



**T3.4.11 Country report: Bulgaria**  
**Results Part a) Interviewees` educational  
and working trajectories, meanings of  
work, coping strategies**

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## 1. Brief overview of Bulgarian sample

This report is based on empirical material collected through 43 interviews. The field work was conducted in the period December 2015-July 2016. All respondents are aged 18-29. The interviews were carried out in two different geographical contexts: 21 participants were living in the city of Montana (Northwestern region) at the time of the interviews and 22 in Sofia (capital, Southwestern region). The female are overrepresented in the sample – 26 out of the total sample (N=43), and the man are 17. With respect to the other criteria: ethnicity, education and participation in policy measures the sample is well balanced. More than the half of interviewees (23) are from Bulgarian origin and the rest 20 belong to ethnic minority groups, especially Roma. In the sample plan taking into account the national peculiarities this ethnic minority group is considered as “specific vulnerable group” due to the relatively disadvantaged position of Roma people in general in terms of important individual welfare determinants such as: access to employment, education, healthcare and other public services, negative stereotypes and high discrimination risk. Another important reason for paying attention to participants belonging to the Roma community is the ethnic structure of the population living in one of the district that we choose to study - approximately 13% of the Montana district’s inhabitants are of Roma origin. Moreover the data from the last census in 2011 shows that approximately 5% of the population in Bulgaria belongs to Roma ethnicity group. The tendency is for constantly increase of the number of Roma people and since the beginning of the century it has doubled<sup>1</sup>.

21 participants are (or have been) involved in some measures aimed at decreasing youth unemployment and avoiding the risk of social exclusion and 22 have not participated in any such measures. Regarding the education level, most of the interviewed young people (19 out of 43) have secondary level of education (ISCED 3), 13 have a tertiary education (university degree, ISCED 5-6) and the rest 11 have a low educational level (ISCED 0-2). The age group 25-29 has more representatives – 29 out of total, and 14 were aged 15-24. Regarding their occupational status, 13 were temporary workers (in this number 11 youths labour market programme participants). The unemployed or working without a regular employment contract were 10 participants, and 12 were NEETs, 8 youths had secure job. With respect to the interviewees’ housing situation, 28 interviewees live in the parental home, while 15 live in a separate household alone, with flatmates or their partner. Distribution of interviewees in the two cities on the different criteria can be seen in Annex 1 Table for the sample overview. For more detailed

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Statistical Institute. 2011. Book 2: Demographic and social characteristics. Available at [http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FulltOpen/P\\_22\\_2011\\_T1\\_KN2.pdf](http://statlib.nsi.bg:8181/isisbgstat/ssp/fulltext.asp?content=/FullT/FulltOpen/P_22_2011_T1_KN2.pdf) (in Bulgarian).



information about the National sampling strategy, Interview implementation process, Difficulties and Specificities see: Bulgarian methodological report in D3.3 *A methodological report*).

## **2. Interviewees' educational and working trajectories**

In the Bulgarian sample regarding level of education most presented are participants with secondary education - 19, with tertiary education – 13, and 11 have primary or lower education, among them there are boys and girls who have no education at all. In the sample the young people with tertiary education have a linear development of the educational path - immediately after the secondary education, they have begun to study at a university. Most participants with tertiary education have graduated Social Sciences: 3 Economic disciplines, 2 Pedagogy, 2 Social work and Psychology, 2 Jurisprudence. One of them had graduated Biology and Chemistry (Natural sciences), and only one has a degree in Applied sciences - Medical technician. According to the rating system presented by the Ministry of Education and Science<sup>2</sup> the unemployment rate<sup>3</sup> among the graduates is highest precisely among people graduated social sciences. All these courses, with the exception of the medical laboratory, are above the average for this indicator, as with some of the highest values are the Social work, Psychology, Pedagogy, Biological sciences. Each one of these youths declares his willingness to work in the specialty, which he studied. Petar (29, M, HE, PE) even graduates "Psychology" though his parents insisted him to study engineering specialty that would ensure him a craft. He himself was aware that it would be more difficult to find work, but decided to follow what is interesting for him.

Only one of the graduates had chosen a tertiary education, given the connection between education and opportunities for a future career. Considering the shortage of medical staff in the labour market in Bulgaria, Petar is convinced that:


*"... This is a profession [medical technician] that will always have a job, this is the basic. There will always be patients there will always be hospitals (laughs) and the probability of not not to work right in this specialty, given that you've graduated it is minimal" (Petar, 29, M, HE, PE).*

It could be said that when Bulgarian youths choose a tertiary education, they are led more by their personal interests, rather than the opportunities for future work. The reason for this can be found in the unawareness of the situation on the Bulgarian labour market, but also the lack of professional advice and guidance before completing high school. This can lead to disappointment, as is the case with Anton (25, M, HE, TE), who because of his love for the sports began to study and graduated from the National Academy of Sports, Physical Education profile.

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<sup>2</sup> For details see : Source: Ranking System of the Bulgarian universities (RSVU), ed. 2015 §2016, available at: <http://rsvu.mon.bg/rsvu3/#MajorsAnalysisPlace:fA> (last visited: 6.2.2017).

<sup>3</sup> Rate of official registered unemployed among those graduated professional field in Bulgarian universities for last 5 years, calculation based on data from NSSI and AdminUni.



He was accepted Veterinary medicine in another university but preferred Physical Education course. But when the dreams of the young man meet reality he realizes that he does not want to work as a teacher in physical because:

*„We had practice in different schools and I realized that this job is not a job I want to work. I think that I cannot make it and that's why I will look for something else ... Moreover, the salary of a school teacher is ridiculously (...) low"( Anton, 25, M, HE, TE)*

Most of the interviewees with tertiary education had not attended additional courses during university. One of the respondents (Biliana, 27, F, HE, TE) had a chance to participate in Erasmus mobility scheme as a visiting student in Germany. A small part of the graduates undergo additional training after graduating. Anton (25, M, HE, TE) for example passes a paid course for a masseur:

*"In order to (...) to expand my knowledge acquired at the sport academy and to have some kind of vocation".*

Georgi (25, M, HE, TE) had passed a course for additional qualification “Initial and preschool pedagogy” after starting work. This additional qualification was ensured by his employer, i.e. the decision to continue his studies was not taken at his own initiative. Therefore, he had to combine work and studies, which, in his words, was not an easy task.

The majority of the youths with higher education (10 of the 13 graduates) have participated or are currently participating in youth-targeted active labour market programme (internship for university graduates or subsidized employment). The reason for this is that they have failed to find a job after graduating university and decided to participate in youth labour market program, more specific an internship for university education graduates without job experience (“Career start”), but also subsidized employment, as is the case with Kornelia (26, F, HE, TE). She has Master’s degree in chemistry and biology, but received (and she accepted) a proposal by the National Employment Agency through a youth targeted labour market programme for subsidized job as an intern in accounting in a private company. A work radically different from the education she has. To Stoyan (22, M, ME, PE), who has completed secondary vocational education - cook and wants to work in his specialty - the Employment office also offered several works unrelated to his specialty:

*“Previously they offered me down in trade - wholesale warehouse. I didn’t like it, it’s not my specialty. They offered me a car wash, welder, joiner, not my field” (Stoyan, M, 22, ME, PE).*



According to National statistical institute data<sup>4</sup> the unemployment in Bulgaria is lowest in the group of university graduates - 3.2% for the third quarter of 2016 (compared to unemployment among people with primary or lower education which is 52.4%, while for those with secondary is medium 6.2%). Despite the low levels of unemployment among high education graduates, they are affected by qualification mismatch. Less than half of the graduates who have completed over the last 5 years are employed in a position that requires a higher education<sup>5</sup>. These vertical discrepancies (lack of conformity between the level of the acquired education and the level of education required for an employment) on the labor market among the graduates according other studies (Ilieva-Trichkova and Boyadjieva 2016) are a reflection of structural problems in the economy and education system. This indicates that important for a successful inclusion in the labor market in Bulgaria is not only the level of education, but also the type of the acquired specialty.

Among the group of young people who have a tertiary education there is also a disappointment from the quality of higher education in Bulgaria. For Petar for instance a significant point in his educational trajectory is in his third year at the university:

*"In the high education I also had a moment when was a little disappointed rather than (...) by the system as lecturers are not very motivated. Some of them rush things very much and just keep formal lectures, on which for most of the time they did not come at all or pay no attention if they do teach you something" (Petar, 29, M, HE, PE).*

Many of the interviewees did not continue their education after completing high school (19 of total 43), and some of them drop out of school too early and remain only with primary or no education (11 of total 43).


The reasons why the young people did not enrolled in university are different. Bulgaria is among the countries where inequity in access to high education resulting from socio-economic disadvantages is most salient (Eurydice 2012, Ilieva-Trichkova and Boyadjieva 2014). Some of the youths say that they had wanted to study at a university, but did not have enough money to do so. Milena (21, F, ME, U) had excellent diploma and wanted to study jurisprudence. However, she could not due to financial constraints – her parents could not support her and that is why she had to find a job.

There are young people who wish to study at an university, but do not do it immediately after completing their secondary education. The reason in some cases is a failure on the university entrance exam (for instance Sotir, 20, M, ME, U). Some young people decide to have a year to work and raise money, and others to navigate to what they want to engage with. Some of them have quite confused desires, such as Miro, who oscillates between Economy or Sports:

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<sup>4</sup> Source: NSI: unemployed and unemployment rate for the population 15 years and over in the third quarter of 2016. Available at: <http://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/3998/> (last visited: 6.2.2017).

<sup>5</sup> Source: Ranking System of the Bulgarian universities (RSVU), ed. 2015 §2016.



*"I do not know ... Economy or Sports I would be engaged" (Miro, 26, M, ME, U).*

But when we asked him what he would like to work he says that he would like to work as a policeman or fireman. In contrast, Poly (25, F, ME, PE) impresses with purposefulness and clarity for her future development:

*"Gradually, one by one. Everything is a chain, when you make a successful first step of a something you already have security for the second" (Poly, 25, F, ME, PE)*

Poly is ambitious young woman who sets specific goals and pursues them. She has an idea about the labor market in Bulgaria, realizing what it would be more promising for future realization and adapts - although recorded economy, plans to complete pharmacy (this specialty will be connected with the work that is in progress and will enable her development in the industry) and to be able to have more job opportunities. Pragmatic in her decisions and actions, acts with perseverance and patience in goals.


*"I know what I want, I know where I am, I know how to achieve it, I know what I have achieved ... " (Poly, 25, F, ME, PE).*

In the interviews often is shown the conviction that education is not important for the future careers. For instance Ivan (19, M, ME, U) does not believe that education is important for his future job:

*"I have no desire to study, but (...) it's simply a must. That is, with it and without it again, I think, there is no matter exactly in Bulgaria ... Yes, education has nothing to do, anything related to your work. I think one of the 20 people in Bulgaria work according the education they have" (Ivan, 19, M, ME, U).*

As another reason we can deduce from the interviews the lack of orientation among the young people about what they want to do in the future. The life of Ivan is a typical example. He has changed so many schools that cannot even remember the name of the last, which he had finished. The reasons for this are: *"Voluntarily (laughs), so that I did not like, for example, classes, teachers, etc."* His answers show some chaos in his intentions, inconsistency in its decisions on his future education:

*"And I graduated from High School. Then I decided to study, but at the last moment I decided that I want to go abroad. I refused to study in Bulgaria. Now again I decided that I want to study in Bulgaria and next year will study "Business Management" (Ivan, 19, M, ME, U).*



But he is convinced that education has nothing to do with what he will work. Ivan has no clear idea in what he will be involved, he wants to be a dynamic and interesting work:

*"Well, right now I do not know, cause I've been bartender (...) at the sea for two months and then I was here a bartender (...), now a month, three weeks was a real estate broker. But this is not my job, because I sit in an office all day long and talk to various people, sit in front of a computer" (Ivan, 19, M, ME, U)*

The majority of the interviewees who have none or low level of education (elementary or primary) were interviewed in a district of Sofia, inhabited mainly by members of the Roma ethnic group. This group is characterized by high rates of poverty, low education and reproduction of marginal position. The interviewees often pointed for dropping out of school the lack of funds and the need to work and help their family. This is the case of Dimitar (19, M, LE, U), who lives in the Roma neighborhood of the capital with his parents. He graduated primary education (ISCED 2) in a class with studying computer engineering, but after that he interrupts school because he went with his father to Greece. There they were looking for work, but after one month they return. He did not continue his education, although he is willing to continue to learn. Boris (26, LE, NCJ) from the same neighborhood was also forced to leave school in 7<sup>th</sup> grade because his parents did not have the necessary means. After that, when he turned 16, he started working (mainly as a construction worker) in order to support his family's budget. In his point of view, this is the most negative moment in his educational pathway.

Significant factor for low educational attainments according another studies is the family background and especially parents education level (Hadjivassiliou, Sala, and Speckesser 2015). Reason for the interruption of school, which is revealed in the interviews, is the lack of support from the family, where education is not valued. This in a greater degree refers to the girls from Roma families. It could be explained by some of the cultural beliefs shared among the Roma community – some parents do not allow their daughters to attend school because they might meet with and date boys. This is related to the tradition young Roma women not to have a relationship with men before the marriage. Another reason for early drop out from school is because parents believe that their girls do not need education given that they will look after the kids after getting married. The belief that the main role of the woman is to be a mother influences the lifestyle of the Roma girls and many of them accept as something normal the early birth, i.e. as minors. Albena for example is 19 years old. She gave birth when 15 years old and during the interview she is pregnant with her second child. She says:

*"I: Have you ever discussed with your parents that you gave birth so early.  
R: Well, for us (note: In the Roma community) it is modern ... something normal" (Albena, 19, F, LE, U).*



Vania (23, F, LE, U) lives with her partner since she was 14 years old. She left school with less than primary education as her partner was insisting to leave school. She is caring for her two children and has never worked. Ivanka (29, F, LE, U) is stopped by her parents. She has never been to school most probably following the tradition that girls do not need to study as they will marry and look after their children:

*“I never went to school because my mother and my father did not let me go. They were scared to let me go. I don’t know why they were scared” (Ivanka, 29, F, LE, U)*

Another reason for dropping out of school for part of the interviewees are the health problems, as in the cases of Petranka (19, F, LE, U) and Ilia (28, M, LE, U). Due to health problems Ilia began to study very late (4 years) and has studied only four years. He has started the fifth year, but could not finish it. He is in a situation where it is obvious that there is no way to deal either alone or with the support of the existing institutional channels. He requires qualitative social work - developing an individual plan for dealing with various problems, including obtaining a qualification and some skills but the state mechanisms for this are insufficient.

The young people with low education pass more often through different trainings to obtain qualification - eg hairdresser (Valya, 20, F, ME, U), for makeup artist (Mira, 24, F, ME, U), training course on digital competences development (Katya, 29, F, HE, TE; Ana, 19, F, ME, U; Kremena, 28, F, ME, TE; Miro, 26, M, ME, U; Slavi, 26, M, ME, PE) and language courses (Ani, 24, F, HE, U). The courses are offered mainly by the Employment Agency. Finishing a driving school and obtaining a driver's license is also among the objectives of the part of these young people. By the accumulated skills/knowledges these trainings enhance the qualities (human capital) of the young people, especially those without education or skills when seeking employment.

Particularly important part of the educational trajectories of the young people and how they will continue their working path proves the existence of a supportive environment/figure. For some these are the parents who support (morally and financially) and guide the young person and for others it is a teacher in a school or an university professor who sees his determination, efforts and energy and helps him to find a job (as is the case with Georgi 24, M, HE, TE). As Daria tells us about lecturers who have helped her and had an important place in her educational and working paths:

*„It is very helping and really good to see that someone is ready to help you, even with something that hardly is his/her work” (Daria, 22, F, HE, PE).*

### **Working trajectories**

Regarding the occupational status, about half of the interviewees do not have a job at the time of the interviews – 10 are unemployed and 12 can be defined as NEETs. 13 of all interviewees working with a temporary contract, most of them (10) as a part of a targeted youth labour market programme. Eight respondents have secure job with open-ended employment contract. The working paths of majority of the interviewees is





characterized with various short-term jobs. Only these young people who manage to begin work right after graduating university have a continuous work in the same activity (for example Petar, 29, M, HE, PE; Kiro, 28, M, HE, PE; Ekaterina, 24, F, HE, PE).

As mentioned above, the majority of the young people with tertiary education have participated or are currently participating in youth labour market programs and work in their specialty. Among them are teachers, psychologist, accountant, youths who are working in the public administration. Boys and girls who have no education and are part of a program to reduce unemployment work unskilled activity - cleaners, gardeners in municipal parks.

Those respondents who are currently in the program are on temporary contracts (6 or 9 months). Three of those who have finished such programs have received a proposal for continuing the work and pass to the open-ended contract. However, Petar (29, M, HE, PE) shares, that before he knows whether he will continue working in the same company was very nervous and uncertain, and Katya, who is currently temporary employed in a labour market programme, says:

*“Duration, yes... It is something which I’m worried about because after that it is not clear what is going to happen... I have to go through the same path... to register myself at the employment office, to get an unemployment benefit and after that... uncertainty” (Katya, 29, F, HE, TE).*

Georgi, who does not participate in youth program also says that his contract as a teacher is temporary and must be renewed year-by-year and he is very worried how he will be able to cover his living expenses after the support from the NGO ends.

The other working young people who are not included in youth employment program work in the service sector in activities that do not require high qualifications - such as salespeople, waiters, barmaid, kitchen assistant, cleaner. Most youths, especially in Montana reported that existing jobs are of low quality with very low payment. They share that they easily find jobs as waiters, vendors, cleaners, but if they want to start more secure and more highly paid work it is almost impossible. Kremena is an active young woman who enrolled medical specialty, seeks actively for work, was able to study and work simultaneously. Although Kremena (28, F, ME, TE). is an active girl, the financial difficulties prompted her to abandon higher education and specialization that would enable her career in the future. Pressed by the need to pay the rent, to cover the living expenses, she is forced to begin work that is heavy and does not want to work:

*"To me, cause I find no reason to stay in Bulgaria. No proper job, not just ... well and will work. I was forced to start in "[the name of the supermarket]," I did not want to start there, that I know it's a very hard work. I have worked in grocery stores and know what it is. But I could not find a job and so ... we live here rent with my husband and just had to start something quickly" (Kremena, 28, F, ME, TE).*



Most of the interviewees had experience with working without a contract. Some of them made it at own will in order not to pay contributions on anyway their low wages:

*“What employment contract? Such thing is rarely applied for the job that I’ve done. Most people I know, although they work full time, they also don’t have employment contracts. And I used to work for short periods of time – usually one to three months. Who bothers to make a contract for such a short period of time? And it’s not profitable – entering into such contract makes us pay taxes and for social insurance. What social insurance, as our wages are too low? It happens that one doesn’t get any payment for the job done, so what taxes and social insurance payments are we talking about?” (Ani, 24, F, HE, U).*

Some young people believe that the seasonal/low skilled jobs do not matter to their future career, on the contrary. In the summer after the gymnasium and before the university Dona had worked for two months as a saleswoman in a shop. She has not had an employment contract at her own will:

*"Well no, I haven’t wished to work this, but rather to fill the time. Seen from the perspective of a specialist in human resources, it is not good to have many such jobs ... In order to apply for any serious job it is better if you had worked in the specialty, what you have graduated in. So I decided that it's better without a contract" (Dona, 24, F, HE, TE).*

Another youths who have been worked without contract but were deceived from employers. Dimitar started his working experience with fraud by the employer - one month he was working as a builder in Greece without a contract, but the employer did not pay him. This affects on his confidence about private companies. Now he has more trust in the state enterprises, and believes that those companies can offer him a contract, and guarantee payment of wages and benefits.

For cases which we can define as examples of successful working trajectories is typical that the young people rely on moral and financial support from their parents, which is associated with transmission of resources and cultural capital (Warmuth, Kittel, Steiber, and Muhlbock 2014). The fact that some young people receive material support from their parents does not necessarily mean integration into the labor market and independence (O'Reilly et al. 2015: 7). But the presence of such enables the young people to seek their desired job longer and reduces the risk of social exclusion. Those who are deprived of such opportunities are often forced to work any job - low-paid, under poor working conditions etc. (Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2009). The importance of social capital received by the family becomes especially important in times of crisis and high unemployment rates (Krasteva 2015).

Along with this, the young people, who have a successful educational and working trajectories, are characterized with high activity and personal initiative, with good educational achievements and exact idea of what they want to do and how to achieve it.



Kiro ( 28, M, HE, PE) for example, has a consistent and clearly arranged in advance educational and working path – he studied medical specialty for which there is a strong demand in the labor market in Bulgaria, he began working on it before he is graduated, creates a family, buys a home and a car, increases his qualification for to ascend in this career. However Kiro has to work two jobs to maintain this standard of living for him, his wife and two children. That is, except the personal initiative, the informal support from the family, it must be taken into account the broader context in Bulgaria. Namely the overall situation in the country makes Kiro experiencing uncertainty and therefore he cannot imagine his life even after one year:

*“Well, just as life is quite dynamic, things change quite quickly and today all is calm, tomorrow revolts, coups and whatever so. I therefore say that simply it is uncertain” (Kiro, 28, M, HE, PE).*

Georgi (24, M, HE, TE) and Katya (29, F, HE, TE) can be cited as examples of young people who have managed to overcome significant risk factors for exclusion from the labor market, such as in Bulgaria (but not only) is the belonging to the Roma minority (Georgi) and disability as in the case of Katya. Both manage to complete higher education and at the time of the interview they work, though temporary work. Important to their success is also their personal activity and initiative but also the support of family - financial and/or moral (micro level), of non–government organizations - financial (meso level), of the state (macro level) - by including in employment policies and providing financial assistance for people with disabilities.

### **3. Meanings of work**

Although recognizing the importance of wages as a factor to start/continue working, the young people with higher education say that for them it is very important the work to carry personal satisfaction, to feel happy (*“with a smile on your face”*), to be dynamic, interesting and not monotonous, something which is rather a hobby than an obligation (Magda, 21, F, ME, TE). If all this is combined with suitable remuneration it is achieved the picture of the ideal job for a significant part of the interviewees:

*“[...] to have money not only to cover your costs, but also to give you some freedom, to have security, ie to have an employment contract hopefully constant and to be sufficiently dynamic and enabling development, so this is the ideal job, whether it is on your specialty or not” (Petar, 29, M, HE, PE).*

In the opposite end of the concept for dynamic work is the notion of Dimitar (Roma boy with primary education) for ideal job:

*“sit at the desk and work with computers and some signatures. This is the ideal job for me (smiles)” (Dimitar, 20, M, LE, U).*



Most of the interviewees without education conceived work as a requirement, as a means of survival, as Petranka says:

*“Nowadays you are not able to survive if you don’t work, especially in Bulgaria” (Petranka, 19, F, LE, U).*

While young people with higher education focus primarily on the unmaterial significance of the work. For example, Petia arranges her criteria for a perfect job as follows: *„Maybe satisfaction, salary and finally prestige” (Petia, 23, F, HE, TE).*

Of course, good salary is also pointed as a very important factor for the work of the young people:

*„And no matter what I will work, what matters is money to be good. I mean, it should be a pleasant job, but most important is money to be enough” (Valya, 20, F, ME, U).*

There are significant differences in the perceptions of young people from Montana and those from Sofia to what constitutes "good salary" and how a young person may feel good in Bulgaria. If in Montana the youths state that with 500 BGN they can cover all their costs and there be rest to spend, without have some big deprivations, the youths in Sofia are convinced that with less than 1000 BGN they could not live.


*„I do not think about myself as very experienced in this profession, however, I would not ... I would not have worked for example below a certain fee. For example for 500 BGN per month I cannot work this thing" (Ivan, 20, M, ME, U).*

This difference in the perceptions of young people about the desired salary is due largely to the higher cost of living in the capital. As the low pay for Stefan for example is the reason to give up a job. He has sought work through ads, but gave up because of the low pay:

*"Yes, but when they tell me what is the pay and I give up immediately” (Stefan, 22, M, ME, U)*

The work is determined as directly connected with the self esteem of the young people:

*“... I did not work for two months and I was very much ... I felt stupid, that I had no income. And-and-and I did not feel a person generally cause I felt like ten years old - only: "Mom, give, give Mom and Dad" (laughs nervously). And yes, this is a way that I can make money with my own work and earn a living so to speak" (Ivan, 19, M, ME, U).*



Most of the interviewees related the work with transition to adulthood. Katya is convinced that work, alongside with education, is the only way in which young people can develop themselves as responsible individuals:

*“I cannot imagine a situation when I’m staying at home doing nothing” (Katya, 29, F, HE, TE).*

### **Labour market insecurity**

Almost everyone interviewed cites as the main difficulty for his professional realization the finding a suitable job. This applies to young people with low education but also to boys and girls with higher education. Unemployment rates are high in the Northwest region (Montana) - 10,4% - and the competition between job seekers is very high as well. In Southwestern Bulgaria, where is also Sofia the unemployment rates are half lower - 5.4%.

Another problem in Bulgaria, which leads to a feeling of insecurity among young people are the low wages. It applies both to people with no education and those with tertiary education. As a teacher the remuneration (250-300 Euro) of Georgi (25, M, HE, TE) was not adequate compared to the cost of living in Sofia. Petar (29, M, HE, PE) has the education that he likes and is working in his specialty, but his main problem is the low pay. Actually he is a working young man, but without the possibility with the money he receives to support a family, he should be deprived of activities that young people do - cinema, holidays, travel.

In addition, employers tend to hire employees who have sufficient experience – in its turn this makes young people and especially recent graduates not competitive enough. Valya is 20<sup>th</sup> year old woman who had completed a course for hairdresser and hoped to find work in Sofia in this occupation. But she has serious doubts if she will be able to use the course that she had completed:

*“It was good. But when you do not have practice and you start to forget. Now if I go to the salon, I begin to wonder, will it happen or will not happen. Otherwise my diploma is excellent” (Valya, 20, F, ME, U).*

*“I wanted to realize myself in hairdressing, but could not. I had no practice, without practice how they will take you to a salon to work. I need practice to take me. Without experience they won’t take you anywhere - I’m have been trying, I wondered, I questioned, but not, without experience no way. They don’t take you anywhere. And at home - my parents, my brother, friends and acquaintances - I practice on them. But this cannot be proved” (Valya, 20, F, ME, U).*

The experience requirement when starting a job is also indicated from the participants who already have a job:



*"Well I can say it is difficult because nowadays an employer wants you to be young, to be educated, to be knowledgeable and at the same time to have 5-6 years working experience that you have nowhere to take these years from. Cause until that day I was at university, today on the street and a vicious circle occurs. Or employers have certain requirements to men, to women not to become pregnant or have already given birth or some such stories that I can say, she will become pregnant and will go on a maternity leave, he loses respectively and did not deal not it is not profitable for him and that's it" (Kiro, 28, M, HE, PE).*

Besides the experience requirement from employers, another uncertainty factor for Bulgarian young people is the discrimination - by gender and ethnicity.

*"For example boys find a job much easier than women [...] their jobs are better paid, they find better positions. For us, women, is more difficult – waitress, shop assistants. It is very hard to find a proper job" (Mira, 24, F, ME, U).*

Boys and girls of Roma ethnicity say that when trying to find work, have experienced discrimination. Though Ana has graduated from high school with a degree in "Business Administration", she was unable to find work in her specialty because:

*"R: In our town they make a big discrimination. At least I do not show that I am a Gypsy, Roma woman, but as they see the address and say I'll call you back and then nothing.*


*I: Although eligible advert.*

*R: Yes, yes. It happened to me at least twice, if not more" (Ana, 20, F, ME, U).*

On the basis of his friend's experience, Stavri also believes that ethnic discrimination is a major obstacle for him to find a job as well:

*"They saw that he is swarthy and said that the job is already taken" (Stavri, 21, M, LE, U).*

Another feature of the labor market in Bulgaria, which creates a feeling of insecurity for the interviewees are the unfair practices by employers and lack of support from the state by which to protect employees labor rights. Young people tell of cases where they were not paid salaries or were forced to work trial without a contract. In the case of Vera (24, F, ME, TE) the employer deceived her that he had signed a contract. When she left for maternity, it appeared that there is no such and she was left without benefits. In cases with signed contract, it is a common practice to not observe the working hours. From the story of Kremena (28, F, ME, TE) about her work in two different supermarket chains we realize that obsolete goods or they are forced to buy it, fines during runtime are imposed.



The problem with not respecting labor laws and violation of labor rights, according to Poly (25, F, ME, PE) is everywhere in the country, even in larger cities. Tells of cases where her friends working on holidays, but they are not paid as overtime or if some take leave, his colleagues have to work double, again without charge, providing minimum wage and pay the rest of the salary on hand. No one claims his rights because:

*"People are scared not to lose their jobs. This is the reason people keep quiet. Just people are scared" (Poly, 25, F, ME, PE).*

The lack of protection Poly associates with poor protection from state institutions and even corruption, because she knows of cases in which employers are warned of inspections, and in other cases, government knew about the violations, but give "blind eye".

#### **4. Coping with job insecurity**

The interviews indicate that young people have undertaken different kinds of action to cope with employment insecurity and unemployment. As the most commonly used strategies can be pointed out:

- Improving qualification/education
- Searching for support by family/friends (informal networks)
- Odd jobs
- Searching for support by state
- Work/emigration abroad

As mentioned before, some of the interviewed Bulgarian youths have dropped out of school and have no education or only primary. For some of them, especially the boys, continuing education is an important factor in finding a job. The main strategy to tackle the unemployment for Dimitar (M, 19, NEET) is related to education, i.e. his plans for secondary education and a diploma, giving him a license to operate a particular craft. The young people who have higher education are directed to courses for qualification (eg Erasmus), which they believe will make their CV more attractive for the employers. And others graduate courses that give them new competences, other than those obtained during education in order to increase his employability.

Family and friends networks are used as a protective factor against the uncertainty of almost all young people who participated in the interviews. On one hand, the family is able to provide emotional and financial support, on another the young people can use the social capital that their parents have.

*„My parents have a close acquaintance who can give me a job within my specialty. We've talked to him and he has promised to do so. He is a decent guy, so I think I can rely on him" (Ani, 24, F, HE, U).*



A significant part of the young people say they have found a job through acquaintances and rely on that in case they lose their job, again using the "from mouth to mouth" method.

On the other hand the family and the environment in which the young people grew up and live are themselves factors of social exclusion - life in ghettoized neighborhoods, low education of the parents and low assessment of the importance of education, conservative family traditions. Eva (21, F, LE, U) for instance has no education and her life is heavily influenced by the culture, beliefs and lifestyles of the Roma ethnic community. The importance of gender is also evident – the fact that she is a female to some extent limits her subjective feelings what possible coping strategies could be. Her ethnic origin, the lack of education and the fact that she lives in a deprived urban area inhabited mainly by people belonging to the same ethnic group which does not share mainstream cultural norms, are the main factors contributing to her labour market exclusion.


The work on various short-term, seasonal works is a way to tackle unemployment and the uncertainty of Bulgarian youths who participated in the interviews. The work, though temporary, allows the accumulation of experience, skills and social contacts. Anton (24, M, HE, TE) and Kremena (28, F, ME, TE) change various works that have not always satisfied them, but they believe that despite all the difficulties they teach her adaptability and gave her valuable experience that prospective employers can appreciate. On the contrary opinion is Donna (24, F, HE, TE), who operates low-skilled jobs in the summer and does not want that her future employers now that when seeking employment in her specialty. Work under the educational level is way out of the unemployment and therefore its adoption may be a targeted strategy to overcome it. This strategy can lead to lower incomes and loss of human capital.

When seeking a strategy for dealing with lack of income and unemployment, the respondents are prepared to work "any kind of job", even work without contract, in other words. However, this has not reduced their insecurity.

In terms of the support that young people are looking for from the state, we can deduce two types of opinion. On the one hand the trust that young people have about the opportunities of the local labor offices to find them a suitable employment is low. Magda (21, F, ME, TE) would rather start searching for a job in online job platforms than to go to the local employment office. Some of them have never registered and refuse to do so, while others have registration but did not remain satisfied with what they received as a job or had none. On the other hand, are young people who benefited from existing opportunities provided by the labour market program. Most of them, especially those participating in the program "Career Start" express their satisfaction with the opportunity that they received from the state to begin work in the specialty they have.

For the Bulgarian youths working abroad is one of the frequently mentioned strategies to tackle unemployment. Almost every one participant has friends and/or relatives working in another country where income even for low-skilled jobs is much higher than this in Bulgaria. For instance Petranka (19, F, LE, U) intends to leave the country and to





follow her husband. She was certain that she will be able to find a regular job abroad with a higher salary compared to jobs existing in Bulgaria. That decision was influenced by her dissatisfaction with the quality of existing job opportunities in Bulgaria and the remuneration in particular:

*“Here there is no sense to work 24/7 for nothing... only to buy food” (Petranka, 19, F, LE, U).*

Her dissatisfaction is triggered not only by the poor quality of existing job opportunities but also by the inadequate state support provided to people with disabilities and mothers with small children.

What we reveal from the stories of the young people, especially those in Montana is that they express a greater willingness to seek work abroad than to move to another, larger city in Bulgaria, which has more possibilities to find work.

An interesting strategy to adapt to the Bulgarian conditions in the labor market has Ivan who believes that during the negotiations with the employer he should always want a higher salary, because the employers do not comply with the arrangements and are always wanting more work from their employees:

*"The contract is one thing but after that is completely different. Everywhere is so. And generally I expect a lot more pay because ... not quite, but... But for example, half of what they offered me on top to go to work, so that I know what is required of me actually. Not what we talked about and that is the contract tells, but what is good for him [employer].... For example at the sea I went to work with exactly clear certain obligations but actually I have done work for ten people. Quite different from mine" (Ivan, 19, M, ME, U).*

Despite all attempts to manage with the situation of uncertainty and unemployment, the context in which they live and try to work the young people in Bulgaria has its negative impact and questions the success of their efforts. For example although Kremena (28, F, ME, TE) is an active girl, she is prompted due to financial difficulties to abandon higher education (medical specialty) and specialization that would enable her career in the future. She takes different coping strategies - from the capital, where life is more expensive moves to live in a smaller town seeking work through acquaintances, registered in the "Labor office," where benefit from the proposed job opportunities and training courses. She works seasonal job abroad. However all these efforts, Kremena fails to remedy the situation of uncertainty, she says she cannot create her own family, she's experiencing a number of material deprivation and eventually is ready to emigrate.

## **Conclusion**

What most Bulgarian young people we talked to are looking for is a steady job with an income that allows them not only to meet the most pressing needs, but also to allow activities specific to people of their age. What we could see are young people stumbling



on their way to adulthood because of such diverse causes as material poverty, lack of an individual strategy or plan, lack of appropriate support from state and/or family and informal organization, lack of education or career orientation, disability. Crucial to the successful path of the young people is the presence of a supportive environment (from parents, teachers, and informal networks, state institutions) and active agency from the young people themselves. However, no matter how active a young man is, his/her life is influenced by the general context in which he/she lives - economic and financial uncertainty, limited labor market, inadequate policies, ineffective institutions in Bulgaria.

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## Annex 1 Table for the sample overview

Criteria		TOTAL	Montana	Sofia
Nested criteria	<b>Gender</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
	Female	26	14	12
	Male	17	7	10
	<b>Age</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
	15-24	14	8	6
	25-29	29	13	16
	<b>Occupational status</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
Not employed, incl. NEET	32	14	18	
Employed	11	7	4	
Not nested criteria	<b>Education</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
	ISCED 0 - 2	11	2	9
	ISCED 3 - 4	19	15	4
	ISCED 5 - 6	13	4	9
	<b>Involvement in ALMP</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
	Involved	21	12	9
	Not involved	22	9	13
	<b>Ethnic origin</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
	Bulgarian	23	13	10
	Other (Roma, Turkish, etc.)	20	8	12
	<b>Living in parental house</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
	Yes	28	16	12
	No	15	5	10
<b>Occupational status</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	
Temporary job	13	6	7	
Unemployed	10	8	2	
NEET	12	2	10	
Secure job	8	5	3	