

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

Principal Investigators

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Project Overview

Research Question:

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

Main argument:

Through different educational offers available in different Bulgarian regions the education system is responsible for creating social disparities in school-to-work transitions.

Implications:

- theoretical
- policy
- practical

Aims

The project aims at better understanding

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

Context

Bulgaria's transition from state socialism to market capitalism

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

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

- Stratification in Bulgaria includes significant *gender, ethnic and regional differences* in educational achievement and employment (Stoilova and Haralampiev 2009; Pamporov 2011, Stoilova 2012)
- Bulgaria achieves greater *gender equality* in education and employment compared to other countries (Kovacheva 2008)

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Theoretical Backdrop

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

(Maurice et al. 1982; Allmendinger 1989)

Relevant components

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

Project Plan

Project Duration: Nov. 2012 – Oct. 2015

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

Study Components

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

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

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

Methodology

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

School-leavers Survey

Part 1: Educational Variables

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

Part 2: Labour Market Outcomes

(including a calendar of activities)

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

Part 3: Socio-demographic characteristics

Role of social background, of place of birth, of gender, and ethnicity

1st Project Year

Milestones:

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

1st Project Year

Publications and (selected) Presentations:

- “Dynamics of inequalities in access to higher education: Bulgaria in a comparative perspective” by P. Illieva-Trichkova & P. Boyadjieva, *European Journal of Higher Education*, , 4(2): 97-117.
- “Education Systems and Gender Stratification in Bulgaria” Career orientations, education systems and gendered school-to-work transitions Conference, University of Basel, November 24-5, 2012.
- “Does expansion and greater equity in higher education mean worse employability? A comparative perspective” (P. Illieva-Trichkova & P. Boyadjieva) EAIR Forum Rotterdam, August 28-31, 2013.
- “Higher Education and Well-Being” (P. Illieva-Trichkova & P. Boyadjieva) CHER Lausanne, September 9-11, 2013.

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2nd Project Year

Publications:

- “Towards understanding of higher education as a public good: Inequalities in access to higher education and trust in a comparative perspective” (forthcoming) by P. Boyadjieva & P. Ilieva-Trichkova, *Sociological problems*. Special Issue.
- “Higher Education and Social Trust: A European Comparative Perspective”. In N. Popov and A. Wiseman (eds) “Comparative Sciences: Interdisciplinary Approaches” (forthcoming) by P. Boyadjieva & P. Ilieva-Trichkova, *International Perspectives on Education and Society Series*. Vol. 26.

2nd Project Year

- Stoilova,R. The Welfare State in the Context of the Global Financial Crisis: Bulgaria – between financial stability and political uncertainty, In:Schubert/de Vilotta/Kuhlmann “Challenges to European Welfare Systems”, Springer Publishing, forthcoming 2014,
- Stoilova,R. 2014 Intersectionality – Roma women in Bulgaria, Sofia University Publishing House, forthcoming 2014.

Lessons learned

- Electronic communication is very useful but meetings are indispensable.
- Joint participation at international conferences, in the elaboration of a new project consortium, in the comparative volume.
- Field work should start as early as possible.
- Outreach activities and contacts with policy makers should:
 - be actively promoted from the beginning
 - focus on a hot issue – in our case: dual system – contacts with MES, MLSP, school principals.
- Great potential of the Bulgarian-Swiss research programme to:
 - further strengthen collaboration between Bulgarian teams from different research areas and thus to promote interdisciplinarity
 - develop international collaboration of Bulgarian and Swiss researchers with scholars from other countries
 - initiate new projects.

Our Contacts

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