



## **COUNTRY REPORT ON THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING: BULGARIA**

**(March 2011)**

This report - as well as the reports from 30 other countries that were represented in the working group on the Adult Learning Action Plan.

It has been drawn up on the basis of country-experts' analysis of existing national literature and the Confintea IV-report. In finalising the report the National Authority has been asked for comments and feedback, however, the report does not necessarily reflect an official position of the Member State.

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Country Report on the Action Plan on Adult Learning: Bulgaria



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# COUNTRY REPORT ON THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING: BULGARIA

## 1 CONTEXT

### 1.1 Social context

#### 1.1.1 *Demographic trends*

According to the census of 1 March 2001, Bulgaria had a population of approximately 7.9 million. The most recent data (at the end of 2007) show that the calculated resident population of Bulgaria had dropped to 7.6 million persons. It is expected that the population will be 7,649 million by 2010 and 7,170 million by the end of 2020. At the end of 2000, the density of population was 73.4 persons per square kilometre (Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria). Between 1990 and 2006, the number of Bulgarians fell by just over one million. The main reason for the decline is the negative natural increase of the population, i.e. the significantly greater number of deaths compared to that of live births. Another reason is emigration.

A significant factor in demographic change in Bulgaria during the last 20 years has been emigration. Net emigration has considerably decreased with another rise after the EU accession of Bulgaria, which is the case in almost all of the new EU Member States. According to EUROSTAT, net emigration was about 680000 people from 1989 to 2006. The population of Bulgaria has declined steadily over the last 17 years with a fall of eight per cent between 1989 and 2000 (Source: Joint Assessment Paper on Employment Policy: 5).

The population is predicted to fall by a further six per cent by 2010 and again by six per cent between 2010 and 2020. Between 2000 and 2010, the major declines will be in the age groups 0-14 (by 23 per cent) and 15-29 (by 17 per cent). Thereafter, the 0-14 age group is expected to grow slightly, whereas the 15-29 age group will decline further – by more than 30 per cent between 2010 and 2020 (i.e. it will be less than 60 per cent of its size in 2000). Such a large change in the size of this age group will have implications for the education and training systems and employment structure in Bulgaria over the next two decades. In terms of the distribution of the population between urban and rural areas, 70 per cent of the population live in towns and cities, and 30 per cent live in rural areas. A major trend in the demographic development of Bulgaria is the ageing of the population. This ageing of the population has resulted in changes in Bulgaria's age structure, namely the breakdown of the population by categories under, at and over working age. This breakdown has been also influenced by the changes in legislation fixing the age limit for the population at pension age.

At the end of 2007, there were 4.817.000 thousand persons of working age or 63 per cent of the total population. In comparison with 2006, this number had decreased by fewer than 3,000 persons. At the same time, the proportion of young people under working age has been constantly decreasing and fell from 21.6 per cent in 1990 to 14.5 per cent in 2007. Average life expectancy is rising, albeit slowly. The life expectancy of women is 76 years and that of men is 69 years.

#### 1.1.2 *Education and literacy trends*

According to a number of usual statistical indicators, the educational attainment in the Republic of Bulgaria is currently at EU level, and in some respects it is even higher. Currently, three-quarters of the working population aged 25-64 years have completed

upper-secondary or higher education. This level is more than the average of the EU15 countries (62 per cent). On the other hand, the proportion of adults of working age (25-64 years) who have completed primary education at most is 29 per cent (in 2002). Bulgaria, however, suffers from a heavy “brain drain” of the young and the well-educated people go to other European countries or the USA either for education or for work, but as the statistical figures show, this migration does not cause a constant stream of emigration and population loss. More than 30 minority groups live in Bulgaria, which has an impact on the long-term effects of lifelong learning strategies. The most numerous of these groups are the ethnic Turks, estimated to number at least 900,000 before the mass migration in 1989, and the Roma, estimated at about 550,000 to 800,000 although official numbers are lower. Other large minorities are the ethnic Macedonians living mostly around Blagoevgrad and the Pirin regions, and Bulgarian Muslims, a religious rather than ethnic minority, mostly living in the Rhodope Mountains and in the Pirin region. Most ethnic minorities have lived in Bulgaria for centuries – the ethnic Turks since the end of the 14th century. Despite many campaigns of often forced assimilation, most Bulgarian minorities have retained their identity and culture, and live in identifiable ethnic communities rather than dispersed throughout the population. The presence of identifiable ethnic communities may well affect the way lifelong learning strategies will develop towards facilitating targeted efforts to improve minority education and employment opportunities. Bulgaria has made some positive efforts to improve the living standards and educational opportunities for minorities.

Parliament ratified the Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities in February 1999, and many NGOs and other agencies are active, especially UNICEF, Open Society, the International Centre for Minority Studies, and the Balkan Foundation for Cross-Cultural Education. There is, however, no explicit national strategy for education of minority groups, and conditions, especially for Roma, are still far from equal. Small-scale discrimination against Roma continues in daily life. The literacy rate among Roma is considerably lower than in the general population, and in 1990, both the Bulgarian and international media reported that 80 per cent of prisoners were Roma.

### 1.1.3 *Employment trends*

According to the Labour Force Survey in 2002, the economically active population numbers 3.29 million people. The variations from 1997 to 2001, from 3.56 to 3.26 million, are mainly a result of economic and migration trends. The slight increase of the activity rate in 2001 was mainly due to changes in conditions for retirement. Dismissed workers in the period 2000-2002 accounted for more than 13 per cent of those who were outside the labour force, the figure being twice as high as in 1994. With regard to the different sectors, in 2001, the number of people employed decreased in all sectors of the economy and most seriously in mining (-12.8 per cent) and industry (-3.6 per cent). The branches in which employment levels have been maintained or increased in the past five years have been the processing industry, civil construction, trade, tourism and communications. The other branches need further restructuring and investment in order to become more proactive in demanding labour. There are economic disparities between urban and rural areas, which are now being addressed under Regional Development Plans and Programmes. The productivity of labour in Bulgaria has also risen consistently in recent years. This increase in productivity is one of the key factors in economic growth. In terms of a EU25 comparison, labour productivity in Bulgaria was 29.2 per cent of the EU25 average in 1997 and has been growing ever since, to 35.9 per cent in 2008.

In line with the above described employment developments in Bulgaria, the unemployment rate first rose sharply between 1998 and 2002 (as a result of

privatisation and the restructuring of the economy) and since then has been rapidly and continuously declining. The data below show that from nearly 14 per cent in 2003, the unemployment rate fell to 6.9 per cent in 2007. Unemployment is still a problem especially for the young. Other age groups have been relatively close to the overall unemployment rates of 13.7, 12.0 and 10.1 per cent in the years 2003, 2004 and 2005. However, the unemployment rate for those aged 15-24 is nearly twice than the overall unemployment rate.

## **1.2 Economic context**

Bulgaria has succeeded in sustaining economic growth as high as five per cent on average per year between 2002 and 2008. Most of the targets and economic levers were created to reach that economic goal. As a result, the Government planned measures designed to reach its goals in the social, education, culture, health and environmental sectors. The main strategic priorities in the social sector were: generating conditions for rapid economic growth aimed at job creation and higher income; a more flexible labour market; reducing unemployment by 150.000 between 2002-2005; formulating a new income policy concept; ensuring a substantial rise in child allowances; guaranteeing social safety nets for socially vulnerable groups; and promoting social dialogue.

Children's rights, gender equality, social schemes for minorities and the disabled, and consumer protection will be implemented concurrently. In the early 1990s, one of the strategic goals of the reform process was the stabilisation and structural reform of the economy through the reduction of the role of the state and encouragement of the private sector. Although some progress has been made, the employment potential of the private sector is still insufficient and many of those laid off in the public sector have not found employment in the private sector. Despite the economic slow-down experienced by Bulgaria during most of the period between 1990 and 1997 (-9.4 per cent growth in 1996 and -5.6 per cent in 1997), the economy started to recover in 1998 with the introduction of the Currency Board, which combines strict fiscal policy with cuts in public expenditure and progress in privatisation. GDP per capita rose between 1997 and 1999, but fell during 2000 and 2001 when measured in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS). The GDP per head of population is rising; in 2003 it stood at 2249 Euros and has risen since then to 2,500 Euros in 2004 and nearly 2,800 Euros in 2005. This increase is definitely a positive for Bulgaria, but nonetheless it is still one of the lowest levels among all the member states.

## **1.3 Historical and ideological context**

Historically, the demand for lifelong learning in Bulgaria has always been recognised. But for a long time there was a lack of concrete activities aimed at the improvement of general knowledge and vocational skills. Some historians of pedagogy think that the founder of adult education as a specially organised activity was St. Kliment Ohridski. A radical change in the whole economic, political and cultural development of the country began with Bulgaria's liberation in 1878. The historians of Bulgarian education lay a great emphasis on the importance of Marin Drinov's "Temporary Regulations of Basic Primary and Secondary Schools", written in 1878, which represents the first legislative articles regulating the education of the principality of Bulgaria. Further development of the idea of continuous education was closely tied to the whole educational policy and its strategy at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially to the development of structures of general and vocational education. In the period 1878-1944, the development of vocational education has become more intensive. Its structures were based on compulsory grades of general schools. The education law for trade and industry, which was enacted in 1924, divided all vocational schools in Bulgaria into secondary, practical and additional schools. The purpose of the latter was raising the education and qualification level in

the corresponding vocation of workers and employees who had not finished vocational or grammar schools. The vocational education was tied to the evening and Sunday courses for wide audiences where lectures of agriculture, trade, craft etc. were held in order to improve workers' general and specialised knowledge. *Čitališta* (traditional reading rooms that organise libraries and adult education across Bulgaria) were a very important part of these courses. The education of the period 1944-1989 was characterised by, central administration, weak education structures as a consequence of too many reforms, and too much emphasis on ideology. These factors had an impact on the system for adult education, which is composed of adult education within the educational system in addition to different education and qualification courses that were not part of the educational system. In addition, there was a multiplicity of informal institutions that offered education in the form of courses, rounds and correspondence. The subject matter was mainly concentrated on the improvement of the knowledge and proficiencies of workers. Further education and re-education were usually organised by factories according to changes in their needs for labour. Methodical supervision of activities in further education and re-education was performed by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Labour, its branch ministries and authorities were responsible for their organisation. The increase of adults' general cultural level was organised by different establishments such as the society for spreading of scientific-technical knowledge (Znanie), scientific and technical unions, trade unions, different clubs etc.

## **2 POLITICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Political Framework**

A concept for the development of a national programme for adult education in Bulgaria has already been accepted. This concept was developed (but not yet fully implemented) by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Justice and Legal Integration in Europe, universities, the Federation of Societies for Spreading of Knowledge, Federation of Scientific and Technical Unions, Chamber of Trade, trade unions and vocational schools. Such conception creates conditions for the establishment of the national system for adult education in cooperation with social partners. The establishment of such a system in Bulgaria has the following aims:

- Establishment of social and economic reforms corresponding to the opportunities for adult education in Bulgaria;
- Raising the educational level of the population;
- Extension of access to different educational forms for adults;
- Co-operation with social partners at the national, regional and local level;
- Extension of public support for adult education.

Bulgaria started supporting lifelong learning in 2001. Lifelong learning is one of the few occasions through which adult education; adult studying and learning throughout life can be made popular by organising campaigns and relevant media coverage. Thus the wide variety of existing educational possibilities is presented to the audience. Special emphasis is put on 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, and ministries is encouraged.

The National Lifelong Learning Strategy that covers the period 2007-2013 defines the key domains for action and assures the harmonisation of the national objectives in the

field of lifelong learning, in compliance with the relevant documents adopted at European level. The strategy's general aim is directed to the achievement of effective, qualitative and full-valued human resources development and individual development in the knowledge-based society. The concrete objective is defined as creation of the conditions necessary for increasing the number of participants and widening the domains for people participation in Lifelong learning, targeted to acquiring and improving their professional, social and civic knowledge, skills and competencies. The strategy is also linked with the acting strategic documents at national level. These are the National Programme for School and Pre-School Education Development (2006-2015), the National Strategy for Introducing ICT in the Bulgarian Schools (2005-2007), the National Further Vocational Training Strategy (2005-2010), Employment Strategy (2004-2010), as well as the Human Resources Development Operative Programme (2007-2013). Furthermore, a draft on Adult Training Strategy (2007-2013) was developed under PHARE project in 2006. This strategy's aim is the development of adult training as an element of lifelong learning and assistance to promote the effective functioning of adult vocational training system. As a strategic document defining priorities in the field of adult training, this document is taking into account during the development of our national lifelong learning strategy. In October 2008 the project of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2008-2013, developed in implementation of the National Reform Program for 2007-2009, was adopted. One of its main emphases is the recognition of qualifications. The project includes activities aimed at ensuring transparency and recognising qualifications acquired in the process of lifelong learning.

## 2.2 Legal Framework

According to the Bulgarian legislation, the notion of "adult education" is to be perceived as *the training and education of people above 16 years of age*. Therefore, this classification also includes the attainment of university or vocational education. Bulgarian legislation has not set any age limits that could be an obstacle for the citizens to obtain the desired education. Training and education for adults can be obtained at public and private institutes and universities, NGOs, and centres, which have been licensed by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) in order to provide professional education orientated toward public and private associations. Lifelong learning is considered, from a national perspective, as one of the major factors in improving the professional activity of people and in provoking active citizenship.

The policy of the Bulgarian government concerning lifelong learning is a component of the overall social and human resources policy directed towards building a society of learning and knowledge, towards broadening the European cooperation in education, research, culture and technology, and in the free movement of workers. In Bulgaria, specific legislation concerning lifelong learning has not yet been elaborated. The idea of lifelong learning, however, covers the whole spectrum of education, which is legally supported by the following documents:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (1991);
- The Labour Code (2001);
- The Law on national Education (1991);
- The Law on higher education (1995);
- The Law on culture protection and development (1999);
- The Crafts Law (2001).

The present legislation in Bulgaria regulates many aspects of adult education. In spite of that, it could be said that it is much diffused and indefinite and mostly concentrated on further education, re-education and orientation. The following laws are of greatest importance for adult education:

- *Civil education law*: gives right to education and further education, and restrictions or privileges based on race, nationality, sex, ethnic or social origin, religion or social position are not allowed;
- *Vocational education law* (passed in 1999). aims at a clear legal regulation of vocational education in and out of schools. It defines the responsibilities of institutions tied to vocational education and whose activities are coordinated through a national agency in the Ministerial Council;
- *Law for protection of the unemployed and advancement of employment*: passed in 1997. The authorisation for this law is given to the National Institution for Employment;
- *Associations Act or "Non-Profit Making Legal Persons Act"* (2001): Bulgarian legislation allows adult education to be provided by foundations and voluntary associations that pursue social or private aims provided that they are not profit-making (for short: NGOs);
- *Cultural Centres Act* (1996): the cultural centres (*Čitališta*) are an institution with a long tradition in Bulgaria. They were established in the 19th century, during the time of Ottoman rule, as educational facilities sponsored and funded by the local elite. Today, the cultural centres play an important part in non-formal adult education.

In the last decade, Bulgaria has adopted various strategies, action plans and programmes in the broader field of adult education. In retrospect, the first official document/paper related to ALE and signed by the Bulgarian government was the Convention on Technical and Vocational Education, proposed by UNESCO and signed in Paris in 1989. The Government Paper on Lifelong Learning came in the wake of discussions on the European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, and the Ministry of Education put forward a paper on developments to date and possible future steps in this field. The Continuing Vocational Training Strategy 2005-2010 is concerned with all types of vocational training for adults (from the age of 16 years), and aims to better prepare them for the European labour market.

At the beginning of 2008, the Encouragement of Employment Act and the Vocational Education and Training Act were amended. The list of professions for vocational education and training was amended and supplemented, by which the broader access to vocational training in professions with different degrees of professional qualification have been provided. The number of professions with a lower degree of qualification was increased. The legislative changes are in the following directions:

- Increasing the quality of the work force by developing opportunities for increasing the qualification of employed and unemployed people in correspondence with the needs of the business sector while experiencing a low unemployment rate;
- Improving access to training for uneducated, low-educated and unqualified people;
- Encouraging employment and increasing the competitiveness of underprivileged groups on the labour market;
- Lowering the minimum entry and exit levels for the acquisition of the first degree of professional qualification for people over 16 years of age;

- Expanding the opportunities for vocational education and training for people over 16 years of age.

### **3 STRUCTURAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Structural Framework**

There are several structures involved in lifelong learning, but coordination is lacking and a coherent alignment is non-existent. The following structures are involved:

- The Council of Ministers is the leading institution in the field of education and employment policy.
- The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) develops the policy guidelines for vocational training and coordinates its implementation. MES issues orders and prescribes appropriate methods for the formal education system (i.e. vocational schools, vocational colleges, and institutions of higher education). The Minister of Education and Science approves the national training requirements for the four levels of vocational training and the list of training occupations drawn up by subordinate agencies (chiefly the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training). The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) develops the policy guidelines for vocational training and coordinates its implementation.
- The National Pedagogic Centre is an institution belonging to the MES. The task of the NPC is to support pedagogically pupils, teachers and parents by a) qualifying teachers and educators, b) reducing the numbers of pupils failing to stay in school, and c) providing consultation and orientation of vocations and vocational education opportunities. The NPC organises qualification programmes for teachers, including teachers of professional education institutions. The centres also provide occupational information for pupils, students and teachers.
- The National VET Agency (NAVET) is a specialist body directly subject to the Council of Ministers. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is responsible for the vocational training of the employed and the unemployed. It draws up an annual "National Employment Plan".
- The Bulgarian Employment Agency and its subordinate local branches, the employment offices is an agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

A National Higher Education Accreditation Agency (NAOA) was set up in 1995 under the terms of the Higher Education Act, directly answerable to the Council of Ministers. Its role is to accredit higher education institutions, and to monitor and evaluate their work (and to withdraw accreditation in cases of doubt). Finally, Local Authorities play a part in occupational guidance for school pupils, the unemployed and others. Furthermore, they are responsible in principle for funding vocational schools and colleges belonging to them.

There is a long list of public and private bodies and institutions active in Adult Education and Learning (ALE) in Bulgaria, as well as many NGOs active in the field and a number of relevant projects. These include the following:

- Vocational schools and vocational colleges: 179 vocational secondary schools, vocational schools and vocational colleges (of a total of around 500 such schools) provided continuing vocational training courses for adults in 2003.
- Higher Education Institutions: most Bulgarian universities provide adult education in various forms, for example correspondence courses or special postgraduate courses. One widespread form of continuing education is specialisation or

postgraduate training for people who have already been in employment after finishing a first degree. The costs of courses in different subjects are usually borne by employers, and occasionally by learners themselves.

- Licensed Vocational Training Centres (CPOs): based on the Vocational Education and Training Act from 1999, the first CPOs were created in 2003 and since then their numbers have grown rapidly. A large number of the current licensed CPOs were existing establishments, companies, training centres, voluntary associations, etc., and even include some state schools and colleges.
- German-Bulgarian Vocational Training Centres: the three vocational training centres (BGCPOs) have been in operation since 1995/1996.
- In-service training: this is found more often in larger enterprises – in 62 per cent of enterprises with more than 250 employees, in 34 per cent of enterprises with 50-249 employees, and in only 24 per cent of smaller enterprises with 10-49 employees.
- Cultural Centres “*Čitališta*”: these are self-governing cultural and educational institutions with a separate legal status, dating back to the 19th century. Their activities have expanded over the years and laid the foundation for many aspects of modern cultural life in Bulgaria, including music and museums. The cultural centres are currently facing the task of finding new ways of operating. The more active cultural centres are now once again in effect independent adult education institutions that are combined into several national networks. They are governed by the National Cultural Centres Act. They usually work very closely with the local authorities, especially concerning funding and staffing.
- NGOs, foundations and associations: these are governed by the Associations Act, regulating the legal status of non-profit organisations in Bulgaria. The most important ones are the Znanie Association, the Associations of Engineers and international organisations.

Other foundations and projects that organised programmes for adults during the last decade include:

- Partners Bulgaria Foundation: supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the foundation Partners Bulgaria launched – as one of its activities – a programme for interethnic integration in Bulgaria in 2000.
- “A Second Chance” Project for Adult Literacy: was funded by the PHARE “Social Integration” programme and implemented by the Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV International, Bulgaria).
- National Programme for Adult Literacy and Qualification of Roma: has been implemented in the labour market since 2006.
- Development Programme of the National Council for Cooperation in Ethnic and Demographic Affairs: the Urbanisation and Social Development of Regions with a Predominance of Minority Populations project was run by the Council for Cooperation in Ethnic and Demographic Affairs.

### **3.2 Financial Framework**

Public funding from the state budget is valid for the school system (especially vocational schools), the cultural centres, and many of the current programmes to retrain unemployed, etc. Funding by European programmes and the ongoing European Structural Funds is used for lifelong learning and human resources. The

European Social Fund is also of special interest. Private funding through fees paid either by the training participants or by the employers who want to invest in the qualification of their employees is especially important for the approximately 600 Vocational Training Centres (CPOs) that have been founded in order to participate in a growing adult education market.

One of the largest shares of the public budget for ALE is via the National Employment Action Plan through which every year millions of Bulgarian Lev are spent on various education programmes. The National Employment Action Plan for 2007, for instance, has a budget of €148 million. Most of the projects covered by the plan combine employment and Vocational Education and Training, so that it is difficult to say how much money is spent solely on education. Some of the programmes in the 2007 plan that emphasise VET are as follows:

- Krasiva Bălgarija (Beautiful Bulgaria), in which the unemployed are trained in a building profession while renovating public places (2,300 have been employed and 1,400 trained);
- Various types of training courses organised by the Employment Agency in compliance with the Employment Promotion Act (21,000 course participants);
- Several projects financed by PHARE and other donors to enhance employability by providing better access to vocational education (11,000 participants).

The National Employment Action Plan can regularly be accessed from the website of the Ministry of Social Policy and Labour ([www.mslp.government.bg/bg/docs](http://www.mslp.government.bg/bg/docs)).

Since 2005, the National Employment Agency has implemented a programme called Active Labour Market Services. The programme is financing employment services (ES), training and re-training services (TS), small business support services, small business incubators, and local economic development planning (LEDP). The overall costs of the programme are approximately €10 million. Special attention is paid also to the new programme of the Ministry of Social Policy and Labour for 2008, called "Lifelong Learning and Better Adaptability to the Labour Market", which is funded by €88 million.

## **4 PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION IN ADULT LEARNING**

Despite its low participation rates in non-vocational adult education in particular, Bulgaria has recently shown significant improvement of the ways in which learning participation and outcomes are understood and appreciated. In Bulgaria, the evaluation of learning is subject to the acting legislative provisions. Adult education is attached to, if not confused with, VET. For this reason and in order to redirect public opinion as well as policies developed for adult learning, Bulgaria aims to achieve unification of the criteria for assessment of knowledge and skills regardless of the form and the system of education. With the implementation of the standards for professional qualification, the legislative requirements for the evaluation of every type of training and learning are gradually realised. The evaluation of learning is related to the quality of education, which is provided through:

- Assessment at the entrance and exit of the different stages of learning;
- Constant monitoring of the process accomplished by the responsible authorities;
- Licensing educational institutions and certification of education;
- Providing updated management of lifelong learning.

#### 4.1 Opportunities for Participation

There is a long list of measures specifically designed to raise participation rates. Nonetheless, not all of them were very successful. Those that were more “influential” in terms of their social impact were the following:

- The National Programme for Literacy and Qualification Courses for Roma, in which 1,300 unemployed individuals passed training and qualification courses;
- A project launched by the Ministry of Education and Science in 2009 in which 10,000 individuals up to the age of 16 passed literacy courses and were reintegrated in the education system within the next three years;
- Qualification courses have been organised for different target groups of teachers in order to update and build their knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Other important measures and initiatives to raise participation rates in lifelong learning also include the following:

- Increasing the financial resources available for training unemployed people within the scope of active employment measures;
- Substantially enhancing the participation in training activities for groups vulnerable to long-term unemployment and social exclusion such as low-skilled young people, older people with no or low qualifications, and ethnic minorities;
- Promoting targeted support measures that take into account the specific characteristics of individuals or groups and include a wide range of services (e.g. advice, training, and work experience);
- Fostering the institutional capacities at regional and local level to anticipate changing employment and skill needs, develop active labour market policies and monitor their effectiveness;
- Establishing systematic cooperation between schools, employment services and local communities and linking regional development priorities more closely with labour market and education policies at regional level;
- Creating incentives for companies to invest more in continuing training for workers. The example of the Training Fund (financed most often by enterprises as a percentage of their payroll), which has been introduced in some countries, could be adapted for this use.

#### 4.2 Barriers to Participation

Bulgaria has the lowest EU record for adult participation in formal education and training overall compared to the EU average. The level of human capital in the country, reflecting the educational level of the population as a whole does not differ as a whole from the average EU level. Nevertheless, only 2.7 per cent (EUROSTAT: 2008) of the total number of the population aged between 25 and 64 have participated in some form of education or training. Women participate more in educational activities than men. Differences between the genders can be observed both among adults of working age (25 to 64 years) and among young people and young adults (15 to 24 years of age). Among people aged 45 years and over, participation in educational activities declines sharply, and the 55 years and over age group has the lowest participation level (6.5 per cent). The EU25 average in all these figures is about two to three times higher. There is a strong correlation between the level of previous education and participation in continuing education. Participation in educational activities by those who have completed higher education is three times as high (45.2 per cent for the age group 25 to 64 years) as among those who only completed upper secondary education (12 per cent). A difference is also apparent

between the different levels of vocational upper secondary education. Those who completed Level 3 of vocational education are more active (14 per cent) than those who completed Level 2 (10 per cent). The lower the level of education, the larger the discrepancy with the EU25 average. For example, while people in a EU25 country who have completed secondary education have a 68.7 per cent participation rate in any educational activity, in Bulgaria that rate is 45.2 per cent. 44.2 per cent of people in EU25 countries whose highest education level is a completed secondary education participate in continuing education, but only 12.2 per cent of the same group do so in Bulgaria. Employment status has a considerable influence on people's educational activity. Participation by those in employment (22 per cent) is twice as high as among the unemployed (11 per cent) and nearly four times as high as among the non-working population 5 (5.7 per cent). Comparison with EU25 data, however, shows again that Bulgaria is far behind, usually by a factor of two, three or even more.

Place of residence is also a factor that has a significant impact on people's motivation to take part in educational activities. Participation among those in employment living in towns and cities is 26 per cent, three times as high as participation among those in employment living in rural areas. The differences between the unemployed living in urban and rural areas are equally marked. In towns and cities, 13 per cent of the unemployed take part in educational activities, while this figure is only just over four per cent in rural areas. The non-working population and those living in rural areas show the lowest participation in educational activities, only 1.7 per cent. Of course, there are differences between participation in formal and non-formal learning activities.

The efforts for raising the participation in lifelong learning are especially important for early school leavers, as well as for low-qualified individuals and those without qualifications. The groups of people that are more difficult to reach are mainly the disadvantaged groups on the labour market – people of Roma origin, young people, adult workers, continuously unemployed persons, disabled individuals, and senior citizens. Since 23.7 per cent of the population of Bulgaria is of pensionable age and this number is constantly on the increase, ensuring the well-being of senior citizens (in terms of both physical and mental health) is a challenge for public authorities, medical and the social services and organisations. 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. There are about 800 centres for social services in the country and their capacity ranges from 12 to 150 places. However, their condition is extremely poor. The fall of the net incomes and the gradual and constant ageing of the population 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 centres. At the same time, the majority of these centres are located outside the towns and villages, their facilities are out-of-date and dilapidated, and there are no helpful social activities available to their residents. Therefore, the logical consequence is a low standard of living, social isolation, uncertainty, and helplessness.

Unfortunately, in Bulgaria, senior citizens' average incomes are often not sufficient to cover even the lowest level of the standard of living. In order to survive, pensioners tend to live with their children's families, with other relatives, or, as a last resort, in public care-centres for elderly people. Usually, those who are in good health try to find a job to help them cover their everyday needs, no matter whether it corresponds to their educational qualification or not. The description of the current situation shows that there are no premises and opportunities for gaining new knowledge by taking part in training and educational programs for people of pensionable age. Unfortunately, due to the serious problems regarding the youth working-age

populations, the educational system, and the restructuring of the economy restructure, senior citizens are not seen as a priority in the internal policy of Bulgaria.

## 5 CLUSTERS OF MEASURES

Overall, the focus on lifelong learning in Bulgaria is primarily on initial education, with adult education following developments in initial education and VET. There are two sets of measures in Bulgaria in regards to mobilisation strategies to raise participation in lifelong learning. These strategies are official, but not much of what has been planned has been implemented. In these terms, the first set of strategies relate to planned measures, while the second set refers to actions and measures already taken:

Planned measures for overcoming obstacles regarding raising participation include the following:

- Updating and completing the legislative regulations in the sphere of education and training (Updated Strategy of Employment in the Republic of Bulgaria 2008-2015);
- Creating various possibilities for lifelong learning, improving the conditions for population participation in the PVT, increasing measures for stimulating participation (Updated Strategy of Employment in the Republic of Bulgaria 2008-2015);
- Developing lifelong learning orientation activities: education orientation, professional orientation, and career development (Updated Strategy of Employment in the Republic of Bulgaria 2008-2015).
- Utilising Operational Programme “Human Resource Development” finances (provided by the European Social Fund), in addition to finances from the state budget. These finances will be used for the encouragement of participation in lifelong learning (Updated Strategy of Employment in the Republic of Bulgaria 2008-2015);
- Ratifying and developing the module principle at the development of vocational training curriculum as a means for expanding the access to training, effectively utilising the means for training, and improvement of the training results (Updated Strategy of Employment);
- Creating a system for accumulation and transfer of credits in vocational education and training, which will stimulate people to take part in and employers to organise training (Updated Strategy of Employment in the Republic of Bulgaria 2008-2015);
- Creating possibilities for the validation of the results of informal training and self-education based on the approved common European principles and existing successful practice in some European countries (Updated Strategy of Employment in the Republic of Bulgaria 2008-2015);
- Forming attitudes among the population regarding their participation in informal training.

Adopted measures for overcoming obstacles regarding raising participation include the following:

- Implementing education funding for the acquisition of vocational qualifications, key competencies and literacy education;

- Expanding the circle of institutions licensed to conduct adult education. In terms of vocational schools, centres for vocational education and training and higher schools that conducted training for adults for acquisition of vocational qualifications, schools are licensed to offer literacy education. People and legal entities, registered according to current legislation, are licensed to offer education for the acquisition of key competencies and motivation training;
- Providing opportunities for the professional qualification training of unemployed people over 50 years of age who qualify for the early retirement pension, of women with children up to five years of age, and imprisoned people;
- Providing opportunities for the training at a specific workplace of unemployed people with elementary (first to fourth grade) and lower education and without qualifications who cannot start vocational training. The training is given in the form of an apprenticeship under the guidance of a mentor;
- Providing opportunities for internships in companies for the acquisition of practical experience by unemployed people who have acquired professional qualification in a profession during the past 24 months, but lack experience in it;
- Using active labour market policy funds to finance quality services for informing, consulting and advising people who are registered as unemployed, to whom services will be provided by licensed information and career guidance centres or by employment agencies' Job Centres;
- Providing opportunities for unemployed people who have completed a literacy course to be included in vocational training courses.

#### *Information, counselling and guidance services*

Little has happened in terms of the development of counselling and guidance services provided by the Ministry of Education and Science at the national level. The previous structure was abolished in 2000, and a new one has not been established. However, there is a legal framework for the establishment and functioning of the national system for career guidance for students and adults, which is regulated in the Law on Vocational Education and Training (LVET). There is also the vocational guidance and counselling system of the NAVET and its local labour offices, which are used by students and adults. Reform efforts might consider the further development of an overall counselling and guidance system, concentrating on mutual benefits and cooperation. In 2006, the NAVET has prepared a report concerning the current situation regarding career guidance policy development at the European and national levels.

#### **Quality management**

The chief directions for providing quality education and training for the 2002-2007 period include:

##### ***The introduction of new education documentation***

The main prerequisite for the improvement of the quality of vocational education and training is the introduction of new learning documentation.

In order to ensure a good quality of VET, over 6,531 curricula were elaborated and approved for the 2004-2008 period. They define the objectives and tasks of the training, education content and the expected knowledge, skills and vocational competencies in each grade subject module. In 2003, in accordance with the requirements of the Law on VET, state exams for the acquisition of a vocational level of all those trained by the school system were organised according to National Exam Programs.

### ***The improvement of equipment***

Improvement of vocational schools' equipment is carried out mainly through supported project works.

### ***The active participation of business representatives in the assessment of learning results***

The participation of employers and workers in the expansion of education documentation and execution of state exams for the acquisition of a vocational qualification is an important factor in ensuring VET quality. It contributes to the process of bridging the gap between vocational education and training and labour market needs.

### ***Establishing administrative structure for assessment needs***

The external evaluation of schools is done by the Regional Inspectorates of MES, which are situated in the 28 administrative centres. Experts working with them are directly responsible for the quality of vocational education and training in the school system. Unfortunately, administrative capacity is insufficient because there are inspectorates that do not have such experts. In 2005, the Centre on Control and Assessment of Education Quality in Bulgaria with the Ministry of Education and Science was established, the aim of which is to create mechanisms for internal and external evaluation, and systems for the quality control of secondary and higher schools. The activities of the Centre are directed mainly towards the general education system.

### ***The introduction of modern training in entrepreneurship and foreign language into training in a profession***

A national political context for the improvement of the quality of vocational education and training is provided through the planning or implementation of the following initiatives:

#### ***- Outreach work to specific target groups, community-based learning environments***

An important factor for assuring necessary access to education and training in today's society is keeping the educational units' ICT equipment up-to-date. As an implementation of the National Strategy on ICT for 2001, ICT equipment has been provided to 440 computer labs for schools (the total number of secondary general education and vocational schools in Bulgaria is 3,500). The majority of these labs will be situated in small towns. In order to facilitate the process, approaches have been made to furnish the schools with adapted and original Bulgarian software for educational needs. According to the approved programme, until 2005, the total number of PCs in the school network was approximately 35,000. The system of higher education in Bulgaria has a long experience in introducing new information technologies. In general, there is a trend to train all students in computer literacy. Access to higher education has been broadened through establishing new units across the country.

#### ***- Acknowledgement of prior (experiential) learning***

The certification of qualifications acquired outside the formal systems of education and training is a subject of discussions. National and regional conferences are being organised with the participation of the academic community and the society in order to promote the opportunities and perspectives of lifelong learning.

#### ***- Economic instruments***

According to the annual UOE financial questionnaire on education (of UNESCO, OECD and EUROSTAT), the National Statistical Institute gathers and summarises

the data about expenses for formal and non-formal education and self-education. State budget funds are the largest provider of funding for formal education. Furthermore, a key role in the funding of non-formal education is played by private sector companies. Funds spent on adult education by the private sector tend to increase. Since Bulgaria's accession to the EU, the expenditure by private individuals on non-formal education and self-education have increased, and since 2007, funds provided by the European Social Fund have been in active use and have also tended to increase. The annual activity information results for 60 per cent of VTCs for 2006, demonstrate a tendency change from 2005. In 2005, the largest number of courses were financed by the Employment Agency, followed by those financed by employers and those self-financed by the trainees. In 2006, the largest share consists of courses self-financed by the trainees, followed by those financed by employers, the Employment Agency, by national programmes and by EU programmes.

## **6 THE FIVE PRIORITIES OF THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING**

### **6.1 Analyse effects of reforms in other educational sectors on adult learning**

Since May 2006, a separate National Programme for Literacy Education and Professional Qualification of Roma has been implemented. The main purpose of the program is increasing the fitness for employment of unemployed people from the underprivileged groups, illiterate people or people with lower literacy. This task is achieved by including them in literacy training and in training for the acquisition of professional qualifications.

### **6.2 Improve the quality of provision and staffing**

The system for the development and increase of the qualifications of active teachers in the sphere of vocational education and training is not focused enough on the specifics of the various groups of trainees and the related approaches and methods. In 2005, the National Strategy for Continuing Education 2005-2010 was approved. In priority three - "Securing of high quality of the continuing vocational training," the development and accomplishment of programmes for the improvement of the teaching staff's qualifications in the sphere of continuing vocational training has been stipulated. Teachers in vocational and high schools participate in the development of documents regulating to vocational education and training. The Bulgarian teachers' syndicate participates in discussion and decision-making regarding crucial issues in the development of education and training, including the directive for the quality of provision under discussion. Some basic documents have been developed where systematic and long-term activities on a national level have been defined, regarding the preparation of adult teachers and the responsible institutions, as well as determining the terms for accomplishment. Discussions on the developed documents with the participation of the responsible and interested parties took place and seminars were held with the aim of popularising them. Some other actions in terms of providing andragogical expertise at HE level include:

- Andragogy programmes in progress in Bachelor and Master's courses for the training of adult educators in Sofia University, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Plovdiv University - Paisii Hilendarski and Konstantin Preslavski University of Shumen;
- A Master's course in Adult Education Management is taught at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", which provides basic andragogy training for adult educators;

- The implementation of a Programme for Increasing the Quality of Adult Training (in 2008), in which 200 adult educators are being trained in order to master modern teaching methods;
- An andragogy (adult education) training course was given in 2006 as part of the National Programme for Literacy Education and Qualification of Romanies. A total of 72 adult educators were trained on this course and specialised study programmes for adult literacy education have been developed as part of the same programme;
- Since 2008, a new specialty – “Non-Formal Education” – has been opened in the Faculty of Education of Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, which is intended to educate specialists and educators in the field of non-formal adult education.

### **6.3 Increase the possibilities to achieve a qualification at least one level higher**

Adopted measures for improving the quality of the qualification acquired by adult learners include the following:

- Provision of opportunities for funding the training of adult educators with active labour market policy funds;
- Implementation of a project entitled “Encouraging the Vocational Training of Adults and Employment in Bulgaria,” with the financial support of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and GTZ;
- An andragogy training course for adult educators (multipliers) has been organised. In 2007, there were three groups of 15 participants each, i.e. a total of 45 people, were trained, and in 2008, one group of 16 participants. Methodological manuals have been developed.
- Training sessions are given by adult educators from the vocational training centres under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgarian-German Vocational Training Centres, the vocational training centre under the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the vocational training centre under the Bulgarian Industrial Association, and trade union training centres;
- Secondary schools are licensed to offer literacy education. People and legal entities have been licensed to offer education for the acquisition of key competencies and motivation training and provide opportunities for the professional training of unemployed people over 50 years of age who qualify for the early retirement pension, women with children up to 5 years of age and imprisoned people.

### **6.4 Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups**

Most actions target the Roma. In the present moment, one fifth of Roma people do not have even primary education. This lack of education is a serious obstacle for their full-valued professional realisation on the labour market. Around 0.2 per cent of Roma have graduated from higher education. This number is especially low, and their percentage of school drop-outs is the highest when compared to other ethno-cultural groups. Since 2006, the National Programme for Literacy and Vocational Training of Roma People is being implemented on the labour market. The overall aim of the project is to support the employability of illiterate and unemployed adults. Since adult illiteracy is a problem chiefly of the Roma in Bulgaria, almost all participants were Roma. The project used a double approach, comprising an adult literacy module (held in 2006) and, as a second step, a vocational education (VET) module. Initial literacy courses are financed under the programme as a first step towards training for the first degree of professional qualification in professions currently sought on the labour

market. In 2007, about 2,500 young had achieved literacy and had improved their employment chances through vocational training. In 2008, 1,500 people will be trained under the programme. To this end, the programme combined the efforts of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Agency and its local sections, the municipalities, the school authorities and NGOs. DVV International was responsible for training the teachers and course providers in adult education methods. The programme is included within the national budget of the above-mentioned institutions. According to the project plan, the adult literacy module had a budget of 1.65 million Leva (i.e: 320 Euros for each of the 2,500 participants). VET courses were additionally financed by the appropriate regular state programmes. DVV International contributed 17,000 Leva 2006.

#### **6.5 Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector**

A political decision has been adopted in Bulgaria for the development of a National Qualification Framework connected with the European Qualification Framework. The National Qualification Framework is under development. An interagency work group has been created under the Ministry of Education and Science for that purpose.

Guidelines for Users of the European Credit Transfer System in Vocational Education and Training are also under development. They are directed at providers of vocational education and training.

The European Credit Transfer System has been introduced in the higher education institutions and allows for the recognition of credits for courses taken by the students in other European universities as part of student mobility in the Erasmus programme. The recognition of credits as part of the student mobility at the national level is still not sufficiently implemented.

Using the credit transfer system improves the transparency of qualifications, human resources mobility at a European level and the connection between the developments of different educational sectors.