

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOBILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN EMPLOYMENT POLICY

### OPORTUNIDADES DE MOBILIDADE NO CONTEXTO DA POLÍTICA EUROPEIA DE EMPREGO

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#### Abstract

The European Union's principle of free movement of workers is considered one of the most important rights of EU citizens. This means you can move to any EU country, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, as EFTA members, to look for and start work. Indeed, sometimes exercising this right can seem like a daunting and difficult task. The analysis of social processes shows that from the middle of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century, the transnationalization of production became a dominant feature of globalization. The challenges of the XXI century affected not only institutions, but also interpersonal relations. In the Covid-19 situation, there is no doubt that there is a need for leaders to present their leadership qualities to the public, declaring stability and confidence.

And in Bulgaria, the employment policy in 2021 is mainly aimed at overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis; increasing the qualifications and skills of the workforce according to the needs of the economy and activating and increasing the employment of disadvantaged groups on the labor market, with priority from the least developed regions and those who have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 crisis. The active policy of the labor market includes the implementation of employment programs, incentive measures under the Law on the Promotion of Employment (EPL) and projects under the Operational Program "Human Resources Development" (OP HRD) to preserve and increase employment, limit unemployment through subsidizing jobs, as well as increasing the quality of the workforce by conducting training for adults, acquiring professional qualifications, acquiring and improving key competencies and motivating active behavior on the labor market, career counseling and development.

**Keywords:** European Union, mobility, integration, employment

#### Resumo

O princípio da livre circulação de trabalhadores da União Europeia é considerado um dos direitos mais importantes dos cidadãos da UE. Isso significa que pode se mudar para qualquer país da UE, bem como para a Islândia, Liechtenstein, Noruega ou Suíça, como membros da EFTA, para procurar e começar a trabalhar. De fato, às vezes exercer esse direito pode parecer uma tarefa assustadora e difícil. A análise dos processos sociais mostra que, de meados do século XX ao início do século XXI, a transnacionalização da produção tornou-se uma característica dominante da globalização. Os desafios do século XXI afetaram não apenas as instituições, mas também as relações interpessoais. Na situação do Covid-19, não há dúvida de que é necessário que os líderes apresentem ao público suas qualidades de liderança, declarando estabilidade e confiança.

E na Bulgária, a política de emprego em 2021 visa principalmente superar as consequências da crise do COVID-19; aumentar as qualificações e competências da força de trabalho de acordo com as necessidades da economia e ativar e aumentar o emprego de grupos desfavorecidos no mercado de trabalho, com prioridade para as regiões menos desenvolvidas e aqueles que perderam o emprego devido à crise do COVID-19. A política ativa do mercado de trabalho inclui a implementação de programas de emprego, medidas de incentivo ao abrigo da Lei de Promoção do Emprego (EPL) e projetos no âmbito do Programa Operacional "Desenvolvimento dos Recursos Humanos" (OP HRD) para preservar e aumentar o emprego, limitar o desemprego através da subsidiação de postos de trabalho, bem como do aumento da qualidade da força de trabalho através da realização de formação de adultos, aquisição de qualificação profissional, aquisição e melhoria de competências-chave e motivação de comportamentos ativos no mercado de trabalho, aconselhamento e desenvolvimento de carreira.

**Palavras-chave:** União Europeia, mobilidade, integração, emprego.

## 1. Introduction

At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, the scale of trade relations increased extremely rapidly as a result of the growth of industrial production and international agreements to reduce protectionist barriers between countries. The economic convergence of countries in the field of production is beginning, which is helped by the fact that the industrial mode of production is based on technologies that are subject to unification, thus creating preconditions for the international division of labor.

The analysis of social processes shows that from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the transnationalization of production has become a dominant feature of globalization (Marinova, 2014).

The challenges of the 21st century have affected not only institutions but also interpersonal relationships. In the Covid-19 situation, there is no doubt that there is a need for leaders, with leadership qualities that declare stability and confidence. Today, more than ever, there is a need for management decisions that directly correspond to leadership skills.

We live in unprecedented and challenging times and that is why the need for leaders is greatest now. Leadership in itself is not an easy task, especially in the 21st century, when people have more demands regarding the candidates for leadership. But what happens during a crisis? That is, when leadership comes to the rescue, because it is in emergencies that people need someone to rely on, give them security, make decisions and take responsible (Pencheva, 2020).

In the situation of Covid-19, the crisis has changed the priorities of the National Reform Programs, which are prepared by the EU's national governments. Priority has been given to vulnerable groups and the most affected sectors of the economy.

The object of this study are the European projects aimed at the mobility of citizens in the European Union (EU), as well as the European Employment Strategy and the possibilities for its implementation in Bulgaria.

The subject of the study are their specific applications in Bulgaria.

More specifically, we intend to explore the conditions and opportunities offered in the cross-border regions of the EU in terms of the labor market. The purpose of the study is to analyze the European legislation that affects mobility within the Union, including in Bulgaria. To achieve this goal, the methods of description, comparison, grouping and analysis are applied.

## 2. Exhibition

The European Employment Strategy (EES) is in line with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Global Employment Strategy, which provides: making employment a central issue for any economic and social policy; recognizing the importance of increasing labour productivity and especially that of the working poor; providing resources and new investments to achieve social stability, compliance with basic labour standards; promoting job creation with good working conditions

as a factor in increasing productivity; promoting entrepreneurship and private investment; promoting adaptability and increasing employability; prevention of discrimination on the labour market; building a macroeconomic framework to increase employment (Vladimirova, 2009).

The European Employment Strategy dates back to 1997, when EU countries took action to set common objectives for employment policy. Its main goal is to create more and better jobs across the EU. It is already part of the Europe 2020 growth strategy and is implemented through the European Semester, which is an annual process to promote close policy coordination between EU countries and the EU institutions. In particular, the implementation of the European Employment Strategy, supported by the Employment Committee.

The Employment Guidelines include common priorities and objectives for employment policies. They are proposed by the Commission, approved by national governments and adopted by the Council of the EU. A joint employment report is based on:

- (a) an assessment of the employment situation in Europe;
- (b) the implementation of the employment guidelines;
- (c) evaluation of a set of employment and social indicators. It is published by the Commission and adopted by the Council of the EU.

Based on the evaluation of the National Reform Programs, the Commission publishes a series of reports analysing the economic policies of the EU countries and issues country-specific recommendations, as well as analyses of whether the programs are in line with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The Europe 2020 strategy, adopted in June 2010 by the European Council, is a multifaceted strategy for sustainable growth and jobs for the next decade, which aims to help Europe emerge stronger from the world's worst economic crisis since The 30s of the 20th century.

The Europe 2020 strategy defines three priorities:

- Smart growth: building an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- Sustainable growth: promoting a greener and more competitive economy with more efficient use of resources;
- Inclusive growth: stimulating an economy with high levels of employment, leading to social and territorial cohesion.

To measure progress in achieving the objectives of the strategy, five flagship targets have been set for the European Union:

- Employment for 75% of the population aged 20 - 64 years;
- Investments in research and development (R&D) in the amount of 3% of GDP;
- Achieving the 20/20/20 climate/energy targets (including reducing emissions by an additional 30% if conditions are right);
- Below 10% relative share of early school leavers and at least 40% relative share of the young generation with completed higher education;
- Reduction of the number of people at risk of poverty by 20 million people.

The national goals of Bulgaria in implementing the strategy are defined in the National Reform Program of the Republic of Bulgaria (<http://www.minfin.bg/bg/page/867>).

### **3. The EURES network and the mobility opportunities for European citizens**

EURES helps jobseekers find jobs and employers hire staff from all over Europe (<https://eures.bg/index.php?lang=bg>). The European Union's principle of free movement of workers is considered one of the most important rights of EU citizens. This means that you can move to any EU country, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland, as members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) to look for and start a job. Indeed, sometimes exercising this right can seem like a daunting and difficult task. The purpose of EURES is to assist jobseekers and employers in this area. This includes the provision of a wide range of services available on the EURES portal or through a wide network of more than a thousand advisers to organizations that are members or partners of the network (<https://eures.bg/index.php?lang=bg>).

EURES offers the following services for jobseekers and employers: finding matches between job vacancies and CVs on the EURES portal; information, guidance and other services to support workers and employers; access to information on living and working conditions in EU Member States, such as taxation, pensions, health and social security; specific services to support frontier workers and employers in cross-border regions; support for specific groups under the EURES Targeted Mobility Schemes; support for active recruitment initiatives through the European (online) employment days platform; information and access to post-employment support services, such as language courses and support for integration in the host country.

Established in 1994, EURES is a European cooperation network of employment services, which aims to facilitate the free movement of workers (<https://eures.bg/index.php?lang=bg>). The network has always worked hard to ensure that European citizens can enjoy equal opportunities despite language barriers, cultural differences, bureaucratic challenges, differences in labour law, and a lack of recognition of educational certificates across Europe. EURES is a cooperation network set up to support the free movement of workers in 27 EU countries, plus Switzerland, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

The network consists of: the European Coordination Office (ECO), the National Coordination Offices (NCOs), the EURES Partners and the EURES Associates. The network's partners can be: public employment services (PES), private employment services (PRES), trade unions, employers' organizations and other labour market stakeholders. The partners offer information, recruitment and employment services for employers and jobseekers, and European and national coordination offices monitor the organization of activities at European and national level, respectively. In addition, EURES has an important role to play in providing specific information and helping to find employment for the benefit of employers and frontier workers in cross-border regions in Europe. In practice, EURES provides its services through the portal and a human network of around 1000 EURES Advisers, who

are in daily contact with jobseekers and employers in Europe. The EU's internal border regions cover 40% of the EU's territory and are home to nearly 2 million cross-border workers ([https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index\\_bg](https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index_bg)). In 2018, more than 1.5 million people in the EU lived in one country and worked in another. Cross-border workers face a number of specific obstacles on a daily basis, such as different national practices, social security systems, tax rules and legal systems. In addition, in cross-border regions, public transport is often less developed than inland transport, which further hampers cross-border labour mobility. EURES helps cross-border workers to overcome these obstacles by providing financial support for cross-border partnerships under EaSI, the EU's employment and social innovation ([https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index\\_bg](https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index_bg)).

These partnerships involve EURES members and partners working together across borders to support the mobility of workers and employers. Organizations that are not part of the EURES network may also participate if their activities are related to the regional market for occupational mobility. Partners usually include public employment services, social partners and organizations such as universities, business associations, trade unions and chambers of commerce. In 2020 and 2021, 8 cross-border partnerships involving 14 countries will receive EaSI funding. In addition, a number of other partnerships operate without EaSI support. The cross-border partnerships supported by the European Union's Employment and Social Innovation Program (EaSI) are:

1. Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands - EURES in the border regions of Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands;
2. Spain and Portugal - Cross-border partnership of EURES Galicia - Northern Portugal;
3. Northern Ireland and Ireland - EURES Ireland-Northern Ireland Cross-Border Partnership;
4. France, Germany and Switzerland - EURES T Oberrhein - Rhin Supérieur;
5. Belgium and the Netherlands - Cross-border partnership of EURES Scheldemond;
6. The Czech Republic, Germany and Poland - EURES-TriRegio;
7. Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg - EURES Transfrontalier Grande Région;
8. Italy and Slovenia - EURADRIA.

The main goal of the partnerships is to share information and advice for jobseekers and employers on cross-border labour mobility, to offer job opportunities and to provide pre- and post-employment services. There are groups of experts who provide support to workers at every stage of their professional lives and answer all their questions about the practical aspects of working in another country.

Each year, the partnerships carry out numerous activities in support of both jobseekers and employers. The most significant initiatives currently include guidance for jobseekers over the age of 50, cross-border traineeship schemes and a new job-finding application targeting job vacancies on the border between Belgium and the Netherlands.

The partnerships also monitor mobility flows across their respective borders, labour market developments and identify obstacles that could impede the free movement of workers within the regional cross-border labour market.

### 3.1. Production and sale of goods in the EU

Most goods are subject to the so-called "principle of mutual recognition", according to which any product legally produced in one Member State may move freely and be sold in all EU countries ([https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index\\_bg](https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index_bg)).

Certain trade restrictions remain in place for certain sensitive sectors, such as the construction and the pharmaceutical industry. In addition, Member States may restrict the free movement of goods to their internal markets in certain circumstances relating to issues such as the protection of the environment or public health.

Gradually, conditions are being formed for voluntary participation of enterprises in the system of joint environmental management and audit for the countries of the European Union. At the same time, regular measures have been taken, such as the holding of international conferences on nature protection, the creation of numerous agreements on the transboundary movement of pollutants and the transport of hazardous waste, the reduction and emission of ozone-depleting and greenhouse gases, and others. A number of international conventions in the field of environmental safety and chemical production are being adopted. However, the very nature of the international "technological" division of labour formed in recent decades should provoke public vigilance, as it has produced not only environmental but also related social and economic consequences that have destabilized the development of many national economies. In connection with this, the movement of anti-globalism is growing, taking on more and more mass and aggressive forms (Marinova, 2014).

In principle, EU citizens are free to buy goods for personal use in other Member States. In most cases, there are no restrictions on what you can buy and take with you when traveling to different EU countries. No additional taxes are paid when moving from one Member State to another, as the purchase price includes value added tax (VAT) and excise duty, which means that other countries cannot impose additional taxation.

However, there are restrictions on certain products such as alcohol and tobacco ([https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index\\_bg](https://eures.ec.europa.eu/index_bg)).

A useful and detailed list of rules for purchasing these goods in another Member State is published on the website of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union. Special rules also apply to the purchase of a motor vehicle from one Member State and its introduction into another country for personal use. Thanks to EU law, people are free to manage and invest their money in any Member State.

It is not only financial markets that benefit from the free movement of money by achieving greater efficiency - every European citizen can benefit as well.

With few restrictions, everyone is free to open a bank account, buy shares, invest and acquire real estate in other EU countries. Moreover, EU companies can invest in, own and manage other European companies.

With regard to the free movement of capital within the Member States, certain exceptions apply, mainly relating to taxation, financial supervision, public order considerations, money laundering, and pecuniary sanctions.

In Bulgaria, the minimum age for employment is 16 years. Exceptionally, persons aged 15 to 16 may be hired to perform work that is light and not dangerous or harmful to their health and proper physical, mental and moral development (<https://eures.bg/index.php?lang=bg>). Furthermore, the performance of this work should not be an obstacle to attending school regularly or participating in vocational guidance or training programs. For persons under 18 years of age, a medical certificate is required, which establishes their suitability to perform the relevant work and permission of the labour inspectorate for each individual case (<https://eures.bg/index.php?lang=bg>).

Employment contracts can be concluded for an indefinite period or for a definite period, full-time or part-time, or can include a probationary period of up to 6 months. An employment contract may stipulate the performance of labour obligations in connection with the manufacture of products and / or provision of services in the home of the employee outside the workplace of the employer for remuneration with their or the employer's equipment, materials and other aids. There is a possibility to sign an employment contract with a company that provides temporary work. Full time is 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week for a 5-day work week. Work can be organized into shifts, including night shifts.

Full-time employment is more common. Usually employers include in the employment contracts a probationary period / maximum 6 months. During the probationary period, the employee may be released without notice. Regardless of the type of work the person is hired for, the conclusion of an employment contract in writing is mandatory.

Since 2015, the Labour Code regulates the possibility of signing employment contracts for short-term seasonal agricultural work for a period of 1 day.

The employer is obliged to provide the employee before their employment with a copy of the concluded employment contract, signed by both parties, and a copy of the notification for concluded employment contract under Art. 62, para. 3 of the Labour Code, certified by the territorial directorate of the National Revenue Agency. The employee may enter into employment contracts with other employers to perform work outside their established working hours under the main employment relationship.

The maximum duration of working hours under an employment contract for additional work together with the working hours under the main employment relationship for daily calculation may not be more than 48 hours per week, and not more than 40 hours per week for persons under 18 years. Persons over the age of 18 may work more than 48 hours a week only if they have given their express written consent, and the consent is given to the employer with whom the employee has signed an employment contract for additional work (<https://eures.bg/index.php?lang=bg>).

An employment contract may also be signed for work on certain days of the month, as this time is recognized as length of service.

More information on labour legislation can be found on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Control over the labour legislation is carried out by the Executive Agency “General Labour Inspectorate”.

### **3.2. Definition of “seasonal worker” and “seasonal work”**

The terms “seasonal worker” and “seasonal work” are defined in the Bulgarian legislation in the context of the entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers in the Labour Migration and Labour Mobility Act (<https://eures.bg/index.php?lang=bg>).

- “seasonal worker” is a third-country national who retains his / her main place of residence in a third country and resides legally and temporarily on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria in order to perform seasonal work on the basis of one or more fixed-term employment contracts with an employer whose registered office is in the Republic of Bulgaria;

- “seasonal work” is work that depends on the change of seasons and is linked to a specific time of year through a recurring event or series of events related to seasonal conditions in which the need for labour is significantly greater than in ordinary current affairs.

These definitions are in line with Directive 2014/36 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers.

### **3.3. Types of employment contracts**

With regard to seasonal work, the general rules of the Bulgarian Labour Code apply, as well as the minimum monthly salary and the minimum hourly wage.

Seasonal workers may be employed on a fixed-term contract under Article 68 of the Labour Code, which determines the period of employment.

For short-term seasonal work in agriculture, a specific type of contract is concluded in accordance with Article 114a of the Labour Code. Their duration is one day, and they are concluded with an employee for no more than 90 days within one calendar year. Such contracts must contain information about the parties to the contract, the place of work, the type of activity, the remuneration, the date of performance of the work, the duration, the beginning and the end of the working day. The usual working day is 8 hours, but the parties can agree on half a working day. Remuneration is paid directly to the employee against a receipt at the end of the working day. Such contracts are certified by the General Labour Inspectorate.

There is a mandatory template for concluding such employment contracts, which can be found, as well as more information on the website of the General Labour Inspectorate at: <https://www.gli.government.bg/bg/node/>.

The labour relations between the employer and the employee in the Republic of Bulgaria are obligatorily settled by signing an employment contract. The employment contract is concluded in



writing before the employee starts the job and contains data on the place of work, job title and nature of the work, date of conclusion and start of its implementation, duration, amount of the basic and additional paid annual leave, remuneration and length of working day or week.

Within three days of signing the employment contract, the employer is obliged to send a notification of its conclusion to the territorial directorate of the National Revenue Agency /NRA/ and to present the employee with an original of the employment contract signed by both parties and a copy from the certified notification to the territorial division of the NRA.

Employment contracts can be concluded for an indefinite period of time or for a definite term/ fixed-term employment contract/. The fixed-term employment contract becomes a contract for an indefinite period of time, if after the expiration of the specified term the employee continues to work for 5 or more days, without a written objection from the employer and the position is vacant. In most cases, a probationary period of no more than 6 months is provided.

In case of any change in the employment relationship, the employer is obliged to provide the employee with written information about the changes made no later than one month after the entry into force of the change.

Contracts with a probationary period may be terminated without notice by the party in whose favour the term is within its limits (maximum 6 months). The employment contract is considered final if it is not terminated by the end of the probationary period. After this period, termination of the contract may be made only on general grounds.

Permanent contracts are usually terminated with one month's notice, and fixed-term contracts with 3 months' notice, but not more than the remainder of the contract. Without notice, employment contracts may be terminated by mutual consent of the parties, or upon expiration of the contract, upon return of a replaced worker, upon completion of the specified work, etc.

With one month's notice, the employer may dismiss employees who have acquired the right to a pension for length of service and age. Under the same conditions, but without notice, employees may terminate their employment with the employer. In 2015, a new type of employment contracts was introduced - for short-term seasonal agricultural work. They last one day and are certified by the General Labour Inspectorate.

More information on labour relations can be found in the Labour Code, published on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, under the section "Documents".

Bulgaria's full integration into the EU includes bringing its domestic labour and social legislation up to EU standards and its subordination to certain common principles and rules. This is a long and complex process, as it affects virtually everyone - the country's population and organizations, i.e., employers and employees (Vladimirova, 2009).

The challenges of demographic and socio-economic factors, digitalization and new technologies place increasing demands on organizations. Some of the key factors that influence smart risk-taking decisions include talent management, training and education, staff qualifications, leadership, and the organization's ability to make risk-based decisions. Therefore, effective risk management requires smart risk management. This approach seeks to incorporate appropriate risk

management procedures in all parts of the organization. This is possible through risk assessment, overall design and implementation of a program for its management (Yordanova, 2020).

In 2021, the recovery of the labor market from the crisis due to the corona virus is slowing down. The measures introduced by the government limited the growth of unemployment, but the pre-crisis levels of the main indicators of the labor market in the field of employment and unemployment have not yet been achieved.

The economically active population aged 15-64 in 2021 was 3,155.3 thousand. The economic activity rate was 72.0% compared to 72.2% in 2020. The value of the indicator for men in 2021 was 76.2% and for women 67.7 %.

The number of employed persons aged 15-64 is 2,986.7 thousand compared to 3,024.3 thousand in 2020. The employment rate for the same age group is 68.21% and is lower compared to 2020 and 2019 by 0.43 respectively. p.p. and 21.09 p.p. The employment rate for the 20-64 age group is also lower compared to 2020 and 2019 and is 73.21%. In 2021, the employment rate for women (15-64) was 64.23%, and that of men for the same age group was 72.0%.

In the age structure of the employed, the highest share are 45-54 year olds (27.7%) and 35-44 year olds (26.5%), and the lowest are young people aged 15-24 (3.4%). Compared to 2020, in the structure of the employed by age, a decrease was observed in the shares of the employed aged 15-24 and 25-34 (by 0.3 pp), while the shares of the employed aged 45-54. and 55-64 years are increasing (respectively by 0.7 pp and 0.1 pp).

In the structure of the employed (15 years and older) by economic sector, the highest share are those employed in "Manufacturing industry" (18.6%) and "Trade, repair of cars and motorcycles" (16.7%). Compared to 2020, the largest increase was recorded in the share of those employed in construction (by 0.7 pp), which in 2021 reached 8.7%. With 0.2 p.p. the share of those employed in the economic activities "Transport, warehousing and mail" (6.8% of all employed) and "Creation and dissemination of information and creative products" is increasing; telecommunications' (3.3% of all employed).

The increase in the share of the employed in some economic sectors is accompanied by a decrease in others. The share of employed people is decreasing more significantly (by 0.7 p.p.) in one of the economic activities most affected by the coronavirus crisis, "Hotel and restaurant industry", whose share in 2021 is 4%. According to the latest NSI survey among accommodation facility managers in December 2021, 16.8% of accommodation facilities benefited from government measures to support employers. The relative share of those employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing decreased by 0.3 pp. to 6.3%. With 0.2 p.p. decrease the shares of those employed in "Trade; repair of cars and motorcycles", "Administrative and auxiliary activities" and in "Mining industry".

The recovery of employment at the local level has been uneven. Compared to 2020, the employment rate for the age group 15-64 increased in two of the six statistical regions - in the North-East region by 1.2 pp. to 67.9% and in the North-West region by 0.9 p.p. to 59.6%. In the South-West region, the value of the indicator remains almost unchanged (73.87%) compared to 2020. In the remaining three regions, the employment rate decreased - by 1.8 pp. in the North Central region (up to

66.5%), with 1.1. p.p. in the South-Central region (up to 66.1%) and by 0.9 p.p. (up to 66.2%) in the Southeast region.

The downward trend in unemployment observed since 2014 is interrupted in 2020 as a result of the measures introduced to limit the spread of COVID-19. In 2021, unemployment decreased on a quarterly basis in absolute and relative terms. The number of unemployed persons is 171.1 thousand against 168.6 thousand in 2020. The unemployment rate is 5.3% against 5.1% in 2020 and 4.2% in 2019. The value of the indicator for men is 5.5% and for women 5.0% in 2021

Of all the unemployed, those with previous employment are 143.5 thousand, and those looking for their first job are 27.6 thousand. Of the unemployed with previous employment, the largest number left work due to layoffs or dismissal (36.1%) and due to completion of temporary or seasonal work (31.6%).

Labor market strengths in 2021 result from the economic recovery that has begun with growth in GDP and employment, albeit falling short of 2019 levels, and include low unemployment with a rapid return to work of many laid off as a result of the pandemic; fiscal sustainability and secured financial resources, continuation of employment support schemes, good condition of epidemic-resistant sectors, ongoing health measures against the epidemic and accumulated experience of the competent institutions, adequate changes in the regulatory framework, support of European institutions and funds, etc.

Weaknesses in the labor market in 2021 are fewer and different than in 2020, while coming to the fore and problems “displaced” in 2020 from those that are characteristic of the pandemic. The recovery of employment after the lifting of anti-epidemic restrictions is slower and more limited, and the lack of qualifications and skills makes it difficult to find employment in activities less affected by the pandemic. The situation of some disadvantaged groups in the labor market is not improving. The shortage of qualified personnel remained for the sectors not significantly affected by the pandemic, despite the redirection of laid-off persons to the vacant jobs in them. In the case of seasonal employment, a labor force shortage emerged as a result of the anti-epidemic restrictions affecting the free movement of workers and the importation of workers from third countries, as well as due to the outflow of personnel from sectors permanently affected by the pandemic. The transition to remote work and the more widespread use of new forms of employment have increased the risks and prerequisites for undeclared employment, social isolation and new difficulties in combining family and professional obligations (National Employment Action Plan, 2022).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The tendency is for Bulgaria to gradually adapt its public institutions to the standards set by the EU, the good European practices are an example of the successful integration of the lagging member states of the Union. The introduction of new services, the improvement of the service, as well as the gradual transition to electronic services of some public sectors are only part of the good prospects that are applied in Bulgaria.

Threats to the labor market in 2022 - some of them have a long-term nature, such as demographic trends, structural mismatches in labor demand and supply, skills shortages, especially digital ones. The main threat remains the continuation of the pandemic in 2022 and a change in its impact on the economy through growing inflation, supply difficulties and shortages of goods, losses from the sudden introduction of restrictive measures in the country and in the country's trading partners, limiting hiring of new staff due to the uncertain economic environment, etc. The suspension of adult training due to the suspension of face-to-face group classes and the lack of certified operating distance learning platforms makes it difficult to increase the knowledge and skills of the unemployed and the employed at risk of layoffs. The threat is structural unemployment as a result of the closure or redirection of production in implementation of anti-epidemic measures or measures included in the "green deal".

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