

OPINION

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Title:	Circular migration of health professionals - attitudes, challenges and perspectives in Bulgaria
Prof. field:	3.7 “Administration and Management”
PhD programme:	Organization and Management of Non-Material Production (in Healthcare)”
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1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Iliana Georgieva's PhD thesis has all the traditional characteristics of a dissertation - sufficient length (188 pages); introduction, main text and conclusion; list of sources used; two appendices. The material is richly illustrated with numerous tables and figures.

The **relevance** of the chosen topic can be commented in two directions. On the one hand, the problem with the outflow of Bulgarian medical professionals has a 30-year history. It has been documented and analysed by the scientific community, various methods have been proposed to solve it. On the other hand, all the proposals remain open for discussion and there is no decisive intervention of the state to overcome it. As pointed out in the thesis, despite its long history, the migration of medical professionals in our country is not adequately reflected by national statistics and the registers of various professional organizations. What is new here is the focus of the study – the circular migration as an opportunity to alleviate some of the problems of the Bulgarian health system (lack of staff,

especially in some specialties; insufficient opportunity to maintain and improve qualifications; demotivation).

The elements of the **research apparatus** mentioned in the introduction (subject and object, aim and objectives of the thesis) are clearly formulated and stem from each other. The research is based on a main thesis supported by 5 hypotheses, which are tested by a highly appropriate combination of research methods. It is imperative to note the precise subjecting of the hypotheses to a series of verifications, each made with well-chosen statistical and sociological methods.

The review of the **bibliographic reference** shows a conscientious attitude towards the available scientific literature on the subject, as well as knowledge of the normative and strategic framework. The list of literature used is logically arranged and contains 220 sources. Its relevance can be assessed as high – the vast majority of the cited scientific titles have been published in the last 5-7 years. Over 90% of the sources used are in English, which is logical given the relative novelty of the topic for the Bulgarian scientific community.

2. ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS

The overall research approach also demonstrates the clarity exhibited in the construction of the research apparatus. The adopted manner to draw conclusions and generalizations after each point in the individual chapters, the explicit reference to definitions and interpretations used by the author, and the modeling of the conclusions on the main research tasks are to be admired. The style of expression is scholarly, precise and very clear.

In my opinion, the results in the dissertation can be characterized mainly as **scientifically applied** and can be divided into two groups:

1) The first ones arise from a thorough study of the theoretical literature on **circular migration**; combining this with a review of international and national policy documents and concepts; drawing out the factors and interrelationships within the phenomenon. This is a novelty for the Bulgarian scientific literature, and the research work done by the PhD student can be of great help to decision-makers in creating more modern policies regarding human resource management in the health care system.

2) I would single out the second group of results as particularly valuable – those that represent **scientific novelty** and have been gathered, processed and discussed in the survey, in-depth interviews and subsequent cross-analyses of the relationships between the attitudes

and experiences they set out. The attitudes of Bulgarian medical professionals towards the conditions in which they work (at macro- and meso-levels), the resulting intentions for temporary or permanent labour migration and related issues are not explored for the first time. But linking them to the little-known circular migration is the real achievement of the PhD student, making the dissertation a worthy addition to the body of scholarly knowledge.

3) The circular migration incentive model and related tools presented in Chapter Three are the main output of this thesis. Despite the lack of full clarity regarding the causality of the factors in all stages of the model (also pointed out by the author), recommendations are made to institutions and organizations operating at national and regional level in the health care system, as well as to medical institutions. An interesting next scientific task for the PhD student is the refinement of the model by investigating the interconnectedness of the observed factors.

3. ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

Five contributions are listed in the abstract: the **first two** stem from the analysis and synthesis of theoretical literature, strategic and normative documents. They can be accepted as novel only in their part related to circular migration. The other findings (especially the first contribution) are rather updates of known processes.

The third contribution is again worth highlighting as an extremely systematic approach to testing the hypotheses of the study. The developed methodological toolkit is multi-stage and allows for clear and unambiguous conclusions about the relationships between the collected data.

I rate the fourth and fifth contributions as purely practical and applied. They give me a reason to return to the acute topicality of the researched topic and especially to the necessity for policy makers in our country to notice, evaluate and use adequately such scientific results. The model and its associated tools need to be subjected to scientific discussions to further refine them and this (I hope) is the next step in the PhD student's commitments.

4. ASSESSMENT OF THE PUBLICATIONS

In support of his dissertation research, the PhD student has presented one report and 4 articles published in periodicals of Medical University – Varna and other reputable scientific publications. They are related to the topic of the dissertation and were submitted during the period of doctoral studies. In order to popularize the proposals contained in the

model presented in the dissertation, I would also recommend their publication as soon as possible. Due to the high quality of the research carried out, I believe that the publication of the dissertation in its entirety in the form of a monographic study would be a very valuable reading for the medical community and especially – for the managers of the country's healthcare system.

5. ASSESSMENT OF THE ABSTRACT

The abstract presents the logic and the main points of the thesis very precisely. It summarizes the research apparatus, structure and content, contributions and publications on the dissertation topic. Of particular note is the skillful concise presentation of the dissertation itself and the fact that the main focus is on the actual research and the model of chapter three of the full text.

6. NOTES, QUESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is probably already clear from the foregoing, that no substantive criticisms can be made of the PhD, as the research is meticulously documented, covers the available current literature on the topic, applies a fully adequate instrumentation, and does so with adherence to the best standards. My only more substantive **comment** relates to the stated limitations of the study. To these I would add the choice to examine only the international migration of Bulgarian health professionals, as well as the caveat that it does not examine the possibilities for foreign health professionals who enter the country as part of circular migration flows to work temporarily in the Bulgarian health system

A reading of the text certainly raises some **questions** on which it would be interesting to hear the author's views during the defense:

1) From the beginning of the study, you make the qualification that you use the terms "medical professionals" and "health professionals" as equivalent, despite the fact that you accept the more encompassing nature of the latter. Why do you take such an approach?

2) In describing the factors in the Circular Migration Stimulation Model (in Chapter Three), you refer to this type of migration as a "spontaneous phenomenon." Does this not contradict the idea of its management/stimulation?

3) Although the implementation of the Model and the tools in practice is not one of the tasks of the dissertation research, I would be very interested to understand how do you envision their implementation? Which stakeholders should be an active party in promoting circular migration? Do you expect developments in this field in the coming years?

7. CONCLUSION

The doctoral thesis “Circular migration of health professionals - attitudes, challenges and perspectives in Bulgaria” prepared by **Iliyana Georgieva** under the scientific supervision of assoc. prof. Maria Rohova-Yordanova and assoc. prof. Veselina Slavova **meets all the requirements** for gaining a PhD degree. Therefore, I would recommend the members of the honorable scientific jury to vote positive and **to adjudicate a doctoral degree to Iliyana Georgieva.**

Reviewer:

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assoc. prof. Denitsa Gorchilova

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