



Challenges of the contemporary migration phenomena

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Abstract: International migration and internal mobility are representation of the growing demographic and economic disparities. People move from youth to aging societies, from poorer peripheries to richer urban agglomeration. The most brilliant example of these processes is the current refugee's crisis and the massive migration of refugees towards Western Europe, dominated by the Syrian refugees, but also represented by migrants from many poor countries around the world. All these migration processes contribute to essential demographic changes of the society, that have later effects on its development.

Keywords: Migration, Development, Demographic dynamics

1. Introduction

Before the beginning of the refugees crisis, the tendencies in the society showed that the majority of mobile people manage to improve their income, their access to education or health system. Many of them are contributing to the welfare of their regions of origin by sending money to their families, thus efficiently combatting poverty, but also are contribution to an efficient development of the host societies.

The migration of skilled workers is a persistent phenomenon. Skilled workers are migrating now more than before. In 2000, 24% of the immigrants to OECD countries had a university degree. In 2010 this percentage was 29%. Promotion of skilled migration by issuing special kinds of visas and residence permits is a policy towards attracting this kind of migrants. This creates a challenge for policymakers on how to maximize the benefit from those people and how correctly structure the migration process and the labor market.

2. Migration and its contribution to the country's development

The contemporary migration phenomena have introduced many challenge to our society.

In this section, I will discuss some specific examples related to referring to the migration processes in different contexts and scales such as the Bulgarian and Georgian migration phenomena and return migration.

2.a. Bulgaria from a transit country to a country of destination. The Bulgarian return migrants.

After 2009 Bulgaria, like the rest of Europe, began to feel the impact of the global financial and economic crisis, resulting in slowing migration processes. Currently emigration from the country still exceeds immigrant influx, being estimated to be -2,51 immigrants/1000 people for 2014 (Bulgarian National Statistical Institute 2014). However, there is a pronounced trend towards reduction. Conversely, the number of immigrants is relatively small but a distinct trend of growth is observed.

One can regard Bulgaria as in the initial phase of its transformation from a country of origin and transit of migrants into a final destination country. The nature of migration to Bulgaria is also becoming more diverse and heterogeneous. Immigrants undoubtedly have increased the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of Bulgaria, while avoiding cultural clashes.

The level of education of the immigrants in Bulgaria is relatively high: 41,8% of them are university graduates, and 55,6% had secondary and college education. This is beneficial both in economic terms and in terms of opportunities for their integration into the Bulgarian society.

The immigrants who come from new destinations (for example China) or have joined their relatives, who have settled in Bulgaria, have started small or medium businesses or have found employment in trade and catering, mostly in companies of other immigrants.

In the last decade and especially after the accession of Bulgaria to the EU, new types of immigrants appeared. They work as managers and experts in transnational corporations and international organizations.

Recently, Bulgaria has become a country of interest for the immigrants coming from Maghreb and the Middle East. The Syrian civil war has increased the number of refugees coming to Bulgaria from Turkey, crossing the Bulgarian-Turkish border.

A research based on in-depth interviews and online questionnaires with Bulgarian returnees from Western Europe, the USA and some other countries from all over the world, funded by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Robert Bosch Foundation, has been recently published (Ivanova 2012). A multidisciplinary network in the field of immigration and integration has been created in 2008 by these two institutions with the aim to design a leading platform for dialogue among future decision-makers and an international forum for exchange on crucial immigration and integration issues.

According to the research, the returnees are young people between 20 and 40 years old who have stayed at least a year abroad with the aim of studying or working. Most of them have already completed their university education in Bulgaria, or they have finished it while being abroad.

In 2010, 3,518 people changed their permanent residence from abroad to Bulgaria. 18% were below 20 years old; 32% were between 20 and 39 years old; 35% were between 40 and 59 years old; and 15% were above 60 years old.

The majority of the highly skilled young Bulgarians, who returned to Bulgaria, were driven by three main motives:

- Work related motives – they want to start their own companies or to join the Bulgarian administration. But in reality, they mostly find employment in international companies, create their own businesses or start working in local NGOs.

- Family-related motives – they feel nostalgic about their families and are the willing to return.

- Economic crisis motives – they feel vulnerable due to the crisis and don't see perspective for a professional development abroad.

Some real steps towards reintegration of young highly qualified people are done by the annual forum “Career in Bulgaria. Why not?”. This is an attempt to socialize and communicate with the people abroad in order to exchange their experiences. An association called “Tuk-Tam” (“Here-There”) has been created in 2008. One of its major activities is the annual forum done in cooperation with one more Bulgarian non-governmental initiative such as, for example, Back2BG. The aim of the Forum is to bring together students and graduates with experience abroad and leading companies in Bulgaria, to learn about career opportunities and meet with other young professionals in a similar situation (Ivanova 2012).

2.b. The Georgian migration panorama. The Georgian return migrants.

During the last two decades, Republic of Georgia faced a series of political crises that had their impact on the country's economy, the urban composition and migration.

According to the European Training Foundation project, launched in 2011 and researching the relationship between migration, development and skills, almost 30% of people aged between 18 and 50 years living in Georgia intend to go abroad and 11.4% of them are ready to migrate at any moment (Bardak 2011).

The intention to emigrate is highest for single young men with lower and secondary education, being primarily from rural and urban areas rather than from the capital Tbilisi, who have a poorly paid jobs or are unemployed.

According to the data, given by the Georgian National Statistics Office, the distributions of the emigrants/immigrants by sex, age and citizenship, corresponding to 2013, are given in the following Figs. 1 and 2.

The circular character of the migration pattern is represented by about 25% of the returned migrants, the later being mostly from rural areas, generally married with children.

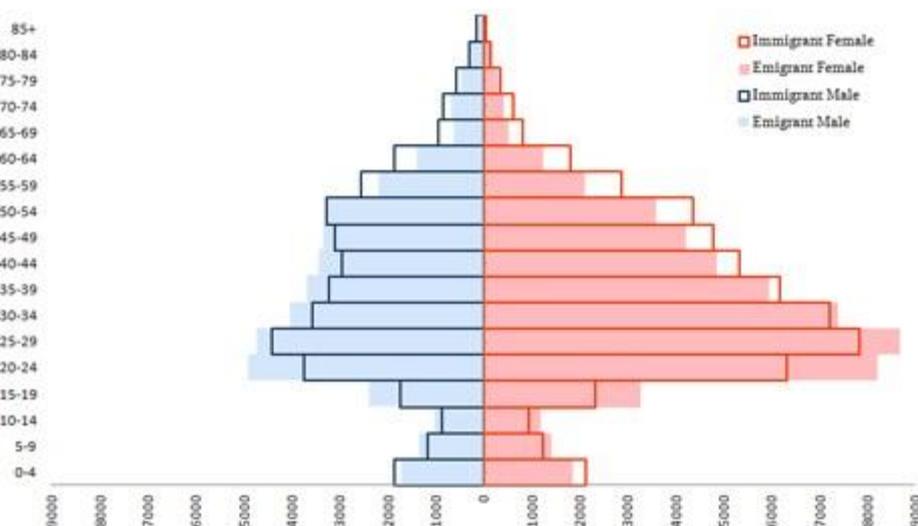


Fig. 1 Emigrants/Immigrants by sex and age for 2013
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

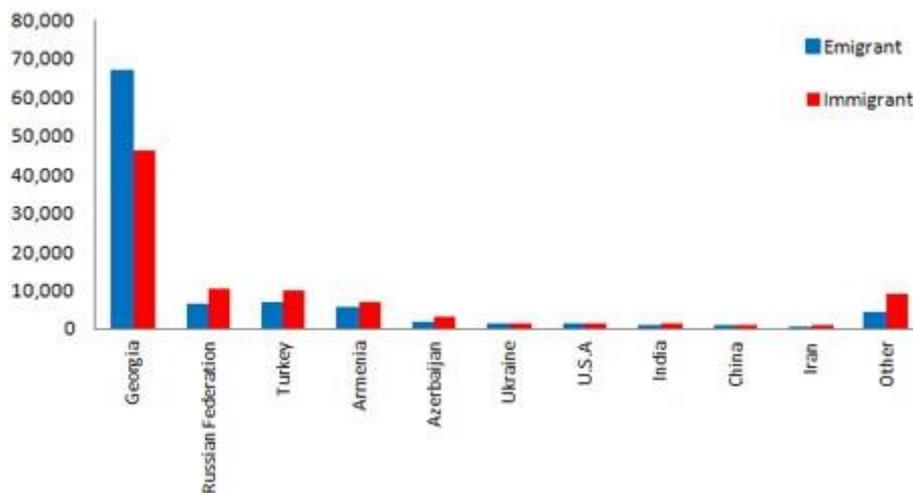


Fig. 2 Emigrants/Immigrants by citizenship for 2013
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

In general, the Georgian migrants are relatively well educated, almost 30% have university education and another 30% have vocational education, being the female migrants better educated than males in both the potential and returned migrant groups. The preferred destinations for migrants with low and intermediate education level, according to the ETF research, are Turkey (32%), Russia (29%) and Greece (13%), being Turkey a top destination due to the lack of visa requirements for Georgian citizens, while better educated people tend to prefer the USA, Italy or Germany as an emigration destination (Jasnova et al. 2012, Collyer 2013).

The main sectors of employment abroad are domestic service for female returnees and construction for males. Due to the rather high educational background of the Georgian migrants, many of them, 48% from the ETF statistics, had working experience abroad below their education level, which is even more pronounced in the case of female migrants (70%), who are usually characterized by a higher education level (Jasnova et al. 2012). On the other side, the experience abroad has enriched the migration pattern through formal training, language training, vocational training, workplace organization, culture and entrepreneurship skills. Taking in mind the previously described emigration panorama, it is obvious that the return migration faces a lot of challenges. According to the ETF survey (Bardak, 2011), only around 30% of the returnees manage to find a job after return and around half of them have the same job before and after migration due to the poor conditions of domestic labor market. In general, the experience of living and working abroad has helped them to have some improvements, being most of the return migrants wage employees, while around 12% have started their own business.

As a general rule, the educated people tend to enjoy a more successful return than less educated people, the later facing a series of difficulties to fit into the Georgian labor market.

In this sense, more support for the creation of employment and job opportunities in terms of job-matching and placement services and labor market management, increasing legal labor circular mobility with a gradual liberalization of entry visas for beneficial migration and sustainable return are necessary.

In 2009, Georgia entered into a mobility partnership with the European Union. Within this frame, the Center for International Migration and Development (CIM), which is promoting cooperation between the German and other Governments in the area of global migration for sustainable development. It is supporting Georgia with a pilot migration project referring to return and circular migration between Germany and Georgia (CIM 2013).

The return migration to Georgia is one of the main tasks of the pilot project “Strengthening the Development Potential of the EU Mobility Partnership in Georgia through targeted Circular Migration and Diaspora Mobilization”. With an estimate of 25 percent of all Georgians living abroad, Diaspora mobilization plays a major part in the frame of this pilot project (CIM 2013).

CIM is offering an information and support on starting up an own business or/and to find a job in Georgia. In addition to placement and advisory services, the program offers financial support to experts interested in returning to Georgia.

The profile of the returned skilled migrants is mainly represented by Georgians who have been educated in Germany in the area of Social Sciences and who are not willing to work as entrepreneurs once back in Georgia (CIM 2013). It is believed that this project will contribute to the improvement of the professional skill’s levels and the country’s and city’s development changes towards effectiveness and innovation.

In 2009 the joint declaration on Mobility Partnership was signed between Georgia and the European Union member states, which promotes among others managing legal labor migration in the form of circular migration equally benefiting migrants, countries of origin and of destination, including the respective societies and individuals.

The hospitality sector in Georgia has a big potential for development. The South Caucasian region has a long history of tourism, which is currently revitalizing after the post-soviet collapse. Tourism is one of the most important areas of the country’s economy,

but a lack of innovative business ideas and a skills shortage are major obstacles to the sector's development (Koroutchev, Iashvili 2015).

3. The European refugee crisis

This section is devoted to the current European refugee crisis, which is one of the major challenges for Europe and the World after the Second World War. According to a recent report of IOM (IOM 2015b), there were about 19.5 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2014. An essential part of them, about 14.4 million, were under the mandate of UNHCR, that is around 2.9 million more compared to the previous year (UNHCR 2015b).

The Dublin Regulation¹ was adopted when the EU did not expect strong arrivals of asylum seekers. However, in 2011, the so-called "Arab Spring" marked the beginning of a significant number of irregular travels across the Mediterranean from Tunisia and Libya towards Italy and Malta, that later increased in magnitude when the political conflict in Syria started. The war in Syria caused over 4 million refugees. The average of about 300.000 refugees per year in the EU during the period 1994-2002, has been replaced by a arrival of asylum seekers, reaching 663.000 in 2014 and almost 1.005.500 at 21 of December of 2015 (IOM 2015a, b). 970.000 refugees arrived in Europe by crossing the Mediterranean. The major part of them have reached Greece and Italy, while Spain, Cyprus and Malta have been less affected (Migration Policy Center 2015, Koroutchev 2015, 2016). Another 30.000 arrived in Bulgaria from Turkey by land.

3.a. The Syrian conflict and the role of the neighboring countries

The conflict in Syria between the government of Bashar al-Assad and other forces, which began in the spring of 2011, together with the appearance of the autodenominated Islamic State in the territories of Syria and Iraq, are the major causes of the massive migration within the countries, through the region and towards Europe. In late 2014, an estimated 7.6 million people were internally displaced and 3.7 million Syrians have left the country since the conflict began. During 2014, more than one million Syrians were registered as refugees in neighboring countries (Ayoub 2014, Oytun 2014). The Syrian conflict has put enormous pressure on neighboring Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (Fig.3). In late 2014, Lebanon, with about 4.8 million of population hosted more than one million Syrian refugees. Similar is the situation in Turkey with more than one and a half milion of registered refugees and in Jordan with more than five hundred thousands of registered refugees.

More than 80% of registered Syrian refugees in the neighboring countries live in communities and cities instead of refugee camps. This arrival of refugees in the urban areas situated mainly in the northern part of Jordan and in Lebanon along the Syrian border has changed the demographics by creating problems of basic services such as water, sanitation, health care, housing, etc (UNDP 2014). Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, the number of refugees in Lebanon has increased by around 25% that let to a collapse of the national health, education, and infrastructure services mainly in the areas of higher concentration of refugees. At the end of 2014, more than the half of the registered Syrian refugees lived in bad conditions without the necessary basic supplies. Similar is the situation in Jordan. Among the Syrian refugees in that country, nearly the half lived in poor sanitary conditions. According to IOM data, in 2015 (IOM 2015a,b), 9 of every 10 Syrian refugees living in Jordan and Lebanon are below the poverty threshold and only half of the children go to school (Lebanon 2014). In Egypt, initially there was a protection program for the Syrian refugees, in terms of health and education, but the later introduction of visa requirements for Syrians in 2013, has reduced significantly the arrivals into the country (Ayoub 2014). Similar was the situation in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, where in the fall of 2013, the authorities stop the issuance of residence permits for Syrian refugees. The situation in Turkey is also dramatic. At the end of 2014, more than 70% of the Syrian refugees live outside refugee camps offered by the government, thus struggling for basic needs such as housing, health care and education (UNHCR 2014). It is believed now that the financial aid from EU to Turkey from March 2016, will improve the living conditions and the access of the refugees to the labor market (EU-Turkey 2016).

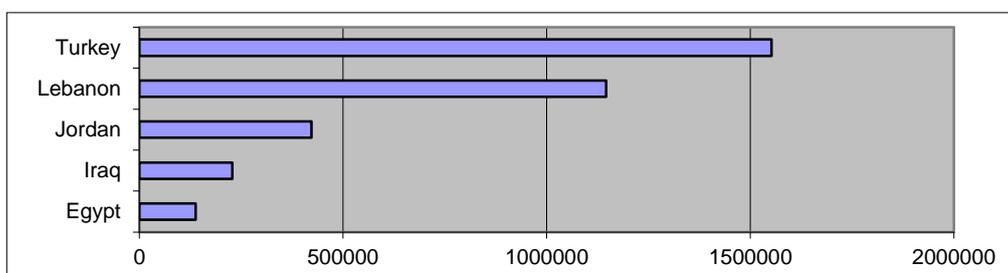


Fig. 3. Registered Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey 2014, Bitoulas (2015) EUROSTAT. Own elaboration.

¹ This Regulation determines the EU Member State responsibility to examine an application for asylum for those migrants seeking international protection under the Geneva Convention and the EU Qualification Directive.

3.b. The asylum seekers in Europe. The Syrian refugees

More than a half million refugees have arrived in Greece and more than 643.000 people have managed to cross the Mediterranean this year. Thousands are finding their way to Germany, Austria and Sweden, with about 10.000 arriving daily in Germany (Fig. 4). During December the number of the people who have arrived in Germany was around 125.000 (IOM 2015b, Bitoulas - Eurostat 2015). This means that the total number of refugee's arrivals in the country at the end of 2015 is of 1.1 million. In comparison, at the end of 2014, their number was 200.000.

Hundreds of thousands of people are still waiting in Turkey. There are about 40,000 people in the path of the Western Balkans on their way from Greece to Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia. According to recent UNHCR data, about 64% of the immigrants are Syrian, 22% are Afghans, and 7% are Iraqi. The number of male refugees, which in summer stood at 80%, has also changed, being in November 2015 of 64%, with 14% of women and 22% of children (Fig. 5), (Bitoulas - Eurostat 2015).

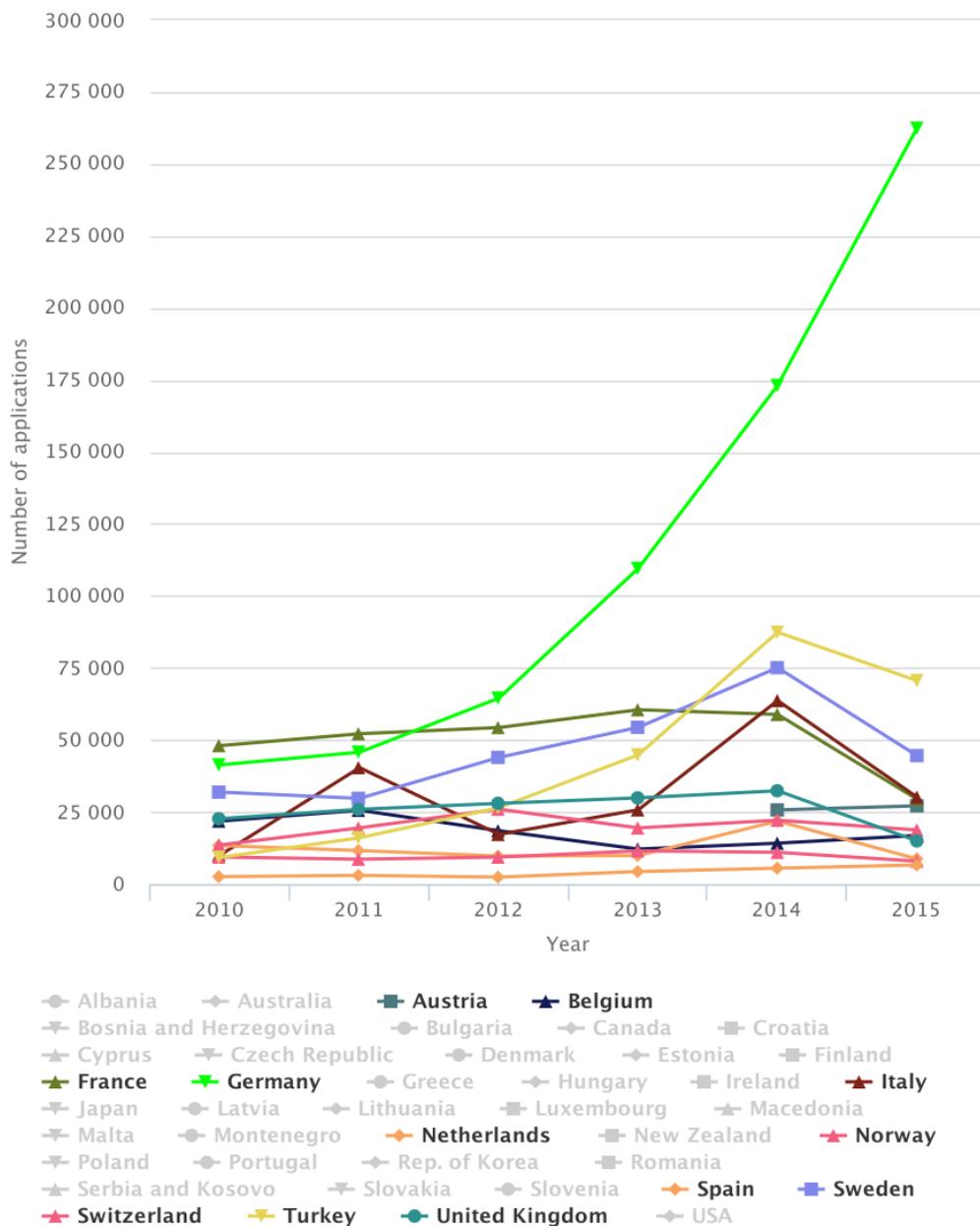


Fig. 4. Number of first asylum applications by countries for the period 2010-2015. <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/migrant-crisis/migrant-crisis-refugees> (December 2015).

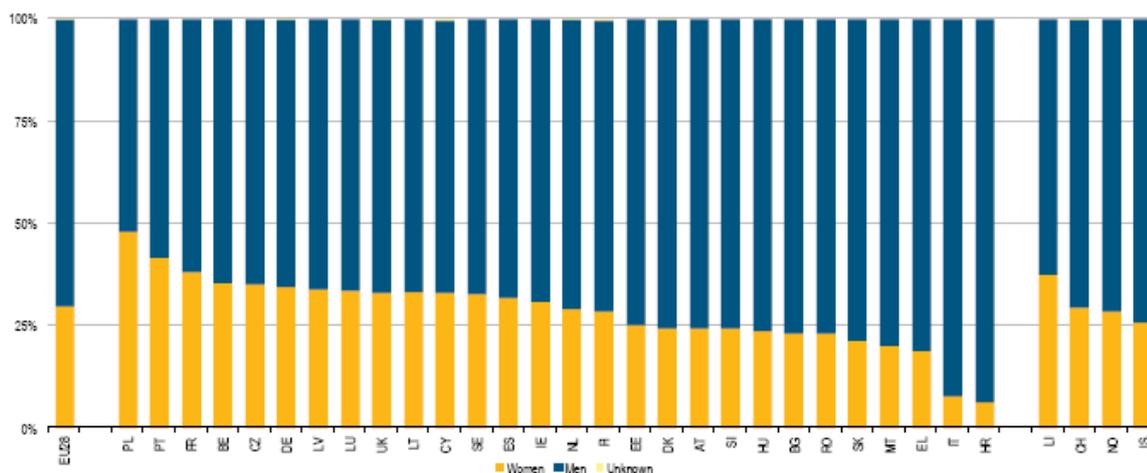


Fig. 5. Asylum applicants in % by gender, 2014 – Bitoulas (2015) EUROSTAT.

In comparison with other European countries, Germany and Sweden received the largest number of asylum applications by Syrian nationals. Between 2012 and 2014, Germany received 61.885 applications for asylum from Syrians and Sweden received 55.210 (German Federal Ministry of the Interior 2014, Government of Sweden 2014). In contrast to Germany and Sweden, the number of Syrians seeking asylum in the United Kingdom and the United States was modest, being respectively 5.739 and 5.280.

There are several reasons for the difference in the number of asylum seekers, mainly due to family ties, location, and administrative procedures. Sweden and Germany are generally considered among Syrian asylum seekers safe countries, giving opportunities for jobs and settlement for a long-time term. The refugees receive in these two countries housing maintenance and support for integration into the labor market. These opportunities are more reduced in countries like, for example, Greece, which is suffering important consequences of the current economic crisis. However, the last months events and the agreement with Turkey have changes this policy, converting Greece as a hot spot for refugee's arrivals. Nowadays, more than 40.000 refugees are waiting in Greece to be redistributed in the rest of the EU countries, according to that agreement.

Many of the refugees are young, educated and skilled and could help the European countries with their knowledge and experience if they really want to integrate and live peacefully. This is a challenge for Europe as many European countries have an aging population.

Conclusions

In this paper we have studied the recent Bulgarian and Georgian transformations related to the countries development and migration policies. We have done a detailed analysis of the current economic and social situation in Georgia and the role of the migration processes with an emphasis on the skilled migration and its contribution to the city's and country's development. Similar results have been also presented in the case of Bulgaria, which after his adhesion to the EU becomes to transform into country of destination.

Finally we have given a short overview of the current refugee's crisis and the challenges that Europe is facing with respect to aging, labor market and opportunities or imported skills.

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