in 1996, it was 34, in 1997 it was reduced to 16, in 1998 decreased further to 3, in 1999 slightly increased to 4. In 2000 the outward migrant remittance to Bulgaria sharply jumps to 26, then in 2001 it is 27, in 2002 and in 2003 there is a decline again: 14, and 13. After that the outward remittance has increased from year to year, reaching a peak in 2008: 162. From 2011 to 2018, the flow has gone upwards, with few exceptions in 2015 and in 2016.

Outward Migrant Remittance flows (US\$ million)	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Bulgaria	34	16	3	4	26	27	14	13	29	35	50	103	162

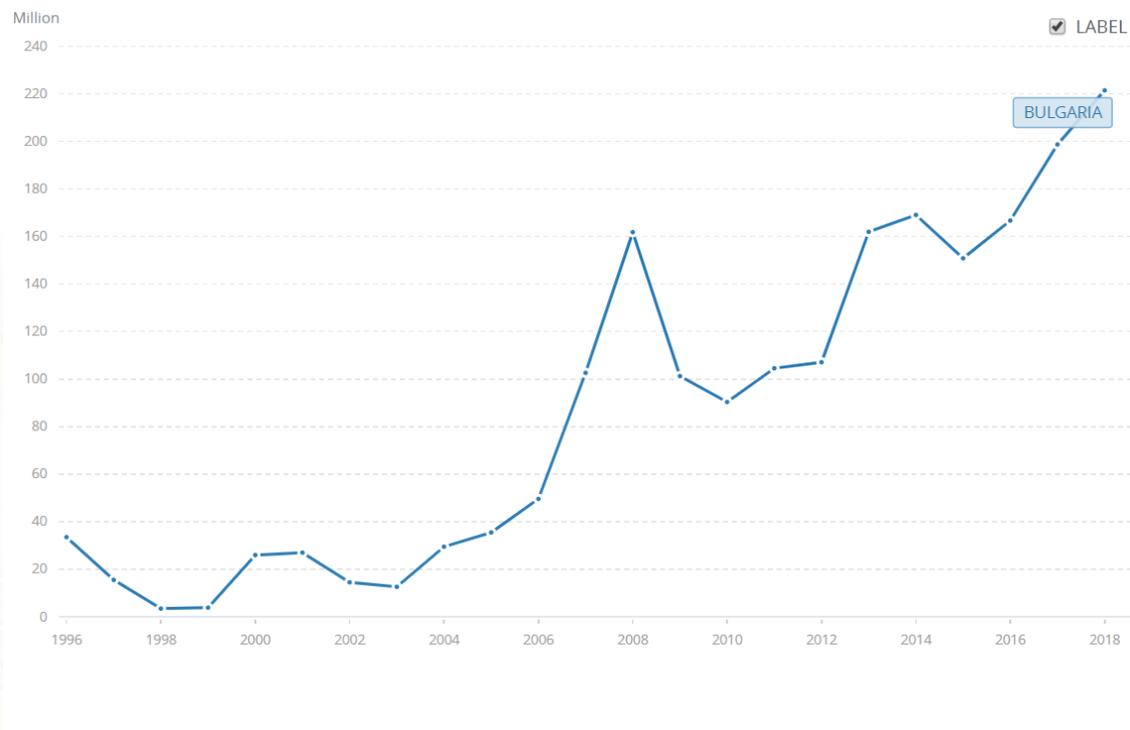
Outward Migrant Remittance flows (US\$ million)	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Remittances as a share of GDP in 2017 (%)
Bulgaria	101	90	105	107	162	169	151	167	199	221	0.3%

**Fig 3. Source of the table: World Bank Annual Remittance Data (updated as of Apr. 2019) Outflows**

Data of the World Bank show that in 2018, personal remittances that Bulgarians working and living abroad sent to their families in their country of birth was USD 221,480,000<sup>2</sup>

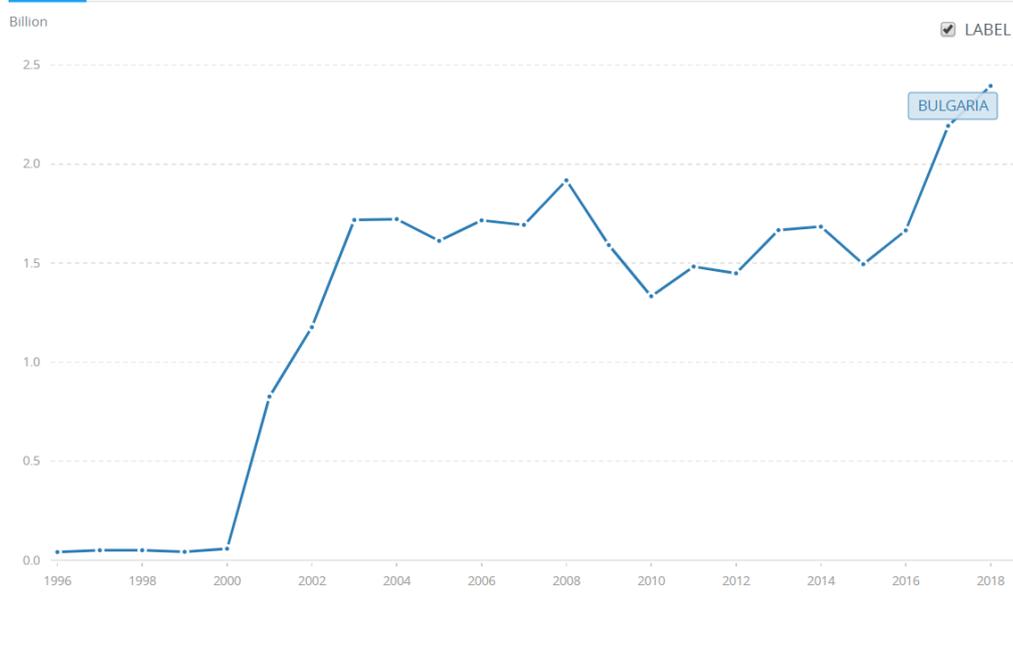
<sup>1</sup>World Bank Annual Remittance Data (updated as of Apr. 2019) Inflows and Outflows  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/labormarkets/brief/migration-and-remittances>

<sup>2</sup>  
[https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BM.TRFPWKR.CD.DT?end=2018&locations=BG&most\\_recent\\_year\\_desc=false&start=1996&view=chart](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BM.TRFPWKR.CD.DT?end=2018&locations=BG&most_recent_year_desc=false&start=1996&view=chart)



**Fig 4.**

The personal remittances received in Bulgaria in the same year was USD 2,395,410.00<sup>1</sup>



**Fig 5.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=BG>

This is equal to 3.7% of Bulgaria's GDP<sup>1</sup>.

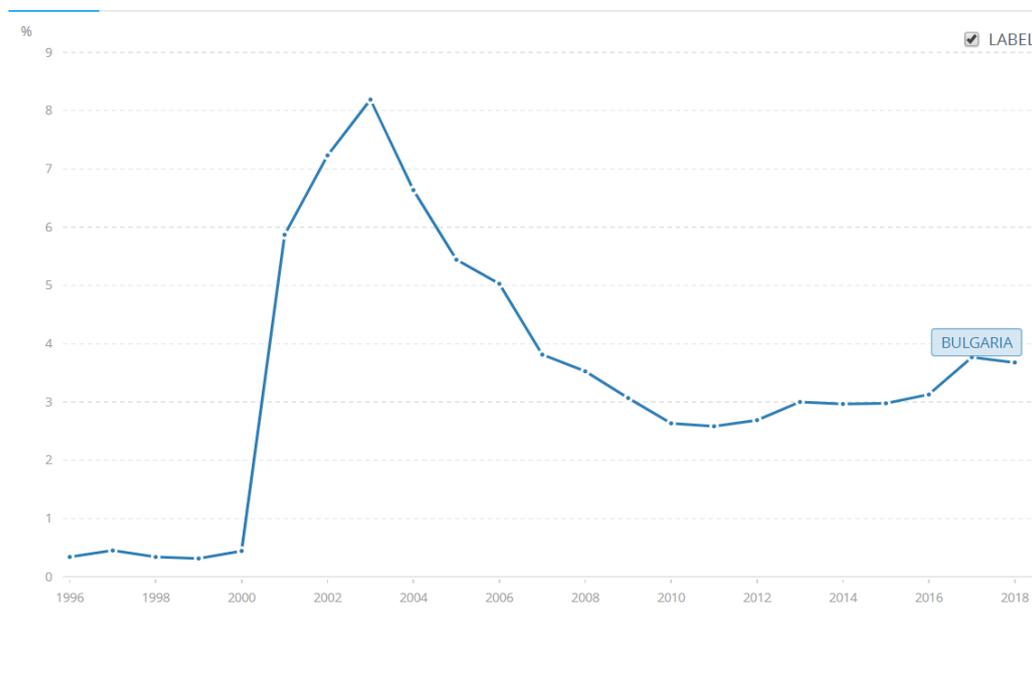


Fig 6.

Bank transfers are most expensive, followed by postal registrations. That is why, additionally to these money transfers, there are cash transfers, but their amount is not a part of the statistics.

In Bulgaria, for a long period the amount of money of the foreign direct investments (FDI) was bigger than the amount of remittances, sent by the Bulgarian immigrants to their country of birth. The economic situation has changed and according to the analysis of the Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA) in August 2018,<sup>2</sup> the FDI in Bulgaria collapsed in the period 2007-2017. They reached a rock-bottom level, fallen ten times in absolute terms – from BGN 17.7 billion in 2007 (the time of Bulgaria's EU accession) to BGN 1.8 billion in 2017. The analysis of the same organization proves that FDI are dramatically down, as well as a percentage of GDP – from 28% in 2007 to 2% in 2017, and even the funds of the emigrants outperform foreign investors. Among the reasons for the lack of FDI, the Executive President of the BIA, Radosvet Radev, considers that until recently Bulgaria had a competitive advantage in terms of quality workforce, but currently this advantage is questionable as the

<sup>1</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=BG>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.bia-bg.com/analyses/>



number of workers is not enough (BIA 2018: BIA ANALYSIS SHOWS COLLAPSE OF FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN BULGARIA IN THE PERIOD 2007-2017).

The costs of migration are not cheap as “they include also social and emotional cost”.<sup>1</sup> The emotional cost is difficult to measure: the migrant is far from his home, family, children, relatives, friends and country, the migrant’s family, which remains in the sending country suffers from a physical and emotional loss of the migrant as a partner in a couple, as a parent in a family. While it cannot be remunerated on an emotional basis, the lack of migrants in the families is materially compensated by the remittances sent by the migrants, which in many cases are vital for the material survival of their separated families .

### **SHORT OVERVIEW OF BULGARIAN LABOR MIGRATION (“GURBET”) FROM OTTOMAN EMPIRE TERRITORY TO THE SOCIALIST ERA: BULGARIAN MARKET-GARDENERS ON FOCUS.**

That working-age people engage in an employment outside their home country for a certain period of time is not a new phenomenon for the Bulgarians, who have a centuries-long tradition in a seasonal, temporary male migrant labor. In Bulgaria, such labor mobility is called “gurbet”.<sup>2</sup> It began in the Ottoman Bulgaria, i.e. during the time when Bulgaria was under Ottoman rule. The practice of labor mobility of Bulgarians over large distance within the Empire and outside of it either started at the same time or is even older than the internal labor mobility – from mountains to the plain, from rural to rural places, or from the small and poor areas to urban centres of the country. Especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the skilled Bulgarian labor force of workers in the building sectors (masons), construction workers, workers on the farms, shepherds, and itinerant merchants moved in the territory of the Ottoman Empire and outside of it. Another prime example of such labor mobility of Bulgarian workers, who expanded their craft out of the Ottoman Empire, was the mobility of agricultural workers, who practiced the profession of market-gardeners and who were well-known abroad as Bulgarian market-gardeners. They had no individual, but a collective identity as they were mostly peasants: healthy

<sup>1</sup> Neoclassical economics and the new economics of migration, Why Do People Migrate? Theories, European University Institute (EUI) <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/migration-theories/0/steps/35078>

<sup>2</sup> The word is Turkish and is translated in English as “foreign land”, “absence from home”, “abroad”. According to the Bulgarian dictionary it denotes working abroad for profit or subsistence. A man working (for his living) abroad is called “gurbetchiya”.



men in good physical condition, who were accustomed to heavy rural labor. Very energetic and industrious, they worked abroad in groups, organized by their villages in their home country. In terms of religion and native language, they were Orthodox Christians, whose native language was Bulgarian. “Firstly, their work was seasonal – every year they traveled to the territories outside of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the winter – on 1 February (St. Tryphon’s Day)<sup>1</sup>, and went back home to their families after 26 October (St. Demetrios Day)<sup>2</sup> – the day which according to the traditional Bulgarian folk calendar marks the end of the farming cycle and the beginning of winter” (Savova, 2017, p. 132). They migrated in search for markets for their production and for subsistence out of the declining Ottoman Empire (Savova, 2017, p.131). One of the first gardens for vegetables outside the Ottoman Empire was probably created in 1714 in Brasov, Transylvania – at that time part of the Kingdom of Hungary<sup>3</sup>. Later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the labor movements of Bulgarian market-gardeners covered countries like Russia, Serbia, the historical and geographical region Wallachia, and Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc., where they introduced the so-called Bulgarian School of Horticulture, and the traditional Bulgarian gardening, whose important elements were the organization of work and the irrigation. In 1848, some of the Bulgarian market-gardeners owned gardens on the banks of the Dnieper River, near the city of Kiev; in 1858 they had gardens in Tavria and the Crimea, where they rented land from the displaced Tatars and cultivated it, as well as gardens near Mariupol, Berdyan, Sarabus, Simferopol, etc. (Gogev, 2018, p. 52). After the October Revolution in 1917, almost all Bulgarian market-gardeners left Russia. The reasons lie not only in the changes in the political environment there, but also in the harsher climate, the geographical remoteness of the country from Bulgaria, the underdeveloped transport links between Bulgaria and Russia, etc. There is data, proving that after the Crimean War, in 1852 Bulgarian market-gardeners settled in Wallachia (later in Romania) – in the cities of Alexandria, Zimnicea, Turnu Magurele, but subsequently left the country due to the promulgation of a law protecting the local market-gardeners producers (Gogev, 2018, p. 53). In Serbia, Bulgarian market-gardeners had a similar fate like in Wallachia –

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<sup>1</sup> The feast of St. Tryphon – the patron saint of gardeners and winegrowers in the Eastern Orthodoxy.

<sup>2</sup> The feast of St. Demetrios of Thessaloniki – the patron of agriculture. St. Demetrios’ Day is called also “a payment day”, because on that day the market-gardeners finished their agricultural seasonal work and collected the wages which they had earned during the year. The day finished with a celebration in honour of the saint and a festive table.

<sup>3</sup> Kingdom of Hungary was a monarchy in Central Europe which existed from 1000 to 1918 and from 1920 to 1946.

they worked there in the 1860s, but they were forced to leave the country, because a law was adopted to protect only local market-gardeners.

“The appearance of the Bulgarian market-gardeners in nowadays’ Hungary started in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many decades before the official diplomatic relations between the two countries were established” (Savova, 2017, p. 131). They came to work in the 1840s, and in 1862 already leased gardens (Gogev, 2018, p. 53). Some authors like Gyurov (2001, p. 141) argue that the first group of Bulgarian market-gardeners came to present day Hungary in April 1865, when it leased 75 acres of meadows to grow vegetables. They were five people at that time but eight years later, in 1873, 18,000 Bulgarian market-gardeners passed the Danube, leased lands in the whole country and started to work them (Gyurov, 2001, p. 141). Some years later, when in 1865 the Austro-Hungarian Empire was established, Bulgarian market-gardeners covered its territory. After its breakup in 1918, they entered the newly-formed countries of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria (Gogev, 2018, p. 53).

The apogee of the gurbet of Bulgarian market-gardeners took place in the 1930-1940s, before the WWII. Then many times they returned back home to Bulgaria with a “garden train” and a “garden steamships” on the Danube river – specially hired wagons of trains and steamships to prevent possible thefts of their profit and property, earned abroad after very hard work (Gogev, 2018, p. 57). Remittances were an indispensable part of their profits, and for example, “in the period 1941-1943, the gardeners from Draganovo village of Veliko Tarnovo region in Bulgaria brought to the village 45 million Bulgarian leva”<sup>1</sup> (Gogev, 2018, p. 57). Thanks to the remittances of Bulgarian market-gardeners many houses with a modern architecture, churches and cultural community centers were built in Bulgaria, as well as monuments were constructed. The transferred money was invested also in a solid education of the emigrants’ children in prestigious European universities (Gogev, 2018, p. 57). The livelihood of Bulgarian market-gardeners in Europe continued until the 1950s, when their lands and gardens in the former socialist states were nationalized by the authorities. Many gardeners who have mixed marriages or have been working abroad together with their families, accepted foreign citizenship, stayed forever abroad and did not return to their native places.

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<sup>1</sup> The lev was introduced as Bulgaria's currency in 1881 with a value equal to the French franc. During World War II, in 1940, the lev was pegged to the German Reichsmark at a rate of 32.75 leva = 1 Reichsmark. In September 1944, the lev was pegged to the Soviet ruble at 15 leva = 1 ruble. A series of pegs to the U.S. dollar followed: 120 leva = 1 dollar in October 1945, 286.50 leva in December 1945 and 143.25 leva in March 1947. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian\\_lev](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian_lev)



## CONCLUSION

Bulgarian labor movements and labor emigration is a phenomenon with an old history, which started at the time of Ottoman Bulgaria. In the 21st century, after Bulgaria has become a member of the EU, Bulgarian employees cannot depend only on the local labor markets. The benefit of the regulated labor emigration is mutual as it contributes the development in sending and receiving countries, the life of migrants, returnees and their families. The remittances have a positive effect on the country of origin of the emigrants. They cause a rise in trade, crafts, cultural and social life in the country, contribute to the well-being of the migrants' families, foster the development of their places of origin in Bulgaria, especially in the small settlements, and they have a beneficial effect for the economics of the country. From this perspective, the remittances are a welcome financial injection for the Bulgarian economy, but insufficient for sustainable economic growth in the country. Wage increases in Bulgaria, job-creating investments, which is the government's, not the migrants' responsibility, are also needed. The reasons and consequences of the labour emigration, the regulation of the migration through labor market policies should be a national policy priority for the Bulgarian state.

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