

## 10 Years in EU<sup>1</sup>

### Migration Trends in Bulgaria

*Georgi Angelov, Senior Economist and Marin Lessenski, European Policies Program Director,  
Open Society Institute – Sofia*

- In the last three decades, the largest number of people left the country in the end of the 1980s (the emigration of Bulgarian Turks) and during the crisis-ridden 1990s of the last century, but since then outmigration has been decreasing substantially.
- The total number of people, born in Bulgaria and living abroad is about 1.1 million people, out of whom 600-700 thousand left the country for economic reasons. They are living mainly in the EU, Turkey and the USA.
- The membership of Bulgaria in the EU provides visa-free travel to about 150 countries in the world and free access to the labor market of the EU. However, there is no increase of those leaving the country after the beginning of the EU membership, but rather legalization of those who have already left.
- About 35,000 Bulgarians returned to the country in the last four years. Net migration decreases, but still more people leave the country than return to it.

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<sup>1</sup> This brief is part of the “10 Years in the EU” series of the Open Society Institute – Sofia in regard to one decade of EU membership of Bulgaria. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect an official position of the Open Society Institute – Sofia.

## Context

We are now so accustomed to free travel and access to the European labor market that we often forget that we only recently acquired them. For example, the rights related to the free travel as European citizens were acquired 10 years ago and the full access of Bulgarians to the EU's labor market exists for slightly over three years (after January 2014).

When the first census during the transition was carried out in 1992, Bulgaria still had a very distant EU membership perspective (i.e., and it was the European Community at the time). Just in 1999, Bulgaria was invited to start negotiations with the EU and became a member in 2007

The free movement of people materialized later and at different stages. Until the 1990s, there were "exit visas" for leaving the country, and for quite some time after this Bulgaria had a visa regime with almost all Western states.

Just in April 2001, the visa free regime for short visits with the Schengen area member countries entered into force. The visa regime for the UK and Ireland was retained until 1 January 2007, when Bulgaria joined the EU. From that moment on, travel with only an ID card within the EU became possible. In addition, because of EU membership, from 2007 Bulgarian citizens can travel visa free to about 150 countries in the world.

The restrictions to the labor market of some EU states remained until 1 January 2014. Thus, the full rights of free movement and residence within the EU exist a little more than 3 years. Before that, emigrating abroad was often been done illegally or semi-legally. There are restrictions for a number of other states, where Bulgarian citizens tend to migrate – the USA, Canada and Australia, and only for Canada the restrictions on short-term visits will be lifted from December 2017.

## Change in the population figures

The change in population figures can be traced through the official censuses in 1985, 1992, 2001 and 2011, which provide fuller and more accurate picture of the situation. The most recent annual assessments of the National Statistical Institute (NSI) until the end of 2016 are also included.

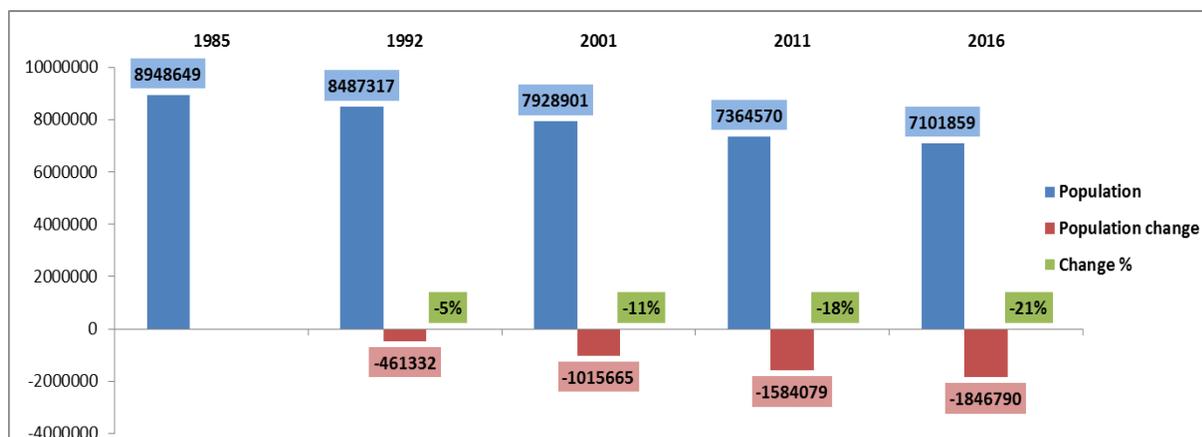
The population of Bulgaria decreased by over 461,000 people between 1985 and 1992- 5.2% - which is due entirely to emigration. The main reason is the leaving of Bulgarian Turks and Muslims in the second half of the 1980s after pressure and expulsion by the regime.<sup>2</sup>

The next census, conducted in 2001, registered a decrease by 554,333 people in comparison to 1992. This is a share of 6.5%, which on annual basis is smaller in comparison to the period 1985 – 1992 because of the longer interval between censuses.

The decrease registered by the 2011 census is 564,000 people compared to 2001. This is 7.2% drop, but also the longest interval between censuses. That is why the annual decrease of the population is the smallest one relative to the rest.

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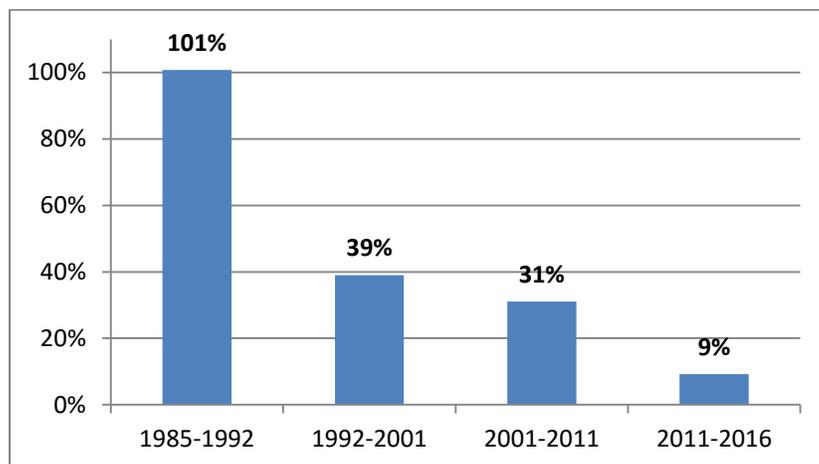
<sup>2</sup> UN data shows that as of 1990 there are 462,767 people in Turkey, who were born in Bulgaria.

**Change of population compared to 1985 (cumulative)**

Source: National Statistical Institute (NSI) of Bulgaria

The two main factors for decrease of population are negative growth and net migration (i.e. the share of those leaving the country) of Bulgarian citizens. For the entire period from 1985 to 2016 the population of Bulgaria has decreased by 1.85 million people. According to NSI more than half (over 52%) is due to the negative natural growth (the difference between birthrate and mortality rate), while 48% is due to net migration. Nearly half of the net migration is due to the expulsion of the Bulgarian Turks at the end of the communist regime.

The two factors have different importance during the different periods. Between 1985 and 1992 the decline in population figures is entirely due to net migration, while in the next period the predominant factor is the negative natural growth rate. The share of net migration in population drop decreases to 39% in the period between 1992 and 2001, 31% in the period between 2001 and 2011, and falls under 10% for the period from 2011 until now.

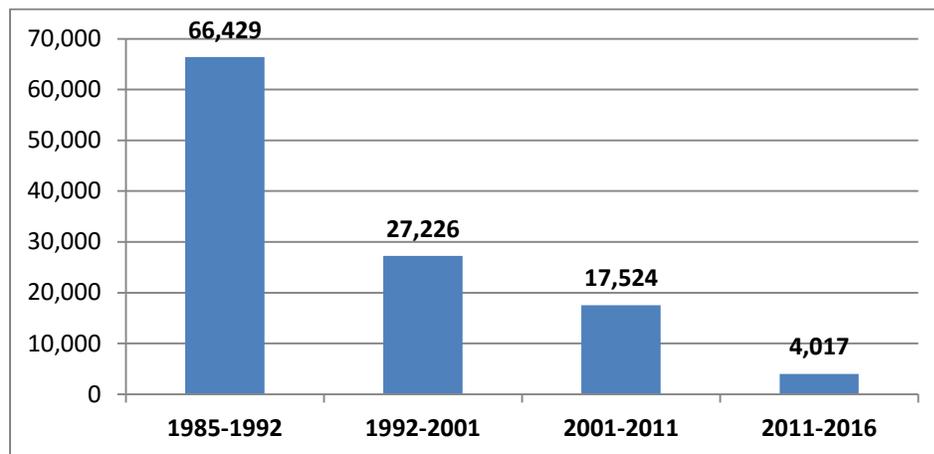
**Share of net migration in the population decline**

*Source: NSI, calculations by the authors. The data after 2011 are from the annual population information.*

In the last three decades, the data indicate a tendency of significant decrease of the number of people leaving Bulgaria. The average annual net migration in the end of the 1980s was over 66,000 people (as Bulgarian Turks were leaving the country), decreased to about 27,000 people in the 1990s and to 17,000 people between 2001 and 2011. According to NSI data, the net migration is slightly over 4,000 people annually for the period after the last census of 2001.

The largest number of people left Bulgaria when there were visa restrictions, when the country was in the negative Schengen list and there were considerable impediments to labor migration. Conversely, in the last decade the net migration decreased despite the EU membership, the visa free regime with over 150 countries around the world and the freedom of movement, work and residency within the EU.

The EU membership did not increase migration but provided opportunities for legalization and better options for work for Bulgarian citizens. In fact, the free movement and the full access to the EU labor market provide benefits – for example, Bulgarian citizens can leave and come back freely by exercising their rights as European citizens.

**Average annual net migration from Bulgaria**

Source: National Statistical Institute, census data. The data after 2011 are from the annual population data.

**How many and where are the Bulgarians abroad?**

There are very different assessments and claims circulating about the number of Bulgarian citizens abroad. The regular censuses, done by countries every decade, can provide relatively objective information. In Bulgaria and the EU member states the last census was in 2011. There is a census in Turkey the same year, but in other countries the censuses take place in different years and in some countries they are substituted by other types of regular surveys.

There are two approaches. The first approach is to use census data from Bulgaria, according to which the number of those who left the country will be calculated. The greatest number of migrants is in the period 1985 – 1992 – 465,000 people, and the number falls to 218,000 people in 1992-2001 and 175,000 people between 2001 and 2011. Overall, according to the national statistics, for the last 30 years those who left Bulgaria are about 900,000 people (about half of them are the Bulgarian Turks who left the country in the late 1980s).

**Net migration according to Bulgaria's statistics**

Period	Number of people
1985-1992	465 000
1992-2001	217 809
2001-2011	175 244
2011-2016*	24 103
<b>Total</b>	<b>882 156</b>

Source: National Statistical Institute, census data. The data after 2011 are from the annual population data.

The other approach is to use the census data from other countries, as most of them include the place of birth. This information can provide the number of people, born in Bulgaria, who live abroad.

According to the data from censuses in receiving countries, in 2011 there are about 1 million people abroad, who were born in Bulgaria. There are mostly living in other countries of the European Union and the European Economic Area – about 500,000 people mainly in Spain, Greece, Germany, Great Britain and Italy. There is a substantial number of migrants in Turkey, who are born in Bulgaria – slightly over 400,000 as well as North America where they are slightly under 100,000.

*Table: Number of Bulgaria-born people living abroad as of 2011*

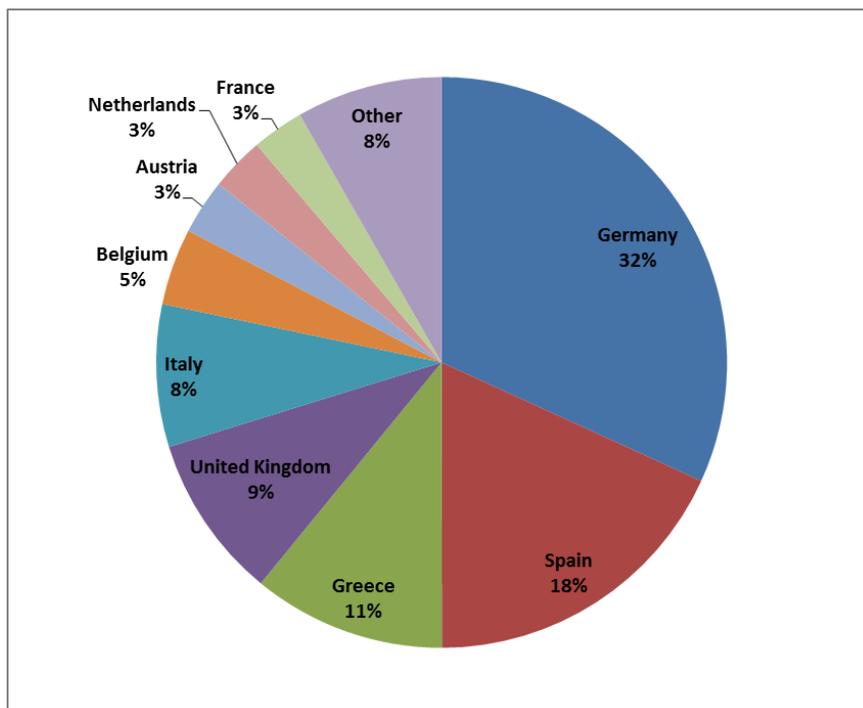
Country	Bulgaria-born population
Turkey	409,000
Spain	122,130
Greece	75,426
Germany	71,250
USA	65,202
UK	48,260
Italy	43,701
Canada	30,485
Cyprus	19,284
Belgium	18,726
France	18,231
Israel	16,633
Austria	15,323
the Netherlands	15,037
Romania	11,029
Czech Republic	9,192
Sweden	6,943
Portugal	5,391
Switzerland	4,607
Denmark	3,543
Norway	3,081
Poland	2,744
Ireland	1,877
Hungary	1,228
Finland	1,112
Slovakia	1,107
Malta	875
Luxembourg	807
Slovenia	786
Croatia	308
Iceland	130
Latvia	98
Lithuania	72
Estonia	71
Lichtenstein	11
others	25,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,048,700</b>

*Sources: Eurostat census 2011; in case of missing census data the annual Eurostat data for 2011 was used; US Census Bureau; Turkey statistical institute; Canada 2011 National Household Survey*

The census data is from 2011, but for some countries there is more recent information. For example, Eurostat published data for 22 countries of the EU and the European Economic Area (EEA) until early 2016. Overall, for the countries for which there is available data, there is an increase by 87,000 of the people, who are born in Bulgaria. Thus, the number of those living in other EU countries reaches 600,000, in the US – about 70,000 and in the world – slightly above 1.1 million as of 2016.

We can compare these results with the regular assessments of the United Nations on international migration, which are published every five years. According to the last UN data, in 2015 the number of those born in Bulgaria and living abroad is 1.176 million people. There is a considerable difference in regard to Turkey, where the UN assessment is for 482,000 people – 73,000 more than the data from the last census in Turkey. For the EU countries, the assessment is for 570,000 people and for North America – about 85,000. If we remove the difference in regard to Turkey, the overall UN estimate for Bulgarians abroad is also 1.1 million people (as of 2015).

In addition to the census data, which show the population according to the country of birth, Eurostat also publishes data for the population according to citizenship. Unfortunately, this information is incomplete for most of the years and do not provide opportunity for comparison through the years. But as of 2016 there is data for 31 countries from the EU and the EEA, with information missing only for two states (Malta and Cyprus). As of 2016, there are 719,000 Bulgarian citizens in the countries of the EU and the EEA with the largest numbers in Germany, Spain, Greece, UK and Italy. It should be noted that not all Bulgarian citizens are born in Bulgaria – part of them are from the traditional Bulgarian communities in Moldova, former Yugoslavia or Ukraine, which have received Bulgarian citizenship and use it to work in the EU countries. At the same time, the children of Bulgarians, who were born abroad, also received Bulgarian citizenship, but they did not emigrate from Bulgaria. This is the reason why the data for Bulgarian citizens, living in the EU, to a certain extent overestimate the number of those who have left the country.

**Share of people with Bulgarian citizenship living in other EU member states as of 2016**

Source: Eurostat

We can see that the comparison of data by different sources shows similar results, although with some differences. According to official Bulgarian statistics, about 900,000 people left the country in the last three decades. According to the other countries data the number of those born in Bulgaria and living abroad is about 1.1 million. The UN assessment puts the number at 1.176 million, but removing the difference for Turkey also results in 1.1 million people. The differences can be explained by the differences in the timeframes, different definitions for migration and inaccuracies. We can accept that the figure of those left Bulgaria is about 1.1 million people and that they are living mainly in the EU, Turkey and the US. According to our estimate between 600,000 and 700,000 people left because of economic reasons.

**Is there a reversal in the outmigration?**

In the last few years, there are interesting changes in the emigration patterns. On the one hand, the number of those leaving stays high – about 25,000 on average annually for the last 5 years. On the other hand, however, the return migration flow to the country is gradually increasing – for the last 5 years it surpasses 21,000 people annually on average. Thus, the net migration from the country is about 4,000 people on average on annual basis, which is significantly lower than the levels in the last three decades. According to NSI, in different years there is substantial variation in the net migration from

1,000-2,000 in 2012-214 to 9,000 people in 2016. Despite this, the net migration is far lower than in previous periods.

According to national statistics, in 2016 21,241 people have changed their residency from abroad to Bulgaria. 46% of them are born in Bulgaria – i.e. these are Bulgarians who have returned, 9% are born in other EU countries and the rest come mostly from Turkey, Russia and Ukraine.

In the last three years, there are about 10,000 people annually returning to Bulgaria. This is twice more than in 2013, when the number of returned Bulgarians was 4,771. Thus, for the period 2013-2016 close to 35,000 Bulgarian migrants returned to the country. This flow is still lower than outgoing migration but shows a process of reversal of migration and returning to Bulgaria.

The rate of return could be increased if there is high economic growth, growing employment, decrease in the differences in incomes and standards of living between Bulgaria and the countries of Western Europe. There are already similar examples in new member states such as Estonia, where for a second year in a row the net migration is negative, i.e. much more people are settling in the country than leaving it.

**Changes in migration flows**



Source: National Statistical Institute



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53

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#### About the author

Georgi Angelov is Senior Economist, Open Society Institute – Sofia. *Marin Lessenski, European Policies Program Director, Open Society Institute – Sofia*

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#### Contact

Address:  
56 Solunska Str.  
Sofia 1000  
Tel.: (+359 2) 930 66 19  
Fax: (+359 2) 951 63 48  
E-mail: [eupi@osi.bg](mailto:eupi@osi.bg)  
Web: [www.eupi.eu](http://www.eupi.eu)