

NATIONAL SCIENCE FUND
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Sabbatical Project
Final Report – Summary

BULGARIAN STUDENTS IN LONDON

MIGRATION PATTERNS AND EDUCATIONAL
STRATEGIES

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This research focuses on the Bulgarian students, who came to London between 1999 and 2009. We consider two groups among those students: 1) Bulgarian students, who enrolled to British universities and arrived to Britain with a 'student' status and 2) students from various Bulgarian universities, who come to Britain via the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme, language courses or any other status and decided to stay and work in London. Although these are two different types of migration – the first is a case of educational migration and the second involves economic migration - our hypothesis is that there is a common factor which links the students from these two groups – an aspiration for professional development/career.

This research looks at how the aspirations for career development, combined with other factors (gender, age, family ties, proficiency in English), shape the migration strategies of the two groups in question. The Bulgarians' perspective will be studied in terms of the cultural capital they accumulated during their stay in Britain and will bring back to Bulgaria.

The study draws on P. Bourdieu's theoretical framework concerning the different forms of capital and adopts CRONEM's research methodology (see: Drinkwater, Eade, Garapich 2006), which combines qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. The research results shed light on questions about which we have limited understanding and data. For example, do Bulgarian students, who interrupt their studies to join the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme, complete their higher education? What are their migration intentions? Do students, graduating from British universities, see themselves as going back to Bulgaria? What kind of social remittances (as defined in Levitt 2001; Levitt, Lamba-Nieves 2010) cross borders? These remittances, unlike financial ones, cannot be traced by any financial institution.

This research project was hosted by the Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (**CRONEM**) - **an internationally recognised research centre** involved in many prestigious projects which focus mainly on the issues of contemporary migration and identity. Its multidisciplinary and multilingual team links together University of Surrey and Roehampton University. CRONEM's ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council)-funded study on class and ethnicity among Polish migrants was awarded an 'outstanding' grade and has remained one of the most quoted research reports on the subject. CRONEM is, therefore, a multilingual and multidisciplinary laboratory, which undertakes research within and on London. The metropolis is itself a social and cultural laboratory, since it is a national capital and multicultural, international city.

Between January and April 2010 work on literature review began and list of contacts of individuals and institutions was drawn up. A detailed diary and clear

research action plan was also developed. Research tools and instruments designed were discussed with CRONEM staff and tested. The preliminary stage of this study has involved building relationships and trust with key individuals in the Bulgarian migrant community and a considerable amount of knowledge about the field has already been generated. Close contact was also maintained with the migrant groups involved in the study.

Between April and December 2010, 147 survey interviews and 53 in-depth interviews were conducted with Bulgarian migrants from the groups under research in London. 10 interviews with stakeholders were undertaken - the Bulgarian Embassy in London, the Bulgarian School in London, the Association of Bulgarians, who studied and worked abroad, who have returned or want to return to Bulgaria, as well as consultancy firms for education abroad were undertaken. In June an online version of the survey questionnaire was developed and published at the address: www.bulgarian.students.london.com to allow more students to complete the questionnaire.

In December 2010 a detailed Final Report for the National Science Fund was completed (in Bulgarian). Financial report of the Sabbatical project was prepared by the Research and Development Unit of the University of Plovdiv, which administered the project on behalf of the applicant's organization. The Final report (114 pages) consists of 7 chapters: 1. Introduction. 2. Research Context. 3. Theoretical Framework. 4. Research Methodology. 5. Profile of the Bulgarian Students in London. 6. Conclusions. 7. Appendixes (References, Dissemination List, Survey Questionnaire, List of acronyms).

RESEARCH RESULTS

According to the statistical data of HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) the number of the Bulgarian students in London increased from 80 in 1999 to 580 in 2009.

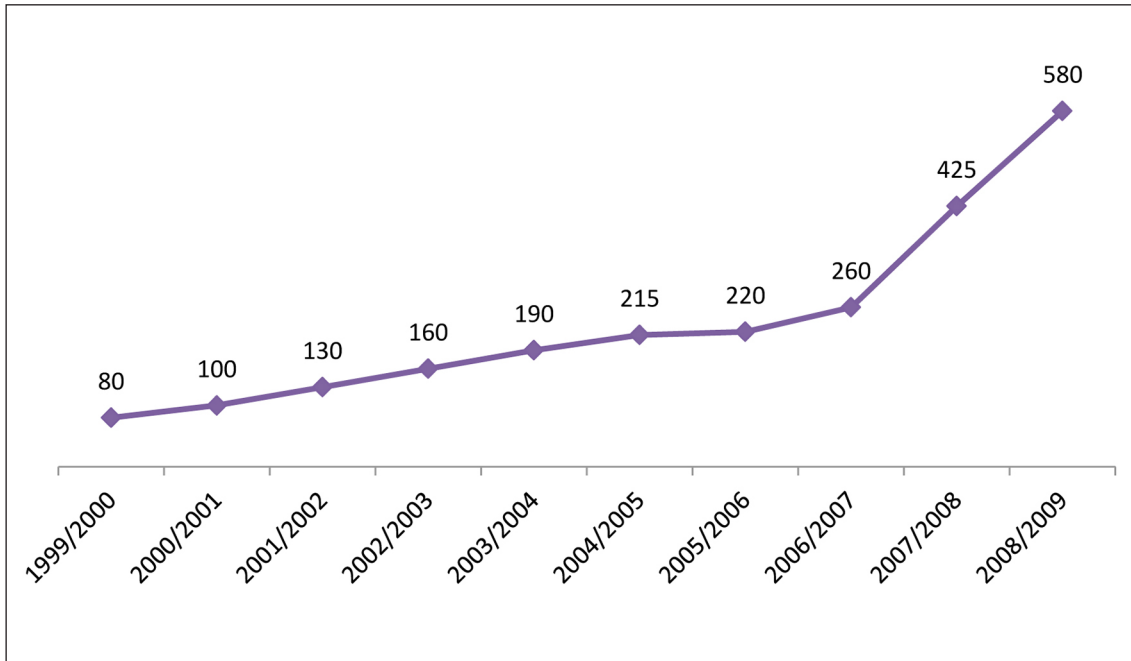
Among the 147 interviewed half (50%) are those who arrived in London as students in a British university (cohort S1). The other half arrived with another status (cohort S2).

The majority of the students from the cohort S1 arrived in 2007 – 2009.

The majority of the students from the cohort S2 arrived in 2003 when the process of visa application was liberalised in anticipation of the 2004 Enlargement.

Gender: 60% of the interviewed are women and 40% - men. This result is supported by the research of the students migrant potential in Bulgaria, showing that among Bulgarian students women are those who are more inclined to long

FIGURE 1. Bulgarian students in London (1999 - 2009)



Source: Higher Education Statistical Agency

term migration (see: Makni 2009).

Age: 25% of the interviewed are in the age group 20 – 24, the majority are in the age group 25 – 29 (32%), 22% are those who are between 30 and 34 (the respondents in this age group are predominantly from the S2 cohort).

Citizenship: All the respondents hold Bulgarian passports, 19 of them are also British citizens, 1 holds a French passport, 1 – a German one, 1 has a double citizenship – Bulgarian and Russian.

Residence: The majority of the interviewed (72%) live in London. (17%) live elsewhere in Britain or Ireland. 7 of those who had spent at least one year in London, while being students between 1999 – 2009, returned to Bulgaria.

The choice of London: About one quarter (26%) of the interviewed came to London, because of the excellent educational infrastructure; every fifth person just 'feels good' in London, 16% liked the multicultural environment in London. The rest had their family, friends or job there.

Education: 32% of the interviewed haven't yet completed their higher education. 37% hold a BA degree, 27% hold a MA degree, 4 hold doctorates. 38% of the interviewed completed their higher education in Bulgaria (these are mainly students from the cohort S2). Half of them did so while working in London. 17 have not completed their higher education started before their arrival to London. 10 of those gave up their studies. 7 are still hoping to graduate. One third of those

who arrived as graduates of Bulgarian Universities continued their education in British universities. The majority of the students come from the three major BG cities: Sofia (30%), Plovdiv (27%) and Varna (7%).

Fields of Study: Those from the S1 cohort chose predominantly programmes in business and administration studies, followed by Social Studies and Mathematical and Computing Sciences. Among those from the S2 cohort there is a greater variety of subjects of studies. 41% are planning to continue their education. 40% are not sure, if they will go on with their studies. 19% think they completed their education.

Financial Support: Nearly half of the students are getting financial help (fellowships, loans). Only 15% are supported from their relatives in Bulgaria. Out of these 15% half are fully supported, so they don't have to work during their studies, the other half work part time.

Family and Social Ties: 63% of the students are married or have partners. About 70% of their partners are Bulgarian. 15% cohabit with British, nearly the same percentage are married or are in relationship with somebody from another nationality (Albanian, Greek, Pakistani, Polish, Romanian, Russian). 37% of the respondents said that their friends are predominantly Bulgarian. Only 16% said, that their friends are predominantly British. These are mainly the respondents, who cohabit with locals. Almost half of the respondents define their friends as "others" or "from all sorts of backgrounds".

Work: 72% of the interviewed are economically active. Nearly half of them work predominantly with British people. This percentage is much higher than some previous research on Bulgarian migrants in the UK has shown, due to the type of the group under research (predominantly highly qualified migrants), but also because of the financial climate of recession, when British people do jobs, which were previously taken by migrants (see Markova 2010). The majority of those, who live in the UK earn between 10 000 – 30 000. Among those who returned to Bulgaria the highest declared income is 30 000 BG levs.

Proficiency in English: About 40% of the interviewed claimed an excellent knowledge of English upon arrival. Those are mainly the respondents from the S1 cohort. 25% said, that their English was 'good', nearly the same (23%) define the level of their English as basic, and 12% said they did not speak any English. These last three groups are mainly students from the S2 cohort. The current level of English proficiency has changed. 76% said that they speak excellent English, 22% still report a moderate level of proficiency and only 2% define their English as basic.

63% follow the news from Bulgaria, half of them are doing it via Internet. 42% uses Skype for regular connection with their families and friends. 38% use the

telephone. Only 2% still use letters. More than one third (37%) are going back to Bulgaria at least once per year. 33% are going back two to four times per year. 10% are traveling more than 4 times per year and consider themselves transnational migrants. 20% travel back less than once per year, most of them have all their families in Britain.

Migration Decision: 40% of the interviewed replied they would rather go back to Bulgaria. (This percentage is even higher in the cohort S1 – 45%). 35% said “No”. 25% are not sure. Half of those, who are prepared to go back to Bulgaria, prefer not to give any indication, proving the “intentional unpredictability” principle (see: Drinkwater, Eade, Garapich). 23% see themselves in Bulgaria when time will come to retire from work, 21% are prepared to return in the next 2-3 years and 6% plan to do it in the following year. Ranking the factors, which are considered as hindering their return to Bulgaria, the most important are the low salaries and the lack of possibilities for career development. Predictably, family ties are the most powerful pulling factor for return migration. Nevertheless cheap flights and real time communication with friends and relatives in Bulgaria are seen as compensations. Among those 7 people, who returned to Bulgaria, 4 are ready to leave again, 2 are not sure if they would stay or leave, one is certain, she would live and work nowhere but Bulgaria.

Our research revealed that, **gender** is a relevant variable for the migration decisions of the Bulgarian students: women are more likely to stay long term in the UK, than men. **Age** also seems to be a relevant factor, but it brings different results in combination with **length of stay**. 35% of those who are in the age group 20 - 24 either see themselves in the future in Bulgaria or are not sure what the future will bring (30 %). These are mostly the Bulgarian students who arrived to London after 2007. The majority of them are still attached to their families and friends and not well adapted in London. The migration decision is dependent on the age of arrival and the length of stay. The longer their stay, the more reluctant the migrants are to go back to Bulgaria. **Language proficiency** does not have a significant impact on the migration decision among the Bulgarian students. As expected, strong **family ties** are a powerful pull factor towards return. The migration decision is dependent on the **field of studies**: student in Arts are tempted by the wider opportunities for work they have in London and internationally. On the contrary, those, who plan to develop their own business or to join the family one, see themselves in Bulgaria. Our research shows that greater the investment in education is, the less inclined are people towards entrepreneurship. Those, who invest time and money in their education, are looking for a secure future in big corporations.

EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES:

We are witnessing certain changes in the educational strategies of the Bulgarian students in London in the timeframe of the research 1999 – 2009:

- The majority of those who arrived before 2007 came with a different (not student) status and applied to British universities while in Britain. After 2007 they applied directly from Bulgaria.
- Those who applied for a Bachelor programme were applying through UCAS, those who applied for MA programmes applied directly to the universities.
- Many of those who completed a BA, go on studying in order to sit out the recession and postpone their entry to the labour market.
- A strategy to save money is to complete a BA programme in Bulgaria and apply for an MA programme to the UK. This is also considered as a good strategy to secure a social and professional environment in case of people return to Bulgaria after completing the educational degree in the UK.
- The UK is preferred to other EU educational destinations for MA studies (Sweden, for example). Despite the fact that tuition costs are lower than in the UK, MA programmes in most of the EU countries are 2 years (compared to 1 year in the UK). The costs of living and the possibility to work (knowledge of the local language) are also considered favourable in the UK in comparison to the Scandinavian countries.
- Another strategy, used by those who arrive to London (to UK) with another status, is to apply to a British university on the spot. Most of them have already the experience of studentship in Bulgaria. Some of those, who already started a programme in Bulgaria decide to complete their studies and then go on with their studies in the UK at the same or higher (secondary or tertiary) level of higher education. Others manage to get recognition for their period of study in Bulgaria, or apply to a new programme and graduate in the UK.
- A relatively new educational strategy involves moving to London for an MA programme after completing a Bachelor degree at a US university. This strategy could be partially explained by the gravitation model (it is better to be closer to home, ageing parents etc., in Europe). The economic context of the last two years was not favourable to those who graduate and start work in the US, and this might be considered as an additional factor for Bulgarian students to seek professional and educational opportunities in Europe.

MIGRATION PATTERNS:

Among the students from the S1 cohort, who arrived in London with a student status, we witness three general migration patterns: 1) students graduate and go back to Bulgaria (return migration – brain gain); 2) students graduate and remain in London/abroad (labour/economic migration – brain drain); 3) students graduate and work in the both countries or internationally (transnational migration – brain circulation).

Among the students from the S2 cohort, who arrived to London with another migrant status, the same models as in the case of S1 cohort could be observed. However, one of the peculiarities of Britain as a destination for student migration and mobility is the existence of SWAS. This is a possibility for short-term migration when students put their foot on the international labour market. Some of them, after having the international experience, consider long term migration at a later stage, or just remain in the receiving country as economic migrants. This still cannot be considered a brain waste, since students might complete their studies either in Bulgaria or in Britain. Some students start completely new courses. In this particular case short-term labour migration is followed by a period of studies, which could be considered as educational migration, which then is followed again by either long term labour migration, return to Bulgaria or international career, i.e. brain circulation.

SOCIAL REMITTANCES:

Bulgarians, who studied and lived in London, are noticing changes in their values and attitudes. They mention first their greater confidence and positive attitude towards life. Most of them admit that their participation in community life and willingness to volunteer are values, which they acquired while being away from Bulgaria. All of them mention their different attitude towards work – a growing commitment and consistency in fulfilling tasks, as well as respect for deadlines. Another value, which some of them are ambivalent about defining as necessarily positive, is their growing individualism. They praise long distant relationships and find traditional gender roles claustrophobic.

After the flow of Bulgarian students to Vienna in the 1990s it was Germany that became the most popular destination for European educational migration. In the first years of of 20c. (the peak was in the academic year 2004/2005) Bulgarian students became second largest population of foreign students (after the Chinese) in Germany. Since 2007, when Bulgarian joined the EU, UK and London,

in particular, seem to be the new favoured destinations for Bulgarian students. We could argue that the international experience accumulated by the Bulgarian students as well as the development of migrant networks will stimulate both educational and labour migration towards London. However, this might be adversely affected by such factors as raising fees and changes in British immigration policy. That is why, it is important to look for compensatory strategies. The process of brain drain, as well as the international brain waste, could be partially compensated by Bulgaria activating the links with the Bulgarian diaspora and engaging the Bulgarian migrant elites. Bulgarian students are already part of this future elite. That is why it is important for Bulgaria to prepare students for international mobility. Needless to say, such an investment in the prosperity of the country would make Bulgaria an attractive destination for both Bulgarians and others.

DISSEMINATION OF THE PROJECT RESULTS:

Dissemination was undertaken through the lifetime of the project. An explanation of the research will be posted on the CRONEM's website (<http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/researchcentres/cronem/clients-and-projects/index.html>) as well as the Website of the University of Plovdiv (<http://slovo-uni.plovdiv.bg/clic>).

As expected, many parties are interested in the research: Bulgarian officials and individuals directly involved with the migrant groups under study as well as the academic community dealing with migration research.

Papers at International Conferences and talks at seminars:

1. Chongarova, I. Migration patterns and Educational Strategies. The case of Bulgarian Students in London. Living Together conference. Surrey, June 2010 <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/resources/podcasts/living-together-podcasts.html>

2. Negotiating Diversities. The Case of Bulgarian Students in London. Presentation at a Research seminar at Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen, January 21st, 2011.

3. 1st CFP RGS-IBG Annual Conference, London 31 August – 2 September 2011 (Re-)Imagining 'Return Migration': Language, concepts and contexts. Session organisers: Anastasia Christou (Sussex) and Madeleine Hatfield (RHUL and RGS-IBG). Sponsored by the Population Geography Research Group of the RGS-IBG.

Publications in Bulgarian press (in Bulgaria and in the UK):

Bulgarian paper in London BG BEN, (issue 202) (<http://www.bgben.co.uk/>). Is the Choice of London a Life Sentence? (in Bulgarian) Publication of some preliminary results of the project.

Publications agreed with the following newspapers and magazines (due

in January and February 2011):

The Bulgarian weekly newspaper CAPITAL (<http://www.capital.bg/>),

The Bulgarian daily Standart (<http://www.standartnews.com/>)

Plovdiv University newspaper (http://www.crosspress.bg/index.php?option=com_content&view=media2&id=142)

Presentation of the Project results agreed on February 24th in the University of Plovdiv and in March (date to be announced) in the Bulgarian Embassy in London

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