

## COUNTRY REPORT BULGARIA PROJECT PEFETE

### 1. A short description of the adult education

According to the Bulgarian legislation, the notion "adult education" is to be perceived as the training and education of people above 16 years of age. Therefore, this classification includes also the attainment of university or vocational education. The Bulgarian legislation has not set any age limits which could be an obstacle for the citizens to obtain the desired education. Training, as well as education for adults can be obtained at public and private institutes and universities, NGO s, centers, which have been licensed by the NAVET (National Agency for Vocational Education and Training) in order to provide professional education orientated toward public and private associations.

### 2. The current demographic statistics

The preliminary statistic results note that the bg population has numbered 7 801.3 thousand people toward the end of 2003. Since the death rate has been much higher than the birth rate, a population decrease of 44 568 people in one year can be observed (0,6% of the total population).

#### The population of Bulgaria (toward 31/12/2003)

Year	Total Population	Male Population	Female Population
1990	8 669 269	4 269 998	4 399 271
1995	8 384 715	4 103 368	4 281 347
2003	7 801 273	3 790 840	4 010 433

Compared to the female population, the male one has shown a greater drop – 25 322 men (0,7%) and, respectively, 19 246 women (0,5%) in 2003. In the total number of population, women are still outnumbering men - 51%.

In the year 2003, the bg population's average age is 40.8 years. In the countryside, as well as in the cities, there proves to be a process of advance in age. As a result, the average age in the cities is 39, whereas in the rural areas: 44.9 years.

Over the past 10 years, the population's average life expectancy has increased from 70.91 years (on record in the period between 1992-1994) to 71.87 years at present. The continuance of life of the female population is almost 7 years longer than the male one (a life expectancy of 75.37 years for the women compared to 68.54 years for the men).

The range and number of the population in activity age is influenced not only by the process of advance in age, but also by the recent legislative changes in the retirement age. The number of persons on retirement in 2003 is 1 845 000 people. It has decreased by almost 42 000 people. However, the reason for this decrease is not only the mortality-rate, but also the changes mentioned above, which have lead to the exclusion of a great number of people from the inactive population and their addition to the group of persons in activity age.

### Population under, in activity age and in pension age

Year	Total	Age groups		
		Under the activity age - %	In activity age - %	In pension age - %
1990	100.0	21.6	55.5	22.9
1995	100.0	19.1	56.6	24.3
2002	100.0	15.9	60.1	24.0
2003	100.0	15.5	60.8	23.7

### 3. The current state of adult education in Bulgaria

As it has already been mentioned above, the government has stated that a person's age could not be an obstacle to obtaining the desired education. Nevertheless, the notion "adult education" is usually perceived as training and educating people in activity, not in pension age. On the one hand, this perception is formed by the Bulgarian traditional way of thinking, which implies that pensioners do not need training and education, firstly, because these elderly people lack development perspectives, and secondly, for their advancing age is thought to be the reason causing their inability to handle innovations. On the other hand, in Bulgaria has never existed a national policy promoting the education of pensioners. Nowadays, like in the former social and political order, there are no legislative acts, ordinances, programs etc. focused on the development of education for senior citizens. The work with people on retirement has never aimed to provide them with new knowledge, or to make up for missing education, nor has it aimed to give possibilities and encourage the search for new chances for development in any given sphere of life. As it has been before the political changes, at present there are certain legislative acts, which regard, above all things, the pension securities and, partly, the social and health care for elderly people. Examples of such legislative acts are the Law on Social Security (publ. in SG, № 56/1998), the Law on Public Health (published in SG, № 88/06.11.1973), the Law on Higher Education (published in SG, № 11/27.12.1995), the Law on Vocational Training and Education ( SG № 68/1999).

Unfortunately, in Bulgaria, the senior citizens' average incomes are often not sufficient to cover even the lowest level of the life standard. In order to survive, in most cases the pensioners live together with their children's families, with other relatives, or, as a last resort, in public care-centers for elderly people. Usually those ones, who are in good health try to find a job that would help them cover their everyday needs, no matter whether it corresponds to their educational qualification or not.

There are about 800 centers for social services in the country and their capacity ranges from 12 to 150 places. However, their condition is extremely bad. The fall of the net incomes and the gradual and constant advance in age have lead to the increase in the number of people needing social aid and protection, and, consequently, to more people waiting to be admitted to the social services centers. At the same time, the majority of these centers are located outside the towns and villages, their facilities are out-of-date and dilapidated, and no social activities are helpful to the people who stay there. Therefore, the logical consequence of all this is low standard of life, social isolation, uncertainty, helplessness.

The description of the current situation, which has been outlined above, shows that there are no premises and opportunities for gaining new knowledge by taking part in training and educational programs for people in pension age. Unfortunately, due to the serious problems regarding the youth and the population in activity age, the educational system, the economy restructure etc., senior citizens are not seen as a priority to the internal policy of Bulgaria.

#### **4. Planned legislative changes**

Since 23,7% of the population of bg is in pension age and this number is constantly on the increase, ensuring the well-being of senior citizens (in terms of both physical and mental health) turns out to be a challenge for the public authorities, the medical and the social services and organizations. The governmental policy, which has recently been declared and officially published, can be seen as a step forward to improvements in the social sphere, labour market, education and science. At present, efforts are being made in order to develop new legislative acts, concerning the spheres mentioned above, and to restructure the existing mechanisms and methods of work. However, these changes are far from being implemented. Below are some of the planned measures.

**1). The amendment to the Law on Social Security**, aiming to improve the standard of life, has the following basic schemes regarding elderly people:

- Building different protective systems, determining the range of people needing social aid
- Preventing the social isolation and discrimination of the most affected groups
- Proceeding the work on the creation of standards in the social services' system, which correspond to the European legislation
- Encouraging the work of non governmental institutions, which are responsible for the social services
- A gradual rise of the pension incomes in conformity with the rise in the price of life standard, widening the possibilities for receiving more than one pension and increasing the allowance to them.

#### **2). The National Program for Adult Education**

The Conception for Development of the National Program for Adult Education has recently been approved. Basically, it refers to the development of the education for people in activity age, however, some of the activities might be appropriate for people in the third age, too, for example:

- Increasing the accessibility of various educational programs and systems in favour of elderly people
- Cooperation with social partners at the national, regional and local level
- Extension of the public support for adult education

Not long ago, the first university subject dealing with the specific character of the adult education was created. Two years ago the representative office of the IIZ-DVV initiated the creation of a new sponsorship master program at the New Bulgarian University, which was called "Management of the adult education". The schedule of this program includes partly some specific methods for work with elderly people.

The following activities and projects, that have already been carried out or have taken place, could be seen as good examples for an effective policy, despite the fact that they have been

rather casual and accidental, and initiated by NGOs and cultural institutions, and not by the government.

### **I. Long Life Learning**

Bulgaria started supporting this enterprise in 2001. “Long life learning” is one of the few occasions through which adult education, adult studying and learning throughout one person’s whole life can be made popular by organizing feasts, campaigns and their media coverage. Thus the huge variety of the existing educational possibilities is presented to the audience. Special emphasis is put on the informative and non formal learning. Moreover, the public attention is drawn on questions concerning educational problems by the motto “The education is for every person”, and, finally, the exchange of ideas and the partnership between experts, NGOs, ministries is encouraged.

### **II. “Chitalista”**

The so called “chitalista” are a specific type of cultural and educational institutions, which have had lasting traditions in the history of Bg – since the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost all villages and towns in the country have had at least one “chitaliste”. These cultural and educational centers are the arena for numerous different types of cultural activities (for example concerts, celebrations, film shows etc.), as well as for educational projects – foreign language courses, music education, drawing and painting etc. The chitalista are the places, where usually different study groups are organized according to the interests of the participants – choirs, amateur dance ensembles etc., regardless of the sex, age, religion or minority belonging of the participating people. Nowadays, the chitalista are may be the only place, where elderly people are able to gather and study a certain vocation, to exchange their experience and knowledge or just to establish social and cultural contacts with other people. For example, there are various-amateur theatre and vocal groups, study groups on cookery, needle-work, wood-carving etc. Some of the leaders of these chitalista are the initiators of meetings, feasts, gatherings and fairs, where all the participants in the different study groups can show what they have learned and practiced.

### **III. Non governmental Organizations**

A non governmental organization, which has accomplished a project in the sphere of education for people in retirement age, for example, is “Znanie” Association, Sofia – through its Foreign Languages School for Children, namely, “JOY FLL – Learning a foreign language together with our grandchildren”, a project of the Socrates Program, Lingua 1. At present, this has been the first and only project in Bulgaria, the aim of which has been the education of elderly people. The main activities of the project concern the grandparents of children aged 6 to 12 years. The main purpose is the extension of the conversance with the advantages of learning a foreign language throughout the whole life by motivating and including in a practical way a certain social group, and more specifically of people in retirement age and parents, who take care of their children on their own. The partnership structure unites organizations from Spain, Italy, Greece and Bulgaria and supports their initiatives to encourage pensioners to take part in foreign language courses. These are organizations with long-standing experience in the education of foreign languages, in the work with children and, furthermore, in the work with their parents and elderly people. A social characteristic, common for all the countries, is used: it is a family tradition for the grandparents to take care for their grandchildren, their cares often include helping in the process of learning, especially when it comes to very young children. In the mentioned countries the pensioners have similar range of abilities when it comes to speaking and leading a conversation in a foreign language.

Due to similar reasons, there is a slim chance for these pensioners to speak fluently a foreign language, if they have the simplest knowledge of such language at all.

Engaging the grandparents in the foreign language education of their grandchildren influences the attitude of the children to the process of education in a positive way. Most of the pensioners have spent all their life at a single village or town, without ever having had the chance to travel much, and without encountering the need to understand and tolerate the traditions of other nations, their lifestyle and national characteristics. The process of engagement in this type of education, combined with an emphasis on the cultural similarities and differences provides practical examples for development of social skills, such as respect for other people, tolerance and understanding.

One of the main aims of the partnership is to give ideas and fresh directions on what the emphasis of the training materials should be, and to support the partnership organizations to develop and experiment with the following new method: avoiding grammar exercises and laying stress on the acquaintance to other countries' lifestyles, based on the discovery and acknowledgement of similarities, explanation of differences in the cultural traditions, social relationships and so on. Throughout the whole education process new innovative methods were used, which emphasized on playing different games – pantomime, puzzles, domino. The teachers working with these groups created especially for them new training materials, which corresponded to the specific age differences of the participating people.

### **Others**

Other organizations working with elderly people (in much different spheres and ways, however) are the following associations: The Pensioners' Union, Union of the War Veterans, Hospice "Charity" etc.

Although the current situation of the adult education in bg is not very bright, we consider that the first steps toward laying the groundwork in this sphere have been made and they will not be the last.

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