



Danube Transnational Programme **YOUMIG**

National policy recommendations for
improved cooperation on youth migration

National policy recommendations

WP6
Activity 6.2

June 2019

BULGARIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Migration is a global phenomenon that has a direct and indirect effect on the economic, social and cultural development of countries. When managed properly, it can contribute to the development of human capital and labour markets, in addition to the exchange of knowledge and culture, whether in sending or receiving countries and regions.

Good migration management can be achieved only through improved cooperation and data exchange between the different levels of governance, both national and regional, that facilitate the measurement, management, and assessment of migration, in terms of its causes and effects.

The YOUMIG project focused on the study of youth migration (age group 15-34) in the Danube Region. Young people, regardless of their education, are the most mobile group in the population. High unemployment rates, poverty, social isolation, low wages and a lack of good education opportunities are the prevalent factors influencing migration in this age group. Two Bulgarian project partners – the National Statistical Institute and the Municipality of Burgas worked together to highlight this global phenomenon at the national and local level. The purpose of this document is to propose recommendations for interested parties (primarily at the level of national and local governance) in the area of youth migration management, focusing on current trends in the development and management of this phenomenon at the local level.

The recommendations, directed at the national government and municipalities, offer guidance on strengthening cooperation, boosting knowledge and improving data exchange between statistical offices, academic institutions, local authorities and national institutions. Strategies and policies that enhance management processes in relation to youth migration at the regional level are also included.

The recommendations propose interventions in two main areas:

- 1) The availability and quality of indicators on youth migration,
- 2) Policy collaboration at different governance levels in the domain of youth migration management.

It is important to draw attention to the lack of good quality data on youth migration and the implications of this fact for institutions at all levels of governance. Data on youth migration (that are both reliable and broad ranging) have become increasingly valuable with regard to drafting appropriate policies for the development of human capital, and in particular, the elaboration of clear-sighted and effective strategies. If the appropriate measures are implemented, youth migration can be transformed from a challenge into an opportunity, improving the social and economic circumstances of a country or region, regardless of its sending or receiving status. In many ways, a country's socio-economic outlook, whether at the national or local level is determined by its youth, in terms of their influence on the labour market, demographic change and local culture. Therefore, the assessment and management of migration flows, as well as the planning and implementation of appropriate policies should be based on reliable evidence-based information.

YOUMIG at a glance

Full name: YOUMIG – Improving institutional capacities and fostering cooperation to tackle the impacts of transnational youth migration

A project of the **Danube Transnational Programme**

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Budget: 2,718,853 EUR (ERDF Contribution: 2,055,179 EUR, IPA Contribution: 255,846 EUR)

Call number: Call 1

Priority: 4. (Well-governed Danube region)

Specific objective: 4.1. (Improve institutional capacities to tackle major societal challenges)

Project partners:

Lead partner: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HU)

Work package leaders: University of Vienna (AT), Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (DE), Maribor Development Agency (SI), INFOSTAT - Institute of Informatics and Statistics (SK)

ERDF partners: Municipality of Szeged (HU), City of Graz (AT), Institute for Economic Research (SI), Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities (RO), Municipality of Sfântu Gheorghe (RO), National Statistical Institute of the Republic of Bulgaria (BG), Burgas Municipality (BG), Municipality of the City district of Bratislava- Rača (SK)

IPA partners: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (RS), Institute of Social Sciences (RS), Municipality of Kanjiža (RS)

Associated Strategic Partners: Statistics Austria (AT), City of Karlsruhe (DE), Federal Institute for Population Research (DE)

YOUMIG, in which 19 partners from 8 countries work together, wishes to support local governments in using the developmental potential of youth migration, leading to a better governed and more competitive Danube region. The project aims to boost their institutional capacities through enhancing the scarce local evidence on youth migration and contributing to improved policymaking with a focus on human capital. Statistical offices and academic organizations are teaming up with local governments in a complex and customised multi-level transnational cooperation to create local developmental strategies based on improved impact indicators on youth migration and to introduce transnationally tested tools for managing local challenges. As a result, institutions and stakeholders can obtain increased capacities through intensified cooperation.

YOUMIG's work is structured in six work packages (WPs). Aside from management (WP1) and communication (WP2) issues, the thematic work is distributed as follows. In line with the project's Conceptual Framework, all partners contribute to the development of improved evidence of youth migration and its developmental impacts on the EU, national and local level by elaborating local status quo analyses for the local partners (WP3). Through a comprehensive evaluation of the locally available indicators of youth migration, the project identifies the shortfalls of measuring local challenges and elaborates and tests new or improved indicators of youth migration (WP4). On the local level, the project improves capacities to manage related processes by jointly testing and introducing good practices and institutional units, tailored to local needs (WP5). The project concludes in transnationally tested tools for all governance levels contributing to better strategies, policies and services related to the issue of youth migration (WP6).

YOUMIG's outputs can be viewed at <http://www.interreg-danube.eu/youmig/outputs>

Map of the Danube region and location of the YOUMIG partners



INTRODUCTION

1.1. Youth migration: a brief introduction

In recent decades, the mobility of young people throughout the world has increased and taken diverse forms. In this regard, the Danube Region countries are no exception, facing both inflow and outflow challenges related to youth migration. Apart from the traditional causes of this phenomenon, new drivers have emerged making migration patterns more complex. The emigration of young people can lead to a severe loss of labour and human capital, and the phenomenon of (often-untraceable) incoming transfers (social and financial remittances); while immigration, if not properly managed, may result in the marginalisation and underuse of human resources. Improvements in migration management at the local level requires better governance at all levels of administration in order to harness the full potential of migrants in relation to local development.

1.2. Youth migration in Bulgaria

Since 2007, the NSI of Bulgaria has reported data on documented migration. Calculations are based on the information system 'Demography', used for the production of all demographic data in the country. According to this system, 217,980 people left the country between 2007 and 2017, of which 103,570 were aged 15-34.

It is the discrepancy between an individual's assessment of his environment on the one hand, and his needs and interests on the other that exerts a major influence on his intentions to emigrate. If a person's goals (both psychosocial and economic) remain unmet, they may be compelled to look for better conditions elsewhere. In the age group 15-34, the preferred destinations of emigrants from Burgas (with Bulgarian citizenship) are Germany (20.8%), Spain (13.8%), Great Britain (12.5%), and Italy (8.3%). An explanation for this fact is that the average income in Burgas Municipality and in Bulgaria as a whole is lower than in most countries of Central and Western Europe. The emigration of young qualified people may result in a deficit of skilled labour in the labour market (particularly in STEM professions), with major knock-on effects for businesses and state institutions alike.

Generally, we can say that mobility is the preserve of younger people and that 'intentions to migrate' diminish in later years. In Burgas Municipality, emigrants in the age group 15 to 34 make up ca. 35% to 45% of all migrants in the period 2007-2017 (Table1). The most active (higher to lower) are those in the sub-age groups 25-29 and 20-24, followed by the age group 30-34. High mobility among these age groups is a consequence of better employment opportunities for youth in other cities and countries, and greater adaptability to new living conditions.

Table 1. Emigration from Burgas municipality (total and in the age group 15-34)

Years	Emigrants	Persons aged 15-34	Persons aged 15-34 %
2007	5361	2250	42,0
2008	2661	1119	42,1
2009	7393	2410	32,6
2010	4859	2171	44,7
2011	2755	1095	39,7
2012	2775	1082	39,0
2013	2740	1095	40,0
2014	3815	1332	34,9
2015	4421	1580	35,7
2016	3237	1405	43,4
2017	3674	1472	40,1

In general, the emigration of young people (15-34 years old) has various (negative) impacts on the demography of Burgas Municipality, since professionals and students that migrate often remain in host destinations. The out-migration of the young and middle aged unbalances the age structure of the population, causing the ratio of workers to retirees to fall – with knock-on effects in terms of fertility and mortality.

People that relocate from another country to Bulgaria – the so-called ‘inflow of migrants’, include Bulgarian nationals returning to the country, as well as other nationals who have received a residence permit or residence status in Bulgaria. Between 2007 and 2017, 145,696 people relocated to Bulgaria, and of these, 47,044 are in the age group 15-34 (i.e. 32.3% of all migrants). During this period, the biggest number of immigrants came from the Russian Federation constituting 22.5% of all people with foreign citizenship, followed by those from Turkey (19.1%), Syria (16.5%) and Ukraine (6.6%). In the age group 15-34, the highest number of migrants with non-Bulgarian citizenship belonged to Syrian people (21.9% of all persons aged 15-34), followed by those with Turkish citizenship (18.1%), nationals of the Russian Federation (10.5%) and Ukraine (8.4%).

Out of 5031 immigrants in Burgas Municipality, 4017 were of foreign citizenship (over the 11-year period 2007 to 2017). Data of this kind, concerning the origins of migrants, is necessary to create well-targeted cultural and integration policies. In the municipality, there are 879 young migrants (aged 15-34) with foreign citizenship; ca. 65% of them are foreign nationals of three former Soviet Union countries – the Russian Federation (42.8%), Ukraine (15.9%) and Kazakhstan (6.4%). In recent years, Burgas municipality has become increasingly attractive for immigrants – mostly from non-EU countries, reflecting the fact that demographic trends at the municipal level tend to follow country-wide ones. An interesting feature concerning Burgas Municipality is that it attracts migrants not only from the Russian Federation and Ukraine but also from Kazakhstan.

As a result, the current demographic situation in Bulgaria and – by extension, that of Burgas, may cause serious problems in relation to its future socio-economic development. The two poles of labour migration – the highly skilled (that possess ‘mobile brains’) and low skilled – in the context of negative net migration rates, characterise the Bulgarian migration process, and define the country’s ‘sending’ profile. Burgas Municipality is a relatively prosperous city by national standards; however, the gap between Bulgaria’s economy and that of other (leading) economies in the EU is perceived by many as unbridgeable, and provides a strong incentive for the young and ambitious to emigrate. Youth migration in the age group 18-34 is a complicated and qualitatively diverse process that exerts a strong influence on important social structures (e.g. demographic, social, labour-related, etc). Moreover, the fact that this process is not limited to one country or one ethno-cultural environment adds a further layer of complexity. These specific characteristics of youth emigration make it extremely difficult

to study and regulate. From this perspective, the study proposes combining different methods to maximise benefits in the field of migration management.

1.3 The MLG concept: a short introduction

Multi-level governance (MLG), as defined by the EU Committee of the Regions, signifies coordinated action by the EU, its Member States and local and sub-national governments, based on partnership and involving operational and institutional cooperation in all phases of the policy cycle, from drafting to implementing policies. These actions require the coordination and distribution of competencies from national to sub-national levels, with high importance given to the EU transnational level, especially in view of MLG in migration and integration policies. Therefore, MLG refers to the dispersion of central government authority, both vertically to actors located at different territorial and administrative levels, and horizontally, to actors and domains at the same level of government.

Regional (NUTS2) competencies on migration policies are not broad ranging. Nevertheless, it is incumbent on local governments to provide certain public services for migrants. Therefore, MLG cooperation is essential for local governance, and localities should be considered partners in the national-level policy dialogue on migration and integration objectives and indicators.

1.4 Activity 6.2: Building multi-level governance cooperation schemes

This document is the outcome of YOUMIG's efforts to facilitate cooperation between different levels of governance, and to provide a testing field for knowledge exchange mechanisms. The activity tested the modalities of cooperation between national administrative bodies, statistical offices, research institutions and local municipalities to improve the measurement and evaluation of youth migration in terms of its causes, patterns and impacts, resulting in improved multi-level governance cooperation. Based on previous project outcomes (LSQAs, new/ improved indicators, One-stop shops), several channels of institutional cooperation on different government levels were incorporated.

The recommendations listed here are derived from these project activities, and from a series of workshops held on the subject in seven project countries. In 2018 and 2019, two types of workshop were organised at the national level in each country. The Ambition Setting Workshop served to map the existing knowledge and competencies, and evaluate the current cooperation practices in order to define the need for improved multi-level governance cooperation based on the MLG concept. The Vision Development Workshop

provided a means of discussing the national-level policy proposals for improved institutional cooperation regarding youth migration, which constituted the main activity output.

MLG COOPERATION: NATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In Bulgaria, problems related to the collection and analyses of statistical data provided by different institutions are still very much prevalent. Collaboration and improved cooperation between different national and local authorities is needed to ensure access to reliable and timely information characterising youth migration, especially at the regional level.

On the other hand, there is a need to increase the capacity of local authorities to improve understanding in this domain and address longer-term migratory issues, particularly in relation to human capital and demographic processes at the regional level as well as the effects of migration on labour markets and regional economies. This will contribute to improvements in the quality of statistical data and aid regional planning and policymaking.

On this basis, national-level policy recommendations directed at the monitoring and management of youth migration were drafted. These recommendations followed a transnational methodology in the seven project partner countries. The NSI of Bulgaria and Burgas Municipality participated in the process of collecting information and several national and local level stakeholders put forward constructive ideas (in relation to this process) during the workshops. The policy recommendations include guidelines on improving cooperation, fostering learning, and facilitating data exchange between statistical offices, academic institutions and local governments, in addition to national institutions at the local level. The national policy intervention focuses on two key areas: new or improved indicators and policy issues related to youth migration.

Area of intervention No 1: Key recommendations and actions.

Further actions are required to **improve the availability and quality of indicators** on youth migration in Bulgaria.

The indicators, key to migration management, are intended to facilitate improvements in governance, competitiveness, as well as increase the incidence of evidence-based policy-making in local municipalities. The work got underway with an overview of the priority areas, and migration and local development policies. On this basis, the list of indicators was elaborated and the importance of each indicator discussed. Out of this process, a reduced number of indicators were selected, and relevant definitions, clarifications, links to sources, and information on the relevance and availability of the indicators was prepared.

YOUMIG Priority areas and groups of indicators covered

Population and society

Demography and population:

- characteristics of population
- historical involvement into migratory process (1997)
- population reproduction

Health:

- health status
- health risks

Education:

- accessibility
- quality

Social development and social capital:

- Social cohesion, tolerance, trust
- Integration/Incorporation
- Spatial segregation
- Civil society

Economy, living conditions, environment

Economic development:

- macroeconomic performance
- trade and external financing
- sustainable public finances

Income and living conditions:

- Economic activity and inactivity
- Flexibility
- Employment
- Unemployment
- Precariousness
- Entrepreneurship

Urban and regional development:

- information and communication
- cultural, sports, health etc facilities
- housing market
- health threats
- safety

The indicators cover different areas of social-economic and demographic development since migration management cannot be examined as a separate entity.

Poverty, inequality, high unemployment rates, and disparities in economic wealth are important factors in relation to increasing/decreasing migration flows, especially at the regional level.

On 30 October 2018, the Bulgarian Ambition Setting Workshop took place, organised by the National Statistical Office in compliance with the plan set out in the YOUMIG project. During the workshop, several inter-related issues were discussed, including: mapping existing knowledge and competencies, evaluating current cooperation practices and defining the need for, and possibility of, improved multi-level governance cooperation for selected indicators (core and local) and identified policy cases.

In respect of the indicators, the discussion focused mainly on the possibility of providing reliable information on selected indicators through coordinated actions at different levels of governance. It is worth pointing out that the project partners do not produce all of the indicators' components – it is also necessary to obtain data from other institutions with regard to other elements. The participants were provided with indicator-related information concerning their availability and contribution to the Local Status Quo Analysis and policy development in the area of youth migration, in addition to information on indicator

definitions. The participants agreed that Bulgaria is primarily a sending country and that the indicators should be considered carefully on this basis. The participants contributed to the discussion by sharing information on laws, regulations, procedures and possibilities in relation to data collection.

The main outcome focused on the importance of establishing multilevel cooperation to provide information on the indicators under discussion (e.g. the identification of sources, documents and necessary changes in legislation). The National Statistical Institute (NSI) was identified as the main coordinator of data collection and aggregation.

The main challenges: despite the identification of potential multi-level information-provision schemes on selected indicators, a number of issues were reported relating to the (slow) process of creating legislative change, changes in regulative documents, as well as changes to the central administration's procedures that comprise future proposals for the national authorities.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations for national-level institutions on managing youth migration at the local level were formulated:

Policy recommendation No 1: Improve cooperation between the national authorities responsible for the collection and provision of information.

In Bulgaria, national registers and databases containing information on migration processes are by nature, centralised. Therefore, it is recommended that greater efforts are made to connect databases used in the production of indicators (that show emigration and immigration levels among young people) and increase levels of cooperation in general. This will contribute to the provision of improved data for local authorities concerning regions with migration issues. Moreover, it will provide data on the social-economic and demographic traits of young people leaving or returning to the country.

The establishment of an inter-ministerial working group to review the legislation and available regulatory documents and to prepare proposals for appropriate changes in legislation (e.g. the introduction of a 'level of completed education' field in the document 'Restoration of health insurance rights') is recommended.

The elaboration of an effective mechanism to coordinate all institutional stakeholders and organisations is recommended. This could facilitate the improved management of migration

processes, including youth migration, which is a policy area included in the 'National strategy on migration, asylum and integration' (2011-2020).

At present, Bulgaria's legislation is fully compliant with the European requirements regarding the regulation and provision of information on international migration. However, the key policy action should focus on supporting those institutions that focus on legislative initiatives aimed at introducing amendments to national legislation in relation to enhancing the registration of Bulgarian citizens residing abroad. The fact that young people lack incentives to deregister when moving abroad (particularly in the case of temporary emigration); results in the under-coverage of emigration, including in the age group 15-34. Consequently, subsequent analyses and strategies suffer in qualitative terms. The lack of data on Bulgarian citizens leaving the country is a consequence of Bulgarian citizens having no legal obligation to deregister from the Population Register in the event of leaving the country for more than one year. Nevertheless, the institutions having competencies in the field of migration and the NSI in particular has made concerted efforts to improve the coverage of emigrants' data. The availability of person-related data from the National Revenue Agency constitutes a positive step forward in this regard. This information concerns persons who have officially stated their intention to reside outside the country for more than 183 days per year (which in turn relates to a person's exemption from paying health insurance for the period of absence). Apart from the fact that such a tax reduction policy would be difficult to implement and no doubt face opposition, it is worth considering in that it could help to improve the coverage of migrants and produce more realistic population and labour force numbers.

Policy recommendation No 2: Improve cooperation between the national institutions responsible for data collection and the regional divisions of the central government.

The development of specific initiatives and surveys that can be implemented through the regional divisions of central administrations is recommended.

For example, the establishment of a mechanism that provides preliminary and secondary information on institutes of education (secondary schools). This would involve conducting research on students (in their last year of secondary education) in relation to their intentions to enrol to foreign universities. This could be conducted by means of a questionnaire that could also determine a person's (expected) employment status. Data users could be educational institutions and regional inspectorates, the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Statistical Institute. The identification and promotion of practices that encourage cooperation between central authorities and regional ones, is recommended.

Policy recommendation No 3: Elaborate a national strategy that provides a complete solution to the problem of youth migration.

A political framework for tackling youth migration lies at the heart of this strategy. Moreover, the development of a system of indicators is necessary for its strategic goals and priorities to be effective. The strategy should serve to create a political framework for tackling youth migration. To monitor the strategy's goals and priorities, it would be necessary to develop a system of indicators whose selection should be carried out by a team of experts. This team should include statisticians, scientists familiar with migratory issues, in addition to other interested parties. The indicators should cover the main objectives of the strategy. Concerning the indicator-selection process, the following criteria are important:

- The indicators should reflect the main objectives of the strategy
- The data for the indicators should be collected and processed in a uniform manner on a regular basis
- The data on the indicators should be representative of the country
- The indicators should be easily qualified as positive or negative for the research, depending on their changes
- The indicators should be clear and statistically valid
- The indicators must be timely
- The production of the value of indicators should not be an additional burden on citizens, disproportionate to its benefit. Already existing indicators should be used wherever possible
- The set of indicators must be open and accessible to citizens
- The indicators should be easy to understand and interpret by the public; the indicators and their metadata should be easily accessible

After developing an overall strategy for tackling youth migration, an action plan at the regional level is also necessary. In addition to Burgas and other municipalities developing action strategies in the field of youth migration, each municipality should prepare an annual report on this domain, on which the national strategy implementation report can be based.

Area of intervention No 2: Key recommendations and actions – further action is needed to tackle policy challenges related to youth migration at different governance levels in Bulgaria.

The analysis of institutional and inter-institutional functions with respect to the policy challenges of youth migration is based on the substantial exploratory and analytical work delivered by the YOUMIG project teams and presented in several policy papers. These analyses include: a 'Conceptual framework for the study of youth migration in the Danube Region'; a 'Local Status Quo Analysis for Burgas'; the 'European and global good practice collection of relevant services and actions linked to youth migration'; an 'Evaluation report on Burgas's local pilot' and the 'Ambition Setting Workshop' national report. The experience of the Burgas Municipality pilot and that of the subsequent pilot activities in the framework of the YOUMIG project underscore the commonplace problems of inter-agency cooperation at the local level, including obstacles and setbacks. These findings, presented at length in the Local Status Quo Analyses and the conclusions of the Ambition Setting Workshop, can serve as a point of departure for the formulation of policy recommendations in relation to the management of youth migration at the national and local level in Bulgaria.

1. Enhancing the coherence of institutional policies at the local level

At the local level, a key issue is the lack of coordination and cooperation between the various agencies and institutions concerned with youth migration. This problem became apparent during the early stages of gathering information for the pilot: the local branches of the state agencies provided data that was incomplete, intermittent and often contradictory. For the time being, the only reliable source of information on local issues appears to be the National Statistical Institute. Another difficulty relates to discordance between the policies of educational establishments and those of municipal authorities. Elite language schools in Burgas are major conduits for youth migration – graduates of these schools are known to migrate to countries corresponding to their language studies (typically Germany, the UK, France and Spain), initially as students and later as economic immigrants. The effect of this failed cooperation is a reflection of the general lack of 'joined-up' migration-related policies at the local level.

In response to these problems, it is recommended that the local government take the lead in deliberating on the complex issues of youth migration, bringing together the divergent agendas of the different stakeholders (educational establishments, public authorities, employers, community based NGOs, etc). It is strongly recommended that the representatives of young people and their families be involved in the deliberation process so that its wider publicity can be ensured. **A proposal for mid-level governance** is that horizontal communication and cooperation across institutional boundaries at the national, regional and local levels be encouraged. In view of the structure of Bulgarian governance, such a task should be assigned to the administration of the Regional Governor.

2. Fostering evidence-based policymaking at the local level

The findings of the Burgas LSQA suggest that the public authorities have limited knowledge and often biased understanding of the complex phenomenon of youth migration. Hence, municipal policy is often driven by popular assumptions rather than systemic analysis based on reliable data. A popular take on youth migration in Burgas is that young and educated Bulgarians are leaving the country in a massive exodus en route to developed European countries, affecting unfavourably the development of the municipality and the country as a whole by exhausting its demographic and economic potential. In contrast, return migration – a source of hope and policy ideas – is perceived as feasible and highly desirable. However, neither of these viewpoints corresponds entirely with reality. In fact, the statistical data and municipality-level population projections reveal a more balanced trend on migration. General attitudes in the community are informed by popular perceptions, and the municipality's strategy on migration is often a response to such attitudes.

It is recommended that local-level authorities collect and process data from various sources concerning young people's general circumstances, and their migration prospects in particular. **At the national level**, it is proposed that the relevant central government institutions place youth migration at the centre of their policies on local development.

3. Exploring the non-economic drivers of youth migration

Another finding of the project is that youth migration is construed, at both the national and municipal level, predominantly in economic terms. This narrative portrays young migrants as rational, opportunistic agents, who devise strategies to optimise their economic choices in pursuit of a better life. The research findings and experience gained from the various project activities, however, disprove these assumptions and reveal a more complex picture of multiple and often contradictory motives. It would appear that along with the desire to improve their economic circumstances, young migrants share a variety of other motives such as living independently, emancipation from their parents and culture of origin, learning about different cultures and enhancing their future choices etc. In the interviews, a common theme revolves around keeping the doors of opportunity open for as long as possible by avoiding what they perceive as the 'depressive economic realities' that channel life in a predetermined direction. Apparently, in the value system of youth, the freedom to continue making choices, without committing to an ultimate one, takes priority over the security and predictability of a settled life.

Both the Local Status Quo Analyses and the workshops at the national level identified the rigid bureaucratic culture of Bulgarian administration as a major impediment to multi-level governance cooperation and efficient communication across institutional boundaries, in particular. In view of these findings, the authorities need to acknowledge that they lack

sufficient knowledge and understanding of the values, motives, plans and life strategies of young migrants. These issues need to be explored in context – in terms of ‘locality’ and ‘migration opportunities’ – and addressed by relevant policies. **It is recommended that both the national and local authorities** initiate an ongoing process of participatory exploration with the active involvement of young people to arrive at adequate policy solutions.

4. The inflexibility of governance structures

Bulgaria’s state administration is quite centralised and despite operating through its local offices, it has limited capacity to respond flexibly to local issues, including migration. The dispersed structures of the central government are subject to a rigid hierarchy in which the adherence to strict rules is expected. Local administrative offices operate within strictly allocated budgets; their officials often feel disempowered and avoid taking action on their own initiative. On the other hand, municipal governments have the authority to respond to local issues by designing and launching their own policies, but often lack the financial resources to do so. Consequently, policy actions on local-level migration are often mired in bureaucracy and disowned by the mainstream institutions.

This hierarchical structure and culture of Bulgarian administration favours the strict execution of routine tasks, but struggles to meet the complex challenges involved in managing context-dependent migration issues. **Therefore, it is recommended that the central government embark on a process of decentralising and contextualising decision-making and policymaking** to delegate the responsibilities of decision-making authorities to local actors. The process of delegation from the centre to the periphery should be accompanied by investment commensurate to the increased capacity of local authorities, including the provision of resources necessary to exercise their enhanced functions.

5. The empowerment of institutions based on a unified strategic framework

The central finding of this study is that there are neither public offices nor local NGOs in Burgas dedicated to working with migrant communities, and with young migrants in particular. Youth migration is not on the agenda of any local government institutions, and officials appear unconcerned in this regard. Further, youth migration is not treated as a category in itself, and is not addressed by specific policies. Institutional actors at both the local and national level prefer to speak about migration in generic terms, seeking universal rather than contextual solutions. Typically, the authority whose responsibility is to provide solutions to migration challenges (and gather reliable data on such issues) is located elsewhere or has its services outsourced to private sector agencies. At the local level, such issues arise from a lack of relevant information and experience at the local level; while at the

national level, the disempowering nature of the centralised state bureaucracy represents a major hurdle in terms of providing effective migrant-related services.

It is recommended that the central government prioritise youth migration on their policy agenda – for instance, by producing a national strategy in this field and inviting the regional and municipal authorities to integrate it into their local development plans. To succeed, such an effort would require authentic engagement and committed participation on the part of various governmental and non-governmental actors at both the local and central level, including youth. Such a policy shift is therefore contingent on the ability of a closed bureaucratic governance culture to transition to an open, participatory and community-orientated one. However, it should be acknowledged that transforming an institutional culture is no easy undertaking, requiring long-term commitment and the allocation of considerable resources.