

# The Return of the Exotic Birds

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## Understanding the role of the governmental authorities in the process of brain gain in Bulgaria



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## Abstract

One of the integral and significant elements in the cycle of migration is return migration, also known as *brain gain*, a phenomenon on the rise in Bulgaria. Despite its growing relevance, limited research has been conducted to understand the decision-making processes and dynamics behind migrants' return. There is also limited research on the effectiveness of policies and programs in attracting reverse migration, and the focus is shifted away from the opinion of the emigrants, resulting in a top-down approach. This thesis aims to understand what the stimuli behind the decisions of returning are and how these stimuli are understood by the government and reflected in its initiatives. To do so, this thesis takes the *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* as a case study and discusses them through a bottom-up approach. By learning from first-hand experience on the decision-making processes and finding how it relates or not to its programs, the government could point out the weakness of similar programs and improve its actions in the future. The theoretical framework introduces the prospect theory and the *Return Preparation* illustration. While the methodological tools are qualitative research based on eleven semi-structured in-depth interviews and the *realist evaluation approach*. The research concludes that reasons which encourage emigrants' return are grouped under the dimensions of *the job and economic conditions, social network, and personal aspiration*. The first appears to be the base-stone for the return. The governmental programs and initiatives, however, appear to be of little importance to emigrants' return. Although they fall under the category of *jobs and economic conditions, and social networks*, they do not match the needs of the returnees. As a result, this study emphasizes the importance of the bottom-up approach in studying brain gain. The results call for open communication between the target group and the authorities in charge.

**Key words:** brain gain, brain drain, return migration, prospect theory, *Return Preparation illustration, realist evaluation approach*, bottom-up approach, policies, Bulgaria,

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## Introduction

International migration is a complex phenomenon analyzed from various perspectives, scientific areas, and research fields. Nowadays, according to Misheva (2021), a debate around migration studies is how migration trajectories and dynamics influence societies, both sending and receiving ones. One of the relevant trends in migration and development over the last two decades to this debate is the flow in and out of skilled and talented migrants (Bollard et al., 2011). Robin and colleagues (2017) argue that there is a global competition for ‘talent’. Bulgaria is among Europe's countries with the largest export of intellect (Ivanova, 2015). In 2017, the United Nations declared the country the “world’s fastest-shrinking country” with predictions that its population will gradually decrease from 7.2 million to 5.2 million people by 2050 if current trends of negative population growth and high emigration continue (Robin et al., 2017). Both Stoilkova (2015) and Deegan (2018) state that there is a driver in Bulgaria called the culture of leaving, which suggests that emigration is the most secure way to achieve success. In fact, the percentage of student mobility in Bulgaria is among the highest in the European Union (Makni, 2010). As a result, the country faces a decreasing gross rate of student enrollment. Professionals and students see work and study emigration as a promising avenue for income and personal advancement. In recent years, however, one of the integral and significant elements in the cycle of international migration is return migration, also known as ‘brain gain’ (Debnath, 2016) which has also been growing in Bulgaria.

### 1.1. Problem statement

The term ‘brain gain’ is a relatively new term, coined in the 1990s to describe the attempts, efforts, programs, and projects aimed to draw scientific workers having previously emigrated back to a given country (Jałowiecki & Gorzelak, 2007). In recent years, ‘brain gain’ has received increased focus from host and source countries, as both actors are interested in leveraging return migration to their economic advantage (Debnath, 2016). As a result, over the past several decades, many source countries have focused their immigration policy on attracting highly educated and skilled emigrants back to their countries of origin (Banerjee et al., 2018). However, despite the growing relevance and attention to brain gain, Debnath (2016) states that limited research has been conducted to understand the decision-making processes and dynamics behind migrants’ return. There is also limited research on the effectiveness of policies and programs in attracting reverse migration (Debnath, 2016; Czaika & De Haas, 2013; De Haas, 2012). These limitations create difficulties in understanding how brain gain is produced and

sustained. Although the outcomes of brain gain seem to be desired by the authorities, it appears that little is known about the process.

The topic of bringing migrants back to Bulgaria has also been present on the local political and societal levels. Students and professionals returning to Bulgaria from abroad are seen as an essential element for the economic and social development of the country since they can re-invest the skills and knowledge they acquired while studying abroad (Glorius, 2019). However, returning workers face criticism rather than support for choosing to return to their country of origin. In a local newspaper the author refers to the returnees as *екзотични птици* or *exotic birds* (Capital, 2015). The society welcomes them with “Are you crazy?” instead of “Welcome, we’ve been waiting for you [to return]”. According to the general assumption among Bulgarians, as Capital explains, the opportunities for success and prosperity at home are not comparable to the ones abroad.

After acceding to the European Union in 2007, the Bulgarian parliament started designing policies and projects to attract reverse emigration (Krasteva, 2019). These policies show continuous efforts to attract highly qualified Bulgarians who live abroad since this is seen as a possible answer to boost the Bulgarian economy and demographics. Two of the latest projects that the government carried out up to 2021 are the project *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and a subsidy package from the *National EURES Network*. The first one deals with the preparation of analyses of the state of the young Bulgarian emigrants and the challenges they face. The program also tackles the analysis of the attitudes of young emigrants, and organises summer internships for students and young professionals from abroad in Bulgarian state institutions. Furthermore, it promotes the attraction of Bulgarian youth and business organizations from abroad to consulting and direct business relations with Bulgarian partners (National Strategy for Migration, Shelter, and Integration 2011-2020). The second one offers financial support of BGN 1,200 (approximately 650 euros) per month for the duration of a year, as well as other services, including the following:

- i) the provision of funds to cover the rent for a period of up to one year if the applicant starts working in a settlement where they do not own a home
- ii) a babysitter
- iii) a voucher for a language course if a family member does not speak Bulgarian or needs an additional qualification (State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, 2019).

However, regardless of the existence of programs and policies, Bulgaria also experiences the struggles of little to no understanding of what motivates people to return and how these



reasons are reflected in policies and programs carried out by the local authorities (Markova, 2010). Consequently, there is limited or no research on to what extent the Bulgarian policies and programs match the needs of emigrants (Deegan, 2018; Burgees, 2014). In addition, the focus is shifted away from the emigrants' involvement, and the approach taken is top-down rather than bottom-up where agencies are given to the potential returnee migrants.

## 1.2. Aim of the research and Research Question

This thesis project aims to shift the focus on the emigrants and their agency in the process of designing return migration. It will investigate the different perspectives of 'brain gain' and the government intervention by the proposed programs, through the positionality of highly educated and skilled emigrants. It aims to understand what the stimuli are behind their decisions of returning and how these stimuli are understood by the government and reflected in the initiatives it carries out. Therefore, the research question is:

“To what extent do the initiatives from *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* match the needs of professionals who have returned back to Bulgaria?”

Hence, this thesis aims to analyze if the initiatives from these two projects are a way to encourage highly skilled Bulgarian immigrants to return and start a career there. The research question raises three supporting sub-questions:

- i. What are the factors that encourage the highly skilled emigrants to return?
- ii. How do these factors match with the programs' initiatives?
- iii. What improvements can be made in the programs' initiatives to fit with the stimulus and needs of professionals who returned to Bulgaria?

## 1.3. Relevance

A rising number of emigrants are settling into mobility (de Wenden, 2017) rather than a permanent decision of life at home or abroad. Their migration trajectories are not final and are often transformed. Examples include educational mobility, which can grow into temporary work abroad or permanent establishment and realization in the homeland. Hence, it is complex to pinpoint a collection of reasons for whether one returns. According to Garrote-Sanchez et al.

(2021), a combination of economic and non-economic reasons determines return. Research on return suggest that factors such as a feeling nostalgic or missing family play a role in the return decision, while the economic pull factors such as better professional opportunities in Bulgaria are only a minor influence. However, the majority of public and policy concern in the sending countries tends to focus on the relevance of the potential negative impacts on employment and wages, suggesting that it is a matter of supply and demand in regards to job opportunities (Portes, 2019). For instance, better incomes are the main reason Bulgarians decide to leave or return home (Ivanova, 2015). In other words, the policy that has been designed to attract the brain gain focuses on economic opportunities and ignores the non-economical social aspects of return migration. Since the economic causes of migration are confirmed by several sociological studies (Portes, 2019), the policies tend to focus on higher payment, standards of living, and opportunities for better realization. In general, it seems that detailed migration data for Bulgaria is very limited (Garrote-Sanchez et al., 2021). Moreover, there is limited involvement of the voice of the returnees when it comes to designing a policy on this theme (Garrote-Sanchez et al., 2021; Nyberg–Sørensen et al., 2002). The returnees' voice is not involved in the policies targeting the increase of their return. The combination of non-suitable targets, the limited bottom-up approaches, and the lack of data creates the proposition for defective policies.

Therefore, building upon these findings, this study contributes to the existing literature gap by providing a voice to the target group by discussing the institutional contexts and practices on migration, development, and needs. The opinion of the returnees can provide an understanding of why the economic-focused policies offered by the government of Bulgaria are not successful. This knowledge is essential since it can provide an understanding of the importance of people's motivation in the process of making migration-related decisions. The bottom-up analysis of brain gain policies allows for additional identification of some important aspects of the migration process of young and highly skilled people in Bulgaria and how this relates to long-term development. Such an analysis appears to be missing in political and academic scenes. Filling up the missing theoretical literature gap could become useful in drafting future policies and practices, which potentially would be able to demonstrate beneficial socioeconomic results for the Republic of Bulgaria.

From a societal point of view, the research leads to an understanding of the needs of migrants on the bottom-up level. In this way, the migrants can have a voice in designing policies and programs that directly affect them (Doss, 2013). In other words, the returnees are given agency on policies affecting the decision-making process for their lives. By learning from first-

hand experience on the decision-making processes and finding how it relates or not to the programs, the government could point out the weakness of similar programs and eventually improve its actions in the future. This bottom-up approach sets the direction for outlining trends and effects of intellectual migration (de Haas, 2008). Such a direction allows for identifying possible flows in the already finished policies and projects. These actions could result in more productive and successful approaches toward brain gain. In this way, both social and economic understanding and practice of development can also be taken into consideration in the Bulgarian context. The emigration flows in terms of age and skill levels leads to accelerated demographic aging and a lack of a skilled labor force. Such trends have negative consequences on economic prosperity and competitiveness (Glorius, 2019; Makni, 2011), which is also harmful to the long-term development of a given state. Hence, the research focus is relevant for development because educated people are a supply of innovators needed to drive economic growth and social change (Banerjee et al., 2018). Highly skilled emigrants and returnees are recognized as agents of economic, social, and democratic capital and play an important role in democratic consolidation. This directly affects the overall development of the countries of origin (Ivanova, 2021; Krusteva, 2014; Horvat, 2004;).

#### 1.4. Structure of research

The first part of this thesis presents the theoretical context through a literature review and the theoretical framework. The chapter provides a broader understanding of the concept and characteristics of ‘brain gain’, and the relevant theoretical concepts such as prospect theory and *Return Preparation* illustration. Chapter two presents the local context. The chapter zooms into the issue of migration within the context of Bulgaria. The next chapter elaborates on the methodological tools used for conducting the research and analyzing the data. In chapter four, the results from the interviews are presented. The results are followed by a discussion that analyzes and interprets the results based on the literature and the conceptual framework. The thesis is finalized with suggestions for improving future brain gain policies based on the needs of returnees, and the conclusion part answers the research question and provides suggestions for future research on the theme of brain gain.

## Literature and Theoretical framework

This chapter elaborates on the theoretical characteristics of brain gain, the factors that influence the decision-making process of whether emigrants return or not, and how these factors relate to policy and programs. The chapter presents relevant theoretical concepts by introducing the literature background of brain gain and prospect theory. It further discusses the characteristics of *the Return Preparation* illustration and how it relates to the concept of return migration. Lastly, it presents the conceptual model that guides this research by providing a visual representation of theoretical constructs and variables.

### 2.1. Background

Data on migration trends suggest a steep increase in the proportion of high-skilled emigration to total migration (Robin et al., 2017). This phenomenon is known as ‘*brain drain*’. In the economic literature, *brain drain* is defined as the proportion of the tertiary educated and talented population that has emigrated from a country (Docquier et al., 2007). For instance, in 2019, the World Education Project announced that about 15% of high school graduates continue to study at foreign universities (Misheva, 2021). The most debated issue regarding brain drain is ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ at national or subnational levels. Li, McHale, Zhou (2016), Dodani & LaPorte (2005) argue that brain drain leads to a direct loss for source countries. This is the case because some talented students and highly educated professionals are the compositions of the country’s human capital (Rajbhandari & Dotzel, 2017). Educated people are often seen as a supply of innovators needed to drive economic growth and social change. In this way, the source country loses human capital through permanent or long-term emigration. The loss of this supply is an indication that countries of origin are the ones who lose the most, and by default, the hosting countries are the ones that win (Robin et al., 2017).

However, Beine et al. (2008) and Marsh & Oyelere (2017) suggest that whether or not the emigration of talent is a gain or loss for source countries depends in large part on the ‘return’ trajectories of the emigrants. Hence, the discussions on brain drain lead to the debate on *brain gain*. The term brain gain is relatively new as it was coined in the 1990s to describe the attempts to draw scientific workers back to a given country (Jałowicki & Gorzelak, 2007). Some economists hypothesize that skilled emigration may lead to ‘brain gain’ for source countries under certain conditions (Robin et al., 2017). Return migration leads to more development for the country of origin in the long run as the return migrants bring home three types of capital accumulated in the destination countries (OECD, 2017):

- i. *financial capital* – can be invested in business start-ups and to boost selfemployment. This also includes the process of narrowing the technological gap between the host and source economies.
- ii. *human capital* - can mitigate the possible negative effects of emigration of the highly skilled.
- iii. *social capital* - can have a wide-ranging spill-over effect through the transfer of norms.

Misheva (2021) explains that studies on *brain drain* focus on two components leading to development: political ideas and social norms. Hendricks (2002) and Marsh & Oyelere (2017) state that educated emigrants and international students are the conduits of human capital transfer. During their higher education and/or work in developing countries, people gain skills and knowledge which might be difficult to obtain in their country of origin (Wiers-Jenssen, 2007). In other words, the years spent abroad expand the capabilities of people. This can be transformed into benefits for the source country if people decide to migrate back and use their skills and knowledge there. The greater the human capital, the greater the well-being of countries in terms of productivity and innovation (Hendricks, 2002). Brain gain also results in *intangible resources* such as technology, ideas, creativity and innovation, and human talent (Siekierski et al., 2018). Human talent is crucial to development because it consists of political stands and social norms, such as views on human rights. Returning migrants could pass on ideas and demand for political accountability and increase direct participation in the political system (Wahba, 2015). Achieving political stability decreases the risk of civil wars, criminal violence, and terrorism and increases the chances of better standards of life (World Bank, 2011). This was documented in this year's World Bank World Development Report. When migrants return, they transfer financial and human capital accumulated abroad. However, whether the home country can benefit from the return and the skills depends on the home country's ability to make use of the returnees' skills and investments (Wahba, 2015). To benefit from returnees, home countries need political accountability and returnees' participation in the political system. Therefore, when professionals and students who graduated from their higher education abroad return home, they transfer not only technology, knowledge, and social capital, but also management, leadership, and governance knowledge. These ideas and trends are of high economic worth, which results in long-term development (Siekierski et al., 2018). This leads to a spillover effect, meaning less people emigrate and more emigrants return (Misheva, 2021).

When it comes to ‘brain gain’ policies, states mainly focus on factors that first revolve around economic growth and wealth, job opportunities, and quality of life (Straubhaar, 2008). The push and pull factors that explain the reasons behind the migration of professionals can provide an explanation for whether and when students and professionals return to their home countries. In other words, source countries need to have sufficient economic dynamics to absorb and utilize the potential talent of students who return (Bakalova & Misheva, 2018) 2 ). For instance, Marsh & Oyelere (2017) suggest that the ‘Asian Tigers’ are an example of the benefits of brain gain and well-planned efforts. It has been recorded that after decades of brain drain, brain gain brought capacity for innovation and productivity when the outflow of talent turns homeward with state-of-the-art skills, capital, and international connections (Marsh & Oyelere (2017).

However, transforming brain drain into brain gain is not an easy task. In fact, as literature shows (Oishi, 2012; Kofman, 2013; Mavroudi & Warren, 2013), not many policies have achieved their goal of attracting highly skilled migrants back to their country of origin. Brain gain usually requires planned efforts to attract professionals to a given country or organization. Miryam (2017) argues that two of the reasons why return migration policies tend to fail is because states are not able to implicate and sustain a policy regarding emigration and return migration. Another reason Miryam (2017) sees is that there is still a lack of data necessary to understand return emigration patterns well enough to formulate an informed policy. Coniglio & Brzozowski (2016) also state that public institutions at the regional level might play a role in facilitating burdensome administrative practices such as the certifications of diplomas and skills acquired abroad. There is also limited or no research on to what extent the policies match the needs of emigrants (Czaika, De Haas, 2013). In general, the failure of these types of interventions is due to pragmatic reasons. In other words, the focus is shifted away from the emigrants. The approach that has been implemented so far has been top-down rather than bottom-up. The lack of involvement of the emigrants contributes to the difficulty of creating and maintaining a successful policy.

## 2.2. Theory

This chapter introduces the concepts crucial to the composition of the research. It looks into the factors that bring to the decision-making process of whether one migrates back to their country of origin. Further, the theoretical framework chapter presents how these factors relate to the phenomenon of brain gain. This is presented through the introduction of prospect theory and the return preparation model.

### 2.2.1. Factors influence the decision-taking process

Return migration has been subject to various approaches and theoretical conceptualizations. Some examples include propositions stemming from neoclassical economics, the new economics of labor migration, structuralism, transnationalism, and social network theory (Cassarino, 2004). Most often, in the classical economic literature (Todaro, 1969; Harris and Todaro, 1970; Sjaastad, 1962), the explanation behind migration trajectories refers to neoclassical models and the new economics of labor migration. These theoretical explanations refer directly or indirectly to the rational decision-making of agents. These are the assumptions that migrants choose a particular destination because this destination is preferred to another destination if migration to that other destination was both possible and affordable (Czaika, 2015). However, in reality, neither the preferences for migration options nor migrants' needs are identical. As a result, according to Dragneva and Hristova (2018), when talking about the government's views and the returnees' views on policies, there is a theoretical mismatch due to the different needs of both groups. However, there is still a need to know who returns and in what specific social and institutional circumstances.

According to Crescenzi et al. (2015), the drivers of return migration can be organized around three categories: *jobs and economic conditions*, *creative class environmental factors*, and *social networks*.

- i. *jobs and economic conditions* - this dimension is explained by the standard neoclassical economic framework. The framework is constructed by the Human Capital Theory (Sjaastad 1962) and the model of cost-benefit analysis (Borjas 1990). It explains that individuals migrate where they can best maximize their earning potential. In these models, migrants appear to be rational actors seeking the best return on their investment (Crescenzi et al., 2015). This category can be influenced by the policies that the government applies to increase the return migration. Hence, decisions on returning to migration depend on the economic benefits and success of the country of origin.
- ii. *creative class environmental factors* – this dimension is explained by Florida (2004) and Florida et al. (2008). This factor refers to the fact that some representatives of highly skilled individuals migrate - whether back to the source country or another destination - based on the values the place holds. This is the ability of some places to offer open-mindedness, diversity, tolerance, and be a progressive place (Crescenzi et al., 2015). Such attitudes allow people to be themselves and mobilize and attract the so-called *creative energy* (Florida, 2004).

iii. *social networks* – refer to the factor of transnationalism (Haug 2008; Silvey and Lawson 1999). This phenomenon refers to the idea that highly skilled migrants keep social and cultural ties in both the destination and the source country (Portes 2000). This implies that based on the social network migrants have back in their home countries, they can decide whether they would like to return or not. This applies to having family friends or close ones in the country of origin can influence the decision to return.

Another factor discussed by scholars in the literature on return migration is *personal aspirations*:

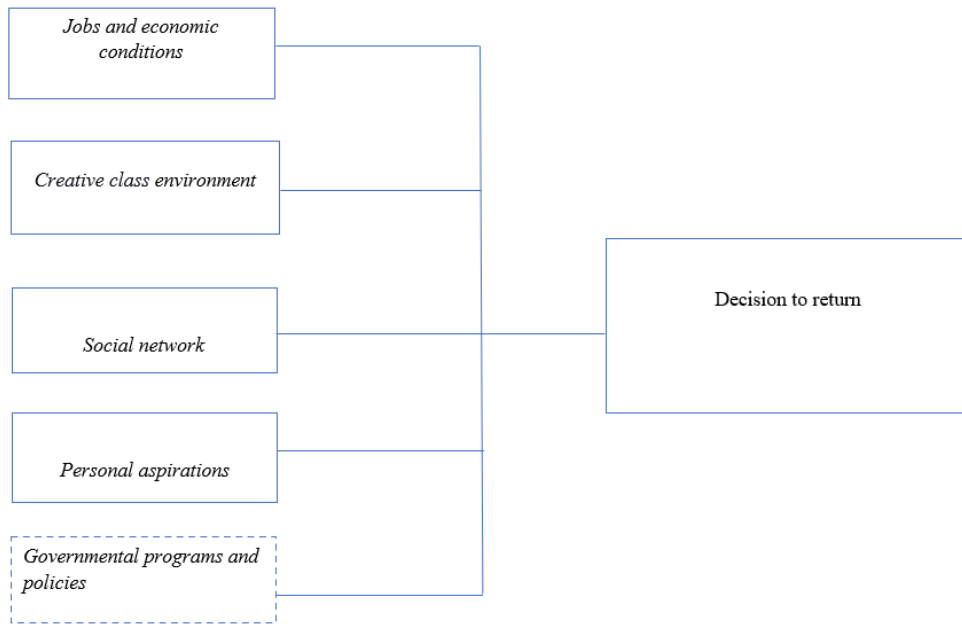
iv. *personal aspirations* - Sinatti (2012) explains that current research shows that return migration is marked by different temporalities, outcomes, personal goals. Papanusso and Ambrosetti (2017) and Boccagni (2017) describe aspirations as the emotional representations of what one's future might and should look like. This includes the nostalgic memory of the place where they grew up, which is generally associated with positive memories. This feeling of nostalgia is stimulated by constant communication with relatives and vocational traveling to and from the home country. Personal aspirations extend to goals, values, a sense of belonging, looking for a different lifestyle, etc.

According to the literature discussed thus far, brain gain is stimulated by push and pull factors that can be qualified under the aforementioned dimensions but also governmental interventions. As presented by Debnath (2016), governments are actively investing in influencing the emigrants' decisions to return. Thus, governmental efforts can also be considered as a fifth dimension in the return decision-making process. Technically, the decision to return to the country of origin after emigration is encouraged by factors such as a new job, societal values, family, nostalgia, or offers by the government. They fall under the classification of the suggested dimensions. *Figure 1* illustrates the relation.



**Figure 1**

*Dimensions influencing the process of decision-making process of return*



However, as discussed by Straubhaar (2008) brain gain interventions mainly focus on factors that first revolve around economic growth and wealth, job opportunities, and quality of life. The box *Governmental programs and policies* are illustrated in a different type of box because they undertake initiatives that can fall under the title and supervision of the other four dimensions. Returning home can be considered an investment project, and realizing this project is based on information and prospects about the future. Thus, the reasons for motivation to return within the context of the brain gain phenomenon are not just economic, but also non-economic reasons such as values, identity, and other reasons that are essential on the individual level established within the scope of the four dimensions.

### 2.2.2. Prospect theory

A relevant theory that could reach both theoretical concepts and involve the practical aspect of the issue is the *prospect theory*. The theory questions the assumption that because, by definition, rational decision-makers, in this case both the government and the target group of migrants, know what they will like, the experienced utility of outcomes can be inferred from the decision utility (Clark & Lisowski, 2017). Simplified, prospect theory's central finding is that individuals' attitude toward decisions depends on whether they face losses or gains (Vis, 2011). The theory assumes that losses and gains are valued differently, so individuals make decisions based on perceived gains instead of perceived losses. This theory suggests that the losses and gains of highly educated and talented migrants returning to their country of origin are valued differently by the government and the migrants themselves and vary from emigrant to emigrant. The source countries benefit from the returning resources of skills acquired abroad

by migrants, and workforce renewal, which are seen to result in improved conditions in the source country (Sinatti, 2015), while the benefits for the migrants extend to psychological, social, and economic benefits. For instance, return migration and brain gain allow migrants to be close to their families. It also allows the one who has accumulated savings abroad to ease credit constraints at home and set up a business, and because of their broad human capital, they may earn higher wages when they return (Wahba, 2015).

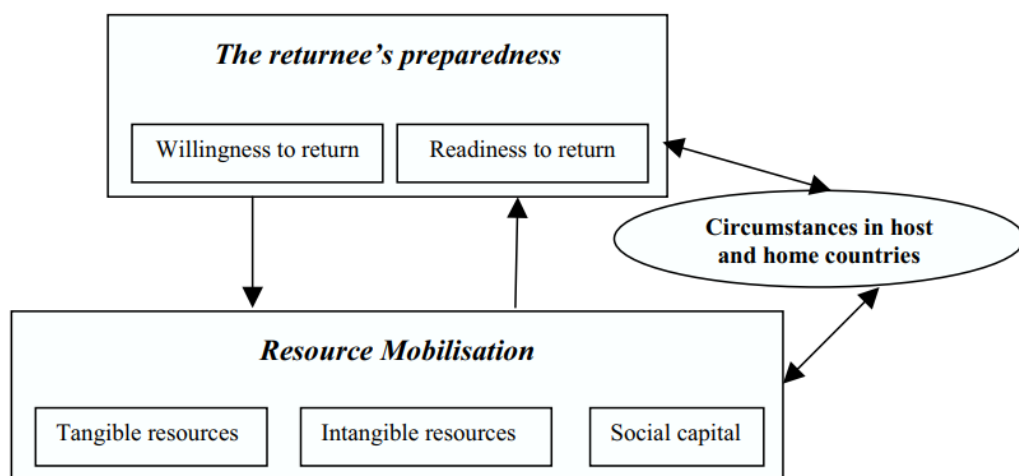
In migration studies, the prospect theory behavioral model is essential because it shows that people's choices are based not only on money values but on the psychological values of outcomes, which is likely true in migration decisions (Clark & Lisowski, 2017). This theory follows that an individual's background is essential in understanding what choice they will make when faced with any expected utilities generated based on known probabilities (Mishra, 2014). This implies that probably two people will not make the same choice or will have a different approach in choosing even when they face the same expected utilities. This will be the case because their reference points are different. The theory suggests that migrants are likely to take their individual background experiences when they face the choice of returning to their country of origin (Clark & Lisowski, 2017). Because individuals are different, they are expected to examine the benefits of policies and programs and their outcomes in different ways based on their reference points. Levy (1992) argues that people think in terms of gains and losses, not in terms of absolute wealth.

Therefore, it is the gains and losses relative to a reference level that matter, and in the case of residential mobility, the reference level is the status quo. According to Vis (2019), if the gains are confronting gains, individuals are risk-averse in their decision-making, while if confronting losses, people are likely to be risk-accepting. If any of the return migration stimuli are perceived by the migrants as something that will benefit them, then they are more likely to take the risk of returning home. Understanding these patterns can be one of the explanations for why the factors and their examples, such as governmental programs do not meet the set goals of encouraging emigrants to return to the source country. Thus, the prospect theory allows for the multilevel consideration of whether the programs as a part of the multiple decision-making factors are successful or not because actors, both governments and emigrants, make or do not particular decisions in response to the programs themselves.

### 2.2.3. Return preparation illustration

Prospect theory also includes the conceptual idea that the propensity of migrants to become actors of brain gain and result in development at home depends on the extent to which the migrants have provided for the preparation of their return. According to Cassarino (2004) and Haase & Honerath (2016), return preparation requires willingness and readiness to return. Figure 2 illustrates that return is not only a voluntary act but also a combination of resource mobilization and preparedness. The illustration summarizes the extent to which return is a voluntary act and the extent to which the returnee can mobilize adequate resources to facilitate a successful return (van Meeteren et al., 2014).

**Figure 2**  
*Return Preparation,*  
(Cassarino, 2004)



Apart from resources before leaving their origin country, such as *social capital*, resource mobilization draws on *tangible resources* such as financial capital and intangible resources such as contacts, relationships, skills, and acquaintances that have been mobilized during the migration experience abroad (Cassarino (2004). *Tangible and intangible resources* and *social capital* affect the readiness of an individual, while the willingness to influence the *tangible, intangible resources* and *social capital* effect needed for return migration. Both willingness and readiness are the foundation of the preparedness for the actual return. These two factors are influenced by the circumstances in host and source countries. Preparedness contributes not only to the willingness of migrants to return home but also to their readiness to return. This is a voluntary act that is assisted by the gathering of sufficient resources and information about post-return conditions at home (Cassarino (2004). Hence, resource mobilization and readiness are influenced by structural factors that largely depend on local circumstances, and usually reflect the levels of economic and social development (Haase & Honerath, 2016). The factors in the home countries that Crescenzi et al. (2015) explain to be the drivers of return migration are: *jobs and economic conditions, creative class environmental factors, social*

*networks*, and *personal aspiration*. However, as prospect theory suggests, resource mobilization and preparedness patterns vary with the experiences of migration of the returnees as well as with their social backgrounds.

### 2.3. Main concepts

The discussion of literature and theory available on brain gain and the components of the returning decision-making process emphasizes the main concepts of this research. These essential components are *return migration*, *the decision-making process*, *gains and losses*, *jobs and economic conditions*, *creative class environmental factors*, *social networks*, *personal aspirations*, and returning migrants' preparedness. These key concepts highlight the connection between the theory and the practical understanding of how brain gain is sustained and attracted to the country of origin. It allows for an overview of the factors that attract people to return, and how they are represented in governmental intervention. These terms are relevant for understanding to what extent the policy and programs correspond to the needs of young professionals who returned to their country of origin. The context of these concepts is incorporated with the theoretical understanding and implementation of prospect theory, and the factors that influence the process of return migration. In the following chapter *Methodology*, they will be contextualized, and their relevance will be implicated in the current research study and the case of Bulgaria.

### 2.4. Conceptual model

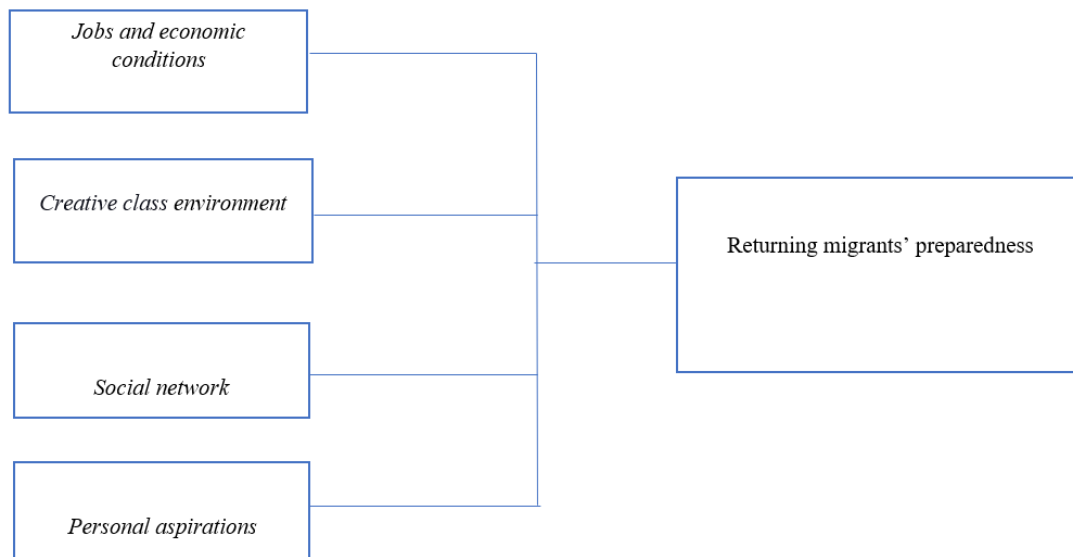
The theoretical framework presents a combination of tools that assist the understanding what the reasons that influence the return migration are. The theoretical framework highlighted five dimensions that encourage return migration, but in this research, the dimension of *Governmental programs and policies* is not seen as an individual aspect but is implemented in the other four dimensions. The literature review explained that programs and policies mostly focus on providing economic benefits or knowledge, which can go into either *social networks* or *personal aspirations* dimensions. These four dimensions expose a direct look at the motives behind the return, which directly answers what the needs of highly skilled emigrants are. The *Return preparation* illustration provides more aspects of the returnee's preparedness to return that elaborates on external factors such as pull and push factors in both sending and receiving counties. This tool aligns with the four dimensions because the aspect of *Resource mobilization* falls under the categories of the four dimensions. Social capital can be a part of social networks, while *tangible sources* fall under *jobs and economic conditions*, *intangible*

*sources* can also fall under *social networks, creative class environment, and personal aspirations*. This implies that the four dimensions can influence the returning migrants' preparedness.

In order further to present a clearer and simplified identification of how the theoretical framework explores the issue of brain gain and the specific case study, this research thesis is assisted with a conceptual framework. The main focus of this research study is to investigate the different factors that influence brain gain in Bulgaria, through government intervention and the positionality of the returnees towards those initiatives. The conceptual model can take into account both the theory and practice behind this mechanism. This conceptual model aims to visualize the research goal of this study. The conceptual model visualizes the emigrants' agency and the different perspectives of 'brain gain' and government intervention.

**Figure 3**

*Conceptual model*



The model portrays the connection between the decision to return and the factors that influence this decision. By understanding this connection, the model allows for reflecting on how relevant each factor is to the return of emigrants. This understanding contributes to the reflection of the extent to which the two programs of the Bulgarian government match the needs in terms of preparedness of the returnees. Such flexibility provides space for answering the research question and the following sub-questions since it further allows for including other factors indicated as a contributor to the process of returning to Bulgaria. In this way, the research will allow for more room for full expression of what migrants need to return and stay in Bulgaria. Further, this conceptual model incorporates the main assumption of prospect theory because it represents that people's choices are based not only on money values but on the psychological values of outcomes (Clark & Lisowski, 2017). The conceptual model allows for

following the importance of the individual's background to strengthen the understanding of what choices influence the returning migrants' preparedness. In other words, the model expands the frame of understanding of what creates and sustains brain gain for Bulgaria. By understanding the full scope of people's needs, this research can provide suggestions for improving policies and strategies through the perspective of the bottom-up approach.

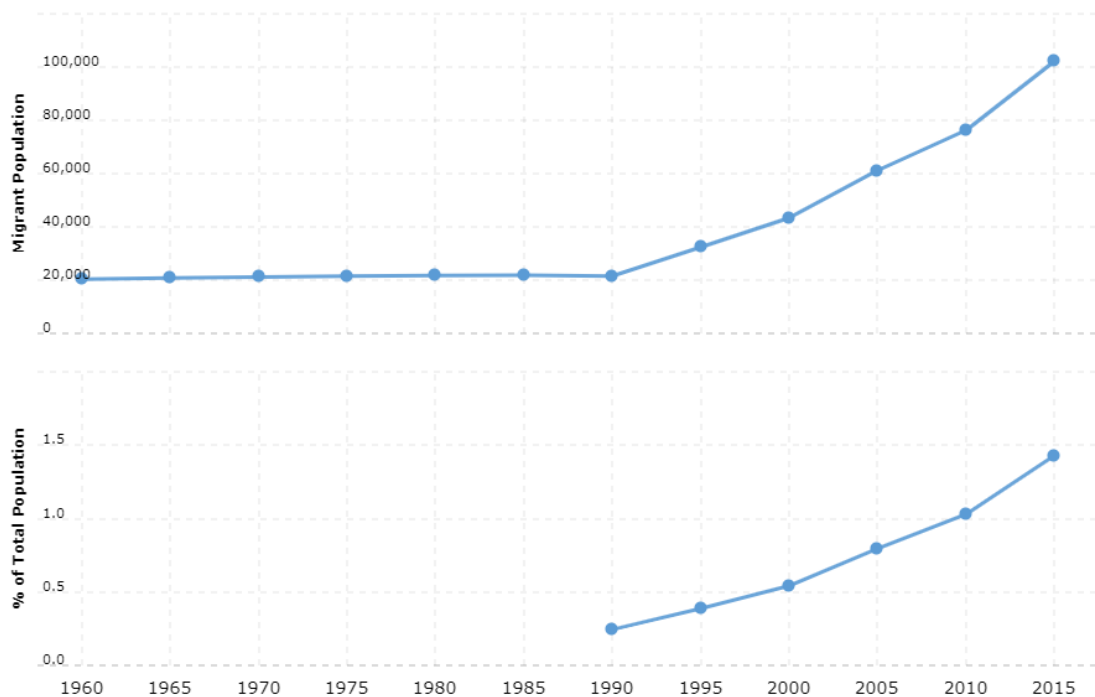
## Local Context

### 3.1. Background

While there is much discussion of *brain drain* and *brain gain* from developing countries in Asia and Africa, less is said about the movement of Eastern European migrants to countries in Western Europe (Robin et al., 2017). According to the journal of *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (2015), Bulgaria suffered the most from brain drain among all of the Eastern European countries. Over the past 28 years, it has been estimated that over 1 million Bulgarians left the country and resettled abroad, whether permanently or temporarily (Deegan, 2018). As depicted in *Graph 1*, the Bulgarian immigration number for 2015 was 102,113.00, a 33.85% increase from 2010, and for 2010 was 76,287.00, which was a 24.91% increase from 2005.

**Graph 1**

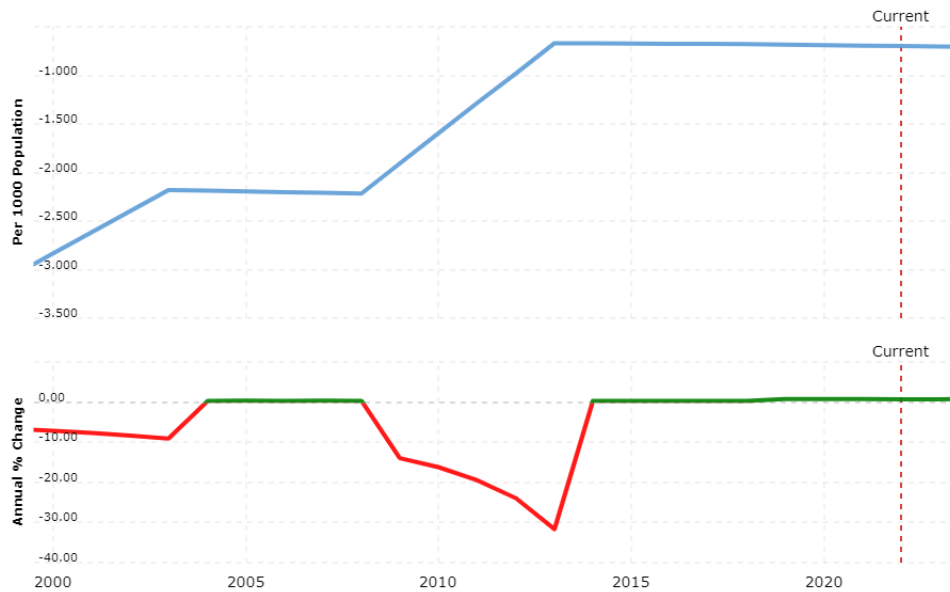
Bulgaria  
Immigration  
Statistics 1960-  
2015  
(Macrotrends,  
2021)



*Graph 2* illustrates the net migration rate for the past 20 years has been fluctuating but has always been a negative figure. The current net migration rate for Bulgaria in 2022 is -0.699 per 1000 population, a 0.72% increase from 2021. While the net migration rate for Bulgaria in 2019 was -0.684 per 1000 population, a 0.74% increase from 2018. Figures below 0 indicate that the number of immigrants is smaller than the number of emigrants, and although in the past year the number of emigrants seems to be decreasing, Bulgaria is still facing the issue of a significant number of people leaving the country.

## Graph 2

The Bulgaria net migration rate from 2000 to 2022, (Macrotrends 2022)



Graphs 1 and 2 depict a peak in emigration around 2007, the year Bulgaria joined the European Union. According to Glorius (2021), since 2007, Bulgaria has had the highest share of students studying outside the country of all EU member states. The Sofia Airport is known as *Vrazhdebna*, meaning *hostile*, because it is a symbolic reference point to the epitomizing Bulgarian youth's urge to migrate (Genova, 2015). The reasons, why Bulgarians decide to emigrate, vary from low-skilled job opportunities to attending universities or pursuing careers in different countries around the globe. Deegan (2018) also suggests that people generally expressed mistrust and dissatisfaction with the government. Stoilkova (2015) further explains that factors of emigration nowadays point more towards social and cultural reasons.

A study by Eurostat emphasizes that Bulgaria is among the European countries that invest the least in their students and the quality of education. In recent years numerous educational fairs have been organized where foreign universities are showcased, featuring agencies ready to assist with the application process (Genova, 2015). Both Stoilkova (2015) and Deegan (2018) state that there is a driver called *the culture of leaving*, which suggests that emigrating is the secure way to achieve success. A contributor to the pull factors for the migration of youth is the introduction of English language classes in the second graders' curriculum (Genova, 2015). According to the Ministry of Education and Science (2001), the English language is the new reality in Europe and the world that necessitates communication in a multicultural environment. Another contributor is Bulgaria's transition to democracy which has led to dramatic socio-economic changes that affected the values and perceptions of young people in the country (Genova, 2015). Chavdarova (2006) categorizes this generation as 'new Bulgarians' who carry



the values of individualism, pragmatism, cosmopolitan openness, and refusal to adhere to traditionalism. These values also contribute to readiness for mobility among young Bulgarians. Such trends can be categorized under the title *creative class environment*. However, in most of the literature available on the topic (Straubhaar, 2008), attention is paid to employment push and pull factors rather than social and cultural ones. In other words, more importance is dedicated to *jobs and economic conditions*, rather than factors such as *creative class* environmental factors, social networks, and personal aspirations.

### 3.2. Bulgarian Brain Gain

In general, the process of the return migration of Bulgarian has been going on for a while. The rate of return migration has been significantly high in the past couple of years. According to Sanchez et al. (2021), the free mobility associated with the EU accession not only has accelerated emigration flows but also brain gain, with a higher share of migrants returning to Bulgaria. According to the national statistics, in 2018, 16 169 Bulgarian emigrants returned to Bulgaria. About 40% of them were in the active age group of 20-44 years. Sanchez et al. (2021) discuss that a combination of economic and non-economic reasons determines returns. For instance, situations such as a ‘feeling nostalgic’ or ‘missing family’ play a significant role in the return decisions or the end of a period of temporary employment or job loss abroad. However, according to Kandilarov (2019), higher incomes and better standards of living, chances for better realization are some of the main reasons why many young Bulgarians decide to leave or return home. Therefore, from a brain gain perspective, the crucial question is what the stimuli are for students and professionals to return after graduation and how the government can contribute to this process. Glorius (2021) argues that the return decisions of international students and professionals need to be considered within the wider context of life-course development. The scope of governmental interventions needs to extend to the level of policies that can offer programs that are close to the various needs of the returnees.

### 3.3. Migration strategies

In response to these current trends, Bulgarian authorities have been trying to encourage high-skilled professionals to return. In other words, the state puts efforts into investing in transforming the brain drain into brain gain. The topic of bringing migration back to Bulgaria has been theoretically present on the Bulgarian political agenda. After the accession to the EU in 2007, the parliament issued an order for the formation of a working group to develop a national strategy on migration for the first time in the post-communist history of the Republic.

In the Bulgarian migration policy framework, carried out after 2007, Bulgaria developed several national migration strategies:

- i. *The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Migration and Integration (2008–2015)*
- ii. *National Strategy in the Field of Migration, Asylum and Integration (2011–2020)*
- iii. *The National Strategy in the field of migration, asylum, and integration (2015–2020)*
- iv. *The National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria on Migration (2021-2025)*

In 2008 the working group produced the *2008-2015 Migration and Integration Strategy*. The main objectives of this strategy were to attract Bulgarian nationals who reside in other countries and people who are foreign nationals of Bulgarian descent and to implement effective control over migrant flows (Dogaru, 2021). In 2011 a new migration strategy was released with the main focus on security and countering illegal migration. The main priorities set up in this strategy were to attract highly qualified Bulgarian emigrants and foreigners of Bulgarian origin for permanent resettlement and settlement in the country (Dogaru, 2021). This goal was aimed to be achieved by setting the second goal of achieving full access to the labor markets of all EU members. In this way, Bulgarian citizens, who work abroad would be pushed into joining the national labor market. Brain drain was also addressed in this plan when the current prime minister Borisov floated the idea of creating a *forced detention* policy for Bulgarian graduates to prevent them from going abroad (Deegan, 2018). It was not implemented, but the discussion of it sparked tension. In 2015 *The National Council on Migration and Integration* was established after years of bureaucratic delays. Once again, the focus was on attracting highly qualified Bulgarian citizens for permanent settlement in the country but also for supporting the Bulgarian citizens to use their rights as EU citizens for free movement in the EU and EEA, as well as other EU/EEA citizens for free movement in Bulgaria (Dogaru, 2021). Nowadays, this Council is the official coordinating body that oversees the *National Migration and Integration Strategy*. The newest strategy for 2021 is a continuation of the previous strategy. Although the word *integration* is not a part of the title, the idea of the process of integration is still present. The strategy aims to implement well-developed and effective legislation in the field of equal opportunities, social inclusion, and non-discrimination (European Commission, 2021).

Overall, the legislation and policies of Bulgaria regarding returning migrants are in line with the international treaties on human rights to freedom of movement (Zareva, 2018). In these strategies, the term “return” defines permanent return. The main activities focus on the overall themes of studying the problems that young highly qualified Bulgarian emigrants face. This

includes, attracting youth and business organizations abroad into direct cooperation with business organizations in Bulgaria; and studying the experience of other institutions in attracting the young emigration back (Ivanova, 2015). Although the four strategies have similar priorities, Zareva (2018) points out that they still have different orientations. The strategies have been adopting various awareness campaigns regarding the potential benefits of returning and comprehensive information services. Examples include practical advice, options for employment and available job vacancies, possibilities for the development of entrepreneurship, training and consultancy, assistance finding housing, and other types of subsidies. Although these attempts have been existing, they are spread around different websites, and the information is not easily accessible. Further, systemized information on the logistics behind the reintegration is not available.

These strategies and initiatives show continuous efforts to attract highly qualified Bulgarians who live abroad. However, the policies produced by this body are slow-moving, and it does not show any significant societal changes (Ivanova, 2015). In other words, the reform projects concerning brain gain so far are either non-existent or unsuccessful, resulting in leaving many Bulgarians with the idea they cannot trust the leadership and the political processes within the current structure of their home country (Ivanova, 2015). No rules have been designed for its implementation, hence no adequate and effective there are no measures and policies in this direction (Zareva, 2018). It appears that brain drain and brain gain are on the political agenda, but as of now there is no success of the implicated policies and actions. According to Deegan (2018), this is due to the tendency that Bulgaria has been led by a system of “competitive state capture” in which political actors compete for control of the country not for purposes of reform or growth but to pursue their interests. According to Zareva (2018), the results and effectiveness of such strategies depend on factors such as the social, economic, and political conditions, the gaps in and discrepancies between policies, on the shortcomings in implementation. In conclusion, even though there is a normative framework and strategic documents that mark priorities regarding the return of Bulgarian emigrants, they are not supported by specific measures for effective implementation. The desired tangible outcomes are still not achieved.

### 3.4. Youth Bulgarian Migration and National EURES Network

The strategies used as an example of how the government of Bulgaria is attracting the return of highly-skilled migrants for this research study are *the National Strategy in the Field of Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2011–2020)* and *the National Strategy in the field of migration, asylum, and integration (2015–2020)*. As already pointed out, some of the essential

priorities of the strategies were to be 'proactive' and explicitly focus on attracting foreigners of Bulgarian origin and Bulgarian emigrants back to Bulgaria with a view to their permanent return (Ivanova, 2015). The campaigns involved in both plans revolved around the flow of information and knowledge about living back in Bulgaria and the return process as a whole, but also projects that revolved around different forms of subsidies. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Ivanova (2015) and Deegan (2018) highlighted that some of the planned activities are reported implemented, but not all results are available for researchers, while no information is available for projects concerning brain gain from the latest strategy<sup>1</sup>. The programs that have been recorded and provide available information to the public are *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network*. They were both started or discussed in the strategy of 2011-2020 but implemented or planned to be implemented in the strategy from 2015-2020. Both programs were specifically designed to target young and highly qualified emigrants.

#### 3.4.1. Youth Bulgarian Migration

As a part of the *National Strategy In The Field Of Migration, Asylum And Integration (2015–2020)*, the *National Policies In The Field Of Migration, Asylum And Integration* was introduced. This policy is preserved in the form of the National Program on Legal Migration and Integration (2012 – 2015). As a consequence, under this combination of legal documents, the *National Strategy for Bulgarian Citizens and Historical Bulgarian Communities Around the World* has been designed and implemented. This strategy aims to include the young Bulgarian emigration in the economic and cultural life of Bulgaria, which is seen to be a favorable resolution to the demographic crisis of the nation. It also aims to transform the country from a source country to a host one (Bakalova & Misheva, 2018). These two goals have been targeted through the regulation of the public relations of the state with Bulgarian citizens and persons of Bulgarian origin, living in other countries. Examples include a comprehensive mechanism for the preservation of the Bulgarian language and maintaining sustainable relations with the Bulgarian communities, and supporting their structures such as organizations, associations, societies, clubs, educational units, etc. The strategy also focuses on studying the problems (psychological, social, cultural, economic) of the Bulgarian communities and their solution at the institutional level. Last but not least, the strategy focuses on the analysis of the attitudes of the young highly qualified emigrants for return and professional realization in the homeland (Ivanova, 2015). The combination of these national policies and strategies creates a

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<sup>1</sup> No information was available as of 30.04.2022.

political framework for building a comprehensive, long-term, and integrated state policy for Bulgarian citizens and historical Bulgarian communities abroad. As a result of this framework, the Youth Bulgarian Migration took place up to 2020. The main aims of the program, specifically designed to encourage the reverse migration of young professionals, were (Council of Ministers, 2015):

- i. Organizing youth forums and discussions brain gain with the participation of graduates and young professionals who have graduated from foreign universities;
- ii. Organizing summer internships for students and young professionals from abroad in Bulgarian state institutions;
- iii. Attracting Bulgarian youth and business organizations abroad to consulting and direct business relations with Bulgarian partners;

Optimizing the institutional and regulatory framework of these three initiatives was seen to ensure a modern state policy to support and encourage all young Bulgarian professionals to return and realize themselves within the borders of Bulgaria. This would have had a positive impact on the participation and contribution to the development of the Bulgarian nation, society, and state.

#### 3.4.2. National EURES Network

In 2014 under the National Strategy in the Field of Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2011–2020) the operational program Development of Human resources (2014-2020) was introduced as a project run by the National Employment Agency. The program aims to increase the quality and levels of employment, reduce poverty, and promote social inclusion and modernize public policies. The measure of the program for 2014-2020 was dedicated to supporting employees, businesses, and entrepreneurs who want to adapt more easily to the changing needs of the economy and the labor market. This was done through the grant for the development of knowledge and skills of employees following the qualifications and competencies needed by the business, the introduction of new forms of labor organization, and the promotion of geographical and occupational mobility (Ministry of Economy and Industry, 2021). As a part of this program, the National Employment Agencies started the implementation of Project BG05M9OP001-1.009-0001 National EURES Network worth BGN 9,060,749<sup>2</sup>. EURES (European Employment Services) was established back in 1994 as a cooperation network formed by public employment services, The main objective of the EURES network is

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<sup>2</sup> BGN 9,060,749 is equal to 4.6 million EUR.

to facilitate the free movement of workers within the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland (European Commission, n.d.) through providing information, advice, and employment or employment to workers and employers, as well as to any citizen of the Union.

The National EURES Network provides support services that facilitate the employment of job seekers wishing to work abroad and EU job seekers employed in Bulgaria (National Employment Agency, n.d.). More specifically, in 2020, the Employment Agency developed an online platform that gathered in one place information about specific jobs, trends in wages in the relevant economic field, kindergartens, hospitals, and the opportunity for better coordination when settling in Bulgaria. As a part of this initiative, a combination of subsidies was signed for the attraction of Bulgarian highly skilled migrants who wish to return to Bulgaria. The main requirement for the candidates was to start working in Bulgaria, and in the last 6 months to have lived in another country. Everyone who would have applied for the support would have been able to choose between different types of support, varying between financial support and services for one year (State Agency for Bulgarians Abroad, 2019). The activities were:

- i. Financial support up to BGN 1200 per month
- ii. The provision of funds to cover the rent for a period of up to one year if the applicant starts working in a settlement where they do not own a home.
- iii. If the job is in a place with an average salary that is below the national average, the candidate would be able to receive half the minimum salary on his / her basic salary for one year.
- iv. If the family's child is not admitted to a crèche or kindergarten, they were provided with a babysitter.
- v. If a family member did not speak Bulgarian or needed an additional qualification, they received a voucher for a language course or additional qualification.

The program was postponed due to the declared state of emergency on the territory of the country in connection with the spread of COVID-19 (*Development of Human Resources*, 2020). Up to August of 2022 there is no updated information available on the state of the program.

Although this program and subsidy package are over or did not get implemented, they are examples of the priorities in the migration policy of Bulgaria - to design and activate actions towards highly qualified emigration, aiming for the return and professional fulfillment of the returnees to the country. Hence, both programs aim to achieve to build activities with complex, long-term, and integrated outcomes for the Bulgarians and Bulgarian communities abroad who

intend to return to Bulgaria. *Youth Bulgarian Migration and National EURES Network* are relevant to the research since the return of students, and young professionals to the country are seen as one of the answers to the demographic crisis (Ivanova, 2015). However, these two programs, as the rest of the programs designed for this issue, aim to solve tackle the economic push and pull factors, while the literature suggests that there are different reasons for students and young professionals to move that go beyond economic stimulus. In other words, they fall under the category of *jobs and economic conditions* as factors stimulating the return. It seems that both programs do not have a broad range of target tissues. Moreover, in the past decade, the strategies and the *National Employment Agency* did not have significant success (Deegan, 2018; Ivanova, 2015). It was also challenging to find the degree of the migrants' involvement in the decision-making process that designed the programs and the followed activities. These gaps lead to doubts about the success rate of both programs. As a result, the actions in regarding to policies on brain gain in Bulgaria highlights two main questions. The first one, is if these theoretical initiatives are what is practically needed, while the second one questions if the generally expressed mistrust and dissatisfaction with the government leads to emigrants believing in the success of these initiatives, and whether they will come back.

### 3.5. Partner organization

The Partner organization for this research study is *Tuk-Tam* (translated in English, the name means *Here-and-There*). *Tuk-Tam* and its network are relevant for this study because they can provide literature and practical insights on brain gain and the local Bulgarian perspective on migration trends, possibilities, and challenges. Further, the network of ambassadors and volunteers is a way to reach potential participants for the field study and the quantitative research. The organisation has assisted this study by providing both participants with in-depth interviews and secondary data.

*Tuk-Tam* is an association for Bulgarians with education and experience abroad who would like to contribute to life in Bulgaria in varying degrees (*Tuk-Tam*, 2022). Their motto is *Go far, stay close*, implying the idea of creating a 'brain gain' network that invests in the education and professional development of the new generation. (*Tuk-Tam*, 2022). The association and its volunteers assist young Bulgarians who would like to study abroad, help them to adapt to the host countries, and support them during the process of returning to Bulgaria. The assistance in the migration trajectories happens through different projects for academic and career education, and a network of ambassadors who live or lived abroad. For instance, *Tuk-Tam* established the

so-called *Go, study, and come back* fund. This scholarship fund supports motivated Bulgarians to continue their education at a foreign university and then work in Bulgaria. The association informs Bulgarian students abroad about job opportunities in their country of origin. Their Career Portal contains information about profiles of leading employers, job advertisements, and information about the NGO's career events (Uspelite, 2020).

The organization also produces research on different brain gain topics. The results of these studies are openly accessible to the public through their website. One of the latest types of research they produced is from 2022 on the topic of brain gain. The study called *migratiON* aimed to start the dialogue and find out more about Bulgarians around the world - where they are, how many they are and how they define their relationship with Bulgaria (Tuk-Tam, 2021). This study and the main goal of the organizations are helpful to this research study because they take the step from brain drain to brain gain and provide the space for the voices of Bulgarians around the world and understand their needs.



## Methodology

The research methods chosen to explore the study issues are vital to investigate the different perspectives of brain gain, and how they are reflected in government interventions. Hence, this section discusses what methodology is adapted to explore the connection between these factors and how they influence each other. This section begins by demonstrating how the essential variables are operationalized within the geographical context of the research. The chapter discusses the qualitative research methods that support the research process, the data analysis process, and the participants' characteristics. The section also presents some of the considered limitations of the research. Lastly, this chapter reflects on the researcher's positionality within the issue and the research.

### 4.1. Research design

This research undertakes a *realist evaluation approach*. The realist evaluation approach assumes that projects and programs work under certain conditions and are influenced by the way that different stakeholders respond to them (INTRAC, 2017). The approach is designed to improve the understanding of how and why projects and programs work in different contexts. This approach attempts to answer crucial questions of what works, for whom, in which circumstances, and why. By answering these questions, development practitioners and policymakers will be able to understand how and why projects and programs work or do not in different contexts (INTRAC, 2017). The approach is quite suitable for evaluating projects or programs that previously have had mixed results targeting a better understanding of why results have been inconsistent (Flynn et al., 2019). Consequently, policymakers will be able to make decisions about how to run and adapt projects and programs to different circumstances most efficiently. In other words, the purpose of the approach is to test and refine the program/policy and to determine whether and how the program/policy works in a particular setting.

Overall, the approach contributes to the understanding of brain gain in Bulgaria, focusing on governmental intervention. It allows for an assessment of whether a development intervention on brain gain worked or not. It takes into account the different settings around it. These settings vary in the range of factors that influence the decision-making process on returning to Bulgaria. The approach allows the integration of prospect theory since the theory also highlights the importance of personal circumstances in the process of taking decisions regarding migration. Further, it is appropriate for this research because *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* have ended, which allows for an evaluation of what

worked and did not and how they can be improved. This research study operates from the assumption that the interaction between the context and the mechanism is what generates the results or not of a development intervention (Flynn et al., 2019). Therefore, the main approach which takes place is the context-mechanism-outcome (CMO) hypothesis. Through the CMO this realist evaluation seeks to explain how the context (the particular aspects of the conditions within which a program is implemented, such as individuals, personal values culture, and interpersonal relationships) can impact the mechanism (the migrants' reasoning and responses to the program resources, which will depend on their values, beliefs, and cognition) (Eslamiamirabadi et al., 2021). The mechanism is the policies and initiatives of the programs and the way they are implemented.

#### 4.1.1. Operationalization of variables

To implicate the theoretical framework within the geographical context, and answer the research question, the main concepts of the research are operationalized accordingly. They are operationalized based on the most commonly used definitions and the existing literature adapted to the context of Bulgaria. Some variables have already been discussed in detail and follow naturally from the literature. The remaining variables with their operationalization are discussed in this section. These variables are defined and influenced by concepts presented in the activities of both programs in question, the research question, and the following sub-questions. Therefore, for this study, the concepts are operationalized as:

- i. *Return migration* – this term refers to the process of returning to Bulgaria after a person has been an international migrant for an undefined time. For the purpose of this study the definition also includes people who not only return but also intend to permanently stay in Bulgaria.
- ii. *Decision-making process* – this is the process of making choices on whether to return to Bulgaria. This process includes gathering information and assessing alternative resolutions.
- iii. *Gains and losses* – returnees' gains refer to the resources or advantages acquired or increased upon the return to Bulgaria. While the returnees' losses, refer to the resources or advantages that are decreased or lost upon the return to Bulgaria.
- iv. *Jobs' economic conditions* – this term refers to the economic benefits and success of the country of origin. This term looks into the factors that contribute to the economic well-being of the returnees. This includes the overall quality of the labor force and market, and the possibilities for economic development on a personal level. It further extends to

the quality of life that revolve around economic benefits such as lower living costs. More specifically to this research, the subsidy package *National EURES Network* fall under the definition of this dimension because they aim to improve the economic wellbeing of the returnees. The program *Youth Bulgarian Migration* also is covered by this program because it offers familiarization with the Bulgarian labor market.

- v. *Creative class environmental factors* – this dimension is measured through the values the place holds and how they match or mismatch the values of the returnees. These values refer to open-mindedness, diversity, tolerance, and progressiveness but also to the values important to the participants in the interview. Examples might include a various spectrum of human rights, animal rights, corruption, etc.
- vi. *Social networks* – this term refers to social network migrants have back in their home country, in the case of this study this is Bulgaria. More specifically this term takes into account not only the family, friends, and other close ones but any social interaction and relation important to the returnees. This also can include personal and working networks made out of people important to the returnees and their choice to return. This dimension covers the initiatives carried out by *Youth Bulgarian Migration*. The program's focus is on the working environment in Bulgaria but through the lenses of professional networking, which can be seen as the social network that influence the decision for return.
- vii. *Personal aspirations* – within the context of this research study this concept refers to the dreams, hopes, or ambitions of the returnees that revolve around the idea of returning to Bulgaria. This includes ideas of how life should look like, feeling of well-being, and happiness.
- viii. *Returning migrants' preparedness* – as explained in the theoretical framework, this term refers to resource mobilization and readiness influenced by structural factors that largely depend on local circumstances. In the specific case of this research study, the definition of it extends to the process of preparing the return based on the pool of resources available for the execution of the actual return to Bulgaria. This term follows the full trajectory of deciding whether to return, the factors that influence the return, the factors and processes that carry the return, and the return itself.

#### 4.1.2. Methods and techniques

The *realist evaluation approach* and prospect theory do not require any particular tools or methodologies to be used. However, the goal of the research is to see whether government

initiatives for encouraging brain gain match the real needs and expectations of highly skilled Bulgarian emigrants. Due to the complexity of the research goal and the flexibility of the main approach and theory, this study applies a mixed-methods approach. This includes both secondary and primary data gathering. The secondary data includes academic papers, governmental papers and policies, and digital news articles. Some data is also provided by Tuk-Tam where possible. The findings are shared through the format of academic research, providing an objective and analytical approach. The secondary data is in both English and Bulgarian language. The data is presented through a literature review and analyzed through the lenses of the realist evaluation. And last but not least, secondary data is the foundation of the interview guide used for obtaining primary data.

Primary data collection is based on in-depth interviews. Interviews as a methodological tool allow for the unfolding of the meaning of peoples' experiences which are essential to migration decisions. The target sample group is Bulgarians who have lived abroad for more than one year and returned to Bulgaria in the past seven years. The two most significant strategic documents that mark migration policy in Bulgaria are *the National Strategy in the Field of Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2011–2020)* and *the National Strategy in the field of migration, asylum, and integration (2015–2020)* (Ivanova, 2015). Thus, this paper targets the group that has returned to Bulgaria in the past seven years because they fall into the time frame of the programs. One of the ways of finding participants was throughout collaboration channels with Tuk-Tam. The organization is willing to provide its network of volunteers who have studied and lived abroad and currently live in Bulgaria.

Another way of reaching out to participants in the research is through the so-called snowball method. Some of the participants are willing to put the researcher in touch with their friends or acquaintances that match the requirements for the interview. The participants are also reached out through a post on social media. In this way, the possibility of sponsor *bias due to the participation of the Tuk-Tam network is reduced*. Any potential risk to participants is addressed in a written consent form, handed to them before the interview. In terms of confidentiality, only data relevant to the research are used for writing the results and conclusions. For anonymity, names and other personal characteristics that can lead to identifying the participants are removed. The participants are given fictional names inspired by typical Bulgarian names.

As a result of Covid-19, the field research had to be transformed into an online version, and interviews were conducted via different online platforms such as Zoom and Google. From

a logistic point of view, conducting online in-depth semi-structured interviews is not an obstacle for the researcher and the participants. This method is also easily adapted to the online environment since it involves mainly the reading of papers and documents, which in most cases are available through official governmental and institutional websites.

#### 4.1.3. Data analysis

After the data was gathered, it was analyzed in a deductive way focusing on the *realist evaluations approach* and the implementation of the theoretical framework. *The deductive analysis* is the predetermined approach which includes the building of categories to point key themes essential to the research. These categories are a combination of the sub-questions and the conceptual model. The first step of the analysis was to develop and apply codes by categorization the data. The codes helped for the representation and analysis of the main themes identified in the sub-questions and the conceptual model. The codes were grouped into:

1. participant background information
2. events and reasons that lead to the return
3. behaviors prior, during, and after the return
4. activities towards and during the return
5. feelings towards the process of return and after the return
6. governmental intervention
7. the opinion of the returnees on the governmental interventions
8. suggestions for improvements and other missing aspects for the returnees

The second step was identifying themes, patterns, and relationships. This step was carried out by the identification of words and phrase repetition. Further, the primary data was compared to the findings in the literature review and theoretical framework. *Thirdly, the data were* summarized and looked at through the prism of the realist evaluation approach. Through the CMO this realist evaluation explained how the context of the discussed programs impacts the mechanism of the decision-making process resulting in the outcomes to return or not. At this last stage, the data was linked to the research aim and objectives. This stage laid the base for the next chapter of suggesting noteworthy quotations and major themes within findings and possible contradictions.

## 4.2. Description of participants

This section describes the trajectories of the participants in the research. For simplicity, *Table 1* summarizes their main characteristics. For the sake of anonymity, the participants are given fake names and an estimate of their age.

**Table 1**

*Participants' characteristics*

Name	Age	Place of emigration	Hometown\city before emigration	Occupation before emigration	Occupation back in Bulgaria	Current city
Ivan	Early 20s	The Netherlands	Burgas	Student	Electrical engineering	Sofia
Georgy	Early 40s	The United Kingdom	Ruse	Medical researcher	Medical researcher	Sofia
Maria	-	Spain	Sofia	Software engineer	Software engineer	Sofia
Ivana	Late 30s	The United Kingdom, The United States	Sofia	Student	Phycologist	Sofia
Nikolina	Early 30s	Italy, The United States, Canada	Sofia	Student	Entrepreneur	Sofia
Anna	Early 20s	The Netherlands	Veliko Turnovo	Student	Electrical engineer	Sofia
Tanya	Early 30s	The United Kingdom	Sofia	Student	Project manager for	Sofia

					education initiatives	
Stoyan	Early 20s	The United States	Koprivsthtitsa	Student	Student	Plovdiv
Petur	Early 40s	Ireland	Sevlievo	IT specialist	IT specialist	Sofia
Krasimira	Late 30s	United Kingdom	-	Hotel maid	Entrepreneur	-
Lora	Early 20s	United Kingdom	Sofia	Student	Web Designer	Sofia

As visualized in the table, several participants have had different trajectories than others due to migrating to more places than just one. For instance, Nikolina has lived in Italy, the USA, and Canada, while most emigrated to only one place abroad. Some emigrated to continue their higher education abroad, while the rest of them emigrated to continue their professional careers. For instance, Georgy and Petur received either promotion or an offer for a better-paid job in the United Kingdom and Ireland, and they emigrated with their families. In terms of their background education before their departure, the majority attended high schools with the main focus on foreign languages or international universities in Bulgaria. Krasimira and Georgy are alumni of *The American University of Bulgaria*, while Ivana and Tanya studied in the prestigious school of *The American College of Sofia*. Everyone except three participants come from relatively large cities, but they eventually moved to Sofia or Plovdiv, which are the two largest cities in Bulgaria. Mobility within the state occurs only after the return of the emigrants to Bulgaria. None of them have moved within Bulgaria before their departure to a foreign country. And last, in regard to their occupation back home, six out of the eleven participants either came to Bulgaria with a foreign remote job or started their own business. Although the trajectories of the returnees are different on the individual level, they are still quite similar on the overall level. The participants come from a prestigious educational background, from cities, and have emigrated to developed countries with the idea to improve on the professional and personal levels.

#### 4.4. Limitations and risks of the research

This research study could also face several obstacles. The first one refers to the biasness of the participants in the field research. A significant number of interview participants reached out through Tuk-Tam's network platform. In this case, there is the possibility of the so-called *sponsor bias*. Such a bias refers to the situation when a participant is opinionated or influenced by/about the sponsor or partner of the study (Groves et al., 2012). Thirdly, this research might be affected by the positionality of the author. Confirmation bias refers to a situation when a researcher forms a hypothesis or belief and uses respondents' information to confirm that belief (Sarniak, 2015). This bias can be influenced by the personal background of the researcher. The researcher herself is a part of the Bulgarian brain drain phenomenon. She is finishing her master's degree abroad, and now she is at a crossroads regarding whether to return to Bulgaria or not. Her views and perception of life in Bulgaria could potentially limit her objectivity while analyzing the data. Confirmation bias can be present at the moment as researchers judge and weigh responses that confirm their hypotheses, and it extends into analysis, with researchers tending to remember points that support their hypothesis (Sarniak, 2015). An extensive explanation of the minimization of confirmation bias is presented in the *Positionality reflection* section of this chapter.

Last but not least, the difficulties of finding official and trustworthy governmental proposals and reports on the programs, their projects, and most importantly their results are an essential obstacle to this research. Such a challenge can affect the quality and validity of the local context, which can influence the analysis process of the opinion of the participants. In this case, the lack of reliable primary sources on what the programs are can mislead the researcher's understanding of the effect of the programs on the participants' decision-making process and experience with brain gain. In other words, without an understanding of what the government offers to returnees, the researcher is likely to draw a wrong conclusion about whether the programs match the needs of the highly skilled migrants.

#### 4.5. Positionality reflection

According to Holmes (2020), positionality reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study. It influences how research's conduction, its outcomes, and results. A personal experience influenced the idea of this research study to a certain extent. The researcher herself is a Bulgarian who migrated at the age of 17 to peruse



higher quality education in Italy and later on to the Netherlands. However, nowadays, she is also considering the option of returning to Bulgaria. This being said, this is an example of biasness towards the process of return migration and the brain drain issue in Bulgaria. Such personal experiences and dilemmas not only influenced the path for choosing a topic research thesis but also contributed to understanding migration trends firsthand. The topic of brain gain is familiar to the researcher not only through theoretical knowledge, but also through personal experience. The personal experiences benefit the research via the approach of researching trends, and themes and finding literature and the partner organization. For instance, Tuk-Tam is enthusiastic to cooperate with this thesis research because the researcher is an example of a brain gain contributor to the sustainable development of Bulgaria. Nevertheless, this personal experience lacks the perspective and the understanding of political and theoretical standpoints. These fixed aspects may have predisposed the interests toward this particular topic, but the lack of understanding of the governmental mechanism behind brain gain allows for the avoiding of particular views or perspectives.

Going for research with missing knowledge on a personal topic allows for the implication of reflexivity while conducting the research. To involve explicit self-consciousness and self-assessment, Savin-Baden & Major's (2013) reflexivity model is applied. The model identifies three primary ways, researchers may identify and develop their positionality. The first way is to locate the researchers about the subject. This applies to acknowledging the personal positions that have the potential to influence the research. This has already been presented above. Secondly, locating the researcher about the participants, by considering how the participants view the researcher and her position within this research. This will be achieved through the help of Tuk-Tam, the introduction for the interview, and the actual interview questions. Last but not least is to locate the researcher about the research context and process by acknowledging that research will necessarily be influenced by her personal experience and the research context. This will be achieved in reflection once the research has been conducted. In this way, the researcher will have the chance to reflex on what influenced her positionality.

## Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the study concerning the research and sub-questions. The findings are based on the data gathered during the field research of online interviews with eleven participants. The data are discussed concerning the research context and the respective discourses in the field of development and migration studies. This is achieved through the implementation of the theoretical framework, which includes the categories of factors that stimulate return migration, the analysis of prospect theory, and the understanding of the return preparation model. Further, the analysis is discussed through the involvement of the realist evaluation approach, which aims to understand why given programs work or do not work. The approach calls for the implementation of the CMO (Context-Mechanism-Outcome) lenses.

The analysis is divided into four sub-sections, which allows for a broader understanding of the data and the issue of brain gain and the involvement of Bulgarian authorities in the process of return migration. First, the background of the returnees is discussed, then the reasons which encouraged the participants to return are investigated. Thirdly, the involvement of the government in the decision-making process is presented. Although governmental initiatives fall under the cap of *jobs and economic conditions*, and *social networks*, they are discussed separately from these categories. None of the returnees have benefited from the programs, thus, the initiatives were looked at hypothetically. The separation allows for looking further into the role of the government in the overall brain gain process, and into the literature gap on lack of communication between the government and the target group. The fourth section discusses the rooms for improvement through the opinion of the returnees.

### 5.1. Analysing the participants' characteristics

As described in *the Description of participants* the participants share some common characteristics such as similar educational backgrounds, growing up in developed cities, settling in Sofia or Plovdiv after their return, and similar professional career paths. These similarities suggest that the reason why the participants decided to return and what their needs might be. During the interviews, it was shared that the participants attended high schools with the main focus on foreign languages or international universities in Bulgaria. Krasimira and Georgy are alumni of *The American University of Bulgaria*, while Ivana and Tanya studied in the prestigious *American College of Sofia*. Ivana and Tanya shared that they were expected to migrate.

“It was always in my family, like unspoken, that I was gonna study abroad. It wasn't even like a question about it” (Ivana, 00:39).

“So, I studied in high school at the American College of Sofia and naturally, the school just prepares you for pursuing a degree abroad. And we decided that we're gonna pursue our bachelor's degrees outside of Bulgaria” (Tanya, 00:27).

These stories correspond with the study of Deegan (2018). The study focuses on *The American College of Sofia*, and it presents that most students will continue their study abroad to receive a better education and achieve success as described by Stoilkova (2015). These stories fall in the aspect of *the culture of leaving, which was described earlier in the study*. The idea of leaving is created and sustained by the environment of the participant's background. A close look at the aforementioned educational institutions shows that the education fees are quite high. The annual fee for the college in question is 37,592 BGN, which is approximately which is approximately 19, 220.49 EUR, while most of the schools in Bulgaria are free of charge (*Educations*, 2021), and the minimum wage for the country is 311,49<sup>3</sup> BGN a month. This fee suggests that before their departure, the participants already had an existing pool of financial, social, or human capital depending on whether the student had financial aid or not.

In regard to their life after their return, according to Ivan, it is unfortunate that all of the well-paid working opportunities are in Sofia. Although he grew up in the relatively big city of Burgas, he still had to move to Sofia to find a suitable job for his skills. In fact, job opportunities are dominantly concentrated in the capital city of Sofia as it has been described in the study conducted by Dragneva and Hristova (2021). Such opportunities can be classified under the category of economic well-being. Return migrants are more likely to select self-employment. It is a result of experiences and skills obtained abroad that could be valuable in starting a business or an increase in starting capital, due to the increased earnings abroad (Mahé, 2021). The rest came without a job, but they sought direct contact with employers and other forms of contact and information similar to what Ivanova (2015) found in her study. A reason for such a trend is the desire to keep their foreign connections. The eleven participants shared that they aim to stay within an international environment even in the geographical context of Bulgaria. According to Garrote Sanchez and his colleagues (2021), the decision not to stay abroad does not necessarily mean that knowledge flows are cut, as emigrants engage in transnational social

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<sup>3</sup> The minimum wage is in this size ss of 28/06/2022.

networks which enable the circulation of knowledge. Hence, it can be argued that when emigrants return, they follow specific mobility paths, encouraged and sustained by the overall beneficial economic conditions Bulgaria has to offer. These factors might not be the reason why people return to Bulgaria, but they can play a role in the decision of where to start the returned life.

Understanding the background of the participants is essential for the implementation of the prospect theory and the return preparedness illustrations throughout the analysis. Both theoretical tools suggest that the individual background is essential when understanding why one might return to their country of origin and what influences their decisions. They implement that the emigrant's personal backgrounds, such as social and political environment, the existing pool of resources, and capitals, would influence their decisions of return and will directly prepare them for the process of return.

## 5.2. Analysis of the reasons for the return

This part of the chapter goes into the reasons why the emigrants decided to return to Bulgaria. The chapter looks into not only the individual reasons that have stimulated the process of returning but also the push and pull factors of the country of sending and hosting one. It further includes a self-reflection on the process of return and reintegration in Bulgaria. These aspects are essential to the research because they allow for the understanding the practice of return migration and brain gain through the perspective of the returnees. This chapter offers a bottom-up perspective of what sustains brain gain and how it can be boosted within the context of Bulgaria.

### 5.2.1. General motives for the return

To understand the individual reasons for their return, participants were asked for their opinion on the motives for the return of highly skilled migrants. The most common answer to this question is: "It depends.", emphasizing the importance of personal circumstances. Some of the reasons include the opening economy of Bulgaria and the following large spectrum of opportunities for professional development, the feeling of belonging encouraged by family and friends, and the feeling of freedom, as described by a couple of the participants. Georgy summarizes the trends by explaining that:

"First of all, there is a group of people that is not satisfied with life outside of Bulgaria. Some come back because they can't handle the pressure. Some of them come because they take what they need from the abroad experience.

And I think I'm following this game. Some of them come back later in life when they are looking for a completely different work-life balance” (Georgy, 09:03).

Ivan further expands on the different personal reasons. He explains that:

“They<sup>4</sup> were quite homesick. Other people might just want to like help the development of different industries here in their home country” (Ivan, 04:16).

Following the participants’ responses, it become clear that whether one has family or not is also a factor that might influence the decision for return. Georgy presents his personal example:

“I emigrated with my family but before this, I have had decades of life in Bulgaria – I had a well-established social circle. Very well developed. So, the overall answer to this question is ‘depends’ on who you are” (Georgy, 12:28).

Ivan and Georgy touch upon the importance of *personal aspirations and social networks* as reasons for the return. As presented in the theoretical framework, aspirations are emotional representations of what one’s future might and should look like that include the nostalgic memory of the place where they grew up which is sustained by the presence of the social network. The combination of these two factors seems to be observed by the participants to encourage return migration. The more connected the person feels to a certain place, the more likely are they to return.

In terms of the increasing professional opportunities in Bulgaria, Anna explains that:

“With the increase in opportunities, many people are graduating from university in Western countries and have a hard time finding jobs there. However, the environment here is nice. It's nothing compared to the Netherlands” (Anna, 04:43).

She also adds that in:

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<sup>4</sup> Ivan refers to some of his fellow Bulgarian students in the Netherlands.

“In Bulgaria there are many opportunities for starting your own business, while in the western world the opportunities are very limited” (Anna, 05:05).

In fact, as presented in *Table 1*, some of the participants have started their businesses. Hence, the described economic opportunities fall under the category of *jobs and economic conditions* as factors for the return of emigrants. The participants believe that Bulgaria is going through a process of development that opens space for people to achieve high professional goals comparable to countries in Western Europe. This suggests that Bulgaria is capable of attracting highly skilled emigrants to return. This in a combination with the aforementioned reasons of personal aspirations and social networks seems to be the main reasons why one might decide to return to Bulgaria. These three factors create an environment where a returnee can grow in a personal and professional way.

### 5.2.2. Individual motives for the return

From the interviews and the theoretical framework, it becomes clear that the stimulus for potential return extends to a cost-benefit analysis of both countries of origin and the host one. In terms of what are the advantages of life in Bulgaria in comparison to the host countries, there are the same patterns regardless of if people emigrated to Europe or North America. On the personal scale in regard to the individual decisions of the participants to return, it seems to be not always a well-thought process but rather a spontaneous one. During the interviews, it became clear that the decision to return dominantly was influenced by push factors from the host country rather than pull factors from the country of origin. The reasons vary from better job opportunities to family and the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 5.2.2.1 *Jobs and economic conditions*

Nine out of the eleven participants agreed that factors such as issues with work permits and visas, higher living costs, problems with healthcare, and the overall busy lifestyle are the main factors that encouraged them to return. Ivan, Nikolina Tanya, and Stoyan returned purely due to economic reasons. Nikolina explains that:

“It wasn't like I had made up my mind to return, and then I started applying for jobs. It was because of this particular opportunity or let's say, even this particular person that I wanted to work with” (Nicolina, 14:22).

Tanya shares:

“And I had a great salary, but then a big chunk of my salary went towards a super expensive housing that is, by Bulgarian standards, super small but very expensive. And I did not have my family and my close friends and everyone. So, the question was: do I go to Bulgaria where I can have a relatively good standard of living, because I have still, you know, enough savings to get me through the first year of like getting settled where I have my family, who you know where I can find a really good job too?” (Tanya, 15:20).

Maria and Ivana further elaborate on the flexible housing market back home. Maria finds Bulgaria a better and safer environment for raising children in her own house, while Petur states that the increase in the housing prices in Ireland was one of the main reasons for him and his wife to return to Bulgaria. In this regards the answers present that the most essential factor for the return of the emigrants is *jobs and economic conditions*. Highly educated returnees can find a better-paid job in Bulgaria, where other economic conditions such as healthcare, and low living costs contribute to a better life in terms of practicality. The main highlights are lower expenses. Ivan shares that:

“I will be able to save a lot more compared to from my salary compared to the Netherlands” (Ivan, 07:20),

which makes life in Bulgaria more affordable. Anna explains that:

“...life is cheaper. And the salary you get is almost the same. The initial salary here and there, or at least for an engineer it's almost the same, but then the standards of life here is much lower, so you can afford much more things (Anna, 07:16)”.

The increasing opportunities for finding a well-paid job or starting own business are also seen by the returnees as an advantage of Bulgaria. Anna shares that:

“When you finish your university studies in the Netherlands, it's much more, much harder to find a job (Anna, 04:34)”.

Nikolina, Petur, and Krasimira agree that Bulgaria is a suitable environment for entrepreneurs.

Nikolina explains:

“Now that I'm doing the business in Bulgaria, I mean there many advantages and disadvantages to building a business here. One of the advantages is that you can iterate on ideas and the concepts faster and cheaper than in other places” (Nikolina, 15:27).

As presented in the literature review, emigrants who return invest their financial and human capital, which leads to development for the country of origin. The government of Bulgaria is welcoming to the idea of brain gain investments in the economy. Further, the country is an EU member state which suggests quite a welcoming environment, but as already mentioned expenses are lower in comparison to other Western countries. Therefore, *job and economic opportunities* play a significant role in attracting people to return.

#### 5.2.2.2 Social network

The third main reason for emigrants to return is family and close ones. During the talk with the participants, it was observed that the feeling of nostalgia played a significant role in the decision to return even before the outbreak of the pandemic. Georgy and Petur returned due to the influence of their partners. Georgy shares that he was satisfied with his life in the United Kingdom, while:

“My wife - she hated it. She hated the climate. She hated the healthcare.” (Georgy, 15:13),

while the partner of Petur was not able to find a job in her field. The feeling of home is a factor on its own for the return. Ivana shares:

“I'm an only child to my mom. My grandparents were getting old, and so there was some like, you know, I wanted to be there. My friends were in Bulgaria and I have broken up with my boyfriend. Yeah, this was the biggest reason for me.” (Ivana, 14:33)

Home is the concept of where people have family and feel that they belong to this place. The emotional connection to a place and people is a middle ground factor between personal



aspiration and social network. Once again, there is some a correlation between how the two dimensions. *Social network* influences the personal aspiration of belonging of the returnees. As described in the theoretical framework, personal aspirations are stimulated by constant communication with relatives and vocational traveling to and from the home country. Although the aspect of *social networks* in terms of close people does not seem to be a priority number one for the ones who return, it is still a factor that directs people to the process of return. The participants' stories align with Portes' (2000) findings that highly skilled migrants keep social and cultural ties in both the destination and the source country. This social network plays the role of stability so the emigrants can decide whether they would like to return or not. Therefore, by implying the theoretical framework, it seems that the drivers of return migration are shared between jobs and economic conditions, social network factors, and *personal aspirations*. The main reason for those three appears to be the *jobs and economic conditions*. The majority of the participants take into account the benefits of returning to a place where they can have a suitable job for their skills. The presence of social ties appears to be the added value which is the extra mile needed for the emigrants to return. The combination of the sense of home where one can have a comfortable life with a suitable job is what influence the emigrants to return.

#### 5.2.2.3. Creative class environment

The interview also looked into the political and social context of the environment in Bulgaria regarding the return of the emigrants. This section looks into the fourth factor of the conceptual model, namely the *creative class environment*. To the question of *How does or does not the environment in Bulgaria match your professional skills and personal views?* the overall answer was that the social environment does not match the personal views of the returnees. Ivana shares that:

“I had a pretty bad reverse culture shock the first year. I couldn't handle like before, you know? Racist jokes, feminism chauvinism, the animal rights.... I mean, I was so happy to see that for the 12 years I was abroad things have changed, but still it was and still it is difficult.” (Ivana, 17:49)

However, in terms of professional skills, the answers were more mixed. The returnees whose skills are matched are the ones who either work within international companies or whose colleagues are also returnees. However, for those who started their own business, the skills and expectations are not met. Nikolina explains:

“It doesn't, but I'm trying to adapt. I'm finding now when I'm developing my own business, I'm finding that a lot of people have incredibly low standards” (Nikolina, 18:50).

To the question: *How did your return contribute to a change in your environment?* their return seems to be contributing to development in regard to both the professional development of the country but also social development. However, it is also difficult to measure this success, improvement, and development. Ivan shares:

“Well, I'm not sure if I was successful, but I really try to. You know, make that difference because I see those benefits. With the line with Western Europe, and I really try to bring that here because I see that this will be able to make our life here better” (Ivan, 15:43).

Therefore, the responses to these two questions suggest that people's motivation to return is not influenced by the *creative class environment*. (Crescenzi et al., 2015). Suggest that some representatives of highly skilled individuals migrate whether back to the source country or another destination, based on the values the place holds. Such claims do not reflect the case of Bulgarian emigrants. None of the returnees return because of the social values of Bulgarian society. The returnees face a mismatch between their values and views and the mainstream ones of Bulgarian society. Although they try to contribute to a change, in most cases, they just adapt to the environment.

#### 5.2.2.4. *Personal aspirations*

Other secondary advantages that seem important to the participants also fall under the category of lifestyle. Georgy, Ivana, and Nikolina share their opinion on the:

“...different bureaucratic circumstances.” (Georgy, 16:00),

which appear to be “the evil that you know” (Georgy, 16:05). The participants express that abroad there are stricter policies and regulations which makes life more stressful. Georgy shares that:

“If you're not doing something right, they always find you and they will find you with the highest possible fine.” (Georgy, 16:41),

Ivana also adds that:

“...in the US it was so easy to take you to courts for everything. I mean like, the slightest freaking thing” (Ivana, 15:23).

The geographical location and climate of Bulgaria also appear to be something people appreciate. Nikolina explains that:

“First of all, obviously geography and just the fact that it's smaller means you can get out of cities” (Nicolina, 10:15).

Tanya adds to this question:

“In London, although it's, you know, the perfect city for working. There are no mountains around. And I love the mountains” (Tanya, 20:26),

while Georgy, Ivana, Anna, and Lora explicitly stated that the weather in the UK and Netherlands was one of the push factors for them. And last but not least, the healthcare system is also a factor for the returnees. Stoyan states that:

“...and probably the most important one is we have free healthcare. I have always been positively impressed by healthcare” (Stoyan, 04:01).

The importance of life-work balance leads to the importance of *personal aspiration* as a factor for the return. However, this personal aspiration is strongly influenced by the *jobs and economic conditions that* Bulgaria offers. It seems that there is a correlation between the factors, where *personal aspirations* depend on job and economic conditions. Hence, *personal aspiration* in terms of lifestyle and work-life balance, although it is important to the returnees, would not be a factor on its own for the return of the emigrants.

#### *5.2.2.5 Jobs and economic conditions, social network, and personal aspirations*

The pandemic appears to be a middle ground between families in Bulgaria and economic opportunities. Some participants, especially the ones who studied abroad, explain that the pandemic affected their professional opportunities. They also felt the need to be close to their families and close ones in these days of uncertainty. Five of the returnees shared that their return was only influenced by the pandemic. Ivan, Anna, Tanya, Krasimira, and Lora explain that due to Covid19 their work opportunities, such as internships and work positions, were canceled so

for them returning home was a logical decision. They did not have a job, or their reasons for emigration failed, so the only thing they could have done was to return home. Tanya adds that apart from the canceled internship, her family was a strong driver for her to return. She explains that:

“But you know, my mom and dad, my sister, but also my grandparents, my uncle, my cousins are in Bulgaria and I missed them. At some point, you know, I guess probably getting older you realize that you need this sort of interaction” (Tanya, 21:15).

This trend corresponds with the latest Tuk-Tam report on reversed migration. The report states that the reason the increased number of returnees has increased in the past two years is due to COVID-19 (Tuk-Tam, 2022). According to Garrote Sanchez and colleagues (2021), the unprecedented number of emigrants who returned to Bulgaria during the pandemic was driven by the loss of jobs abroad or lack of healthcare coverage in their host countries or felt the need to reconnect with family. Hence, the pandemic can be seen as somewhat a combination of *jobs and economic conditions, social networks, and personal aspirations* encouraged and sustained by the importance of personal background and conditions in both countries of origin and host one. Through the return preparation model, the pandemic and the conditions in the countries fall under the aspect of willingness to return, while the personal background of having a family and social network in Bulgaria are the capitals and resources that encourage readiness for the return.

#### *5.2.2.6 Returning migrants' preparedness*

At first glance, the returnees do not put involve extensive planning around their return process. It rather appears to be a spontaneous decision than a well-thought process of gains and losses. According to the return-preparedness model, the process of return requires willingness and readiness for the emigrants to immigrate to their country of origin. On the questions about when they felt ready to return and what they needed, the participants shared that it just happened. Anna shares that:

“I don't think I was ready. Yeah. I just wanted to try because my internship in the UK got canceled. I didn't like my master's degree, so this was the only option, and the best option at that time.” (Anna, 08:47).

The same attitude goes to what was needed for the decision and process of return. Some participants needed information on the practical matters of the retuning process. Some needed nothing to “just five minutes” (12:14) to book their tickets as Georgy shared. Although it is not explicitly reflected, it is visible that there is a need for certain resources for them to return. Georgy explains that:

„I need five minutes on the Internet to buy tickets. Like because we immigrated late in our lives, it meant that we already have a life back in Bulgaria. So, returning for us always meant just five minutes on the Internet to buy the tickets. We had a home. You just open the door. And you can live in it (Georgy, 12:14)”.

This certain flexibility in the decision and accusation of mobility and the fact that the returnees had everything needed for them to return, suggests that there is already an existing pool of *tangible sources* as illustrated in the *Return Preparation* illustration (Cassarino, 2004). Through the prospect theory, the reasons why the emigrants returned to Bulgaria describe that their return was not only a voluntary act but also a combination of resource mobilization and preparedness. This is concluded based on the background of the participants, such as the educational institutions they attended before emigration, and their attitudes towards the practicality of returning. These sources include social capital, resource mobilization draws on tangible resources such as financial capital, and intangible resources such as contacts, relationships, skills, and financial capital. The trajectories of the participants correspond with the model because the return is a voluntary act and the extent to which the returnee can mobilize adequate resources to facilitate a return as suggested by van Meeteren et al. (2014). Similar conclusions can be drawn based on the answers to the question: *How did your background before living abroad influence your decision to return to Bulgaria? How so?* The answers included factors, such as family, nature, and certainly established lifestyles. Stoyan shares that:

“I knew the place and how everything works, and I had my family there.” (Stoyan, 10:45),

while Tanya tells that:

“After our return, we ended up going to the mountains because we have a villa there, and we spent two or three months there so you know we could adapt to life in Bulgaria.” (Tanya, 27:00),

and her husband eventually started working with her father. This quote suggests that upon the return Tanya had both physical and social capital, which made the return an easier process.

Based on the theoretical framework and methodological tools, this section established the answer to the question in three main parts - actual reasons, cost-benefit analysis, and the involvement of personal background. The reasons that encourage the highly skilled emigrants to return are grouped under *job and economic conditions, social network, and personal aspiration*, as the first one appears to be the base-stone for the return. The fourth category of the *creative class environment* appears to be irrelevant to the studied group. Returnees do not seem to take into account the values and views of a place upon their decision to return. The economic opportunities that Bulgaria offers, the added benefits of family, and the balance between work and life are the main benefits in the ratio of cost-benefits of returning. In general, the push factors are stronger upon the decision to return, but the returnees see essential advantages of life in Bulgaria over the one abroad. When it comes to the process of preparing for the return, the returnees see this process as a simple one, which requires only the task of buying the flight tickets. However, in terms of the theoretical framework, this statement does not hold reliability. It became clear that the individual background matters when returning is considered in terms of the pre-existing pool of capital and resources one had before emigrating. Although the background can be different from returnee to returnee, the existing benefits are categorized under the group of social class and wealth. Therefore, when it comes to the actual return, the returnees base their decision on their existing life back in the country, the opportunity for economic growth, the added benefits of lifestyle, and the presence of close ones.

### 5.3. Analysis of the governmental involvement

This part of the analysis takes the research a step further to answer the research question by involving the second sub-question - *How do these factors match with the programs' initiatives?* It further investigates the opinion of the returnees on governmental initiatives toward targeting brain gain. The part looks into the overall opinion of the returnees over the role of the government in the process of return and it also puts a focus on their individual experience with the latest governmental initiatives for increased brain gain. This research study aims to examine the RQ from the perspective of the returnees. Further, this part of the chapter narrows it to the direct question of if the initiatives of the two programs are factors that stimulate return migration. Hence, it is essential to look at what the attitudes toward the overall

involvement of the government in the process of return migration are. Such an analysis allows for answering the question of why the government of Bulgaria fails with attracting brain gain.

### 5.3.1. The visibility of the government

On the question of whether many people migrate back and what the reasons for these trends would be, the participants had mixed answers. Some answers suggested that people have been returning more in the past couple of years, while some answers had the opposite opinion. These differences suggest that brain gain is not very well known or observed by the public. None of the participants received any help from the government upon their arrival or were familiar with any existing help for highly skilled returnees. What catches the attention is that the returnees state that they did not need any help from the government. Georgy shares that:

“I don't want the government to know about. I pay my taxes, but that's about as much of interaction that I want to have with them” (Georgy, 29:15).

He considers himself better off and believes that any kind of subsidy should be directed to target groups that need support. Ivana also shares the same opinion. She adds:

“I wasn't interested in applying because I didn't know that something like did exist and also my dad helped me upon my return” (Ivana, 20:45).”

Such claims also direct the conclusion on the importance of the social class the highly skilled emigrants fall into. However, when asked whether they wished the government has done something for them, the participants shared their need for information. The participants explained that there is a limited resource in the process of returning from the job opportunities in Bulgaria to practicality, such as health insurance matters. Ivan shares:

“I mean, for me personally some financial help or something like this was not that important, to be honest. But, for me, what was unfortunate was that I didn't have any information on what's going on in Bulgaria” (Ivan, 19:18).

Overall, the government is not openly visible in the brain gain dynamics. Further, during the interviews, it became clear that there are narratives of rather a negative view of the government. Maria says that:

“I expect absolutely nothing from the government” (Maria, 14:10).

Although their acknowledgment of the lack of the presence of the government in the process of return, they also highlight the need for the government in the process. None of the participants have heard of the projects of this case study. The lack of knowledge about governmental initiatives, the negative narratives, and the lack of essential tools for the return, suggest that there is a lack of communication between the government and the target group. Hence, this is proof that the bottom-up approach is missing in the equation of creating policies concerning brain gain as suggested in the literature review.

### 5.3.2. Youth Bulgarian Migration and the National EURES Network

In terms of *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *the National EURES Network*, none of the participants have benefited or heard of these projects. Hence, the answers to the questions regarding the programs’ initiatives are hypothetical thinking of the participants. Based on these results, looking at the initiatives from *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* is visible that there is little to no consistency in the efforts to meet returnees’ needs. In events such as youth forums with the participation of graduates and young professionals who have graduated from foreign universities, participants express an interest, and they claim that such an initiative would have been useful towards their return. Anna shares:

“Definitely when you see that someone similar to you has done this and has gone through this and has achieved something or is satisfied with what he's doing and how he's living, definitely that's a factor” (Anna, 21:25),

while Tanya adds:

“I think they would have helped. However, I cannot say for sure if they would have changed my timeline” (Tanya, 38:03).

In the addition of summer internships in Bulgarian state institutions, although it is an initiative that provides opportunities for career development, people do not always see its relevance to their profession or field of realization. Stoyan explains that:

“You know, that could work again in theory, but just imagine you're coming back to Bulgaria for what? I don't know if you're an emigrant, you



come back to work for one month at maximum. So that the probability is not efficient” (Stoyan, 24:04).

The initiative of attracting foreign business organizations to consult and direct business relations with Bulgarian partners seems to be approved by the returnees. Most of them work with international companies or make sure they surround themselves with foreigners even outside their professional life. As already explained earlier in this chapter, it seems important that the returnees maintain these international relations. Ivan elaborates:

“Yeah, I mean, uh, I believe this would help because usually, companies like these try to provide, you know like an atmosphere and conditions for work similar to those in their Western European or American branches. Which a lot of times you know provides better atmosphere. And so, let's say a salary or better people to work with” (Ivan, 23:32).

Regarding the idea of a 1200lv monthly subsidy and housing for the period of up to one year, the participants expressed mixed opinions. Some participants, such as Georgy states that this money will be more needed from a different target group. Nikolina summarizes her thoughts on these initiatives as follows:

“It will not be appealing to me, but I would assume that this would be appealing coming without a job or from a different city than Sofia” (Nicolina, 35:03).

However, Nikolina is someone who returned to Bulgaria with a secured job from a foreign company but Anna is someone who came to Bulgaria because of failed job opportunities abroad due to the pandemic. Her point of view on this initiative is different:

“Yep, yep, this helps. First of all, people who are struggling with housing, because in so it's not, I mean it's. It's not that easy to find housing. It's not super difficult, like some cities in the Netherlands, but still, it's not that easy so. Definitely would have been nice to have. And yeah, a subsidy of 1200 leva, especially in the beginning” (Anna, 26:07).

Stoyan explains that:

“I don't think it will influence my decision. Let us face it, highly skilled people in the US, for example, are way higher paid, why would they come back for only 1200 leva?” (Stoyan, 23:10).

The subsidy is seen as something that is not a factor for people to return to Bulgaria. The highly skilled emigrants have a higher expectation of life in Bulgaria and what they earn when they return. The amount of 1200 BGN is not attractive to the returnees. As for housing, most of the returnees also do not need this help due to the already discussed existing pool of capital prior their emigration.

More mixed opinions also came at the questions in regard to subsidies on babysitters and Bulgarian language courses. The babysitter is seen as a helpful factor but not the turning point for people to return. Nikolina as the only participant with toddlers explains that:

“So, everything that has to do with kids that get you in a very tricky place. So, it would be a good interim solution but not a long-term solution and it would not make me return” (Nikolina, 35:40).

While for the language courses, the participants find it a useful addition to the integration process not only for Bulgarians and their families who return but also for other immigrants starting their life in Bulgaria. Georgy, Maria, Petur, and Lora do not consider this initiative not a factor in their return. Nikolina explains:

I mean everything is better than nothing. But is this something that would have changed their mind? I don't know” (Nikolina, 36:23).

Thus, the *Bulgarian Youth Migration* is not considered to be a factor for people to return but rather an addition to the process; something the returnees would have used as a starting point. The initiatives from *Bulgarian Youth Migration* seem to be matching the needs of the returnees, especially of recent graduates. The program extends the job and economic factors to the involvement of professional and foreign social networks, which appears essential to the returnees. Such initiatives result in networking and providing more social capital. In other words, by surrounding themselves with foreign influence, the migrants combine the economic

and social benefits of living abroad. But at the same time, they are physically close to their family, and other aspects as a healthier work-life balance. As found in the section above, this combination is what played as a pull factor for the emigrants to return. While the initiatives suggested by the *National EURES Network* are not a factor that encourages the emigrants to return. The initiatives designed in the framework of *the National EURES Network* do not match the needs of the returnees. Most of the returnees share that simply they neither need the subsidy of 1200 BGN nor housing or a babysitter, and this would have not been a factor for them to undertake the process of reverse migration. This is the case because they earn enough to afford and arrange their desirable Bulgarian lifestyle without the support of the government. The *National EURES Network* seems to take into account the characteristics of the target group. This includes their background, trajectories, and opportunities upon their arrival.

Although theoretically, the programs fall under the category of *jobs and economic conditions* and boost social networks in terms of professional connections, they are not seen as a factor that influences the emigrants to return. In other words, the programs seem not to be successful in attracting and sustaining brain gain for the Republic of Bulgaria. This is the case, because programs, as analyzed through the realist evaluation approach, work under certain conditions and most importantly are influenced by the way that different stakeholders respond to them. Based on the prospect theory and the interviews, it becomes clear that a development intervention on brain gain needs to take into account the different settings around it. In this case, the characteristics of the target group play a significant role in understanding their needs and thoughts on returning. Other settings that need to be involved in the designing of the programs are the fact that the push factors of the host countries seem to be the reason why emigrants return. The focus of these two programs is shifted towards the pull factors of Bulgaria. This mismatch creates a gap in the expectations of the returnees and the state.

The prospect theory states that individuals' attitude toward decisions depends on whether they face losses or gains (Vis, 2011). However, there are different perspectives on what is a gain and what is a loss depending on whether this is seen through the lenses of the government or the returnees themselves. In this case, there is a gap between what is considered benefits on the side of the returnees and the side of the government. Therefore, when the CMO approach is implicated is seen that the programs are not implemented within the context of the conditions such as individuals, personal values culture, and interpersonal relationships. Simplified, there is no understanding of the needs of the returnees and the initiatives do not reflect the reasons why one might return. This impact the mechanism of the returnees' reasoning

and responses to the program resources. And as a result, the outcome is unsuccessful programs and returnees' negative attitude towards governmental initiatives over brain gain. Hence, through the realist evaluation approach, it can be answered that these two programs' initiatives are not able to reach their goals within the circumstances where there is no open dialog between the policymakers and the target group of highly skilled emigrants.

#### 5.4. Analysis of the needs of the returnees

The closing part of this chapter deals with the analysis of potential improvements that can be done by the government to boost brain gain. It also looks into what sustains the occurred brain gain. As mentioned in the *Local context* chapter, the Bulgarian government aims to encourage a permanent state of return. For the policies to be successful, there is a need of understanding what makes people come back and stay. This part investigates the idea of permanent brain gain through the perspective of the returnees and their needs and how the government can sustain this process. Thus, this last part of the chapter aims to answer the third sub-question: *What improvements can be made in the programs' initiatives to fit with the stimulus and needs of young professionals who returned to Bulgaria?*

In terms of satisfaction, all of the participants express a strong feeling of satisfaction with their choice to return. This is caused due to, as explained by the participants, a better life-work balance. As already discussed, the search for a less stressful life occurs to be one of the reasons for the return. For instance, Tanya expresses a strong feeling of satisfaction for her return because she found a job that combines her goals of being useful and having an impact on someone's life within a healthier working environment. Georgy highlights that:

“I am very satisfied, but this is simply because I capitalized in all ways possible. So, I came back with a better job, a higher-paying job. And lower expenses and then moving back to a better situation for my family”  
(Georgy, 19:02).

The satisfaction of the return is caused by the aforementioned combination of the three reasons for return – *jobs and economic conditions, social networks, and personal aspirations*. The balance between self-development, well-being, and family as reasons stand up as a drive for satisfaction and reasoning for the return. Nevertheless, the tipping point is how comfortable one is with their job occupation. Satisfaction of the return highlights the importance of the reasons and how they are perceived by the returnees. Further, in the literature is mentioned that

return is seen as a permeant phenomenon. Satisfaction is one of the ways to look into whether returnees see their return as something successful and stable or not. So, to answer the research question and sub-questions it is important to understand the feeling towards the return after it has occurred.

On the question of what is needed for staying in Bulgaria, the participants agree on security and family are the priority for them. Security is seen as a job, an improvement in the educational system but also an improvement in the ties with the European Union and NATO. Some of the participants express worries about the current war between Russia and Ukraine and how this would affect the Bulgarian economy, while others are quite positive about the stability of the state due to the new government. To stay there is still the dominant need for a job and economic opportunities with the cooperation with social networks and personal aspirations. In terms of what should be improved, the participants all agree on the judicial system, infrastructure, information on return migration, and the involvement of people in designing policies. Ivan explicitly states:

“You know, they have to change the way they present this information towards all those young professionals and graduate students because I believe that a lot of them don't know what exactly is going on here.” (Ivan, 33:43).

Further, Tanya and Krasimira state that the government needs to find a way to empower the average citizens to fight for their rights. According to Krasimira, there is little to no involvement of people in designing policies. These claims go along with the already discussed issues on the lack of bottom-up approaches in terms of people's involvement in the designing policies. And last but not least, on the question, if the participants plan on emigrating again, they do not have plans to emigrate, but they also do not see Bulgaria as their final destination. Anna explains that:

“Not, currently not. But even if I have to, I'm already gone through this, so it wouldn't be such an issue” (Anna, 28:56).

Return is seen as a permanent decision that will result in development for a country. However, in the study case of Bulgaria, the returnees do not know whether they will stay in Bulgaria or not, they express a state of flexibility and possible mobility. Although the returnees express a feeling of satisfaction with their return, the reasons for returning were encouraged

mainly by the push factors of the host countries and supported by the social networks and personal aspirations at home. The programs were not what encouraged them to return, and as pointed out in the interviews, there are numerous aspects the returnees see as essential to be changed for more highly skilled emigrants to return. Therefore, to answer the third sub-question, what needs to be improved in the designing of policies, this is the involvement of the target group. In other words, there is a need for a bottom-up approach. In this way, the authorities can understand the dynamics of the returnees, including the importance of personal background, the push-pull factors, and the cost-benefits analysis from the point of view of the target group.

## Discussion

This research study provides a space for discussion of the perspectives on brain gain and the involvement of governmental institutions. The case study of Bulgarian brain gain recognizes the re-organization of economic activities and personal aspirations. Additionally, it questions the capability of the pre-existing top-down policy paradigm to deal with the challenges of return migration. The main themes depicted in the *Analysis* chapter revolve around the importance of stable economic opportunities and a social environment. Further, the *Analysis* raised questions about the importance of the bottom-up approach when designing migration policies and programs. This approach allows for taking into account the personal background of representatives of the target group and studying their needs within the geographical context of the country of origin. Hence, this chapter focuses on bringing the research together, including the analysis of the motives for return, and how they reflect the programs in question. Based on the methodological tools dedicated to this research, this chapter also discusses the importance of the involvement of agencies in the process of designing brain gain programs. The importance of agencies is presented through the discussion of the difference between push and pull factors and how they influence the decision to return. As a finding of the theoretical framework, the socio-economic background and the personal values of the returnees are also analyzed in this chapter.

### 6.1. Conceptual model and results

A conceptual model was created to understand what influences the decision of highly skilled emigrants to return to Bulgaria. Studying these dynamics leads to knowing if programs match or not the needs of returnees, and hence the research question of this study will be answered. The conceptual model, *Figure 3*, depicted the four possible dimensions that can affect the returnee to feel prepared to return and do so. From the interviews, it became clear that the essential factor for the return of the emigrants is *jobs and economic conditions*, followed by *social networks* and *personal aspirations*. While the returnees were not influenced by *the creative class environment* dimension. *Social networks* and *personal aspirations* are not influential unless suitable *jobs and economic conditions* are present. As this is true for the context of this study, it seems that these findings do not match with what has been discussed by previous research on the theme of return migration. As mentioned earlier in this study, according to Garrote-Sanchez et al. (2021), researches on return suggest that factors such as a ‘feeling nostalgic’ or ‘missing family’ play a more significant role in the return decision, while the economic factors are only a minor influence. As proven in this research study, the

data claims by Garrote-Sanchez et al. (2021) do not entirely reflect the reality of the Bulgarian case. Being nostalgic and missing family is a part of the decision-making process, but what determines the return is the economic push and pull factors from both host and source countries.

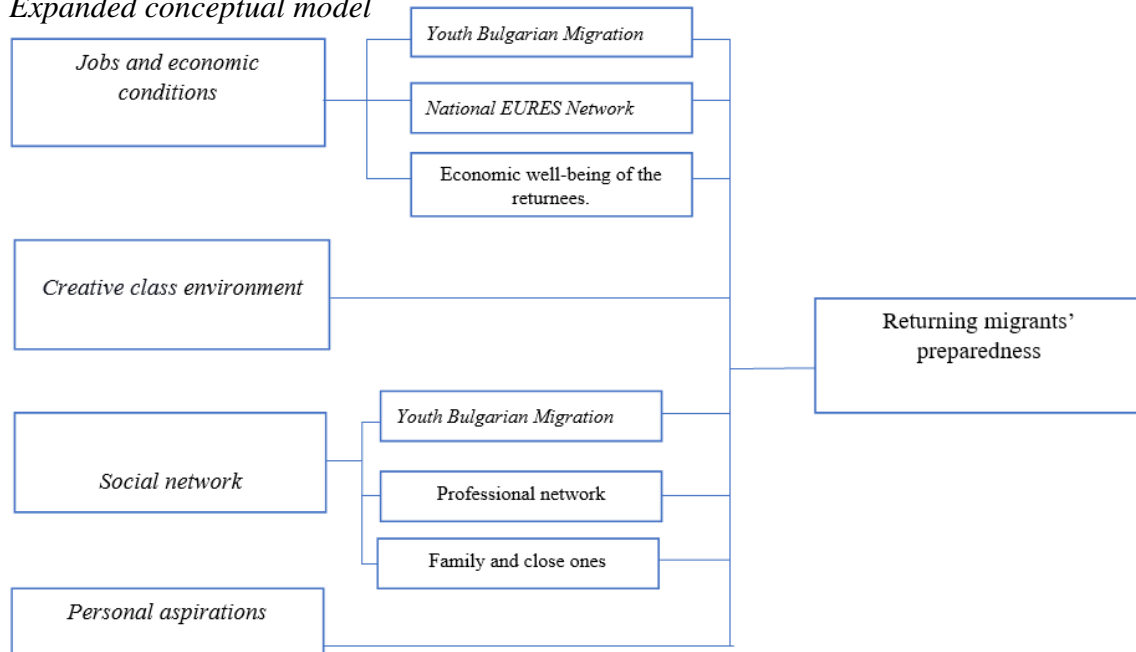
However, the *Analysis* points out a similarity between this study and others in the matter of government intervention towards brain gain policies study does. The claims made by Portes (2019), Straubhaar, (2008), Miryam (2017), and Coniglio & Brzozowski (2016) that the states mainly focus on factors that first revolve around economic growth and wealth, and job opportunities when designing brain gain initiatives holds for this case study. The latest programs, strategies, initiatives, and more specifically *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* focus entirely on economic growth through subsidy packages and professional networking. The two programs in question focus on higher payment and higher standards of living, and opportunities for better realization, which has also been reviewed by Portes (2019) on the general level. Nevertheless, the programs were proven to fail in their aim to attract reversed migration. During the interviews was shared that the programs are unlikely to be seen as a factor that will encourage the returnees to start their lives back in Bulgaria. As already presented in the literature review by Oishi (2012), Kofman, (2013), and Mavroudi & Warren (2013), programs and policies tend to fail because they do not match the needs of the target group.

As established in *the Operationalization of variables*, the programs fall under the dimensions of *jobs and economic conditions* and *social networks*. These two dimensions are two dominant aspects that encouraged return migration, yet the programs still fail to match the needs of the returnees. As a result, this study presents a complex paradox of how the needs of the returnees, and what the government offers fall under the same dimensions, yet the government still fails in meeting the needs of the returnees. It was established that the amount of 1200lv is not comparable to the welcoming environment for starting their own business where returnees are capable of making more profit. Most of the initiatives seem irrelevant to the target group because they do not need them. The returnees saw the economic prosperity in Bulgaria only as the second-best option because life abroad had more obstacles. Within the context of Bulgaria, the aspects of economic wellbeing of the returnees and family and close ones are the aspects that matter in the conceptual model. Hence, the dimensions of *jobs and economic conditions*, and *social networks* can be broken into sub-sections. *Figure 4* visualizes this idea:



**Figure 4**

*Expanded conceptual model*



The figure highlights that even within the same dimension there is a difference in the weight of the different factors. Although the programs are a part of the dimensions they are not as relevant as the economic advantages of the living standards in Bulgaria, foreign companies' units there and the presence of close ones, and the pull factors of the host country. Therefore, as a conclusion for this study also can be stated that the *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* do not match the needs of professionals who returned to Bulgaria and they are not effective in bringing brain gain.

## 6.2. Why do *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* do not match the needs of professionals who returned back to Bulgaria?

The question that raises from the conclusions above is what the reason for this fundamental mismatch is: why are these programs not effective to influence brain gain? One of the explanations presented by the reviewed literature is the lack of bottom-up involvement in designing brain gain programs. As Miryam (2017), Debnath (2016), Czaika & De Haas (2013), and De Haas (2012) explain there is a lack of the data necessary to understand return emigration patterns well enough to formulate an informed policy. One of the factors that contribute to the limited data is what Garrote-Sanchez et al. (2021) explain as the lack of involvement of the voice of the returnees when it comes to designing a policy on this theme. According to the participants in this research study, this is also true for the case of Bulgaria. The participants shared that they did not even know that the government was investing and working towards

encouraging return migration. Such limitations create the narratives of difficulties in understanding how brain gain is produced and sustained. By involving the target group directly, there is a space for the returnees to explain their needs and what matches or does not their characteristics.

A way to prove the importance of bottom-up initiatives and involvement is through the implementation of the theoretical framework and *realist evaluation approach*. These tools assume that projects and programs work under certain conditions and are influenced by the way different stakeholders respond to them (INTRAC, 2017). Further, the tools highlight the importance of personal circumstances in the process of taking decisions regarding migration but also the circumstances in both the source country and host country. The essential point here as investigated in the *Analysis* is the importance of gains and losses. Prospect theory's central finding is that individuals' attitude toward decisions depends on whether they face losses or gains, which explains what works for a program to be successful, for whom, in which circumstances, and why. The research showed that there is a mismatch between what is seen as a gain for the government and the returnees. By definition, rational decision-makers, in this case, both the government and the target group of migrants, know what they will like so the losses and gains are valued differently. This is why individuals make decisions based on perceived gains instead of perceived losses. This theory suggests that the losses and gains of highly educated and talented migrants returning to their country of origin are valued differently by the government and the migrants themselves and vary from emigrant to emigrant.

To implement the CMO this realist evaluation explains that the mismatch between the context personal context of Bulgarian highly skilled emigrants and the context of political interests for the Republic of Bulgaria impacts the mechanism of the returnees' response to the programs. Hence the outcome of programs, not working originates from the mismatch between the contexts of the returnees and the government. In short, the programs do not meet the expectations of the returnees because the context of gains is different for both groups. the government has little to no understanding of what the context of the returnees is and what they consider as gains, and what is lost. This is due to limited or no involvement of the returnees to understand what they value and what their reasons for return are. This knowledge, as mentioned by the returnees themselves, could be implicated in future policies and practices, which potentially would be able to demonstrate beneficial socioeconomic results for the Republic of Bulgaria. This is an essential complement to the long-standing national-state centrism and development for understanding what motivates the returnees to return, what their needs are, and

how the state can meet the expectations and create an environment for the return of the emigrants. Therefore, why the programs do not match the needs of the returnees can be explained by the lack of involvement of the returnees. The bottom-up approach provides a way for getting to know the target group and their attitudes towards the return and whether are stimulated by the sending or host countries.

### 6.2.1. Returnees' background

The implementation of a bottom-up approach in understanding the failure of the programs, suggests that the personal background of the returnees needs to be discussed. Through the implementation of the Return preparation illustration, it was shown that the presence of *resource mobilization* in the face of *tangible* and *intangible* resources and *social capital* was essential for the return. More specifically, through the interviews, it became clear that *social capital* and *tangible resources*, such as financial capital or housing, acquired before emigration are needed when one decides to return. Although there was difficult to notice explicit self-reflection from conversations with the returnees, it was clearly stated that the presence of these resources was the missing point for the return. This variable is not reflected in the programs that Bulgaria undertakes. This once again suggests that there is little to no understanding of the characteristics and hence the needs of returnees. These characteristics form way early in one's life which the government seems not to reflect upon. In the case of highly skilled emigrants and especially the ones who emigrate to pursue higher education abroad social class seems to influence their migration trajectories, needs, and responses towards governmental initiatives. A student's decision to study abroad is determined by their parent's financial status, so they can fund their studies, and also by their parents' high level of education (Zweig 1997; Baruch et al. 2007; Gibson and McKenzie 2011). Therefore, maintaining and perpetuating a high educational capital within the middle class, which most likely gets transformed into economic capital, encourages skilled migration. The middle and upper-middle class and excel at school—in socioeconomic and educational terms constitute the most dynamic youths who emigrate.

In the case study for this research, this relationship is narrowed down to personal assets and social networks which not only stimulated the emigration but also the return. Upon their return, the returnees can make use of the already existing resources which were enough to support their emigration to a Western country with more expensive standards of life. In other words, the returnees do not need housing or 1200 lv from the government because they already have these resources. They might even have more than that. These subsidies are not appealing

to them because simply they do not need them since they are wealthy enough to rely on greater help from the family or their resources before migration. Understanding and studying this essential characteristic of the target group is possible through studies and other theoretical means but the bottom-up approach and grassroots tools offer a broader observation. This observation extends to how social status affects or not the needs of people who plan on returning. Therefore, studying the background of the target group migration enable a better understanding of the dynamics of returnees, and thereby avoid the pitfalls and failures of policies. Hence, considering the socio-economic background from the perspective of the returnees is the tipping point in answering the question of the extent programs that offer monetary subsidies and networking match or not the returnees' needs.

### 6.2.2. Conditions at home

This research and the talks with the returnees suggested the importance of distinguishing between pull and push factors as a reason for the return of emigrants. The research showed that people return mostly due to the conditions in the host country rather than what Bulgarian authorities offer. Personal aspirations and family come only as an added value to the decision-making process. It seems that *Youth Bulgarian Migration and National, EURES Network* do not match the needs of the returnees and are not factors for their return because they are trying to implement irrelevant pull factors. Through the interviews was mentioned that the environment of potential opportunities, family, and other personal aspirations is what makes the home country a place for the continuation of their migration trajectory because it is seen as a welcoming place, it is not a pull factor but a result of a personal-cost benefits analysis. Such analysis did not include the idea of governmental help but rather a personal network, savings, and feelings. Hence, the question shifts to whether the government needs to directly target the returnees, or to target improving the conditions in the country of origin. Playing the role of a receiving country would require facing the fact that the country has limited resources to offer as a reason for a return but has resources to offer as a welcoming place. To become a welcoming country, Bulgaria needs to adopt measures and initiatives that establish sustainable development which can meet the expectations one brings when returning home. Examples, as discussed by the returnees of this research, might include the judicial system, and the overall infrastructure of the country. This idea links with what Bakalova & Misheva (2018) present that source countries need to have sufficient economic dynamics to absorb and utilize the potential talent of students who return. The government has the opportunity to spot the most suitable direction for a brain gain policy that takes into account the push factors of the host countries.

Therefore, their governmental involvements need to target the conditions at home rather than providing monetary help to highly skilled emigrants.

### 6.3. Author's omissions

The chapter *Methodology* also talked about the positionality of the researcher within the study and the potential influences on the research conduction, its outcomes, and results (Holmes, 2020). To avoid any biases, Savin-Baden & Major's (2013) reflexivity model was adopted. In this chapter, the final step of the model is followed up. This step includes the reflection of the researcher about the research context, acknowledging that research will necessarily be influenced by her personal experience. Upon collecting the data, analyzing and discussing it, it was visible the presence of personal experiences with the issues of brain gain and brain gain on the side of the researcher. On the one hand, the personal experience was insightful to the research. The similarities between the researcher and the participants contributed to the creation of trust and comfortability. The interviews had a smooth flow and had the form of a friendly conversation rather than a strict academic interview. This resulted in honesty and vulnerability in sharing their stories.

However, on the other hand, the challenges of confirmation bias were encountered as well. The researcher concluded that her personal bias revolves around her skepticism about returned life in Bulgaria. The main narratives in media, conversations with friends and family, revolve around the increasing rates of poverty, corruption, and homophobia just to name a few. However, during the interviews, it came as a surprise to her to hear that life in Bulgaria is reaching high standards. It turned out that the returnees are happy with the social and political changes occurring in Bulgaria. Overall, the attitude of the returnees towards life in Bulgaria is quite positive, while the researcher had quite a negative one. The decreasing clash between personal expectations and an actual phenomenon was avoided through the way of the use of codes during analyzing the data. In this way, all the interviews were grouped under the same themes, and the repetitive answers were obvious. In this way, there was little room for avoiding the facts and including personal opinions. Further, the involvement of academic literature on the issue through the last two chapters provided relatability and more objectivity and nuanced interpretation of the data.

## Concluding remarks and Recommendations

This research study aimed to understand what the reasons behind the decisions of emigrants are to return to their country of origin and how these reasons are understood by the local authorities and reflected in the initiatives they carry out. As a case study, this research carried the question of “To what extent do the initiatives from *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* match the needs of professionals who have returned to Bulgaria?” Answering these research questions allows for further exploring of what produces and sustains brain gain and how the authorities can reflect on these trends. This final chapter comes back to answering the research and sub-questions and summarizes the main findings accordingly. Further, some of the limitations encountered in the research are discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research are outlined.

### 7.1. Answering the research question

In conclusion, a combination of economic and non-economic reasons determines the return. The reasons that encourage the highly skilled emigrants to return are grouped under the dimensions of *the job and economic conditions, social network, and personal aspiration*, as the first one appears to be the base-stone for the return. The fourth category of the *creative class environment* appears to be irrelevant and non-influential to the studied group. The economic opportunities that Bulgaria offers and the added benefits of family and the balance between work and life are the main benefits in the ratio of cost-benefits of returning. The governmental programs and initiatives appear to be of little importance to the high-skilled emigrants for their return. Although they fall under the category of *jobs and economic conditions* and *social networks*, they do not match the needs of the returnees. It became clear that the individual background matters when returning is considered in terms of the pre-existing pool of capital and resources one had before emigrating. Although the background can be different from returnee to returnee, the existing benefits are categorized under the group of social class and wealth. Therefore, when it comes to the actual return, the returnees relay their decision on their existing life back in the country, the opportunity for economic growth, the added benefits of lifestyle, and the presence of close ones but not upon the government subsidies and programs.

The research concludes that the initiatives carried out by the *National EURES Network* are not a reason for the highly skilled emigrants to return. The majority of the participants shared that they neither need the subsidy of 1200 BGN nor housing or a babysitter, and this would have not been a factor for them to undertake the process of reverse migration. They see these subsidies as something that they do not need due to their socioeconomic

background. They shared that they earn enough money to afford to arrange their desirable Bulgarian lifestyle without the support of the government. The initiatives from *Bulgarian Youth Migration* seem to be more in a line with the needs of the returnees and especially of recent graduates. This is the case because the program offers space for creating professional networks which fall under the category of *jobs and economic conditions*. Initiatives that include networking and sharing knowledge mainly with foreign influence are seen as influential to the decision to return home because they involve a wider spectrum of one's life. Such initiatives result in networking and providing social capital, Nevertheless, the participants shared that the initiatives are just an addition to their return but not an influential aspect. The priorities of the two discussed programs are not only wishful, but they do not adequately reflect the target group they address. Therefore, to answer the research question, "To what extent do the initiatives from *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* match the needs of professionals who have returned to Bulgaria?" it became clear that there is little to no consistency in the efforts of the two programs to meet returnees' needs. The outcomes of attracting brain gain based on their initiatives would have been rather vague and unsuccessful.

## 7.2. How does the study contribute to the debate?

The findings of this study are of importance since they spotted crucial gaps within the literature on the issue of return migration and governmental involvement. By doing so the findings not only contribute to the debate on the issue but also add further evidence to a scientific consensus and also disprove prior studies. The added value of this research begins with disapproving previous studies that claim that the main reason for return revolves mainly around the personal aspirations of feeling nostalgic or missing home. This study proved that personal aspirations such as better work-life balance, and the importance of family play a role in defining the return. The current research study disapproved the fact that these factors matter but they appear to be only secondary. This finding adds to the debate by providing a new direction in understanding the overall picture of why highly skilled emigrants return. Furthermore, this study adds to the existing debate by emphasizing the lack of but the importance of the bottom-up approach in studying brain gain. The results of this study are a call for open communication between the target group and the authorities in charge. Both theoretical understanding and practical implementation demonstrate that without studying in depth the target group crucial details are lost which costs the government failures of programs and policies. This approach answered the crucial questions of what works, for whom, in which

circumstances, and why. Since it takes a greater range of influences into account such as both factors at home and abroad, as personal background and group characteristics. More specifically, the bottom-up approach, involved in this study broadens the debate on the importance of resource mobilization. The study proved that the programs are failing because the government is offering the returnees what they already have. Hence, by involving them in the process of policy creation, these issues could be avoided and the focus could be put on lacking resources or supporting the exciting ones.

Last but not least, the added value of this research extends to the suggestions for improving and designing brain gain policies through the bottom-up approach for the Bulgarian context. Through the interviews and the provided space for returnees to express their needs, it was established that there are points for improvement in governmental actions to encourage more people to return. The majority of them stated that they wished there was more information on practical matters upon their return. As also presented in the reviewed literature, the government does not offer anything that summarizes the steps one needs to undertake when returning, where they might find help with searching for a job, what their rights are, etc. All of these are spread around the websites of different governmental institutions and they are not always consistent and finalized. However, in 2020 Tuk-Tam presented the newly created *Guide to Bulgaria*, an innovative online platform that contains information in one place about the main directions of life in Bulgaria (Tuk-Tam, 2022). This includes life, work, education, and community. The guide provides up-to-date content about life in Bulgaria, job ads, employer company profiles, scholarships, events, and detailed information for Bulgarians planning to return. The aim of the Guide to Bulgaria is to inspire and inform people who want to connect with Bulgaria and each other. Three of the interview participants shared that this guide provided them with the help they wished the government provided them. Hence, similar to what Tuk-Tam did, the government can create an easily assessable platform that gathers all information needed. The investment and promotion of this platform through governmental intervention will be positively welcomed by the group of highly skilled migrants who are returning or plan to do so.

### 7.3. Limitations

The findings presented in this study, however, need to be read with some caution, as some factors might have impacted the validity of the data and thus the results. One of the limitations this research study faced is the reliability of the literature review on the local context concerning the governmental involvement in brain gain. During the information gather process



it was challenging to find consistent information not only to the overall governmental attitude towards brain gain but also about the two projects discussed in this study. There were not any project frameworks or evaluations available to the public. Even when contacting governmental institutions, the representatives in charge of answering the inquiries of the public, had difficulties with providing directions on where to find information. This issue might harm the accuracy of government initiatives and hence affect the reliability of the research and its findings.

The second limitation of this research refers to the sample size. In qualitative research, the sample size has been the subject of enduring discussions (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Although usually qualitative researches require smaller sample sizes, this research aims to evaluate what are the reasons that encourage emigrants to return to Bulgaria and how those reasons are reflected in the two of the late governmental interventions. Therefore, generalizing that *Youth Bulgarian Migration* and *National EURES Network* do not match the needs of highly skilled emigrants based on an insufficient number of participants in the research, might lead to unreliable conclusions.

#### 7.4. Suggestions for future researches

In this study, similar to the work of Cassarino (2004), Crescenzi et al. (2015), and Garrote-Sanchez et al. (2021,) the focus was on understanding what are the dimensions that influence the process of return. In these four studies, it was found that the combination of economic and non-economic factors determines the return of highly skilled emigrants. However, as investigated by Haase & Honerath (2016), Clark & Lisowski (2017, and this research study, the reasons for returning are more complex and involve the background characteristics of the target group. The research, and more specifically the current one, highlighted the importance of the socio-economic background of target groups when one decides whether to return or not. These finding hints that extensive research on this matter might present a new perspective on the relation between brain drain and brain gain. Such a study will not only allow for an understanding of the motives for the wealthy class to move, but it will also provide an analysis of inner social disparities and how they affect brain gain and the overall development of a state. Further, such a potential study can analyze the difference in return policies regarding different target socio-economic groups.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview guide, English Version

#### Introduction

- First of all, thank you for your willingness to participate in my research. Before we start, I will quickly walk you through some practicalities of the interview for today.
- As you already know, my name is Gana Radoeva and I am currently working on my thesis for my MA program in International Development Studies at Utrecht University.
- The study examines the measures/reasons that encourage the reverse migration of Bulgarian emigrants. The overall picture of the study aims to trace the relationship between the development of Bulgaria and the so-called brain gain in this process. In order to be able to analyze these trends, I need to talk to highly qualified emigrants who have lived abroad but have return in Bulgaria in the last seven years.
- The length of the interview is between 30 and 40 minutes.
- You are guaranteed full anonymity. Instead of your name, we will refer to you as a Participant 1, 2 and etc. This means I will use the information you share, but it will not be linked to any of your personal information.
- You are free to ask any questions you have and if there are questions you do not feel comfortable answering we can skip them or if at some point during the interview you would like us to stop with the interview, please do indicate this to me and we can stop with the interview.
- Before we start, do I have your consent to interview you and audio-record our conversation by using my mobile phone? ... Thank you.

**\*start recording\***

#### Opening questions

1. Could you describe your migration trajectory - place of birth, when/why migrated, where to, how long, where do you live now
2. What was your occupation abroad and what is your occupation now?

#### Key questions

##### General questions:

1. What are the advantages of life in Bulgaria in comparison to the country you lived in?

- Probes: economic – better job, highly paid job, social – networking, personal – family, nostalgia
2. How satisfied are you with your choice to come back?
    - Probes:
  3. What do you think are the main reasons that motivate people to return to Bulgaria?
    - Probes: economic, environment, network, personal

### **Factors, prospect theory, and preparedness**

4. When did you feel ready to return? – readiness  
Probes: Stage of life, event, aspiration, dreams
5. What did you need in order to return to Bulgaria?
  - Probes: security – social and economic, help from government, personal event
6. What were the reasons that motivated you to come back to Bulgaria?
  - Probes: economic – better job, highly paid job, social – networking, personal – family, nostalgia
7. By coming back to what extent did you fulfill these reasons? What is missing?
8. How did your personal background before living in (the country abroad) influence your decision to return to Bulgaria? How so? – this refers to prospect theory  
Probes: family, culture, nostalgia, aspiration
9. What were your expectations for your life in Bulgaria and were these expectations met?
  - Probes: better/worse life
10. How does or does not the environment in Bulgaria match your professional skills and personal views?
  - Probes: work environment, societal views
11. How did your return contribute to a change in your environment?
  - Probes: bringing new views, different skills, negative way

### **Local context**

12. According to you do many highly-skilled emigrants return to Bulgaria?
13. Why do you think a low /high/decent number of Bulgarians return home?
  - Probes: opportunities, mindset, societal pressure
14. Did you receive any help/subsidies from the government for your return to Bulgaria?
  - Probes: money, job, housing, shared experience
15. What was the help (in case the answer is yes)?

16. How did the help provided by the government match your needs?
- Probes: skills, space for improvement, opportunities for realization
17. What was missing for you (in case the answer is yes)?
- Probes: skills, space for improvement, opportunities for realization
18. What do you wish the government have has done for you (in case the answer is no)?
- Probes: support, guiding, job, improving in the society
19. Are you familiar with any (other) initiatives that the government of Bulgaria undertakes in order to attract people to return to Bulgaria? What are they?
20. To what extent do you think they are successful?
- Probes: influencing the society, the working environment, the lifestyle

### **Programs context**

21. Have you heard of the programs: Youth Bulgarian Migration and National EURES Network? How and what do you know about them?
22. How do you think events such as youth forums with the participation of graduates and young professionals who have graduated from foreign universities would have influenced your decision to return to Bulgaria? How do you think such events can influence your decision-making process?
- Probes: sharing experience
23. What about summer internships in Bulgarian state institutions? Would have they influenced your decision to return?
- Probes: opening up opportunities, improving the working environment
24. How the attraction of foreign business organizations to consult and direct business relations with Bulgarian partners would influence your decisions to come back to and stay in Bulgaria? How do you think this would be useful and influential to your life in Bulgaria?
- Probes: improving the working environment, opening up more work positions
25. To what extent the amount of 1200 lv and housing for the period of up to one year would have been a reason for you to come back to Bulgaria?
- Probes: higher income – a better life, standards of living, security, extra support, motivation
26. And what about if your child was not admitted to a kindergarten, but the government provided with a babysitter? How would this have made you consider returning to Bulgaria? Why this would be (or not) a factor for you?
- Probes: security, support, reducing living cost

27. What if a family member did not speak Bulgarian or needed an additional qualification, but the government provided you with a voucher for a language course or additional qualification, how this would have influenced your decision on returning?

- Probes: integration in the society, support, reducing costs

### **Closing questions**

1. What do you need in order to stay in Bulgaria?

- Probes: personal reasons, career, security, government, society

2. What do you think should be improved in Bulgaria in order for more highly-skilled migrants to return?

- Probes: government interventions, societal mindset

3. Are you planning on migrating out again? Why yes/Why not?

4. What are your plans?

- Probes: career, family, traveling

5. Is there anything you would like to add on the topic of brain gain/return migration and Bulgaria?

- Probes: suggestions, concerns

### **Appendix B: Interview guide, Bulgarian Version**

#### **Въведение:**

- Преди всичко, благодаря Ви за желанието да участвате в моето изследване. Преди да започнем, набързо ще Ви превода през някои практически аспекти на интервюто за днес.
- Както вече знаете, казвам се Гана Радоева и в момента работя над дипломната си работа за магистърската си програма по Международно развитие в Университета в Утрехт.
- Изследването разглежда мерките/причините, които насърчават обратната миграция на българските емигранти. Цялостната картина на изследването се опитва да проследи връзката между икономическото развитие на България и т. нар. brain gain в този процес. За да мога да анализирам тези тенденции, трябва да говоря с висококвалифицирани емигранти, които са живели в чужбина, но са се завърнали в България през последните седем години.
- Продължителността на интервюто е между 30 и 40 минути.

• Гарантира Ви се пълна анонимност. Вместо вашето име ще сте наричан Участник 1, 2 и т.н. Това означава, че ще използвам информацията, която споделяте, но тя няма да бъде свързана с никоя ваша лична информация.

• Вие сте добре дошли да задавате всякакви въпроси, които имате и ако има въпроси, на които не се чувствате комфортно да отговаряте, можем да ги пропуснем или ако в даден момент по време на интервюто искате да спрем с интервюто, моля, посочете ми това и можем да спрем.

• Преди да започнем, имам ли вашето съгласие да ви интервюирам и да запиша разговора ни чрез мобилния си телефон? ... Благодаря ти.

\* запис\*

### **Въвеждащи въпроси:**

1. Бихте ли описали вашата миграционна траектория - място на раждане, кога/защо мигрирахте, къде, колко време, къде живеете сега
2. С какво се занимавахте в чужбина и с какво се занимавате сега?

### **Основни въпроси:**

1. Какви са предимствата на живота в България в сравнение със страната, в която сте живели?

- Помощ: икономически – по-добра работа, високоплатена работа, социални – мрежи, лични – семейство, носталгия

2. Доколко сте доволни от избора си да се върнете?

3. Кои според Вас са основните причини, които мотивират хората да се завърнат в България?

- Помощ: икономически, екологични, мрежови, лични

### **Фактори, теория на перспективите и готовност**

4. Кога се почувствахте готови да се върнете? - готовност

Помощ: етап от живота, събитие, стремеж, мечти

5. Какво ви трябваше, за да се върнете в България?

- Помощ: сигурност – социална и икономическа, помощ при формирането на правителство, лично събитие

6. Кои бяха причините, които ви мотивираха да се върнете в България?

- Помощ: икономически – по-добра работа, високоплатена работа, социални – мрежи, лични – семейство, носталгия

7. Връщайки се до каква степен изпълнихте тези причини? Какво липсва?

8. Как личният Ви опит преди да сте живели в (страната в чужбина) повлия на решението ви да се върнете в България? Как така?

Помощ: семейство, култура, носталгия, стремеж

9. Имахте ли някакви очаквания за живота си в България и оправдаха ли се тези очаквания?

- Помощ: по-добър/по-лош живот

10. Как средата в България съответства или не отговаря на вашите професионални умения и лични възгледи?

- Помощ: работна среда, обществени възгледи

11. Как Вашето завръщане допринесе за промяна във вашата среда?

- Помощ: внасяне на нови възгледи, различни умения, отрицателен начин

### **Местен контекст**

12. Според Вас висококвалифицирани емигранти завръщат ли се в България?

13. Защо според Вас малък /висок/приличен брой българи се завръщат у дома?

14. Получихте ли помощ/субсидии от правителството за завръщането си в България?

- Помощ: пари, работа, жилище, споделен опит

15. Каква беше помощта (в случай, че отговорът е да)?

16. Как предоставената от правителството помощ отговаря на Вашите нужди?

- Помощ: умения, пространство за усъвършенстване, възможности за реализация

17. Какво Ви липсваше (в случай, че отговорът е да)?

- Помощ: умения, пространство за усъвършенстване, възможности за реализация

18. Какво бихте искали да беше направило правителството за Вас (в случай че отговорът е не)?

- Проверки: подкрепа, насочване, работа, подобряване в обществото

19. Запознати ли сте с някакви (други) инициативи, които правителството на България предприема, за да привлече хора да се завърнат в България? Какво са те?

20. До каква степен според Вас те са успешни?

- Помощ: влияние върху обществото, работната среда, начина на живот

### **Програмите**

21. Чували ли сте за програмите: *Младежка българска миграция* и *Национална мрежа EURES*? Как и какво знаете за тях?

22. Как мислите, че събития като младежки форуми с участието на дипломанти и млади специалисти, завършили чуждестранни университети, биха повлияли на решението Ви да се върнете в България? Как мислите, че подобни събития могат да повлияят на процеса на вземане на решения?

- Помощ: споделяне на опит

23. Ами летните стажове в българските държавни институции? Щяха ли да повлияят на решението Ви да се върнете?

- Помощ: отваряне на възможности, подобряване на работната среда

24. Как привличането на чуждестранни бизнес организации за консултиране и насочване на бизнес отношения с български партньори би повлияло на Вашите решения да се върнете и да останете в България? Как мислите, че това би било полезно и въздействащо за живота Ви в България?

- Помощ: подобряване на работната среда, отваряне на повече работни позиции

25. До каква степен сумата от 1200 лв. и жилище за период до една година биха били причина да се върнете в България?

- Помощ: по-висок доход – по-добър живот, стандарт на живот, сигурност, допълнителна подкрепа, мотивация



26. Ами ако детето Ви не е било прието в детска градина, а правителството е осигурило детегледачка? Как това би те накарало да помислиш да се върнеш в България? Защо това би било (или не) фактор за Вас?

- Помощ: сигурност, поддръжка, намаляване на разходите за живот

27. Ами ако член на семейството не говори български или има нужда от допълнителна квалификация, но правителството Ви предостави ваучер за езиков курс или допълнителна квалификация, как това би повлияло на решението Ви за завръщане?

- Помощ: интеграция в обществото, подкрепа, намаляване на разходите

### **Заклучителни въпроси**

1. Какво ви е необходимо, за да останете в България?

- Помощ: лични причини, кариера, сигурност, правителство, общество

2. Какво според вас трябва да се подобри в България, за да се завърнат повече висококвалифицирани мигранти?

- Помощ: правителствени намеси, обществено мислене

3. Планирате ли да мигрирате отново? Защо да/защо не?

4. Какви са бъдещите ви планове?

- Помощ: кариера, семейство, пътуване

5. Има ли нещо, което бихте искали да добавите по темата за миграцията/върщането на мозъка и България?

- Помощ: предложения, опасения