

**National Policy Recommendations
on the Enhancement of Migration Data for Bulgaria**



National Statistical Institute

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Jointly for our common future

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Authors: National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria

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1. INTRODUCTION

The change of the political system in Bulgaria in 1989 has strongly influenced not only the economic situation and the labour market but also the overall demographic development including the number and directions of emigration flows.

Regarding the demographic trends, the period 1989 - 2011 has been characterized by decreasing trends in fertility and increasing mortality. The natural increase of population since 1990 has been negative and population numbers and structures were strongly influenced by emigration once the last three decades in Bulgaria were characterized by an intensive emigration trend. As a result, the number of the total population decreased and a tendency of intensive population ageing is evidenced¹.

Several phases of population development can be distinguished in these aspects. According to the census data in the period 1985 - 1992 the population decreased by 461,000 persons. As the natural increase during the entire period has been positive, the population decrease can be almost attributed to a negative migration balance. It is at the end of 1990 and 1991 that a negative natural increase was registered in the country for the first time (minus 18,000). The negative migration growth at that time was mainly due to the third migration wave to Turkey in 1989.²

A population decrease was registered for the second time between the censuses of 1992 - 2001 with minus 554,000 persons. While the majority (355,000; 63.6 %) of the decrease within this 9-years period was a consequence of a negative natural increase; the loss of 203,000 persons (36.4 %) can be attributed to a negative migration balance.

Between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the country population decreased further by more than half a million persons (564,331). More than two thirds of the decrease - 389,087 persons or 68.9 per cent - was again caused by a negative natural increase. The further 31.1 per cent of the decrease (175,244 persons) was due to the net migration growth.

The current demographic situation in Bulgaria may cause serious problems in the future economic and human development as well as in the labour market. The two poles of labour migration – highly qualified ('mobile brains') and low skilled – characterize the Bulgarian migration process and the negative net migration rate defines the profile of the country as a "sending" one.

As there are still problems with the collection and analysis of the statistical information provided by different competent institutions to measure related processes, a complex set of measures for data collection and data provision needs to be built. This will help to provide a base of evidence for the policy makers to address these prevailing challenges.

1.1. Introducing SEEMIG

SEEMIG (Managing Migration and its Effects in SEE: Transnational Actions towards Evidence Based Strategies) (www.seemig.eu) was a transnational cooperation project that was implemented in the framework of the European Union (EU) programme 'South-East Europe' (www.southeast-europe.net) from 2012 - 2014. In order to facilitate evidence-based policy-making on the national, regional and local levels, and focusing on data availability and data enhancement, the main objective of SEEMIG was for better understand and address the longer term migratory, human capital and demographic processes of the SEE area as well as their effects on labour markets and national/regional economies. It also strengthened capacities of local and regional authorities to

¹ SEEMIG Historical analysis Bulgaria <http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/2012-11-14-00-09-03/file/365-seemighistoricalanalysisbulgaria>

² SEEMIG Historical analysis Bulgaria <http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/2012-11-14-00-09-03/file/365-seemighistoricalanalysisbulgaria>

better collect and utilise statistical data in their planning and sectorial policies, and to introduce evidence-based policy-making and implementation.

1.2. Introducing the policy recommendations

The following document recapitulates policy recommendations regarding migration data enhancement in Bulgaria. The document has been prepared by experts from the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute (NSI). The National Statistical Institute is the institution at the national level responsible for collection and analysis of statistical data on migration. The institute is the Bulgarian contact point in providing migration data to Eurostat. The official statistical information is intended for analyses and scientific researches, for planning, prognostication and decision making at micro and macro level.

The policy recommendations were developed as an integral component of the SEEMIG outputs elaborated within the project activities. The latter result in building a framework of relevant documents, including: foresight scenarios and population projections; historical analysis of longer term migratory, labour market and human capital processes; analysis of existing migratory data production systems and major data sources; and an Action Plan outlining the future developments in the field of data collection, data linkage and the production of more accurate and reliable statistics not only on the international migration, but also on the population of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The importance of data on international migration and the requirements in respect of its quality and reliability have increased because such data are of a great value in drafting adequate strategies for the development of human capital and in particular the elaboration of proper and effective labour market strategies.³

The recommendations are conform to the overall data production system in the country and mainly take into consideration the expected future developments in the inter-institutional cooperation. Thus the main efforts in the forthcoming years will be directed to expanding the number of administrative data sources used for statistical purposes and coordination of the activities undertaken by separate government institutions towards harmonisation of definitions, classifications and nomenclatures.

Without integrating the administrative data systems, statistical services will not be able to provide data quickly enough for feeding into the decision-making process on relevant policy issues. The capacity improvement and the knowledge gained within the SEEMIG activities was the result of better understanding and communication on existing data on migration. The active participation at workshops and master classes and concordance of all stakeholders at the national and regional level was decisive for crafting the following recommendations.

2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy area 1 – Improvement and integration of administrative data systems

As the migration and population data production in Bulgaria is fully based on administrative data records, the most important step for addressing the problem of quality and coverage of migration data are the expanding of the number of administrative data sources used for statistical purposes

³ The detailed descriptions of the SEEMIG Project documents are available at the project web site: www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs.

and investigating possible new data sources and modes for data exchange. In Bulgaria administrative data are considered a reliable source because they are based on primary records legally determined by the Law on Civil Registration PIN of individuals.

In order to produce qualitative migration data, to answer to the international requirements in the field and to ensure information on the intensive migration processes (that started after the political changes in 1989), a number of agreements on the exchange of information on migration were signed between the National Statistical Institute, as an official provider of statistical data in the country, and providers of administrative data like the Ministry of Interior (dealing with data on foreigners), the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (maintaining the Population Register), the National Revenue Agency (collecting limited data on Bulgarian citizens leaving the country), and the State Agency for Refugees.

Additional work should be done to better use the National Social Security Institute's (NSSI) data on persons receiving their pensions abroad. The dialogue between the NSI and NSSI has already started and an agreement for the exchange of data has been signed.

Consultations are intended also on provision of NSI with annual data on all persons paying social insurance contributions, registered by the NSSI, as well as with full list of persons paying health insurance contributions, registered by the NRA.

Moreover, regardless the progress made, the administrative procedures to ensure access to other institutions' information systems are time consuming and the process of preparation of agreements for data exchange sometimes takes more than a year.

The key policy recommendations for improving and integrating administrative data systems are:

- Legal authorization of the direct access of NSI to individual data in the relevant national stakeholders administrative databases;
- Steps towards exchange of individual data in partnerships between statistical offices of EU member states. Data should be centralized in a database hosted by the Eurostat;
- Steps towards improving data collection procedures through incorporation of new data that can be used for migration statistics purposes.

Challenges: Despite the activities undertaken, there are still gaps in the provision of information while the quality of data is not satisfactory. The challenges can be summarized as follows:

- The information available in administrative data sources is designed for administrative purposes mainly and cannot be always fully used for statistical ones;
- The interaction between the institutions having competences in the field of migration was not effective enough or was quite delayed;

Elaboration of an effective mechanism for coordination of all institutional stakeholders and organisations in order to achieve more effective management of the migration processes is a policy area included in the National Strategy on migration, asylum and integration (2011 - 2020).

Stakeholders: The main data sources and administrations engaged with provision of migration data are:

- Immigration data - Ministry of Interior;
- DG "Border Police" - responsible for the border control and providing information on the illegal migration;

- Directorate “Migration” – coordination of migration processes, regulation and control of the third country nationals migration, administrative service of the EU and the EEA citizens residing in Bulgaria;
- Refugees and asylum data - State Agency for Refugees and Asylum at the Council of Ministers;
- Data on citizenship and foreigners holding long-term and permanent residence permits - Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works;
- DG “Civil Registration and Administrative Service of Population”;
- Emigration data - DG “Civil Registration and Administrative Service of Population”;
- National Revenue Agency.

Policy area 2 – Registration of persons in different national registers and improvement of harmonisation processes between national registers.

Key issues in policy area 2 and the problems that generally characterise administrative data in different national registers are:

- The nomenclatures and definitions used in administrative information systems do not fully correspond to the ones recommended by the international organisations for statistical purposes;
- The lack of comparability between the information systems of different institutions raises issues connected to the use of information available and/or necessity of additional processing in order to produce comparable data.

At present, the principal **challenges** faced, when using data from different institutions’ datasets, stand on these discrepancies.

The registers operating in the country are established to satisfy the necessities of separate institutions according to their main tasks. Unfortunately, no coordination between the institutions has been performed **during the process of establishing different registers**.

One of the future directions is to build a consensus among the institutions involved in migration related data, concerning the information to be collected, data format, indicators to be included, and classifications to be used. This harmonization will allow the integration of the collected data for producing more accurate data on migration processes. Questions on unification of information gathered by separate institutions remain the principal tasks of the already set up inter-institutional working group on migration issues.

Stakeholders: To achieve the required unification, representatives of different institutions should discuss and adopt all the necessary changes in their own databases, as well as future developmental activities. This is a permanent task aiming at the establishment and maintenance in a long-term perspective of an integrated system on migration.

Policy area 3 – Amendments of existing national legislation concerning data on registration of migrants

In the period following the accession of Bulgaria to the European Union to date, the national legislation concerning data on registration of migrants has undergone to a number of changes aiming at the transposition of the EU legislation into the national one. At present, the legislation in the country is fully compliant with the European requirements regarding the regulation and provision of information on international migration.

Data on emigration is likely to be under-estimated in all countries, due to a lack in incentives for self – deregistration for persons moving abroad, particularly in the case of temporary emigration.

The problem related to the under-coverage of Bulgarian citizens emigrating from the country is caused by the absence of a legal obligation for Bulgarian citizens to “de-register” themselves from

the Population Register in case of leaving the country for more than a one-year period. Nevertheless, the institutions having competences in the field of migration and the National Statistical Institute in particular made various efforts in order to improve the coverage of emigrant's data. A good step in this direction is the using of the National Revenue Agency information on persons, who have declared to leave the country for more than 183 days per year (connected to release of payment of health insurance contributions for the period of absence).

Despite the awareness that tax reductions are difficult to be introduced and especially when considering the complicated financial situation in the country, the efforts should be focused onto introducing measures like lowering property taxes and/or utility charges for non-residents into the national legislation, regardless expected resistance from central/local tax collection authorities.

An additional alternative for the improved estimation of the number of emigrants is the use of the "mirror statistics" – data on Bulgarian citizens, who have changed their usual residence in Bulgaria with a residence abroad (based on destination countries data on immigrants).

At present, mirror statistics could be used only as a reference data to assess the accuracy of emigration data produced based on the national data sources. The reason is that the Information System Demography, maintained by the NSI, is a system based on official documents and in order to include or exclude people in/from it, the respective notifications (certificates) or administrative records containing officially registered information are needed. The EU recommendations on harmonisation of address registration within the European Union should help the countries to improve the quality of migration data within the European Union.⁴

Despite these achievements, there are still areas that need additional efforts for improving the quality of data and better coverage of different migrant categories. To address the problems still existing, the main efforts have to be directed on identifying new sources of information, for improving coverage and the quality of statistics on migration.

The key policy action should focus on supporting the institutions having a legislative initiative in their efforts on introducing amendments into the national legislation aiming at enhancing the registration of Bulgarian citizens residing abroad. Besides the awareness that any tax reduction policy is difficult to be accepted and implemented, it is worth considering such policy as an alternative for better coverage of migrants and production of better and more realistic population and labour force numbers⁵.

Policy area 4 - Maintenance of the SEEMIG transnational database beyond SEEMIG's life span

The production of reliable, accurate, internationally comparative and timely data on migration processes is a basic prerequisite for the elaboration of adequate policies on migration and

⁴ SEEMIG Transnational Policy Recommendations on the enhancement of migration data in South-east Europe –www.seemig.eu

⁵ The content of National Policy Recommendations of Bulgaria as a whole is based on SEEMIG outputs including Action plan and discussions with stakeholders at the Master class. The National Policy Recommendations took into account the national peculiarities and legally defined administrative rules regarding the amendments of national laws and practices also. To better understand the challenges and stakeholders please, consult the Action Plan to improve and enhance the migratory data production system and data sources in Bulgaria - <http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/2012-11-14-00-09-03/file/468-action-plan-bulgaria-10oct2014>

demographic developments of the country as well as the regulation of the migration processes, and the elaboration of strategies in the field.

The future maintenance and regular updates of the available statistical datasets are considered equally important as the incorporation of new data. In this regard, the migration dataset developed in the framework of the SEEMIG project is considered to be an important contribution.

The NSI SEEMIG expert group believes that the development of statistical systems linking migration data and related demographic, human capital and labor mobility data can happen only as an outcome of a coordinated set of actions at different levels, namely: the transnational, the national and the local levels. Without this complex set of actions, migration statistics will remain deficient and it will not provide a satisfactory base of evidence for decision makers.

The maintenance of the SEEMIG transnational database beyond the project life span is considered by the NSI project team to be of significant national and transnational interest for the South-East European region.

SEEMIG proposes better coordinated transnational actions namely:

- Establishment of a transnational monitoring committee;
- Collection and exchange of data (especially on commuting) via Memoranda of Understanding;
- Improvement of transnational databases and maintenance of the SEEMIG transnational database.

In conclusion, it should be noted that regardless the great amount of work done until now with respect to transposition of the European legislation in the field of migration into the national one, the establishment of respective national institutions and provision of the necessary information on migration processes, considerable efforts are to be made in order to improve mainly the coverage of emigration statistics for Bulgaria.