

ATTITUDES TOWARDS EMIGRATION AMONG YOUNG CITIZENS IN BULGARIA

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Antoaneta HRISTOVA (1), Yolanda ZOGRAFOVA (2)

All authors of article have contributed equally.

1) Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; E-mail: a.hristova@iphs.eu

2) Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; E-mail: yozograf@gmail.com

Address correspondence to: Yolanda Zografova, Institute for Population and Human Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1113 Sofia, “Acad. G. Bonchev”bl.6., fl 5/6, Bulgaria mobile +359 899472919; E-mail: yozograf@gmail.com

Abstract

Objectives. The aim is to study the emigration attitudes among young Bulgarians and the influence of social factors and values on these attitudes.

Material and methods. In-depth online and face-to-face interviews were conducted with 45 individuals, representatives of the age group from 18 to 35 years. These interviews are part of a wider study on the psychological determinants of emigration attitudes.

Results. They are presented through a qualitative analysis of both characteristic features of the studied group of attitudes to emigration, and some generational differences within the sample - between Generation Millennium and Generation Z. For individuals with clearly expressed intentions to emigrate specific plans and target destinations are typical. People who declared a clearly expressed intention not to emigrate, the value orientations are related to maintaining relationships with relatives and friends and achieving professional realization in Bulgaria. A third group of interviewees had ambivalent attitudes, fluctuating due to frustration with living conditions and opportunities for professional development on the one hand; and the desire to be in a familiar social environment and the hope that living conditions will improve on the other, which keeps them in their home country for now

Conclusions. Attachment to family and relatives plays a significant role in the decision making whether to emigrate or not. A strong desire for better education in other countries and more opportunities for professional realization is associated with readiness to emigrate.

Keywords: emigration attitudes; value orientations; social environment; young Bulgarians.

Introduction

In contemporary social psychological study of attitudes towards different types of migration, the scientific attention is focused mainly on the empirical measures and indicators of a wide range of phenomena related in some way to the attitudes, motives and reasons for moving to another country. Despite the problematic relationship between attitudes and realized migration behaviour, they are at the center of research interest and in research on patterns of migration. Without going into detail about the theoretical grounds of concepts related to development of attitudes, we accept Eizer and Pligt's position that behaviour could not be predicted through attitudes until information is available on preferences, which are a predictor of choice; and until

social context for these choices is known (Eiser & Pligt, 1984). This shows especially valid for studies of attitudes towards migration insofar as – which will be concluded in our study - their formation and manifestation are influenced by various factors and especially the social context, the individual's immediate environment.

With a significantly widespread increase in mobility on a global scale in recent decades, scientific interest has expanded and has been implemented in a number of studies by researchers in different scientific fields. Alan Richardson's study on the social psychological factors contributing to the emigration of British citizens to Australia, published in *The British Journal of Sociology* in 1959, included, in addition to key economic factors, unemployment, discrimination, important personal values, attitudes and behavioural tendencies. It turned out that unemployment was not the main reason for emigration within a sample that consisted mainly of males who were married and had a professional qualification. The results also show that those eager to emigrate do have social connections and networks in the receiving country. Those with numerous family members seemed to take a decision for emigration more easily because there was a number of relatives who would stay in the country of origin to take care of the elderly. The looser the ties within the (extended) family, the stronger the positive attitudes towards emigration. It is interesting, as will be shown further in the text, that similar trends can be observed quite a few decades after the study of Richardson (1959).

A widespread idea is that young people, especially from former socialist countries, are more likely to emigrate. Data from a large-scale study conducted in 10 countries in Southeast Europe 2018/2019 comprising 10,000 14-29 aged persons, including a Bulgarian sample, showed that 61% of the respondents with a good education do not intend to emigrate. Respondents of higher income groups (53%) and living in Sofia (56%) were more likely to leave the country, as well as those who declared they were not satisfied with the opportunities available to them in their local context. A time perspective of the intention and attitude to leave the country were outlined by only 10% of the respondents who declared leaving within 5 months; 20% - up to 2 years; 44% stated they did not have a clear idea. The estimated time to spend abroad varies: 14% of the respondents considered more than 10 years; however the highest percentage 38% of respondents were planning ahead for up to 5 years at the time of the conducted study (Mitev et al. 2019).

In the structural scheme of the conditions and motivations for youth mobility, when applying a macro-micro approach for different types of European countries, mobility emerges as a major mechanism for mitigating socioeconomic disparities in the European Union (Hemming K., Schlimbach, T., Tilmann, F., Nienaber, B., Roman, M., Skrobánek, J. 2019). The type of human capital corresponding to the individual country is sought, and at the same time - expected motivation related to practicing mobility in Europe.

The research in the discussed field seeks to scrutinize both personal characteristics and characteristics of the broader social context. Thus, based on a survey among young people (16-30 years old) from all EU countries, individual characteristics, personal ideas and macroeconomic factors are summarized in correlation with the desire for migration of young people in Europe. The analysis is based on overlapping models for binary dependent variables. According to Flash Eurobarometer, the countries with the highest number of individuals with low level of education attainment are Austria, Bulgaria, Germany and Romania. In Estonia, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria, 60% of respondents expressed a desire to emigrate to another EU country in the future; these four countries have low GDP and medium unemployment (excluding Croatia) (Van Mol, 2016).

Using the method of retrospective interviewing, the attitudes and values that motivate a migrating person can be identified through an interview concerning the whole process of decision making, actual act of moving to another country and their life experiences. The aim is to scrutinize the connection between the general social-cultural environment, context and formation of values that contribute to a positive attitude towards migration. The desires among young people that were identified were: to live abroad for a better and more interesting life, to be away from their parents and to study at a good university (Findlay and Li, 1997).

Youth migration can be seen as a strategic behaviour. Three types of strategic migrants are outlined: potential migrants, migrants who have returned "on the move" (with the intention of leaving again) and regular migrants on the move. The probability of juveniles to fall into any of the categories is determined by a nominal nested regression model. Strategic migrants make up approximately half of Romania's youth. Each migrant type has a specific profile outlined by determinants, consequences and correlates in their migration patterns (Sandu & Tufis, 2016)

The specifics of both the profile of emigrants and the reasons for their readiness and attitudes to emigration are strongly dependent on the country. According to a study conducted in the Netherlands, emigration from countries with good economic conditions can be understood through dissatisfaction with various aspects of public life such as systems of social security, education, justice. With regard to personal factors, the greatest importance for the realization of the intention to emigrate turns out to be the health status of individuals (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2013). In modern research which explores the connection between life quality and intentions to emigrate, life satisfaction is considerably present (Bakina, Orlova, Yaremtchuk, Krasnoperova, 2018).

A specific problem in the discussed sphere emerges due to the parameters of the attitudes towards migration/mobility between European countries. It is perceived more as an intra-European student mobility. A study conducted in 6 European countries, indicates that reasons to move to another country are: improving a foreign language; personal development; getting to know another culture; meeting different people; adventurous feelings; improving career prospects; learning more through different perspectives; achieving of independence; easy to realize; higher education; duty; love (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2013).

Research on attitudes towards emigration in Bulgaria

An overview of the conducted studies on emigration in Bulgaria found that usually target groups mainly consist of young people with an emphasis on labour emigration. This is partly due to the national policy priorities, oriented towards identifying the practices, reasons and motivations contributing to the emigration flows. Understanding the problem in depth would give impetus to an adequate policy making process that would eventually reduce these flows.

Table 1 below presents updated data based on the last census of the (National Statistical Insitute) NSI in Bulgaria and helps create a picture of migration processes.

Table 1.*Average annual number of migrants by age in the period 2011-2016*

Average annual number				
Age	Population	Emmigrants	Immigrants	Migration growth
0-4	339510	652	970	318
5-9	337321	567	698	131
10-14	317087	586	519	-67
15-19	324755	1402	855	-547
20-24	416101	3202	1719	-1483
25-29	483588	3405	1735	-1670
30-34	496747	2757	1698	-1059
35-39	540864	2305	1611	-694
40-44	532379	1899	1430	-469
45-49	491915	1447	1284	-163
50-54	492939	1167	1298	131
55-59	507165	1004	1385	381
60-64	510771	835	1369	534
65-69	465832	595	1109	514
70-74	353176	299	414	115
75+	609066	310	321	11
<i>Total</i>	7219216	22430	18412	-4018

Source: Vladimirova et al. (2019).

When analyzing attitudes towards emigration, it is necessary to take into consideration a number of factors as intermediate variables influencing the emigration behaviour (Todorov, Ivanov, Petkov, 2005). The authors divide them into: internal and external, stimulating and restraining factors. Internal factors might be political, for example political instability, lack of strict restrictive measures; socioeconomic factors, such as lack of good conditions for personal expression, a health system in poor condition, high levels of unemployment, low standard of living; cultural and ethnic factors: tension between different cultural groups; bad cultural and ethnic relations; psychological: major changes in the way of thinking, new social psychological climate in the family; ecological: poor nature and climate conditions, difficulties meeting basic living and/or subsistence conditions. The external factors that encourage potential emigrants to make

their decision, according to the authors, are political, socioeconomic, cultural, psychological, ecological. Examples for each of these categories are: the presence of political freedoms, a better political climate, lack of restrictive policies; better pay, better opportunities for realization, higher standard of living, well developed social and health system; a sense of understanding and harmony at an intercultural level, lack of racial or ethnic prejudice; high levels of value system, experiencing freedom of spirit and thinking; good nature and climate conditions, overall good living conditions (Ibid.).

Potential emigration has been scrutinized mainly through questions of intent and sociodemographic questions. Among the revealed factors some stand out as being the most significant: higher pay, higher living standard and family support policies in Bulgaria. These are some important parameters which shape the motivational profile of potential emigrants (Minchev 2010). Incentives and obstacles in another country are traced through assessments of the perspective that resettlement in another country eventually gives (Alexandrova 2019). Motivational factors for emigration are associated with life satisfaction and professional realization (Belcheva 2011) while good remuneration motivates mostly families with children (Alexandrova, 2019).

In another study, the dynamics and nature of emigration tendencies among students were followed. Through content analysis, several groups of motives for emigration were identified: frustration with the political situation in the country and the presence of corruption in the country; seeking change/challenge from meeting new and unfamiliar situations; searching for an opportunity for professional realization/career; financial factors (formulated in the questionnaire as a "desire to be wealthy" factor); expectation of better education abroad. The arguments of the participants who would not like to emigrate can also be classified into several main categories such as: 1) sense of belonging/patriotism; 2) family and/or friends; 3) professional realization (Krumov et al., 2010).

One of the leading reasons for choosing an emigration path among young people of up to 29 years of age in Bulgaria, who are seeking professional realization and/or simply more job opportunities, is the possibility to receive a good offer abroad. The high level of youth unemployment in Bulgaria is one of the main factors determining the decision about emigration among those aged 20 to 29, a group that tend to be with the highest emigration rates. There is also a lack of willingness to take risks in many of them, late separation from the family and excessively high remuneration expectations (Kicheva, 2017).

A relation has been found between attitudes towards migration and some specific factors: age, employment and marital status within a sample of students majoring in "Medical assistant/Nurse" and "Health Care Management" programs in Plovdiv Medical University. The results show that the main determinants relevant to attitudes towards migration are age and the availability of jobs/employment at the time of the study. (Stoyanova & Atanasov, 2011).

Social ties and/or relatives already living abroad are very important motivational factors and take part in the formation of attitudes and readiness for emigration. A particularly important factor for readiness and attitudes for emigration is the serious presence of diaspora in a given country (Mitev et al., 2019).

Methods

The core methodology behind the study that was used to collect data was the in-depth interview; a total of 45 interviews were conducted both online and in person, targeted at the age group between 18 and 35. The specifics of the in-depth interviews have been worked out through

a calendar approach in order to cover respondents' individual circumstances related to their value orientations, their family and social milieu. A calendar grid has been developed, based on which the interviews were conducted. Calendar interviewing is related to a research procedure that aims to create conditions for better access to the content of long-term memory by providing a graphical representation of the time frame in which the extracted data is being displayed (Glasner, T., Van der Vaart, 2009; Barbeiro & Spin, 2017, as cited in Nacheva, Nedeva-Atanasova, 2021)

Although there are different versions of calendar tools, they all share the same features:

(a) The tools include a graphical representation of the temporal dimension. The target period is usually subdivided into shorter episodes, such as years, months, or days.

(b) The graphic expression includes one or more thematic axes reflecting the areas in relation to which data are collected.

(c) The respondent is given the opportunity to look at the narrative components in their chronological order, whether they are public or subjectively significant events (Ibidem).

The study included 46 interviewees aged between 18 and 46. Among them were 24 women and 22 men, including 5 from the capital, 15 from a large city, 11 from a medium-sized city and 15 from a small city. The selection of the sample was determined by the purpose of the investigation – to outline attitudes towards emigration among young Bulgarians.

The main dimensions in the structure of the interviews are: emigration experience, motivation to emigrate, emigration intentions, environment and emigration intentions, life satisfaction in Bulgaria, self-esteem, family planning in the process of emigration. This article aims to analyze some of these interview dimensions.

For the analysis of the in-depth interviews, a coding scheme based on code units has been prepared through the calendar approach: attitudes towards emigration with different level of manifestation - value orientations - social closest environment (family environment, friends); motives related to similar development and achievement of cultural capital; financial/political, etc. reasons.

The data analysis includes both the peculiarities of the attitudes for emigration of the target research group, as well as differences observed within the sample: between Generation of Millennials and Generation Z.

Results from the qualitative study and interpretation

The current study presented here aims at analyzing the problems of emigration attitudes among young Bulgarians. The object of the study are the influences of the values supported by the respondents, as well as the characteristics of the immediate social environment and the wider sociopolitical context.

Based on the qualitative research, a specific reaction to the readiness for long-term emigration is observed. This means that to a certain extent social status, travel opportunities, relatives living abroad and general attitude appear to be mutually independent factors. This shows the influence of personal and situational variables that need to be measured through quantitative methods. A holistic approach would be most successful in incorporating personality, social and wider social and historical contexts. "A careful look at the most recent work brings to light some qualitative changes in the scientific agenda in recent years, i.e., a shift from a focus on microprocesses to a more holistic, contemporary understanding of attitudes as they exist in three fundamental contexts: (a) the person as a whole, in relation to values, broad goals, language, emotions, other attitudes, and the lifespan; (b) the social context, including communicators, as well as social media and social networks; and (c) the broad context, particularly the sociohistorical

context, in relation to the generational, cultural, and historical backdrop of attitudes” (Albaracin, Shavit, 2018).

The interviews are dominated by the values of the traditional spectrum - family, social immediate and slightly wider environment, attachment to the native country, stereotypes about „the Bulgarian community’s” psychology and attributions of acculturation expectations in the host country. This range of features is associated with very different attitudes - both negative and positive, including nuances in-between. The personal experience in terms of acquired education level, collected or experienced information about living abroad, conventions in the future - “if the situation worsens”, in case of deterioration of the financial situation or when circumstances within the closest social circle require leaving the environment.

Despite some readiness for emigration and the acquired cultural capital, many of the respondents are being deterred by their personal notions about the balance between personal, family and professional life in the context of the foreign country, as well as because of socialized values in their social milieu. These persons’ attitude towards emigration can be assessed as rather negative.

Few examples extracted from the conducted interviews follow below. The respondents' interview excerpts have been cited here by their initials due to privacy reasons.

A 34-year-old male native of a smaller town near the capital of the country having education and scientific degrees, as well as emigration and educational experience abroad, with a positive attitude to self-realization abroad, but considerations related to his value system and social context prevent him from moving. Being asked about his opinion about the possibility of emigration, he replied: "This is not an option for me, because I am quite connected with my relatives and friends and my social life comes first. This is more important than material things. And yes, I would make more money there, but I would be more bored and lonely. You remain a foreigner there, no matter what you do, even if you stay there for 20 years" (D.M., interview, June 2020).

In the above quotation the respondent refers to their notion about the acculturation and its specifics when living abroad, faced with other social environment and cultural context.

Usually, respondents who are eager to make a definitive decision to emigrate imagine a specific path to follow in order to move to another country, and to obtain education or job there.

A male of 31 years, native of the capital, expressed a definite positive attitude towards emigration. When asked about their desired destination, they replied:

"Far away - to Canada, New Zealand, Australia. Somewhere where they have a very different mentality than in Europe... I am currently heading to New Zealand”.

Regarding their motives, the same respondent shared some details:

"An economically well-organized country, democracy in its fullest sense. Transparency. Economically stable (country), with a high standard of living - fits into my ideas about life. Without high population density in big cities. I want peace, not madness" (E.H., interview, June 2020).

This respondent had already applied for an emigration visa, and their motives were not related to their family financial situation, as they were well positioned in a foreign company operating in Bulgaria, but are explained by them with a feeling that conditions in Bulgaria are not getting better and in general "things are not going well".

A 27-year-old female, native of a medium sized town, also had certain preferences and is prepared to emigrate together with their family. Eagerness to explore cultural diversity in their personal life and professional environment is a leading component of their motivation:

"I want to meet new people constantly. I want to communicate with new people and... And I realize that a "maximum" plan would be to stay in Lisbon. However, I need this to feel satisfied. I also think that this is a very good perspective for my child... My dream (...), at this stage of my life, is to live in Portugal with my child until I turn 30 (...) The reason I want to move to Portugal are the new opportunities, new people and first of all I think my son... I like the people, the city in general, I like the food, I like the job prospects there. Because there are TV programs there that are precisely my specialty, that give you a perspective to move up the ladder" (R.T. July 2020).

For this young woman, personal choices for diversity in contacts and professional realization are leading causes, but the good future of her child is also of a primary concern.

Another group of respondents can be identified according to their perception about their opportunities for a "hybrid" professional realization - they already work both in Bulgaria and abroad or are prepared for such a scenario.

A 28-year-old male, born in a small-sized town and living in the capital city of the country has a rather flexible opinion on their own opportunities:

"Definitely to be in Bulgaria - Sofia as a bigger city for example, but also abroad. To realize my idea for my own business. It is connected to (working with) clients from both Bulgaria and abroad. In the beginning coming from Western Europe, mainly Germany. So now I'm thinking about where I will develop best, in quite a rational manner. I've removed all things like ego, sentimental... Or just to be abroad ... no. Everything is with a purpose" (I.K., interview, July 2020).

Based on the models of Ajzen (2005), Ajzen & Fishbein (1980, 2000), as well as Ejzer & Plight (1988), it was expected that norms and beliefs shared through reference groups and significant others would have an important role in forming attitudes towards emigration and this hypothesis was confirmed.

An 18-year-old male from a big-sized city expressed a consideration of pursuing education abroad, but also a firm preference for a professional realization in Bulgaria, due to family connectedness. For them, living in different cities even within the country is already a factor for distance and weakening bonds between relatives:

"We realize that if one of us goes abroad, it would have been much better to stay in Bulgaria, so to say. My sister, who's also studying in Sofia, would have been better off staying here. She is becoming distanced little by little" (M.K., interview, July 2020).

A 34-year-old female, native of a medium-sized city, had to an extent considered and formed a perception about leaving the home country and settling abroad – this move would have positive aspects, especially for their child, but the normative beliefs and desires of significant relatives weigh on her plans and they accept connectedness and close ties to the family and relatives as a leading norm and therefore, staying in Bulgaria:

"No, my parents did not want me to seek development outside our country. We have discussed that I have a desire to go abroad, mostly because of my little one, to find herself in a slightly different environment, different school. They have a better education there. That is all we have commented on. We see each other every day, we hear each other every day, we have a strong connection with my parents. I think it's more important for me to be close to each other. My husband wants to live here in this environment, to manage his business here, to have everything here. He does not think at all about leaving our country in any way" (N.M., interview, June 2020).

Beliefs and notions about the object – whether it is a specific country or the general idea about "abroad" - are based on the individuals' experience, but also on collective perceptions, social representations spread through (digital) media, networks and word of mouth, i.e. in immediate and semi-immediate social circles. The latter play their particularly important role; at the same time,

there is a group that can be easily outlined among the respondents, who emphasize their independence when forming their views and making their decisions unaffected by the impact of their closest social environment.

A male aged 21 who accumulated experience and cultural capital through social contacts and education abroad expressed a clear attitude towards achieving professional development abroad in the long term. Exploring new places and cultures and achieving satisfaction with one's achievements were at the center of their motivation. The respondent placed an accent on not letting their attitude being influenced by relatives' and friends' opinions and ideas.

"My desire (is) not to close my doors and prospects for the future, to have exactly this connection with abroad and with a wider range of people who are not only Bulgarians, this thing has made me... it's just stronger than the desire to stay here to study. (...) Finding a job will happen in England or in another country. Initially, in the short term I do not intend to return, but in the long run, yes. I see this happening in ten, twenty years if needed" (A.L., interview, September 2020).

For this respondent, as for most of those with a positive attitude towards emigration, a tendency can be observed not to "close the door" of going back to their homeland, albeit with a rather abstract time perspective.

The impact of significant others' beliefs and ideas, the acceptance of one's social environment as being of vital importance, is somewhat complemented and to an extent minimized by orienting oneself towards internal migration within the country.

An example of a firm negative attitude towards emigration can be observed in the discourse of a 23-year-old female, native of a small-sized town, who was, at the time of the interview, settling in Sofia because of the better opportunities for their professional development. Her personal values were steadily connected with traditions, strong bonds with their family and the love for the nature of the country.

"What I like - I like that Bulgarians as a nation respect our traditions and customs and have never turned our backs on this. Since I was raised in such a family that all traditions are respected, all the holidays - we gather together, relatives and friends. This is what I like the most. The other thing I like are our homeland mountains and the sea. Not every country has the possibility to have access both to the sea and to the mountains" (S.C., interview, September 2020).

The desire and readiness for internal migration were also observed in other respondents' discourses. These are usually associated with better professional realization and more opportunities for social and cultural life.

A common phenomenon characteristic of modern European youth is access to means for mobility, more traveling and available channels to gain knowledge of different countries, cultures, diversity and attainable ways to participate in this cultural diversity.

Respect and affection for one's country, identity, vision of return are preserved even when the decision for emigrating has been made. At the same time, in young people's discourses strong criticism of the "mentality", corruption, the peculiarities of education, the organization in the professional spheres can be frequently detected.

Young people's strong disapproval of the living conditions, the peculiarities of the educational system, the insufficient opportunities for professional growth in Bulgaria is very common. Despite this clearly expressed critical position, many of them identify a personal need to develop and start a family in their native country and to design their future, as well as their children's by investing their efforts in Bulgaria.

A 35-year-old male with a high educational degree and diverse international experience states:

"Anyway, here the ambitious, and those who are not so much, people work in Western companies, Western corporations, even smaller Western businesses. In any case, the level as a whole is not so different. It does depend on the sector, I guess, and on the requirements of the company itself. Of course, there are companies where the requirements and levels are simply different. But a general difference between working in Bulgaria and working abroad, I would not say that at the moment it is noticeable (...) But let's say a period of 15 years, starting with the government of the three-party coalition... If the outflow of serious foreign investments from the country continues, if the people from my immediate social circle decide to emigrate from Bulgaria and if I myself or someone in my family are directly or indirectly affected by the collapse of our social systems... This would really make me take this - I will use this word - desperate move" (B.V., interview, September 2020).

A tendency among young people in the research sample can be identified, that reflects the acquisition of cultural capital, i.e. from the point of view of expanding the worldview and aspiring for better education as a result of living abroad in different countries, experiencing different educational systems at good universities, socializing in diverse social and cultural circles. They present their critical thinking on a number of components of the socioeconomic life in Bulgaria, but still perceive their professional realization and life here as a more meaningful and interesting challenge. Motives such as a preference to pursue their goals in their native country, as there is a feeling of effectiveness and purpose more than there would be abroad - are also associated with their identification with the country and the local culture. The assessment of foreign educational systems, however, is very high accompanied by a rather realistic assessment of the socioeconomic status of Bulgarian emigrants in a receiving country.

The analysis shows that there is a balanced system of views, ideas and attitudes towards life in Bulgaria, life abroad, professional development here and abroad, family development here and abroad. It seems that the most specific are the ideas about professional development and what advantages they have when staying in Bulgaria – a number of respondents explain their reasons for aspiring a better development in their home country.

Similar to the expectations and attitudes analyzed in a study of young Spaniards (Landolt, Thieme, 2018), most of the respondents in our research also demonstrated a persuasion that accumulation of cultural and social capital - education, skills, knowledge of foreign language and cultures, networks and broadening communication circles – are an essential part of citizens' goals.

What the interviews have in common is that there is no particularly positive attitude towards emigration, but it is expressed rather within arguments, assessment of particular situations and in the context of personal reasons. A specific attitude can be outlined, especially among young people, who are positive about short-term stay abroad for financial and/or educational purposes. Another example can be taken out from the interview with a young woman aged 18, native of a small-sized town, who was considering possible emigration for a certain period of time and with financial conditions:

"It would be for a while - I would not live in another country for too long. I grew up in Bulgaria. I would go for 6-7 months, a year or two, to make some money and come back.(...)Well, to help my family first, and then... The house, mom's loans, to pay some accounts, this kind of things. To refurbish my house in the village of Katina - it needs major repairs, I want to live there, to fix it up" (G.K., interview, September 2020).

Values such as family bonds, feeling of security, financial safety and property ownership, as well as stable professional development usually “slow down” or postpone the necessity of making a decision/move and/or forming a definitive attitude towards emigration. The presence of a partner was observed as being one of the important factors and conditions to leaving the country. A 33-year-old male from a medium-sized town shares their views on settling abroad:

“I have imagined myself living there. Yes but only if my partner comes with me. I can't imagine going alone. Especially as I'm now divorced, I can't imagine leaving my child” (F.D., interview, September 2020).

Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) is usually manifested and/or resolved when respondents' strong criticism towards living conditions in Bulgaria is opposed to negative experience difficulties, loneliness, separation from loved ones, job insecurities abroad, that build up in one's personal perceptions. As a result, the dissonance is solved by looking for positive perspectives and opportunities for betterment of one's qualification and skills in Bulgaria in the context of the familiarity of social environment. Precisely social milieu is a particularly strong factor, along with a bond to the country and local culture but also the feeling of insecurity when no acquaintances or relatives are settled abroad.

A 23-year-old female, native of a big-sized city, with relatively good experience from working abroad demonstrated their favorable views about opportunities for professional realization in a foreign country. However, they still had not developed a plan to leave; attitude and readiness to do so in the event of a negative development of the manner in which professional relations and hierarchy are being built.

A 25 years old male, native of a medium-sized city, expressed their observation:

"I think the people who do it - very few of them really want it. Most people are just forced, for one reason or another. I don't think there are many people who say to themselves "I don't want to live in Bulgaria, I want to live abroad". In a sense, everyone carries patriotism inside in some way.

This person also shared their personal experience from living abroad:

“Everyone has the right to live their life as they wish. One of the things I missed while I was in America was my surroundings and everything related to Bulgaria” (E.R., interview, September 2020).

Discussion

In previous studies differences have been observed between the so-called Generation of Millennials and previous or subsequent generations such as Generation Z. It's found that the Gen Z is “...different from previous generations in some important ways, but similar in many ways to the Millennial generation that came before it. Members of Gen Z are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and they are on track to be the most well-educated generation yet. They are also digital natives who have little or no memory of the world as it existed before smartphones” (Parker, Igielnik, 2020, para. 4).

A survey conducted among representatives of Generation Z in Bulgaria found distortions in the communication between young people and their parents, and the postponement of important life choices. For the so called “digital generation” is proving to be particularly important the inviolability of privacy, but also a developed tolerance for diversity, tolerance towards others (Aleksandrov, et al. 2020).

In our sample Millennials are present through a little more than half of the interviewees, the other part being from Generation Z, i.e. born after 1996 (Dimock, 2019).

Among the sample of the Generation of Millennials, 11 persons out of 27, while in that of the Generation Z - 6 out of 18 persons had a positive attitude towards emigration. Analyzed in a qualitative analysis, the data shows a weak tendency to prevail positive readiness for emigration among Millennials. More extensive research is needed in order to elaborate the influence of factors that form difference or similarity. Hypothetically, it can be assumed that older respondents in the sample have more life experience and a clearer idea of what they could expect in a foreign country. In addition, it could be stated that Millennials have more complex civic position and political views, as many of them express dissatisfaction with the living conditions in the country, with "Bulgarian mentality", as they imagine it, the relationships within professional spheres.

Representatives of the Z Generation also expressed their strong criticism, which is associated with readiness for emigration. For some of the interviewees, dissatisfaction begins to build up soon after graduation, followed by a "clash" with the real opportunities in Bulgaria for realization, problems of diverse nature and financial constraints. Despite an attachment to the immediate social circle, as well as to the country in general, a readiness to leave is gradually formed if the prospects remain unclear.

Based on the qualitative analysis of the conducted interviews, some trends emerge. Attitudes towards circular migration exceed attitudes towards one way emigration. Attitudes towards emigration among young people are related to past personal experience regarding education in foreign countries. When traditional values are at stake, the cognitive dissonance of attraction to foreign countries and cultures is solved through good professional and/or educational achievements in the country of origin or after living abroad. There is a tendency for persons with stable family bonds or long-term relationships to form their attitudes based on these types of connectedness, i.e. depending on how they imagine the future complying to the features and perspective of a life shared with someone. At the same time, the presence of relatives abroad, even close ones, and the emigration experience they have and narrate does not have a significant impact on the formation of attitudes for settling abroad.

The normative beliefs adopted by the closest reference group play a significant role in the formation of attitudes towards emigration, but through the mediating influence of the achieved socioeconomic status of the persons. An interesting aspect is the difference between the two groups of young people: representatives of Generation Z seem more conservative than the so-called "Millennials", born before 1996, and more focused on individual social and material growth in their country.

Summarized conclusions

Research on the attitudes of potential emigrants is very scarce in modern knowledge, and in Bulgaria there is a serious deficiency.

In modern research in the field of attitudes and migration, more and more often they focus on the use of qualitative methods, in particular on interviews - semi-structured, in-depth and more.

Despite a certain increase in research interest in the age group of young people, it is not systematic and it does not fully cover the typology or the motivational mechanisms of migration decision making and realized behaviour.

The following trends in attitudes and motivation among young people studied in different countries are emerging:

- Within the former Eastern European countries, the need for work, career development, a better standard often dominates, while in other European countries the goal is to increase human capital - skills, knowledge, social connections, etc.

- At the same time, in recent years, groups of young people in different countries have apparently been in a similar position due to the globalizing environment and opportunities for mobility, which in turn is linked to the individualization of motives and attitudes and diversity in incentives to emigrate.

There is a certain decline in the attitudes of Bulgarian youth to emigrate, but this is to a certain extent a general trend in European countries. One reason for this is that mobility within the EU is seen as "internal" movement and not perceived as migration. It also becomes "circular" - with an intention to ameliorate one's education level and skills, return to their social environment, seek for opportunities for professional realization in their country and then again go to another level of development.

The study confirms the need for comprehensive and systematic research approaches, the results of which would be utilized to develop policies aimed at potential migrants.

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