

## **How Often and to Which Destinations are Bulgarian Students Travelling in International Work Journeys? Survey in Municipality of Blagoevgrad**

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### **Abstract**

This paper represents the results and conclusions from a survey undertaken in Blagoevgrad municipality, Bulgaria, in the end of the year 2011. It concerned a relatively new socio-economic phenomenon – students work journeys in foreign countries. Here are presented two key points of the process – the destinations of these journeys and the repeatability of the process.

**Keywords:** students, work, employment, journey, international, Bulgaria

### **Introduction**

In the contemporary situation of a global economic and financial crisis students work journeys are a new phenomenon creating opportunities for Bulgarian students and their families. These seasonal migrations are not seriously researched so far. Their importance is however obvious for many students and for Bulgarian economy as a whole. They are an “invisible” export of labor forces and import of financial funds. During such seasonal works participants face different obstacles and difficulties. They work in a new surrounding with its domestic laws, rules and language. Young people sacrifice the period of a deserved summer vacation in order to work and be more sustainable and self-dependant. In some good cases they can even collect small financial capital for their own businesses at a later stage. Their ambition and efforts are admirable, as well as the positive effect they cause upon the national and regional economy.

This survey examines unique topics and processes. They are observed in a small number of countries in the world. These are the countries with well developed educational systems and at the same time with low national incomes for the population. This is typical mainly for the Central and Eastern European countries and excludes the Third world countries.

The present survey was anonymous in order to increase the honesty of participants and to encourage them for sharing additional information if needed.

### **Study area**

The object of research is the student community in Municipality Blagoevgrad. There are two universities and a college in the town. Representatives from all these educational centers are included in the survey. Even focused in a single municipality the results from the survey can be accepted far more representative. In this case they may be assumed as valid for the whole country. Students studying in Blagoevgrad come from the whole country and from many foreign countries as well. The procedures for appliance for work journeys, taxes, conditions, terms and deadlines are identical with all other Bulgarian cities. The concentration of students compared to the total population share in Blagoevgrad is probably the highest in the country, which made this research easier to perform.

## Methods of research

The data was collected using a representative statistical survey by self-filling a statistical survey card. The range of people interviewed exceeds the usual practices. This makes us believe, that our results are reliable and comprehensive. Usually the sample-size surveys (samplings) achieve accurate results based on a very small percentage of people interviewed. Usually 0,015% of the total aggregation is sufficient at a national level. In the presented survey we reached levels between 50 and 200 times higher share of people participated.

## Results

During the survey the following number of students was studied:

For South-West University "Neofit Rilski" were covered about 0.45% or 4.5‰ of the total number of educated students. This is about 30 times more respondents than usual. In fact, this value increases approximately twice if we consider the fact that not all students go to university student seasonal works. Typically, the percentage of participating varies between 25% and 50% of students. In other words, respondents are between 9 ‰ and 18 ‰ of participants in student work journeys, studying at South-West University "Neofit Rilski".

For the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) values are as following: On the basis of 1127 regular students in the spring of 2011, we interviewed 17 participants in work trips. This makes 1.5% or 15 ‰ of the total number of students.

From the College of tourism were surveyed about 0.4% or 4‰ of the total number of students. The sample size of the survey is shown on Table 1.

*Table 1*

Typical national scale survey:	Bulgaria's population:	Present survey:	South-West University (SWU)	American University in Bulgaria (AUBG)	College of tourism (CT)
Total number::	7,500,000	Total number of students:	12,000	1,127	750
People surveyed	1,125 (1,024)	Students surveyed:	55	17	3
% of total number	0,015 %	% of total number	0,45 %	1,5 %	0.4 %
‰ of total number	0,15 ‰	‰ of total number	4,5 ‰	15 ‰	4 ‰

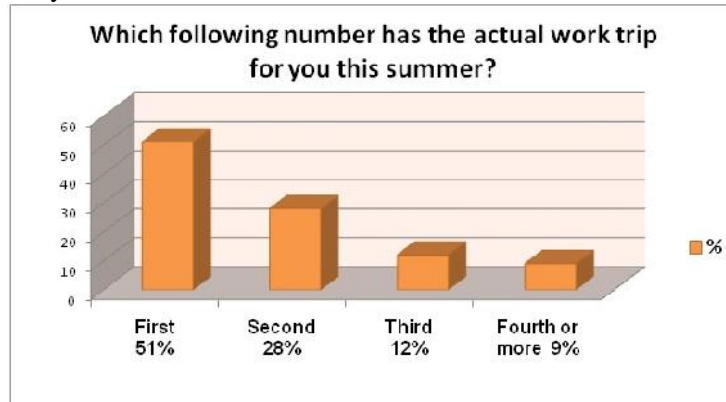
The distinctive share of participants from the different universities is due to the unequal activity of students in the processes. AUBG students are the most active, as almost 100% of them are participating in the first two years of study. The reasons for this activity lie in the high tuition fees, hostel and others they pay, making work trips actually required for most students. Other reasons are: better suited training schedule and vacations, contributing to an early departure and easier to find a suitable employer. AUBG students get easier visas for the U.S., as taught at American University, they are also fluent in English, etc. SWU students are diverse as financial capacity, work commitment, knowledge of foreign languages and labor activity. Tuition fees are relatively low and acceptable for Bulgarian standards, so they are not forced by circumstances to leave the country for work in summer. The percentage of students participating is naturally lower than AUBG.

Lowest percentage of participants in student teams is observed in The College of tourism. The reasons are: heterogeneous and relatively high age of the students, their actual workload

(significant proportion of students have regular jobs, families, etc.), relatively low tuition fees and more.

The large scale of the survey, the proportionality of the number of respondents to the number studying in the universities and even distribution of questionnaires among students of all courses of study allow us to receive that the collected data is representative of it. In other words, the results of this survey are valid in terms of size, scope and trends of the studied processes.

At the first stage of this survey we asked the students: “Which following number has the actual work trip for you this summer?”



*Fig. 1*

As we can see on Figure 1, most of the students are traveling abroad for a summer job once, then their enthusiasm starts to cool. We see that after each successive trip, there are fewer participants. This was the first work trip for 51% of the students, then participating for the second time fell to 28%, for the third time - only 12%, and four or more times involved only 9% of respondents.

### **Conclusions**

The reasons for these results are probably both - subjective and objective.

Subjective - accumulated fatigue, disappointment in the organization of work and wages, the foreign culture and language, the relative financial independence achieved after the previous trips, etc.

Objective - preparing for graduation and state exams and the rules of some sending agencies not to allow senior students to travel abroad. The latter is particularly aggravating because in a functioning market economy and good will on the part of the student, one may find an agency that is not restrictive in that regard. Overall it is probably subjective reasons leading to the decline of enthusiasm with each trip. Interestingly, even the supposedly one of the most important factors - the payment cannot overcome this downward trend.

It is known that by improving their work experience students cope better with their obligations. Moreover they earn greater trust from their employers, thus receiving more important and better paid positions each year. A large percentage of participants in work trips work by the same employer almost every year. Therefore - the work becomes easier (because of experience and improved skills), wages are rising, yet the enthusiasm of participants decreases with each passing year. This shows how strong subjective attitudes are in the formation of human behavior.

At the second stage of this survey we asked the students: “Where did you choose to travel for a summer work?”

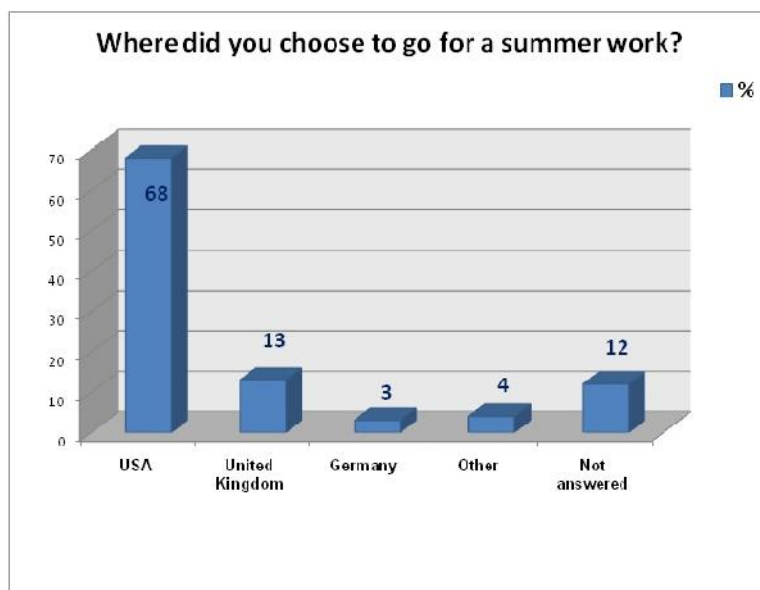


Fig. 2

As shown on Figure 2 most of the students choose USA to participate in work programs in the summer. The largest proportion of participants go to work in the U.S. - 68% of the targets, followed far behind by the UK - 13%, Germany - 3%, and other countries such as Greece, Cyprus and Canada with share of approximately 1%. Other 12% of participants didn't indicate their destination.

### Conclusions

Attractiveness of the U.S. is mostly due to higher pay levels. These data clearly confirmed repeatedly over the years by different participants. Also not to underestimate the fact that young people are adventurous and want to explore more distant and different places, away from the generally more familiar Europe. Adventure is probably the reason for the partial attraction of Canada, but it is lagging behind as a preferred destination due to lower levels of pay. Furthermore, not all its provinces speak the so-widely-used English. The remoteness of Canada raises the cost of a journey and this is a serious obstacle to its choice for a summer implementation destination.

Britain attracts with its vicinity and with relatively admirable salaries, though smaller than those in the U.S. A work trip to UK costs lower, thus making the destination accessible to a wider range of participants.

Other European countries, such as: Germany, Greece, Cyprus and others rely on the same combination of factors, typical for UK: wage rates plus proximity, i.e. affordability.

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