

School-to-Work Transitions in Bulgaria: Social Disparities and Regional Differences

Principal Investigators

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Project Overview

Funding and Duration:

Swiss-Bulgarian Research Programme*

Nov. 2012 – Oct. 2015

Research Question:

How does the education system affect ethnic, social and gender disparities in school-to-work transitions across Bulgarian regions?

* The joint research program aims at strengthening the research cooperation between Bulgaria and Switzerland in order to further enable the integration of Bulgarian researchers within international networks as well as to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and know-how among researchers.

Theoretical Backdrop

School-to-work transitions are embedded in institutional structures of the national education system and its linkage to the labour market

(Maurice et al. 1982; Allmendinger 1989)

Relevant components

- levels of stratification in the education system
- the relative importance of vocational vs. general educational programs
- permeability between and within educational programs
- linkage between study programs and labour market

Context

Bulgaria's transition from state socialism to market capitalism

- led to changes in education systems (decentralization, liberalization and privatization)
- had impacts on school-to-work transition (more risk and uncertainty, decline in employment, social exclusion)

(Noelke and Müller 2011; Kostova 2008; Popov 2007)

Stratification in Bulgaria includes significant *ethnic and regional differences* in educational achievement and employment

(Stoilova and Haralampiev 2009; Pamporov 2011)

Bulgaria achieves greater *gender equality* in education and employment compared to other countries (Kovacheva 2008)

Aims

The project aims at better understanding

- a) the mechanisms behind educational (un)success and school-to-work transition in contemporary Bulgaria;
- b) the social and ethnic inequalities as well as the low gender segregation of these transitions;
- c) the variation of labour market access and the impact it has on disparities across regions in Bulgaria.

Study Components

National: *Retrospective school-leavers and labour market entry survey* to identify young people's pathways along different educational tracks to different positions in the labour market

Regional: Three regional case studies to analyze consequences of differing educational offers on individual school-to-work transitions

International: Comparative analysis of Bulgarian survey data with Switzerland and other European countries

Methodology

- Nationally representative retroactive school leavers and labour market entry survey
- Target group: individuals aged 15-35, who left formal education in the 5 years preceding the survey
- N=2100 (1500 representative cases and 600 additional regional cases)
- Two-stage cluster sample: electoral districts and random walk of households (all target persons available at household are interviewed)

School-leavers Survey

Part 1: Educational Variables

- Education and training career (basic, secondary, tertiary education)
- Vocationalism and Gender-type
- Dropout
- Education & training since leaving education

Part 2: Labour Market Outcomes

(including a calendar of activities)

- Employment before leaving formal education
- First employment experience after leaving education
- Current labour market situation
- Job search
- Income and earnings

Part 3: Socio-demographic characteristics

1st Project Year

Milestones:

- 1st Bi-national meeting and international conference (Basel, November 2012)
- Joint meeting with and survey input from Bulgarian Ministries of Labour & Social Policy, Economics, and Education (June 2013)
- Selection of polling firm; finalization and translation of questionnaire (May-September 2013)
- 2nd Bi-national meeting - data collection; finalization of questionnaire (Sofia, July 2013)
- Pilot survey field work (October 2013)

1st Project Year

Publications and (selected) Presentations:

- “Dynamics of inequalities in access to higher education: Bulgaria in a comparative perspective” by P. Illieva-Trichkova & P. Boyadjieva (forthcoming *European Journal of Higher Education*)
- “Education Systems and Gender Stratification in Bulgaria” Career orientations, education systems and gendered school-to-work transitions Conference, University of Basel, November 24-5, 2012.
- “Does expansion and greater equity in higher education mean worse employability? A comparative perspective” (P. Illieva-Trichkova & P. Boyadjieva) EAIR Forum Rotterdam, August 28-31, 2013.
- “Higher Education and Well-Being” (P. Illieva-Trichkova & P. Boyadjieva) CHER Lausanne, September 9-11, 2013.

Current Project Tasks

A) Secondary data analysis (GGS, LFS, ESS)

B) Preparations for fieldwork

- Pilot survey identifies two challenges

1. difficulty reaching target group in big cities

consider two method approach: random walk with f2f interviews in villages/towns and CATI in cities → sampling weight issues

2. refusal rates

consider offering incentives

Project Plan

- School leavers survey - data collection (Nov-Dec 2013)
- In-depth interviews in regional case studies (Spring 2014)
- Data analysis & writing (2014-15)
 - School leavers and labour market entry survey
 - Three regional case studies
 - International comparative analysis with Kogan's CEE countries study; Imdorf's multi-country study on education systems and gender segregation
- Dissemination of findings to academics and policy makers (2015)

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