

**WORKING AND AGEING IN LOW-QUALITY JOBS: EXAMPLES FROM WASTE COLLECTION
AND CONSTRUCTION IN BULGARIA**

**TRABAJAR Y ENVEJECER CON EMPLEO DE BAJA CALIDAD: EJEMPLOS
DE LOS SECTORES DE RECOGIDA DE BASURA Y DE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN EN BULGARIA**

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Abstract

The paper analyses ageing and vulnerability in case of unemployment for low educated, low skilled workers who are employed in waste collection and construction in Bulgaria – both sectors with low-quality jobs. For most of the workers, employment in waste collection or construction is the only possible opportunity to remain at the labour market. The majority of employees in waste collection are illiterate and unskilled and some have previous experience in construction, steel industry, etc. Construction workers 50+ years of age are particularly vulnerable in case of unemployment because of their health and skills. Original work trajectories of waste and construction workers in Bulgaria are analysed in order to dispel the initial "obviousness" of the relationship between ageing, education and vulnerability. The analysis is based on original qualitative empirical data from case studies in Bulgarian waste collection and construction sectors with low-paid and low-qualified employees.

Keywords

Quality of work – Vulnerability – Ageing – Economic sociology – Unemployment

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el envejecimiento y la vulnerabilidad en caso de desempleo de trabajadores con bajo nivel de estudios y sin cualificación que trabajan en el sector de la recogida de basura y en la construcción en Bulgaria: dos sectores con puestos de trabajo de baja calidad. Para la mayoría de los trabajadores la ocupación en el sector de la recogida de basura y en la construcción es su única posibilidad de mantenerse en el mercado del trabajo. La mayoría de los ocupados en la recogida de basura son analfabetos, sin cualificación, teniendo algunos de ellos experiencia anterior en la construcción o en la industria. Los obreros de construcción en el final de su trayectoria laboral, con 50 y más años, son especialmente vulnerables en caso de desempleo por problemas de salud o falta de habilidades. En el artículo se analizan trayectorias laborales originales en la recogida de basura y en la construcción, para esclarecer mejor "la evidencia" habitual de la relación entre edad, estudios y vulnerabilidad. El análisis se basa en un estudio empírico original mediante métodos de calidad en el cual se analizan casos de los sectores

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búlgaros de recogida de basura y de la construcción con trabajadores de bajo sueldo y no cualificados.

Palabras Claves

Calidad del trabajo – Vulnerabilidad – Envejecimiento – Sociología económica – Desempleo

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Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to analyse original empirical qualitative data, shedding light on the relationship between vulnerability¹ in case of unemployment with ageing and education of employees with low qualification in waste collection and construction in Bulgaria. Both sectors in Bulgaria are of interest with their problematic working conditions, job insecurity, low pay, low skill levels of the workforce². The waste collection subsector remains aside from research interests and research on quality of work and working conditions, or of employees' profile is almost missing. The construction is one of the sectors most affected by the global economic crisis in the Bulgarian economy³ and employers' problems due to shrunk market volumes are passed on to employees.

The concept of quality of work has been enriched with new elements in last decades⁴. Initially including basic aspects like physical and psychological wellbeing and work intensity, the concept has been extended with skills development, job security, work-life balance within the frame of increasing work intensity⁵. However, "job" or "workplace quality" concerns the internal workplace characteristics, while the quality of employment is related to macro-economical phenomena. The debate about the "quality of work" includes both internal and external dimensions and addresses the impact of the working place on the employee. The workplaces with high quality of labour have better impact on employees, compared to the low quality workplaces⁶.

The idea that the quality of work is multidimensional and complex identifies workplace quality with three characteristics: working conditions (work organization, for example), quality of employment conditions (wage, payment system, security, flexibility) and quality of empowerment (skills development, collective representation, employee's voice⁷). We investigated employees in construction and waste collection where we found limited requirements for qualification and education, the labour is low paid, employment is associated with low security – all these make employees vulnerable in case of unemployment, with low chances to remain at the labour market with other and/or better job.

¹ J. Alwang; P. B. Siegel and S. L. Jørgensen, Vulnerability: A view from different disciplines, Social Protection Discussion Paper No. 0115 (Washington: The World Bank, 2001), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/636921468765021121/pdf/multi0page.pdf>

² E. Markova; K. Sardadvar; A. Poggi and C. Villosio, Low-Paid but Satisfied? How Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Workers in Low-Wage Jobs Make Sense of Their Wages In Holtgrewe, U., Kirov V., Ramioul M. (eds), *Hard Work in New Jobs. The Quality of Work and Life in European Growth Sectors* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³ V. Kirov; E. Markova and D. Peycheva, *Prinuditelna gavgavost i nesigurnost na zaetostta. Sotsiologicheski analiz na kachestvoto na truda v sektorite stroitelstvo i smetosabirane, Iztok-Zapad* (Sofia: 2014).

⁴ S. Bothfeld and J. Leschke, *European Review of Labour and Research*, August 2012..

⁵ V. Royuela; J. López-Tamayo and J. Suriñach, "The Institutional vs. the Academic Definition of the Quality of Work Life. What is the Focus of the European Commission?", *Social Indicators Research*, Vol: 86, Issue 3 (2008): 401–415

⁶ European Commission. *Employment and social policies: A framework for investing in quality*, Communication from the Commission to the Council, COM (2001) 313 final, [https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvke1fm2yd1u0_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vkcweebn5wzf/v=s7z/f=/com\(2001\)313_en.pdf](https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvke1fm2yd1u0_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vkcweebn5wzf/v=s7z/f=/com(2001)313_en.pdf).

⁷ D. Grimshaw and S. Lehndorff, *Anchors for job quality: Sectoral systems of employment in the European context*. In: *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation*, 4, 2010.

In the first quarter of 2018 (NSI, 2018) the unemployment rate in Bulgaria is 5.7% (1.2 percentage points lower compared to the first quarter of 2017). Economically inactive people aged 15 - 64 are 1 337.3 thousand, or 29.4% of the population in the same age group - 91.6 thousand (6.8%) are discouraged. The unemployment rate among persons 55+ years of age is 5.3%. In 2017⁸, the total poverty line for the country is BGN 351.08 (EUR 179.5) per person in a household. For the same year, 1 665.3 thousand persons (23.4% of the country's population) were below the poverty line. In 2017, the relative share of the poor among self-identified Roma ethnic group is 77.2%. Unemployment, age and low education are among the main determinants for poverty. Recently, many researchers are concerned on the arena of virtual work⁹, including remote computer-based work (teleworking)¹⁰ that requires high education and qualifications. Less and less studies are focused on low-skilled occupations.

This analysis has no ambition to transfer its conclusions to the general economy, but rather to shed light on quality of labour, working opportunities and limitations of poor, low-qualified uneducated construction workers, waste collectors and sweepers with regard to their age and work opportunities in case of unemployment. This example could be useful for exploring further the effect of ageing, combined with lack of education and qualification on working opportunities of low-educated employees.

Methodological framework

Data collection in “Waste collection and urban sanitation” and “Construction” has been done in three dimensions: expert stakeholder interviews (social partners, NGO's representatives and others), companies' case studies and research on respected socio-professional groups through individual in-depth interviews. We analysed two waste collection companies with different ownership and size, using third company as a reference point. We executed 35 interviews, 21 are with employees, operating in waste management, among which 8 waste collectors, 8 sweepers, 1 low-qualified employee, engaged in manual sweeping, 3 drivers of waste collection trucks, and 1 dispatcher. The data for Construction sector is collected within three construction companies with different size and ownership, based in several Bulgarian cities. We collected 27 interviews among which 16 in depth interviews with employees – 4 qualified workers, 5 employees in rough construction activities, 2 employees engaged in plumbing installation, 1 mechanic and 4 workers in finishing activities.

Sectoral specifics and work organisation

Waste collection and urban sanitation

Until 1989, the waste collection subsector in Bulgaria was carried out by state authorities and was managed by municipal companies. Following the fall of the socialist

⁸ NSI, Indicators on Poverty and Social Inclusion in 2017, 2017, http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/SILC2017_89UE9ZC.pdf

⁹ G. Yordanova, Rabotata ot razstoyanie - predimstva i nedostatatsi prez prizmata na zhenite., Sbornik s redkolegia: "IKONOMIChesKA SOTSIOLOGIA 4.0", UNSS – Sofia, 2016, p. 105-111, <http://www.unwe.bg/uploads/Department/Sociologia.ZA.PECHAT.pdf>

¹⁰ G. Yordanova, and V. Kirov, Predizvikelstvata pred rabotata ot razstoyanie: sluchayat na balgarskite zheni v sektora na informatsionnite i komunikatsionni tehnologii, v: Boyadzhieva, P., Kanushev, M., Ivanov, Y. M. (sastv.) 2018. Neravenstva i sotsialna (dez)integratsia: V tarsene na zaednost (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad).

regime, the model of public service provision for waste collection continued to function for several years. However, in the second half of 1990s and the beginning of 2000, many Bulgarian municipalities started to use the services of private companies. The processes of privatization in waste collection are not comprehensive and there are still municipalities that have preserved municipal participation in waste collection. Foreign investors are trying to get into waste collection, but their presence in Bulgaria is still rare. The waste management subsector in Bulgaria is comparatively undeveloped¹¹, but rapidly expanding with large share of waste landfilled and low recycling¹². Bulgaria occupies the last place in EU-27 in waste management¹³. Such sub-sector development is related also to a respected quality of work and organisation: low qualification and education of the workforce, low pay, job insecurity.

There is no data for the number of workers in waste collection sub-sector. The waste collection sub-sector is not covered by a collective labour agreement. The main labour force in the Bulgarian “Waste collection and urban sanitation” subsector is consisted of persons with Roma ethnicity. In general, the Roma ethnic group has 49% employment rate in Bulgaria, compared to 68% total population employment rate in 2016¹⁴. Women are more vulnerable – only 35% of them are employed, compared to 64% of employed men with Roma ethnicity. According to estimations of the Council of Europe¹⁵, approximately 750,000 Roma are living in Bulgaria (10.33% of the population), compared to 325 343 or 4.9% according to the official Bulgarian Census data in 2011.

Roma employees are often illiterate or with low education, living below or close to the poverty line. In waste collection we find occupations with clear gender segmentation – for example male dominated driving of waste collector trucks, compared to women dominated sweeping although in the last few years the number of male sweepers is increasing¹⁶. Both waste collection and sweeping are considered as occupations with low social prestige¹⁷.

The waste collectors do routine, monotonous work every day. The work organisation is through shifts, five days per week. The day-offs are unfixed, depending on the working schedule – for instance, one could take a break on weekends, another could

¹¹ K. Sardadvar; E. L. Markova and A. Poggi, The satisfaction paradox revisited, In: La nouvelle revue du travail, 11|2017, 2018, <https://journals.openedition.org/nrt/3349?lang=en>

¹² EEA, Municipality Waste Management in Bulgaria, Report, 2013, <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/managing-municipal-solid-waste/bulgaria-municipal-waste-management>

¹³ EEA, The European Environment. State and Outlook 2010. Synthesis. European Environmental Agency Report, 2010, <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/synthesis/synthesis>

¹⁴ FRA, Second European Union Minority and Discrimination Survey, 2016, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2017/eumidis-ii-main-results>

¹⁵ Council of Europe, Roma Integration in Bulgaria, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-bulgaria_en

¹⁶ K. Sardadvar; A. Kümmerling and D. Peycheva, Gender-typing of low wage work: A comparative analyses of commercial cleaning in Austria, domiciliary elderly care in Germany and waste sector in Bulgaria, In: Holtgrewe, U., Kirov V., Ramioul M. (eds), Hard Work in New Jobs. The Quality of Work and Life in European Growth Sectors (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

¹⁷ E. Markova, Who sweeps the street? Why the Bulgarian sweepers are vulnerable and privileged to be employed? Empirical evidences about the phenomenon: low paid job, low social status and relatively high job satisfaction. In: Addressing Quality of Work in Europe (ed. V. Kirov) (Sofia: Ciela, 2013).

have day off on Sunday and Monday, etc. Every waste collection truck has own, preliminary defined daily route, where all the waste containers need to be collected. The waste collection workers are obliged to place the garbage containers on a corresponding track with which the rubbish is inserted into the garbage truck, to return the containers back on the street and to clean up the ground around. After finishing the waste collection route, in most of the cases the workers are free to go home before the end of the working day – of course in case the work is completed.

The sweepers – women and men, start their work at 6:30–7:00 a.m. and the working day lasts until 2:45–3 p.m. In some companies the sweeping is organised in shifts – mornings and afternoons. The obligation of each sweeper is to clean the sidewalk and the area connecting the sidewalk to the roadway of preliminary defined streets (main boulevards or smaller streets). This occupation has seasonal pattern –the sweepers are obliged to clean the public transport stops from ice and snow in wintertime; in autumn they collect fallen tree leaves, they also clean the public rubbish beans. In winter, the public transport stops need to be clean before the start of the working day, so the sweepers start working earlier – usually at 6:30 a.m.

The construction sector

The construction is one of the sectors most affected by the global economic crisis in the Bulgarian economy. In 2007, the construction sector included 18,193 enterprises (compared to 18 908 in 2014), which generated a turnover of BGN 14,800 billion (about EUR 7,6 billion) with 221,176 employees. Since the beginning of post-socialist transformation, the construction sector is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (99.5%): they used 81.63% of labour force in the sector in 2007 (about 11.3% of employees in nonfinancial economics)¹⁸. According to NSI data, in 2016-2017 the number of employed in the construction sector is increasing (214 800 employed in 2016 up to 234 300 in 2017), but in 2010-2011 the tendency was negative.

The reduced volumes of construction as a result of the economic crisis have a serious impact on the organization of work on the construction sites. The transfer of workers from one construction stage to another has become common practice in the surveyed companies in order to compensate the reduced work load and to optimize employment. Some hybrid forms of labour organization are present in construction, described in detail by Kirov et al¹⁹.

There are specialists in rough construction among the interviewed workers, who, after completing this construction phase, are starting to work on finishing activities. Two of the interviewed workers specialized in plumbing installations also make roofs, put inside and outside insulation and perform part of the finishing works. One of the companies uses mainly multifunctional brigades, where rough construction workers carry out finishing works.

¹⁸ V. Kirov; E. Markova and D. Peycheva, *Prinuditelna gavgavost i nesigurnost na zaetostta. Sotsiologicheski analiz na kachestvoto na truda v sektorite stroitelstvo i smetosabirane* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2014).

¹⁹ V. Kirov; E. Markova and D. Peycheva, *Hybrid work organisation in the construction sector in Bulgaria: employees or sub-contractors?*, In: *Employment and Economy of Central and Eastern Europe*, 1/2016, 2017, http://emecon.eu/fileadmin/articles/1_2016/Kirov_et%20al_2016.pdf

In times of economic crisis, the construction companies detained a number of workers - "the Core team" (around 50-60 people). All the workers in the company have employment contracts, usually for a certain time period (until the completion of a particular building site). The technical and administrative staff is engaged in open-ended employment contracts with a probationary period of six months. Interviewed managers explain they have long-term permanent working relationships with some workers. Some of them are hired on permanent employment contracts, but others, usually the larger part of employees, are hired depending on the work load - whether there is active construction site or not. In case there is no new construction site, these workers became unemployed.

The construction is one of the most problematic sectors in Bulgaria: the total number of incidents in 2000-2007 is increasing (398 in 2000, 427 in 2007, 399 in 2007)²⁰. However, the amount of these incidents is increasing in the context of a significant increase in jobs for the same period, which means that their relative share declines. The total number of work injuries represents about one tenth of the incidents in all economic sectors in the country in 2007 (10.47%). But while the injuries in the economy as a whole declined (by 40.37% over the period 2000-2007), within the construction sectors they remained relatively stable. In 2017, the registered occupational accidents in construction are only 195, but this is the sector with the highest number of deaths - a total of 20. Various sources²¹ show that the shadow economy in Bulgaria is wide spread in construction: gray practises, related with hiding taxes, undeclared salaries, social security contributions and employment.

Labour and life trajectories of employees

Waste collection in Bulgaria

In both sectors of interest, we find problematic working conditions and low-quality jobs, taken by employees with limited chances to stay on the labour market. The work is physically demanding, most of the time it is done outside no matter of the weather conditions, with limited facilities for rest (hot water, etc.).

In waste management the company case studies and individual in-depth interviews enlighten three general trajectories of labour, which in some life histories are interweave, but could be analysed in the following directions: *disqualification processes*, because the current occupation is at lower qualification level than the previous; *traditional occupation in waste management*; *temporary employment in waste collection* with intentions to find a better job.

The attempt of systematisation of labour and living trajectories of the employees needs to respect the fact, that the work in waste collection is the only alternative to be part of the labour market – especially concerning the women sweepers, but also for the men – sweepers, street washers, waste collectors, who have no completed education, or especially for those at the end of the working career.

²⁰ V. Kirov; E. Markova and D. Peycheva, *Prinuditelna gavgavost i nesigurnost na zaetostta. Sotsiologicheski analiz na kachestvoto na truda v sektorite stroitelstvo i smetosabirane* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2014).

²¹ Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association (BICA), Report on actualisation of composite index "Economy in light", 2016, <http://bica-bg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Doklad-za-Kompozitnia-index-za-20151.pdf>

First trajectory: disqualification or lack of other alternatives

We link this trajectory to the change of previous employment, disqualification or retraining because of company closures or mass redundancies. Part of these employees – men, are from Roma ethnicity, previously qualified in traditional for Roma occupations – blacksmiths, shoemakers, horse breeders. Some of them were employed in construction, in metallurgical plants - such as welders, machine operators, drivers of large-scale machines, construction workers, etc., but most often as a result of redundancies, these people have changed their place of work in order not to fall out of the labour market.

From craftsmen, shoemakers, smiths, welders, workers in the mining industry, these employees were forced to look for a job in waste collection. One of the workers, who, apart from his other craft skills, plays an accordion, has gone a different way in his work, even though he has not completed basic education. Some of the respondents used to work as taxi drivers in the past, but because of the crisis, they have also been forced to look for a job in waste collection.

While doing research about post-totalitarian Eastern European societies, we need to point out that the crisis since the beginning of democratic changes (1989) when many of the state-owned production enterprises were closed and many people became suddenly unemployed is a key factor for the current employment of the older respondents.

One special example of the main driving factor, shaping female labour trajectories is the absence of choice – mostly because of incomplete primary education. According to Roma ethnicity traditions, the women have early marriages and their socialisation is mainly as wives and mothers. However, some of the previous jobs, mostly mentioned by the older female sweepers, are: school or other institution's cleaner, dishwashing machine operator in a restaurant, unskilled construction worker. The female Roma sweepers are very bright example for limited labour trajectories – mostly because of absence of primary education and the traditional ethnic stereotypes.

Most of the men within this labour trajectory have education and qualification insufficient although to assure employment – because of the economic crisis and company closure, but also because of the age. At the end of working career, these already vulnerable employees have fewer chances than the others to find a job. Although the respondents over 50 years of age have completed basic education, professional experience gained in different productions, the fact that they are at the end of their careers is an obstacle to find a better-paid work. In addition, in waste collection process, the tasks performed by men require physical efforts, working outdoor, without good working conditions. People over the age of 55 already have health problems and are increasingly struggling with their everyday tasks. If they stop dealing with waste, they have no other opportunities to find a job. There are no special programmes and measures to adapt the work place to older workers.

In the observed specific life situations, the education, usually the main key for better employment is not the only factor to increase respondents' chances for remaining on the labour market. The most common reason to work in waste collection is mass redundancies and the lack of other employment opportunities.

Second trajectory: traditionally employed in waste collection

Waste collection provides employment for whole families and households. Often we track many relatives as employed in a company or even in different companies in the sector— son and father, son and parents, husbands and wives, etc.

This “*family employment in waste*” is wide spread not only among Roma, but Bulgarians. For example, the professional choice of the father as a driver of waste collection truck affected the choice of profession and place of work for his son – working right after the secondary school in the same waste collection company.

Third trajectory – temporary employed in waste collection

This labour trajectory is typical for employees with the willingness to increase education and qualification in order to achieve better employment (not only within the company or sector). The temporary status of employment in waste collection is observed mostly for younger men – waste collectors, who are completing or plan to complete in short term secondary education and then to receive driving licence.

The study discovered changes in the traditional attitudes of Roma toward low-prestigious and gender differentiated employment such as manual sweeping. Roma perceive some predefined gender stereotypes of labour, for example the manual sweeping is accepted as “female job”, with low-prestige, having an additional negative meaning if executed by men. This particular stereotype seems to change, mostly because of the economic crisis, and we could distinguish a tendency more men to work as sweepers. However, the male sweepers feel more comfortable by setting this job as temporary.

Construction sector in Bulgaria

The general overview of labour trajectories in construction low-skilled work indicates three main dimensions: construction as the only opportunity for labour, as better employment opportunity, and as a traditional employment.

First labour trajectory: the only opportunity for employment

This labour trajectory is typical for two types of workers:

- 1) Because of lack of education and qualification such employees are highly limited to find a job.
- 2) Qualified workers, having secondary education, who are also with limited employment opportunities. The reasons to find a job in construction needs to be searched in factories closure, mass dismissals in small settlements, as well as better economic opportunities in construction before the economic crisis.

As an example, one of the younger general workers with Roma ethnicity and completed secondary education was working 3 years as mechanical specialist. At the time of the research, he was employed for general construction work, stating that he started this work because of lack of other opportunities no matter he has higher education and experience. In case of other opportunities, this employee will start a job, corresponding to his education and qualification.

The second type of workers with limited employment opportunities includes persons around or above 50 years of age, with completed secondary education, at later stage – additionally qualified in construction.

The redundancies and bankruptcies in manufacture companies are an important factor for this labour trajectory. When the industrial companies in some regions have started to close, the employees were forced to search other employment, as well to transfer their experience in construction in other cities or abroad.

Second Labour Trajectory: Construction as better employment opportunity

The second labour trajectory is typical of end-of-career workers, about 50 years of age and above, who have completed secondary education and have subsequently retrained to work in construction. The mass dismissals and bankruptcies of manufacturing enterprises are the important factor for this labour trajectory. When the industrial enterprises in some regions started to shut down, employees have been forced to look for other employment opportunities and some of them transferred to construction in different cities or abroad.

Third Labour trajectory: traditional employment

In some cases we encounter for young workers one additional condition for being employed in construction site: the need to receive informal recommendation from a friend or relative, personal relationship with the site manager. Prior to 1989, construction in Bulgaria had a formalized system of professions with corresponding job descriptions. Professional growth followed the three-tier hierarchical order of construction - Apprentice, Calf, Master. At present, in the surveyed construction companies we are monitoring the use of a more traditional, informal system of knowledge and qualification enhancement through an experienced and skilled worker. That's why the construction manager would hire newcomers for a trial, based on personal recommendations.

Conclusions

Both Bulgarian sectors of interest have similarities in quality of labour, and the labour force quality of work – low pay, low quality of working conditions, low job security, and vulnerability in case of unemployment. Education and age are very important factors for these low-qualified, low wage employees in waste and construction to remain at the labour market. In waste, all employees, men and women, define the lack of education as the main obstacle for better jobs, living and working in better environment, away from the poverty. In construction, the older employees face limitation for physically demanding tasks and outdoor work, because of their health.

The crisis after democratic change in 1989 in Bulgaria is another barrier especially for older workers – when many of the state owned factories were closed, so many workers became unemployed and are forced to find any job, irrelevant to their education and qualification. The case studies in waste and construction clearly show that even after the current economic crisis the quality of work should be expected to remain the same, mainly because the employers do not implement special programs or measures to improve the working conditions, qualification, education or wages for low-qualified workers. Job insecurity is strongly manifested in the construction.

All the respondents from both sectors are vulnerable in case of unemployment because of their ethnic background, economic situation, gender, age and education. Older workers having secondary education before 1989, usually with previous qualification and working experience, but at present working in waste evaluate this work as step backward – disqualification and less paid job. This group of employees cannot take any benefits from education and qualification to find a better job.

The education matters more for the young employees – for instance the young waste collectors, having intentions to finish their secondary education in order to obtain driving license, and hoping to find better job within or out of waste collection. The young and inexperienced construction workers also could benefit from raising their education in order to improve their chances for better paid and more respected working position.

All Roma workers in waste, we were talking to, clearly perceive that the most serious obstacle for their limited working opportunities is the lack of education, and have declared they will require this from their children.

Based on the overall picture of multidimensional data for both sectors and company case studies, the living and working trajectories indicate an alarming tendency for deepening the problems with low or no education, illiteracy –processes which condemn poverty, exclusion, and vulnerability to generations of Bulgarian employees. Working Roma are striking example of "people on the edge" who, through hard work and constantly fighting prejudice, are trying to improve their living conditions and provide better chances for their children. More and more construction workers will have to retrain to stay out of the labour market. On the other hand, the low pay working cycle is closed, as the low quality of work is in line with the reduced qualification requirements for the employed. As a result, the labour productivity is also low. The age is very important factors that determine the chances for better work and quality life, but needs to be analyzed in conjunction with other socio-demographic factors. In the waste, for example, the influence of the past socio-economic development of the country was clearly expressed in the Roma population aged 50 and over. The change from planned to market economy, closure of enterprises, and further unemployment lead to a sharp negative change in education, employment and social inclusion among Roma. In construction, we notice a similar pattern related to respondents' age - people at the end of their careers are suddenly unemployed and forced to retrain, or to work under worse labour conditions - just to avoid falling out of the labour market. The vulnerability in case of unemployment when being 50+ is much likely than when being young. The higher age is disadvantage, combined with low health and low education. People at the end of working career, victims of mass unemployment and closed factories, need to downsize their own ambitions (education, experience, qualification), in order to find some employment that will help them finally to have the right to benefit from retirement. The low-qualified work in waste collection and construction is physically demanding, which reinforces the limitation of employment opportunities for older workers. Training opportunities in both sectors of interest are virtually non-existent except for health and safety at work, but even these are often completely formal trainings and briefings. In this sense, the impact of skills acquisition on the quality of work is negligible. All these analytical discoveries allow us to conclude that in terms of skill opportunities low-skilled jobs in Bulgaria are in a particularly disadvantageous situation. On the other hand, some of the work tasks are simple and do not require much preparation and knowledge. Indeed, many interviewees in the surveyed companies believe that employees should not have any special skills to start working. Interviewees at all levels explain how work is comparatively "simple". Maybe that's why no training is being done, in general.

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