

**BULGARIAN NATIONAL REPORT ON THE FOURTH CYCLE OF REVIEW  
AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MADRID  
INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING AND ITS REGIONAL  
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY (MIPAA/RIS)  
2018 – 2022**

**Outline of the report on the follow-up to the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS)  
of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in Bulgaria:**

**Part I**

**Executive summary**

General information

1. National ageing situation
2. Method

**Part II: 20 years of MIPAA/RIS**

Main actions and progress in implementation of MIPAA/RIS and the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration

1. Recognizing the potential of older persons
2. Encouraging longer working life and ability to work
3. Ensuring ageing with dignity

**Part III: Healthy and active ageing in a sustainable world**

1. Contribution of ageing-related policies to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals
2. Lessons learnt from managing the consequences and impacts for older people in emergency situations: the COVID-19 pandemic
3. Activities in preparation and implementation of the World Health Organization (WHO) Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020 - 2030

**Conclusions and priorities for the future**

Annexes

## Part I

### Executive summary (by National Focal Points on Ageing)

The development, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of strategic and operational documents related to the demographic development of the population and the enhancement of active ageing is carried out within the **Interdepartmental Working Group on Demographic Issues, Income and Living Standards** established by Order of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and updated annually. **The members of this group (representatives of ministries, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, social partners, etc.) were invited to contribute to this report and to report on their actions within the competence of the Lisbon Ministerial Declaration (2017), as well as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older people and the implementation of activities related to the WHO Decade for Healthy Ageing (2020-2030).** The information received is summarized and systematized in the second and the third part of the report.

The most significant demographic trend in the development of the population of Bulgaria is the process of ageing. The main strategic documents for meeting the demographic challenges in the Republic of Bulgaria, including ageing, adopted by the Council of Ministers are the **Updated National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population in the Republic of Bulgaria (2012 - 2030)** and the **National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030)**.

The strategic goal with regard to ageing is aimed at creating conditions for active and dignified life of the elderly by providing equal opportunities for their full participation in the economic and social life of society. **The National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030) was adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria on March 15, 2019.** The following priorities of the Strategy have been determined:

- *Priority 1:* Promoting active ageing in the field of employment;
- *Priority 2:* Promoting active ageing in the field of participation in society;
- *Priority 3:* Promoting active ageing in the field of independent living;
- *Priority 4:* Creating capacity and favourable environment for active ageing at national and regional level.

The biennial plans and reports for the implementation of the Strategy for Active Ageing present an operational framework for undertaking and reporting on complex actions and measures in response to the challenges posed by population ageing. The plans and reports systematize and report tasks from various responsible institutions in implementation of the four priorities set in the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030), including measures to overcome the consequences of the spread of COVID-19. **Until now, there have been two plans prepared and adopted by the Council of Ministers for implementation of the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030), covering the period 2019 - 2020 and 2021 - 2022, respectively. The first report for implementation of the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030) has also been prepared and then adopted by the Council of Ministers, covering the period 2019 - 2020.**

The analysis of the information received and summarized from the operational documents regarding active ageing shows the need for undertaking additional integrated actions by the institutions to adapt key sectors, such as employment, healthcare, education, social security and social assistance to the ageing of the population.

With regard to Bulgaria's progress in meeting the commitments under the Regional Strategy for the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, **it can be concluded that with regard to the objectives of *Encouraging longer working life and***

*ability to work and Ensuring ageing with dignity, from the Lisbon Declaration (2017) there are diverse and targeted activities by the various responsible agencies, while with regard to the first objective - Recognizing the potential of older persons, activities are presented by narrower circle of institutions and need enrichment in the future.*

#### General information

1. Country name - Bulgaria;
2. Name and contact details of the author of the report - Zlatina Naydenova, state expert, "Living Standard, Demographic Policy and Social Investments" Directorate, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, [zlatina.naydenova@mlsp.government.bg](mailto:zlatina.naydenova@mlsp.government.bg), tel. 003592 8119 514;
3. Name and contact details of official national focal point on ageing - Zlatina Naydenova, state expert, "Living Standard, Demographic Policy and Social Investments" Directorate, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, [zlatina.naydenova@mlsp.government.bg](mailto:zlatina.naydenova@mlsp.government.bg), tel. 003592 8119 514;
4. Name, reference and date of adoption or status of preparation of national strategy, action plan or similar policy document on ageing (please attach relevant documents in the annex):
  - National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030), adopted by Decision No. 142 of the Council of Ministers of 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019;
  - Plan for 2019 - 2020 for implementation of the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030), adopted by Decision No. 779 of the Council of Ministers of 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019;
  - Plan for 2021 - 2022 for implementation of the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030), adopted by Decision No. 368 of the Council of Ministers of 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021;
  - Report for 2019 - 2020 for implementation of the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030), adopted by Record No. 54 of the Council of Ministers of 27<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

**The documents are available on the MLSP website in Bulgarian at the following links:** <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/natsionalni-strategicheski-dokumenti>;  
<https://www.mlsp.government.bg/otcheti-i-planove>.

---

#### 1. National ageing situation

Demographically, population ageing is emerging as a long-term and irreversible social process for European countries, including Bulgaria. According to EUROSTAT forecasts, the share of the population in the Republic of Bulgaria over the age of 65 will increase from 17.4% in 2010 to 32.7% in 2060.

In 2020, the current demographic situation in Bulgaria is characterized by a continuing decline and ageing of the population, low birth rates and high overall mortality rates. The imbalance in the territorial distribution of the population is deepening.

Positive trends in 2020 include the reduction of infant mortality, the maintenance of the total fertility rate at a level close to the average for the member states of the European Union, the reduction of the number of divorces, the increase of the mechanical growth of the population, the improvement of living conditions, standard and quality of life of the population.

As of December 31, 2020, the population of Bulgaria is 6,916,548 people, which

represents 1.55% of the population of the European Union. Compared to 2019, the country's population decreased by 34,934 people, or 0.5%.

As in previous years, the decrease in population in 2020 in Bulgaria is mainly due to negative natural increase and not to external migration - as a result of the negative natural increase the population decreases by 65,649 people. The mechanical growth (net balance of external migration) for 2020 is positive - plus 30,715 people, and the net migration rate is +4.4 %<sup>1</sup>.

The number of women of childbearing age (15-49 years of age) in the country, or the size of the birth contingents and their fertility, has a significant impact on the birth rate and determines the nature of population reproduction. The number of women of childbearing age as of 31.12.2020 is 1 452 thousand, as compared to the previous year decreased by 13 thousand, and compared to 2011 - by 199 thousand.

The birth rate is expected to continue declining in the coming decades, mainly due to a reduction in the birth contingents.

The factors that influence the decision to give birth and raise a child are complex and relate to the creation of a calmer, predictable and secure family, social and socio-economic environment.

The number of deaths in 2020 was 124,735. Compared to the previous year, the number of deaths increased by 16,652, or by 15.4%. The overall mortality rate is 18 %.

The most significant demographic trend is the ageing process. At the end of 2020 (according to NSI data from 12.04.2021) individuals aged 65 and over are 1,504,048, or 21.8% of the country's population. Compared to 2019, the share of the population in this age group increased by 0.2 percentage points.

The ageing process is more pronounced among women than among men. The relative share of women over the age of 65 is 25.3%, and of men - 17.9%. This difference is due to the higher mortality rate among men and, as a consequence, to the lower life expectancy among them.

As of 31.12.2020 the total age dependency ratio in Bulgaria is 56.7%, or each person in the dependent ages (under 15 and over 65 years) has less than two individuals in active age. For comparison, in 2019 this ratio was 56.4%. This ratio is more favourable in the cities - 53.5% than in the villages - 65.9%.

The economic consequences of population ageing on the labour market and its functioning are multifaceted: the quantity and quality of labour is expected to decrease; adverse changes in the educational level of the workforce, professional competencies and adaptability to change are expected, etc.

In 2020, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing demographic challenges:

- The effect of the "freezing" of many economic activities on the level of employment, growth and public debt has made it even more difficult to cope with demographic change;

- Against the background of the declining working age population, we must focus on a more inclusive labour market (in terms of women, older workers, people with disabilities, etc.);

- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to look at policies that promote digital skills development, including for vulnerable groups in the labour market (older people, people with disabilities, etc.).

**More detailed analytical tables of the National Statistical Institute are presented in the annex.**

---

<sup>1</sup> Ratio of net migration to the average annual population during the year (per 1,000 people).

## 2. Method

One of the most important conditions for successful implementation of the objectives of the demographic policy and the policy for promoting active ageing is the availability of developed capacity of all responsible institutions and partners at national, regional and local level. The work on coordination of the demographic policy and the policy for active ageing is carried out by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

All ministries, the National Health Insurance Fund, the National Statistical Institute, the National Social Security Institute, the National Association of Municipalities in Bulgaria are involved and engaged in the implementation of the National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population and the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria, as well as government agencies, the Bulgarian Red Cross, non-governmental organizations, social partners, research institutes, etc.

The Minister of Labour and Social Policy has had an Interdepartmental Working Group on Demographic Issues since 2006, which includes over 80 experts from all institutions, structures and organizations involved in the implementation of the demographic policy. Within this working group, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy prepares cross-sectoral operational reports and plans for the implementation of the National Strategy for Demographic Development and the National Strategy for Active Ageing, outlining measures and tasks for policy improvements.

A formal letter was sent to all members of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Demographic Issues, Income and Living Standards with regard to the preparation of this report, inviting them to contribute and report on their competence actions to meet the three main objectives of the Lisbon Ministerial Declaration, as well as on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older people and the implementation of activities related to the WHO Decade for Healthy Ageing (2020-2030). The information received is summarized and systematized in the second and third parts of the report below, with each of the questions referring to the institution/organization that provided the relevant information.

## Part II: 20 years of MIPAA/RIS

### Main actions and progress in implementation of MIPAA/RIS and the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration

#### 1. Recognizing the potential of older persons

**1.1. What has been done to empower individuals to realize their potential for physical, mental and social well-being throughout their lives and to participate in and contribute to society according to their capacities, needs and desires along the RIS commitments 1, 2, 8, 9 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Ministerial Declaration?**

- ❖ developing and implementing socially responsible and future-oriented economic and financial strategies;
- ❖ fostering effective consultations with, and involvement of, older persons and their representatives at the national, regional and local levels in designing policies;
- ❖ promoting a positive image of older persons, acknowledging their contributions to society;
- ❖ promoting work and volunteering of younger and older persons in intergenerational settings;

- ❖ encouraging businesses, non-profit organizations and public enterprises to involve older persons as consumers in the planning and design of goods and services;
- ❖ ensuring that older persons can attain and maintain their highest possible level of health and functional capacity by supporting the development of age-friendly environments and housing.

### *Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy organized and held on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2020 an online forum on "Active ageing – let's continue together". The forum was attended by representatives of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Demographic Issues, Income and Living Standards of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, as well as by representatives of non-governmental organizations working on the issues of ageing.

The work of the forum examined the trends towards sustainability in terms of active ageing and made recommendations in this direction; a joint project of the social partners and part of the results achieved so far was presented to adapt the work environment to the specific age needs of different generations, in order to promote a longer working life and ability to work.

The theme of the silver economy was brought as a special emphasis in the work of the forum, in the light of providing a new horizon for a better future and longevity. The European documents from 2005 to 2018 were reviewed, and attention was paid to the economic impact of the silver economy at the level of the European Union. Opportunities realized in EU member states were presented - for example, connected health, robotics, silver tourism, etc.

Currently, the MLSP has a modern vision for the development of solidarity between the generations and is taking appropriate action to implement it. The policies implemented by the MLSP are directly or indirectly related to this theme, as well as the improvement of the living standards of the different generations, their realization, or their longer stay in the labour market in good health, the development of the relevant social protection systems and social security is carried out in close and fruitful cooperation with all stakeholders.

It is essential to maintain a sustainable system of communication, exchange of views and discussions in order to ensure true solidarity between generations, because each generation can learn from the experience of others.

### *Agency for People with Disabilities*

#### **Rehabilitation and Integration of People with Disabilities Programme:**

The programme finances non-governmental organizations established in public benefit of and for people with disabilities, as well as nationally represented organizations of people with disabilities registered under the Cooperatives Act. It implements projects for training, skills for independent living, rehabilitation, art therapy and events with public expression of and for people with disabilities, finances the development and publication of manuals and materials to help people with disabilities, as well as activities aimed at changing public attitudes towards people with disabilities by organizing their participation in fairs, job fairs, etc.

The largest percentage of older people with disabilities participate and are involved in projects with performances in various cultural events such as festivals and concerts, issuing manuals and materials to help older people with disabilities, which help to provide adequate and accessible information.

- In 2019, **19** projects were financed at the amount of **BGN 270,000** and **3,658** persons with disabilities were included.

- In 2020, **14** projects were financed at the amount of **BGN 200,000** and **3,662** persons with disabilities were included.

**In the target group of people with disabilities, which benefits from the results of the project activities, about 40% are older persons with disabilities.**

### *Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC)*

The Bulgarian Red Cross managed to establish a joint approach to "*working with older people in the community*", which encourages their active participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of various projects and activities. This was achieved through numerous trainings for advocacy and lobbying for the rights of the elderly before the institutions at national and local level, during which various international documents were presented, incl. the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The trainings helped to increase the capacity of older people, mobilize their potential and empower them, which made them active participants in the life of their communities. Successful partnerships have been implemented at the local level, which have led to the solution of pressing problems for the benefit of the elderly and people with disabilities.

Again in order to promote the potential of older people and in connection with October 1 - International Day of Older People, since 2015 the BRC has held a competition for older people in disaster preparedness, first aid, psycho-social support and knowledge of their rights. In it, teams entirely of elderly volunteers over the age of 65 competed in various fields, and young people value their skills, thus contributing to strengthening solidarity between generations. The competition became traditional and was held annually with the participation of teams from at least 15 districts in the country. An exception was 2020, when due to the pandemic of COVID-19 the competition was postponed.

Another major initiative with the active participation of older people was the European Day of Intergenerational Solidarity, which is celebrated annually on 29<sup>th</sup> April. The BRC upholds the principle that intergenerational solidarity plays a key role in the development of fairer and more sustainable systems, based on the knowledge and experience of older people passed on to younger generations. In 2018 and 2019, on the occasion of April 29<sup>th</sup>, BRC organized simultaneous planting of flowers, trees and shrubs throughout the country. The initiative, which was attended by an average of more than 2,000 people, took place together with volunteers of different ages. The main goal of the event was to draw public attention to continuity, understanding and humanity so that we can live together in better communities. In 2020 this event was dropped from the organization's calendar due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

During the reporting period, the Bulgarian Red Cross continued to fulfil its commitment and to include older people in its activities, motivating and supporting them in defending their right to a dignified, active, healthy and independent lifestyle. Advocacy campaigns in support of the rights of the elderly at local, national and international levels have brought the BRC to a qualitatively new relationship with partners from the central government, municipal administrations and other non-governmental organizations. Representatives of the BRC actively participated in the development of various national and regional policies, concepts and other documents concerning the elderly and promoting their active participation in the labour market, their right to a full life, poverty reduction, ensuring access to health and social services and prolonging their legal capacity in good health, as well as providing conditions for access to education and lifelong learning.

**1.2. Please also reflect on your country's participation in relevant global /UN-wide campaigns:**

- 1.2.1. Does your country take part in a [Global Campaign to Combat Ageism](#) led by

the World Health Organization (WHO)? <sup>2</sup> Do the activities in your country contribute to the endeavours of this WHO-led campaign? Which ones? Did your participation in the campaign contribute to the implementation of the MIPAA/RIS in your country? **Which measures have been set in this context?**

1.2.2. Does your country take part in the United Nations **Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG-A)** for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons? Do the activities in your country contribute to the endeavours of the OEWG-A? Which ones? Do national policies ensure protection of the human rights of older people in your country? **Do you see any legal gaps?**

*Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*

The MLSP has nominated a national focal point on behalf of Bulgaria on the issues of ageing in the Standing Working Group on Ageing to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), based in Geneva. The results of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on ageing (UN OEWG-A) are also reported at the annual meetings of the Standing Working Group.

The Republic of Bulgaria has adopted a horizontal approach to the regulation of the social relations associated with the elderly. There is modern, in line with the European framework, existing legislation in the field of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, incl. on the basis of age.

In the Republic of Bulgaria the principle of equal opportunities and protection against discrimination is also regulated in the Labour Code, Civil Procedure Code, Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Social Security Code, Employment Promotion Act, Social Assistance Act, Civil Servant Act, Higher Education Act, Child Protection Act, Health and Safety at Work Act, etc.

Special protection is provided through the Law on the Ombudsman, the Law on People with Disabilities, the Law on Combating Trafficking of Human Beings, the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence, the Law on Personal Data Protection, the Law on Statistics, etc.

In Bulgaria there are NGOs working in the field of active ageing, and older people are members in some of them. The MLSP actively cooperates with this type of organizations, mostly in the form of organizing information and discussion forums.

**1.3. Highlight in a nutshell the most important policy achievement during the last 20 years** to contribute to empowering individuals to realize their potential for physical, mental and social well-being throughout their lives and to participate in and contribute to society.

**Give some examples how thinking, feeling and dealing with ageing has changed during the last 20 years** and give some recommendations for future action (what is planned/ needs to be done) to avoid ageism.

*Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*

The approach to policy aimed at promoting active ageing over the last few years has become increasingly comprehensive, horizontal and broad-based.

In order to avoid ageism, access to services for the elderly, including digital services, should be ensured, especially in depopulated rural areas, based on the motto that no one

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/ageing/ageism/campaign/en/>



should be left behind. Age is often combined with other discriminatory factors regarding digital exclusion: low income, education, isolation, etc.

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has had a particularly strong impact on the elderly, threatening their right to equal health care. COVID-19 continues to be an unprecedented challenge to the social and health systems of many countries around the world, even more tangible in Bulgaria.

In order to increase the visibility of the policy for the promotion of active ageing, initiatives and measures for public awareness have been taken over the years, outlining the commitments of the central and local government, NGOs and other stakeholders regarding the promotion of active ageing.

The promotion of good practices, through the study of European experience and dissemination to local authorities, in order to mobilize opportunities for improvement and upgrading of measures in the implementation of the policy for active ageing, is one of the successful activities of MLSP.

## *2. Encouraging longer working life and ability to work*

**2.1. Which measures have been implemented to recognizing the potential embedded in the employment of older workers and developing labour market strategies to promote maximum participation opportunities for workers of all ages along the RIS commitments 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Declaration?**

- ❖ promoting lifelong learning opportunities;
- ❖ fight unemployment at all ages, reducing financial inequalities and poverty, taking up measures to reduce the gender pay gap;
- ❖ encouraging employers to value the experience of, and to retain and hire, older workers;
- ❖ providing incentives for longer working life opportunities and more flexible retirement choices;
- ❖ planning and implementation pension reforms, that take into account the increasing longevity and the extension of working lives;
- ❖ facilitating the reconciliation of employment and care work.

### *Ministry of Education and Science*

The Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021 - 2030) sets Priority Area 8 “Lifelong Learning”, which sets out objectives and groups of measures / activities to ensure conditions for the promotion and expansion of lifelong learning opportunities. Efforts will be focused on creating attractive and flexible opportunities for acquiring basic skills, new competencies, qualification and retraining in the formal education system and in non-formal learning, as well as creating conditions for informal learning. Any choice of individual strategies for education, training and learning will be encouraged, supported and developed. The Ministry of Education and Science will take its own initiatives and synchronize its actions with other institutions, incl. the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Employment Agency, as well as with organizations, municipalities, vocational schools and local businesses to "close the circle" of services - providing support for literacy and learning, acquiring qualifications for finding a job.

In 2014, a National Strategy for Lifelong Learning was adopted for a new seven-year

period; with a horizon until 2020. The document specifies the state and challenges of the lifelong learning policy in the next programming period. It defines the principles and vision, and formulates strategic goals and indicators for progress.

The strategy identified four main priorities, which are aimed at:

- applying an educational approach that supports the development of all learners and contributes to the building of thinking, capable and proactive individuals capable of dealing with change and insecurity;
- improving the quality of education and training;
- providing an educational environment for equal access to lifelong learning, for active social inclusion and active civic participation;
- stimulating education and training in accordance with the needs of the economy and changes in the labour market.

The activities in the Strategy are divided into eight areas of impact, which support the acquisition and continuous development of nine key competences for lifelong learning in a common process.

The implementation of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the period 2014- 2020 is based on various structures and tools: National Coordination Group for Lifelong Learning; annual action plans; a multi-level approach for coordination and monitoring of processes through the National Platform for Lifelong Learning 2020; annual monitoring; preparation of reports to the Council of Ministers on the state of implementation, the identified problems and the emerging needs for adaptation or expansion of the objectives and measures; communication plan for interaction of the interested parties, etc.

The financing of the activities for the implementation of the Strategy is carried out with funds from the state budget, the European Structural Funds and the European Union's Erasmus+ programme, as well as from other sources.

An ex-post evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy is under development.

In parallel with these processes in the national context of 2012, Bulgaria systematically and consistently formulates national priorities in the implementation of the European Program for Adult Learning. In connection with this programme, since 2015 our country has focused its attention on professionals in the sector of adult learning. This is done through support for the functional and substantive development of the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE) <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en>.

During the period 2018 - 2019, Bulgaria conducted a large-scale consultation process in implementation of another key pan-European initiative: the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on ways to improve skills: new opportunities for adults. Representatives at all levels of government formulate conclusions and recommendations and offer them to the public.

The accumulated experience of the stakeholders and the professionals in Bulgaria from the work on the programme, EPALE and the Recommendation generate valuable public energy for the initial institutionalization and change of the attitudes for this sector of the society. COVID-19 also gave a new meaning to learning for all.

A direct reflection of the above-mentioned social processes is the new Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021 - 2030), adopted in February 2021. An essential part of the document covers the common policy for lifelong learning and for adult learning policy. In particular, the Framework sets out broad groups of measures / activities related to: introduction of an integrated career guidance approach for learners and adults; development and expansion of the adult literacy system; creation of professional communities of teachers / trainers for exchange of good practices in adult education, mutual learning through open educational resources, creation and sharing of content; creating a network of "second chance" schools;

developing a methodology for ensuring the quality of adult education and training; promoting partnership with stakeholders, etc.

In the field of VET, the participation and interaction of stakeholders is carried out through consultative formats in the VET system - the VET Advisory Board and others. In the field of lifelong learning and adult learning, the partnership with stakeholders is organized through the functioning of the Advisory Board of the National Platform "United for Adult Learning", 28 regional coordination groups for LLL, as well as through the published content in the online space of the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE): <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en> according to the thematic focuses of the Platform.

To the extent that intergenerational dialogue and intergenerational learning are related to the target group of older people, it should be noted that since 2015 Bulgaria has successfully integrated these themes into the national policy for older people. In particular, this is done by publishing content in line with the thematic focuses for the year and the types of resources in the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE): <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en>.

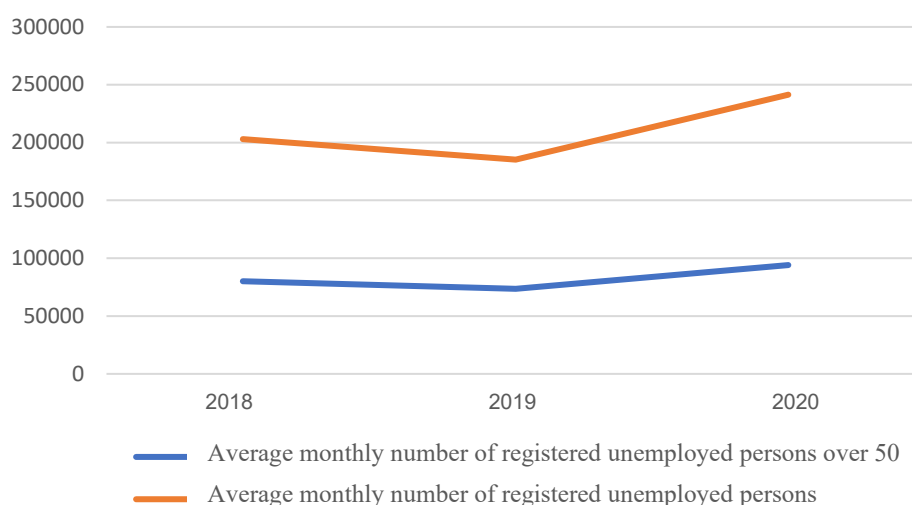
*Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)  
Employment Agency (EA)*

During the period, which is in the focus of the fourth cycle of review and appraisal, employment targets have been achieved annually with the national employment action plans. The National Plan is a tool for achieving key priorities for creating more and better jobs and investing in human resources. During the period 2018-2020, programmes, projects and measures for improving the quality of the workforce and investing in skills tailored to the needs of employers to provide jobs through the effective use of subsidies for employment and development of employment services have been successfully implemented, for quick job placement and reduction of unemployment periods.

Unemployed persons over 50 years of age, registered in the territorial divisions of the Employment Agency, are a relatively large group, their share of all registered persons is also large.

**Diagram 1**

**Dynamics of the registered unemployed persons over 50 years of age**



Source: Employment Agency

The focus of the measures taken by the Employment Agency in support of the elderly is on several priority areas:

- Providing individual services to promote active behaviour in the labour market; mediation for providing information and filling vacancies in the real sector; participation in programmes and measures for education and employment; operations under OP HRD 2014-2020;
- Giving a wider choice and providing access to training for professional development and acquisition of key competencies that meet the needs of employers for skilled labour in specific areas;
- Incentives for companies that provide employment to unemployed persons of pre-retirement age.

The main legislative instruments regulating the implementation of the employment policy in Bulgaria are the Employment Promotion Act (EPA) and the Regulations for its implementation (PEPA). With the annual adoption of the National Action Plan for Employment (NAP), the target groups of active labour market policy are determined. According to §1, item 4a of the Additional Provisions of the Employment Promotion Act, “Disadvantaged groups on the labour market” are groups of unemployed persons with lower competitiveness on the labour market, which include: unemployed youth; unemployed young people with permanent disabilities; unemployed young people using social or integrated health and social services for residential care, who have completed their education; long-term unemployed persons; unemployed persons with permanent disabilities; unemployed persons - single parents (adoptive parents) and / or mothers (adoptive parents) with children under 5 years of age; unemployed persons serving a custodial sentence; unemployed persons over 50 years of age; unemployed persons with primary or lower education without professional qualification; other groups of unemployed persons”.

***Average annual data:***

***2018***

- ✓ *Number of registered unemployed persons – 202 994 persons;*
- ✓ *Number of registered unemployed persons over 50 years of age – 79 973 persons;*
- ✓ *Relative share of the unemployed persons over 50 years of age of the total registered unemployed persons – 39.4%.*

***2019***

- ✓ *Number of registered unemployed persons – 185 266 persons;*
- ✓ *Number of registered unemployed persons over 50 years of age – 73 558 persons;*
- ✓ *Relative share of the unemployed persons over 50 years of age of the total registered unemployed persons – 39.7%.*

***2020***

- ✓ *Number of registered unemployed persons – 241 413 persons;*
- ✓ *Number of registered unemployed persons over 50 years of age – 94 089 persons;*
- ✓ *Relative share of the unemployed persons over 50 years of age of the total registered unemployed persons – 39.0%.*

As data show, the relative share of unemployed persons over 50, registered in the Labour Office Directorates (LOD) is without a significant annual course and gravitates around 39% of all registered unemployed. At the same time, in absolute average annual

number there is a logical increase in 2020, along with an increase in the average annual number of registered unemployed under the influence of the COVID-19 crisis.

Demographic challenges place the implementation of concrete measures to prolong working life in the focus of national employment policy. In this light, older people are provided with equal access to various forms of employment and lifelong learning, as well as participation in training measures and programmes for acquiring knowledge and skills that are in demand in the labour market.

**• Provision of intermediary services to unemployed persons over 50 years of age to provide non-subsidized employment on the primary market, incl. formation and/or improvement of their skills for employment and motivation for active behaviour on the labour market.**

Unemployed persons over 50 years of age are one of the target groups to which the active labour market policy is directed. Some people are highly qualified, but their age is unattractive to employers. They face difficulties in adapting to changing labour market conditions. The priority of the Employment Agency is to improve the employment prospects for the people in this age group, the search for methods to improve their skills, the development of the idea of training throughout active life.

The development of their skills contributes to increasing their efficiency and productivity in the workplace and ensures their longer participation in the labour market. The results of international studies clearly show that the training and development of older workers leads to a reduction in the mismatch of their skills to the requirements of the labour market and at the same time to an increase in labour productivity.

The standardized package of services for this target group includes the following appropriate activities and services that the Employment Agency provides to persons over 50 years of age: Motivation for active behaviour in the labour market; Motivation to participate in lifelong learning; Motivation for inclusion in adult education; Preparation of Profiles for all job seekers over 50; Referral for inclusion in a Job Search Studio; Providing the Family Labour Consultant service; Direction for inclusion in programmes and measures for employment, etc., in accordance with the individual profile of the job seeker.

During the period 2018 - 2020 the following results were achieved:

- Unemployed persons over 50 years of age, involved in motivational activities for active behaviour and formation and / or improvement of employment skills (number):
  - in 2018 – 23 309 persons;
  - in 2019 – 21 734 persons;
  - in 2020 – 11 545 persons.
- Unemployed persons over 50 years of age who started working on the primary market (number):
  - in 2018 – 59 397 persons;
  - in 2019 – 59 414 persons;
  - in 2020 – 67 636 persons.

## **PERSONS OVER 50 YEARS OF AGE INCLUDED IN NATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS**

The active labour market policy pursued by the Employment Agency includes programmes and incentive measures under the Employment Promotion Act, funded by the State Budget, incl. qualification training under Article 63 of the EPA, and the schemes of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme, co-financed by the European Social Fund. The measures listed below are in accordance with the current legislation in the field of employment - Employment Promotion Act, Regulations for the implementation of

EPA and Rules of Procedure of the Employment Agency.

Older people can participate without restrictions in all projects, programmes and measures for training and employment implemented by the Employment Agency, provided that they meet the requirements for inclusion in the respective project, programme or incentive measure.

<b>01.01.2018 - 31.12.2018</b>	<b>01.01.2019 - 31.12.2019</b>	<b>01.01.2020- 31.12.2020</b>
<p><b>Programmes</b> Newly included persons in total – 11 864; Included persons over 50 – 6 730, (56.7%);</p> <p><b>Measures</b> Newly included persons in total – 2 866; Included persons over 50 – 892, (31.1%)</p> <p><b>Schemes of OP HRD</b> Newly included persons in total – 23 942; Included persons over 50 – 9 000, (37.6%)</p>	<p><b>Programmes</b> Newly included persons in total – 11 920; Included persons over 50 – 7 044, (59,1%);</p> <p><b>Measures</b> Newly included persons in total – 2 686; Included persons over 50 – 856, (31,9%)</p> <p><b>Schemes of OP HRD</b> Newly included persons in total – 14 554; Included persons over 50 – 5 837, (40.1%)</p>	<p><b>Programmes</b> Newly included persons in total – 13000; Included persons over 50 – 8 712s, (67%);</p> <p><b>Measures</b> Newly included persons in total – 2 904; Included persons over 50 – 946, (32,6%)</p> <p><b>Schemes of OP HRD</b> Total newly included – 27 578; Included persons over 50 – 4 586, (16.6%)</p>

- **Implementation of the National Retirement Assistance Programme.**

The programme provides support in the transition from unemployment to work for the elderly and retirement. The target group includes unemployed persons over 58. According to the specifics of the activity, persons are employed full-time or part-time. The employment subsidy period is from 3 to 24 months. The programme is aimed at a very wide target group and offers long-term subsidized employment to help reach the required retirement age, which makes the programme sought after by both the unemployed and employers, especially in small towns.

For the period 2018 - 2020 under the Programme a total of 1 276 persons are included in employment, as their distribution over the years is as follows:

- in 2018 – 408 persons;
- in 2019 – 470 persons;
- in 2020 – 398 persons.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the Assistants of People with Disabilities (APD) National Programme.**

The programme is supplemented and developed with the activity "assistant teacher" to support the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of children with disabilities. The activity "personal assistant" for providing employment to unemployed persons has been implemented to alleviate the situation of families with a person with permanent disabilities in need of permanent care. The Programme provides employment for persons on a 5-hour working day.

For the period 2018 - 2020 under the Programme a total of 1,825 persons over 50 were included in employment, and their distribution over the years is as follows:

- in 2018 - 911 persons;

- in 2019 - 914 persons.

The programme was implemented until 31.12.2019. The main goal of APD NP is to provide employment to unemployed persons who provide home care to persons with permanent disabilities with a certain right to external assistance.

The programme is implemented by the Social Assistance Agency (ASA) in partnership with the Employment Agency. The NP APD employer is ASA through Social Assistance Directorates (SAD) throughout the country. The conclusion of employment contracts with the approved candidates for employment is carried out after their referral as unemployed persons by the directorates of the Labour Office. Those wishing to join the Personal Assistant activity should submit an application-declaration to the SAD at current address.

Unemployed persons, supported by monthly social benefits under Article 9 of the Rules for Implementation of the Social Assistance Act (RISAA) or eligible for this type of assistance and providing permanent care for people with disabilities or seriously ill individuals can take part in the programme. Users of the social service "Personal Assistant" are persons with 90 and over 90 per cent permanently reduced working capacity (PRWC) or type and degree of disability, with a certain right to foreign assistance, established by the bodies of medical expertise, for which the Expert Decision of the Territorial Expert Medical Commission, children up to 18 years of age with a defined 50 to 90% type and degree of disability (TDD) or PRWC with a certain right to external assistance, as well as persons or children taken out of specialized institutions.

Persons with 90 and over 90 per cent PRWC or TDD, with a certain right to external assistance, must meet certain criteria of the Programme.

As from 01.01.2020 the National Programme "Assistants of People with Disabilities" has been dropped from the employment programmes, because the Personal Assistance Act and Ordinance No. RD-07-7 of 28.06.2019 for inclusion in the mechanism of personal assistance, issued by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, the mechanism of personal assistance is now regulated.

In 2018, 2131 persons were included in NP APD. For 2019 the number of persons included was 1967.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the National Programme for Employment and Training of People with Permanent Disabilities.**

The programme provides employment to unemployed persons with permanent disabilities or persons who have successfully passed a course of treatment for drug addiction at working age, incl. people over 50, as a prerequisite for overcoming their social isolation and for their full integration into society. The programme has a maximum employment subsidy period of up to 24 months.

For the period 2018 - 2020 under the Programme a total of 880 unemployed persons over 50 were included in employment, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 287 persons;
- in 2019 - 337 persons;
- in 2020 - 256 persons.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the Programme for training and employment of long-term unemployed persons.**

The programme is aimed at providing employment to the long-term unemployed persons registered in the labour offices. The programme contributes to increasing the employability of the long-term unemployed by including them in training and providing full-time or part-time employment for up to 12 months. The programme is implemented on the territory of the country, with an advantage in regions with an unemployment rate above the

national average. It includes two components: Component 1 - private sector employers and Component 2 - public sector employers, which also includes activities for hiring unemployed persons to work in emergency groups, incl. persons over 50 years of age.

For the period 2018 - 2020 under the Programme a total of 1,245 unemployed persons over 50 were included in employment, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 374 persons;
- in 2019 - 364 persons;
- in 2020 - 507 persons.

• **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in projects of external organizations (the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB), the Labour Confederation Podkrepa (LC Podkrepa), the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association (BICA), the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce (BCC), the Union for Business Initiative (UBI) and the Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria (CEIB)).**

The actions of the social partners are also important for more investment in healthy and safe working conditions, as well as for overcoming negative attitudes towards older workers and professionals. They are aimed at improving the quality of the workforce and increasing the supply of qualified personnel in line with business demand, increasing labour market participation and reducing the number of inactive people of working age. The projects implement a set of interrelated measures for targeted impact among vulnerable groups in the labour market, which will contribute to reducing the imbalance between labour supply and demand.

**Persons over 50 years of age were involved in training and employment in 2018** on the following social partner projects: Project "We also can" (CITUB), Project "Restart" (BICA), Project "Training and Employment" (BCC), Project "Upgrading through new opportunities for training and employment" (UBI), Project "CROSS-BI" (BCCI) and Project "Horizons 3" (LC "Podkrepa"). A total of 3,139 unemployed persons from the target group were included in training on the projects of the social partners in 2018. 1 436 persons over 50 years of age were included in employment.

**Persons over 50 years of age were involved in training and employment in 2019** on the following projects of the social partners: Project "We also can-2" (CITUB), Project "Challenges" (BICA), Project "Employment" (BCC), Project "Successful Together - for a Dignified New Education" (UBI), Project "Catalogues" (BCCI), Project "Horizons 4" (LC "Podkrepa") and Project "New Beginning for Work" (CEIB). A total of 3,086 unemployed persons from the target group were included in training on the projects of the social partners in 2019. Subsidized employment of 198 persons over 50 years of age was provided.

**Persons over 50 years of age were included in training and employment in 2020** under the following projects of the social partners: "Classic - PRO" (BCCI), Project "New Skills - New Opportunities" (CITUB), Project "Horizons 5" (LC "Podkrepa"), Restart 2020 Project (BICA), Prosperity Project (UBI), Workforce Development Project (BCC) and New Beginning for Work-2 Project (CEIB). A total of 2,606 unemployed persons from the target group were included in training on the projects of the social partners in 2020. Subsidized employment was provided to 101 individuals over 50 years of age.

• **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the regional employment programmes, which provide access to employment for unemployed persons at a disadvantage in the labour market, incl. for persons over 50 years of age.**

The established and implemented regional employment programmes are in line with



the priorities in the policy for promotion of employment and the needs of the regional labour markets. Various activities of local importance have been implemented, such as: maintenance and protection of municipal and state property - schools, kindergartens, community centres; road maintenance; ancillary activities in retirement clubs, assistance in public canteens, social patronage and other common activities. For the period 2018 - 2020, 28 regional employment programmes have been implemented - one for each district. They have been developed on the basis of project proposals of the regional and municipal administrations and have been approved by the Employment Commissions of the Regional Development Councils. For the reporting period the labour costs of the employers were financed for a period of not less than 6 months.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 3,785 unemployed persons over 50 are included in regional training and employment programmes, and their distribution over the years is as follows:

- in 2018 – 1 245 persons;
- in 2019 – 1 343 persons;
- in 2020 – 1 197 persons.

#### **PERSONS OVER 50 YEARS OF AGE INCLUDED IN INCENTIVE MEASURES FOR EMPLOYMENT UNDER THE EMPLOYMENT PROMOTION ACT (EPA)**

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the measure under Art. 50 of the EPA** - Encouraging employers - micro-enterprises, to create jobs by subsidizing the first 5 jobs created by providing funds for wages, social and health insurance. The measure provides support for entrepreneurship. During the reporting period, the first 5 vacancies in micro-enterprises for a period of up to 9 months were subsidized with funds from the State Budget.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 252 unemployed persons over 50 were included in this incentive measure, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 74 persons;
- in 2019 - 73 persons;
- in 2020 - 105 persons.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the measure under Article 51, para. 1 of the EPA** - Encouraging employers to hire unemployed persons with continuous registration for at least 6 months or an unemployed person up to the age of 24, or an unemployed person with primary and lower education, or an unemployed person over the age of 50 years by providing funds for wages, social and health insurance. The subsidies for the employer from the State Budget were, for an open job, where a person from the target group was employed, in the amount of 50 per cent of the eligible costs for the subsidy period for: remuneration; additional remunerations at minimum amounts established in the Labour Code; social security contributions at the expense of the employer for the Pensions, Accident at Work and Occupational Disease (AWOD) and General Illness and Motherhood (GIM) funds, the Unemployment Fund, the Additional Mandatory Pension Insurance (AMPI) and the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). Employment was subsidized for a period of not less than 3 months and not more than 12 months.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 716 unemployed persons over 50 were included in this incentive measure, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 243 persons;
- in 2019 - 177 persons;
- in 2020 - 296 persons.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the measure under Article 51, para. 2 of the EPA** - Encouraging employers to hire unemployed people with permanent disabilities by providing funding for wages, social security and health insurance. The subsidies for the employer from the state budget are for an open job, where a person from the target group is employed in the amount of 75 per cent of the eligible costs for the period of subsidy for: remuneration; additional remunerations at minimum amounts established in the Labour Code; social security contributions at the expense of the employer for the Pensions, AWOD and GIM funds, the Unemployment Fund, the SMPS and the NHIF. Employment is subsidized for a period of not less than 3 months and not more than 12 months.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 329 unemployed persons over 50 are included in this incentive measure, and their distribution over the years is as follows:

- in 2018 - 94 persons;
- in 2019 - 97 persons;
- in 2020 - 138 persons.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the measure under Art. 52 of the EPA** - Encouraging employers to hire unemployed people with permanent disabilities full-time or part-time by providing funding for wages, social security and health insurance. Under the terms of the measure, financial incentives are provided to employers who create jobs for hiring unemployed persons with permanent disabilities, incl. military invalids referred by the units of the Employment Agency for full-time or part-time work. Employers who have created jobs and provided employment to persons from the target group, have received financing of the labour costs for a period of up to 6 months.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 150 unemployed persons over 50 were included in this incentive measure, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 44 persons;
- in 2019 - 61 persons;
- in 2020 - 45 persons.

- **The incentive measure from the Employment Promotion Act (EPA) for unemployed persons over 55 years of age (Article 55a of the EPA)** has been implemented in support of unemployed persons of pre-retirement age. Part of the expenses of the employers for labour remuneration, additional remunerations for the labour and due contributions under the insurance legislation for a period of up to 6 months are financed. It is the employer's responsibility to maintain employment for an additional period equal to the subsidy period.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 824 unemployed persons over 55 were included in this incentive measure, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 290 persons,
- in 2019 - 317 persons,
- in 2020 - 217 persons.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in the measure under Article 55c of the EPA** - Encouraging employers to hire long-term unemployed persons. Target group under the terms of Article 55c of the EPA are unemployed persons with continuous registration in the employment offices for at least 12 months, incl. persons over 50 years of age. The employer is obliged to keep the employment for an additional period equal to the subsidy period.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 323 unemployed persons over 50 are included in this incentive measure, and their distribution over the years is as follows:

- in 2018 - 100 persons;
- in 2019 - 91 persons;
- in 2020 - 132 persons.

**The eDigiStars Project is being implemented with the leading organization DEX Innovation Centre - Hungary and a consortium of partners under the Danube Transnational Cooperation Programme 2014-2020.** The project covers 19 partners from 8 countries in the Danube region - Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine. The main goal of the project is to address the problem of lack of employees over 50 years of age with digital skills by introducing an innovative transregional system that builds capacity in the field of digital skills in adults for self-employment by developing and introducing three key components. The following three tools were developed during the period:

1. eDigiStars PowerYOU tool, which focuses on the development of a financially sustainable system for promoting the opportunity among senior employees to engage in digital training and employment;
2. Campus eDigiStars tool, for the actual provision of entrepreneurial training for people in cooperation with employment offices, associations, agencies, etc., with a focus on social inclusion;
3. eDigiStars Label tool, for the development and financial sustainability for the functioning of a transregional system for certification of beneficiaries, as well as for the promotion of potential employers.

#### **PERSONS OVER 50 YEARS OF AGE, INCLUDED IN SCHEMES, IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT (OP HRD)**

Within large-scale operations under OP HRD, persons of pre-retirement age are supported through various activation measures, incl. providing opportunities to start working directly with an employer, training opportunities to acquire or improve professional qualifications and key competencies. According to the specifics of the target group, for the elderly access to a wide range of measures is provided, including the equipment of workplaces and others.

##### **• Inclusion in training and employment of unemployed persons over 50 years of age under the Scheme / Project “Training and employment”, OP HRD 2014-2020.**

The operation is aimed at the integration of unemployed persons over the age of 29, registered in the Labour Office directorates at the Employment Agency, in employment with an employer in real business or local government institutions, through training in accordance with the requirements of the work position and subsidy for employment. The implementation of the Project activities helps to facilitate the hiring of unemployed persons to get a new chance to work, new or improved professional knowledge and skills acquired in the workplace, as well as to acquire professional qualifications and / or digital competence.

The “Training and Employment” project is implemented in two components.

The purpose of Component I is to integrate inactive and unemployed persons over the age of 29 (completed 30 years of age) registered with the LOD, in employment with an employer (up to 12 months) in the real sector or local government institutions, through training tailored to individual needs at the workplace and employment subsidy.

The purpose of Component II is to integrate inactive and unemployed persons with

permanent disabilities over the age of 29, registered in the LOD, in employment with employers from the real sector or local government institutions, through training tailored to individual needs at the workplace, employment subsidy (up to 24 months) and a one-time incentive for long-term employment.

During the period 2018 - 2020 under the Project, a total of 6,923 persons over 50 years of age were included in employment under the two components, of which 547 persons under Component I and 6,376 persons under Component II. 357 persons from the target group were included in the training.

- **Inclusion in employment of unemployed persons over 50 years of age under the Scheme / Project "Work", OP HRD 2014-2020**

The "Work" project is aimed at overcoming the regional disparities in the labour market and increasing the employment and work skills of unemployed persons, incl. disadvantaged people in the labour market, from areas with a high level of unemployment. The emphasis is on increasing economic activity and improving access to employment for unemployed persons and activating inactive persons by providing opportunities for inclusion in various forms of training and employment, incl. for people over 50 years of age.

During the period 2018 - 2020 under the Project 5 049 persons over 50 years of age were included in employment. 1,552 persons from the target group were included in the training.

#### **PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF UNEMPLOYED PERSONS OVER 50 YEARS OF AGE**

The Employment Agency organizes training of adults in accordance with the needs of the labour market and the requirements of employers. The trainings are aimed at acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for filling vacancies, as well as for satisfying future needs on the labour market for skilled labour. They promote productivity, competitiveness, creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. They are an important factor in increasing the employability and mobility of the work force in the labour market.

Vocational training for adults, organized by the Employment Agency, is carried out by institutions in the system of vocational education and training. The professions in which the trainings are conducted are in accordance with the List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training, approved by the Minister of Education and Science, after coordination with the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, as well as with the relevant line ministries and representative organizations of employers and employees at national level.

During the period 2018-2020 the Employment Agency continued to support businesses to provide qualified personnel in order to increase the employability of unemployed persons in the labour market and accelerate the transition from unemployment to sustainable employment by investing in skills to increase their competitiveness and their chance for realization. The trainings were financed with funds from the State budget, according to the National Action Plan for Employment (NAPE) and under OP HRD 2014-2020.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in training conducted by the State Enterprise "Bulgarian-German Centre for Vocational Training" (BGCVT), in implementation of the biannual plans.**

The biannual training plan conducted by BGCVT aims to increase the employability of unemployed persons from disadvantaged groups in the labour market by implementing a set of measures, including information, counselling, career guidance, vocational training and training in key competencies in 5 branches of State Enterprise BGCVT.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 1,291 unemployed persons over 50 were included in training, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 359 persons;
- in 2019 - 441 persons;
- in 2020 - 491 persons.

- **Inclusion of persons over 50 years of age in adult education under Art. 63 of the EPA, incl. unemployed persons and employed persons.**

At the request of employers (Art. 63 of the EPA) trainings of unemployed persons for acquiring professional qualification are conducted. During the period 2018 - 2020, 87 unemployed persons over 50 years of age were included in vocational training at the request of employers.

In order to improve the skills of employees and to facilitate the transition from one employment to another, trainings are conducted at the request of employers (Article 63 of the EPA) of employees from medium, micro and small enterprises, to acquire key competencies, whereas for the period 2018-2020 253 employees over 50 years of age have acquired new competencies.

- **Inclusion of unemployed persons over 50 years of age in adult training organized by the Employment Agency through referral to the Centre for Human Resources Development and Regional Initiatives (CHRDIR).**

CHRDIR provides training to increase the employability of unemployed persons and to acquire a degree of professional qualification and key competencies.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 288 unemployed persons over 50 were included in training, and their distribution over the years was as follows:

- in 2018 - 74 persons;
- in 2019 - 117 persons;
- in 2020 - 97 persons.

- **Inclusion in training of unemployed persons over 50 years of age under Scheme / Project “Training of adults who have completed literacy courses”, OP HRD 2014-2020**

The main goal of the Project is the integration of some of the most vulnerable groups on the labour market, namely people of working age who have primary and lower education or no education. The implementation of the activities contributes to the improvement of the chances for active behaviour on the labour market of unemployed persons with low or no level of education by motivating them to make efforts to increase their knowledge and skills and to provide conditions for acquiring professional qualification. Under the Project, personal vouchers are provided for inclusion in training for acquiring the first degree of professional qualification or for a part of a profession in the first qualification degree.

For the period 2018 - 2020, a total of 157 persons over 50 years of age were included in the Project. The implementation of the project ended on December 31, 2019.

- **Inclusion in training of employees over 50 years of age under Scheme / Project “Vouchers for employees”, OP HRD 2014-2020**

The overall goal of the project is to increase the qualification and acquisition of key competencies of employed persons in Bulgaria who are employed in enterprises outside the state administration and have a secondary or lower level of education, as well as employed individuals over 54 (who have reached the age of 55) who are employed in enterprises outside the state administration with higher education.

In this way, persons increase the adequacy of their skills according to the current

needs of the business. In the long run, long-term employment or better jobs are facilitated.

For the period 2018 - 2020, 425 employees over 50 years of age were included in training.

### *Agency for People with Disabilities*

#### **National programme for employment of people with disabilities:**

This programme is approved by an order of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and aims to encourage and assist employers from a normal working environment to create conditions for employment of people with permanent disabilities, according to Art. 44, para. 1 of the Law on People with Disabilities, incl. for the fulfilment of quota obligations. On the other hand, it is aimed at people with permanent disabilities, as employment in a normal work environment leads to the fastest socialization of people with permanent disabilities.

Under this programme, funds are allocated for the following areas of action: providing access, adaptation and equipment of workplaces for people with disabilities, as well as qualification and retraining and training for professional development.

- In 2019, **56** workplaces for people with disabilities were equipped, adapted and provided in a normal working environment, through **22** funded projects of employers at the amount of **BGN 395,000**.

- In 2020, **52** workplaces for people with disabilities were equipped, adapted and provided access to the work environment through **28** projects of employers at the amount of **BGN 400,000**.

**The programme covers 30% of elderly people with disabilities.**

#### **Programme for financing targeted projects of specialized enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities:**

##### **A. Socially oriented projects**

The main goal of the programme is to create optimal conditions for the realization of the labour activity of the workers in the specialized enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities, by improving the working environment and production microclimate in accordance with the requirements for healthy and safe working conditions.

- In 2019, working conditions were improved for **360** persons at the amount of BGN **340,000**, of which about **50%** were elderly people with and without disabilities.

- In 2020, working conditions were improved for **360** persons at the amount of BGN **202,000**, of which about **50%** were elderly people with and without disabilities.

##### **B. Business-oriented projects**

The aim of the programme is to help employers from a specialized work environment to provide adequate working conditions for people with permanent disabilities working for them. Project funding is aimed at improving the competitiveness of specialized enterprises and cooperatives of people with disabilities, to stabilize and gain new market positions through technological renewal of activities by opening new and improving the technical condition of existing jobs, including people with disabilities, incl. the elderly.

- In 2019, through the financing of **13** projects with economic orientation, at a total value of **BGN 867,980**, **25** new and re-equipped jobs for people with disabilities were created.

- In 2020, through the financing of **14** business-oriented projects, at a total value of **BGN 933,184**, **25** new and re-equipped jobs for people with disabilities were created.

The programme covers **40%** of the elderly people with disabilities.

#### **Programme for financing projects stimulating employment and self-employment of people with disabilities:**

This programme provides free financial support for people with disabilities to start and develop an independent business. With the implementation of the financed project activities, real social inclusion in the economic and social life of the country of people with disabilities is achieved, incl. older people, a steady income, and improving the quality of life of this target group.

- In 2019, 17 persons with disabilities started self-employment for **BGN 324,248**.
- In 2020, 16 persons with disabilities started self-employment for **BGN 282,299**.

The majority, about 60% of the beneficiaries of the programme, are elderly people with permanent disabilities. Projects of people with permanent disabilities living in small settlements in different regions of Bulgaria predominate.

### *Ministry of Culture*

The Ministry of Culture has taken specific measures to promote **lifelong learning opportunities**:

Purposeful measures are taken on an annual basis for promotion of the work in the network of the public libraries at local and regional level and their establishment as centres for acquisition of digital competences, which is carried out by conducting qualification, coordination and expert-consulting activities.

Improving the conditions in the community centres, museums and libraries for raising the cultural awareness of the population, for providing opportunities for independent learning and non-formal learning for different age and target groups. The measure is implemented through participation in regional meetings related to the activities of the network of museums, libraries and community centres in the country, in order to increase the capacity of the specialists working in them.

Strengthening the proactive role of community centres, museums and libraries as initiators and drivers for community development and stimulating civic activity at the local level through lifelong learning activities through financial support of creative projects of museums, community centres, libraries and publishing houses. Conditions for creative results in cultural institutions with reflection on various target groups for adult lifelong learning were created through competitive sessions under the programmes of the Ministry. In this way, projects of museums and community centres, public libraries for the purchase of books and enrichment of the library fund, as well as the opportunity for publishing houses to present new works on the book market, were supported.

### *Ministry of Transport, Information Technologies and Communication (MTITC)*

The state enterprise "Port Infrastructure" provides employment among the elderly with specific knowledge and experience in the field of port infrastructure and transfer of knowledge and skills to young professionals. Continuity of knowledge in the organization is ensured. The number of employed elderly people with specific knowledge and experience in the field of port infrastructure is 15 for 2019 and 17 for 2020. The young specialists who have received knowledge and experience from the elderly are 12 for 2019 and 17 for 2020.

In the State Enterprise "National Railway Infrastructure Company" nearly 12% of the staff is over 60 years old, and 40% are aged 50-59 years, according to data for 2020. To promote opportunities for participation of older people in the work process and taking into account their potential, NRIC State Enterprise employs retired employees of the system in order to realize their knowledge, skills, potential and transfer them to young employees. In 2020 the working elderly people, retired from the system of NRIC State Enterprise were 337 and the funds for their salary in annual amount to BGN 4,901,328.

## *Ministry of Defence*

For the period 2018 - 2022 the increase of the required age for acquiring the right to a pension for insurance length of service and age under Art. 69, para. 1<sup>3</sup> of the Social Security Code (SSC) (from January 1 of each following year) for servicemen (men and women), which increases by two months until reaching the age of 55, continued.

For servicemen (men and women) acquiring the right to a pension for length of service and age under Article 69, para. 4<sup>4</sup> of the SSC, the age increases by two months until reaching the age of 45.

As of 24.04.2020, the age limit for military service of servicemen who have not exercised the right to a pension for length of service and age under the terms of the Social Security Code has been increased by 3 years.

## *National Social Security Institute (NSSI)*

Bulgaria has mainly reformed its pension system in 2000, which has led to an increase in the retirement age for women and men to 60 and 63, respectively. In 2011 with regard to the conditions for retirement, legislative changes were again adopted to accelerate the reform and from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 a simultaneous increase in age and length of service by 4 months for each calendar year began until reaching the age of 63 and 37 years of insurance experience for women and 65 years of age and 40 years of insurance experience for men. With subsequent changes in the pension system in 2015, effective from January 1, 2016, a partial parametric reform of the Bulgarian pension system was implemented, which is in response to the challenges of the negative demographic trends in our country. Due to the ageing population caused by low birth rates and increasing life expectancy, measures have been taken to increase the retirement age and keep workers longer in the labour market as follows:

- A gradual increase of the age for acquiring the right to a pension for insurance, length of service and age under Art. 68, para. 1 and 2 of the Social Security Code (SSC) for women and men, where in 2037 it is set to equalize and reach 65 years for both sexes. After 31<sup>st</sup> December 2037, the retirement age is expected to be linked to an increase in life expectancy, but there is currently no statutory mechanism.
- The insurance length of service for acquiring the right to a pension for insurance length of service and age under Art. 68, para. 1 and 2 of the SSC is also increasing, and in 2027 is projected to reach 37 years for women and 40 years for men.
- An increase is also provided for the age for acquiring the right to a pension with at least 15 years of the required insurance length of service, and in 2023 the required age will reach 67 years for both sexes.
- The statutory age for acquiring the right to a pension for length of service and age for all other categories of persons, which are an exception to the general principle of retirement under Art. 68 of the SSC (working in the conditions of the first and second category of work, teachers working in special departments, etc.) is also gradually increasing.

As a result of regulatory changes to increase the retirement age, the effective retirement age increased from 58.5 years in 2018 to 59.3 years in 2020.

As a result of demographic processes and the measures taken with regard to the right to a pension, the number of pensioners is steadily declining. The average monthly number of

---

<sup>3</sup> Military servicemen under the Law on Defence and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria (LDAFRB), reservists on active service or conscription in the voluntary reserve of the Law on the Reserve of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Bulgaria (LRAFRB)

<sup>4</sup> Flight crew, parachutists, submarine crews and diving staff



retirees in 2020 was 2,123,017 and decreased by 1.8 per cent compared to 2018, when they were 2,162,890.

The average pension of a pensioner is growing annually and in 2020 amounted to BGN 437.17. The difference in the paid amounts of pensions for women and men continues to be significant, as in the period 2018-2020, the average paid pension of men was by about 30 per cent higher than that of women.

Indicators	2018	2019	2020
<b>Average Monthly Quantity of Retirees (total)</b>	<b>2 162 890</b>	<b>2 145 271</b>	<b>2 123 017</b>
Men	903 101	891 530	877 503
Women	1 259 789	1 253 741	1 245 514
<b>Average age of pensioners with personal newly granted pensions (effective retirement age) in years</b>	<b>58,5</b>	<b>59,1</b>	<b>59,3</b>
Men	58,7	59,3	59,5
Women	58,3	58,9	59,1
<b>Average pension of a pensioner</b>	<b>364,32 BGN</b>	<b>383,03 BGN</b>	<b>437,17 BGN</b>
Men	424,06 BGN	446,83 BGN	508,23 BGN
Women	321,49 BGN	337,66 BGN	387,10 BGN
<b>Quantity of pensioners who have postponed their retirement to 31<sup>st</sup> December of the respective year</b>	<b>90 129</b>	<b>95 207</b>	<b>98 146</b>

Pension reforms in the last twenty years are aimed at longer working lives and stimulating employment among older workers through flexible elements in the pension system, taking into account the economic and social development of the country and the opportunities for older workers to stay in work.

In order to encourage employment after reaching retirement age in Bulgaria, an incentive for longer participation in the labour market has been created since the beginning of 2007, as each year of insurance experience provided by persons after fulfilling the conditions for acquiring the right to a pension for insurance length of service and age under Art. 68, para. 1 and 2 of the SSC participates in the pension formula, as the percentage for deferred retirement is 3 per cent for actual insurance experience acquired for the period from 01.01.2007 to 31.12.2011 and 4 per cent for insurance experience acquired from 01.01.2012.

This measure stimulates the insured individuals to continue working, thus increasing the amount of their pension. For the period 2018-2020 the number of pensioners who have postponed their retirement has increased from 90,129 as of 31.12.2018 to 98,146 as of 31.12.2020.

*Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences  
(IPHS at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS))*

IPHS at the BAS implements the following projects:

**Project "Measures for overcoming the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria" - Fourth working group "Demographic development and work force".** **Deadline: 2017-2018.** The aim of the group was to set priorities for action and to propose specific measures to improve the regulations and policies in the field of labour through the prism of key issues in its development. An assessment of significant demographic, economic and social parameters of the work force and labour resources in the country during the period 2006-2016, the current regulations and applied policies has been made and 24 packages of proposals for changes in legislation and policies for work force in the country development have been developed. A monograph by Borisova-Marinova et al. (2018) "Demographic development, work force and labour resources in Bulgaria" B: IPHS-BAS. "Measures to

overcome the demographic crisis”, Volume IV. Sofia, Publishing House of BAS "Prof. Marin Drinov”, 505 pages, was published.

**Expert opinion "Opportunities for optimizing active ageing in Bulgaria in the field of employment". Deadline: 09-12.2020.** Analysis of the retrospective changes (2006-2020) in the demographic and main socio-economic characteristics of the population and the work force and the prospects for their change by 2050. Assessment of the effects of the current demographic trends on the sustainability of social systems in the country. Proposals for policy changes related to optimizing the opportunities for increasing economic activity and employment among individuals of pre-retirement and retirement age.

**Project "Regional aspects of the distribution of labour resources by municipalities at the beginning of the 21st century".** The aim of the project is to analyse the relationship between the population indicators and the change in the number and ratio of the three main age groups by municipalities. The estimates make it possible to forecast the increase in the number and share of people aged 65 and over, by region. Based on the forecasts, a proposal is being prepared to promote the participation in the labour market of people of pre-retirement and retirement age. Deadline: **2019-2023.**

Regarding the adaptation of the social security system to the ageing population, in 2018 IPHS at the BAS performed the following activities:

- Analysis of the general trends in ageing and in its demographic and socio-economic consequences;
- Analysis of the legal framework in the field of pension insurance and in the field of alternative sources of income for people of retirement age - opportunities and limitations in receiving income from work;
- Analysis of the strategic documents in Bulgaria and the plans that affect the income policies of the population at retirement age and the NSSI practices on pension incomes and analysis of alternative options for combining income from different sources;
- Study of the international experience in the field of pension policies and the income policies of people of retirement age with an emphasis on European practices;
- Survey among people aged 45 and over regarding their attitudes towards retirement and employment.

Based on this, proposals have been prepared to improve the pension system and additional measures have been set to reduce poverty among the elderly and improve their quality of life (15 measures in total).

As a result of a detailed and in-depth study of the planning documents and policies in the field of long-term care in Bulgaria and other countries, three proposals have been made to reform the social security system in order to ensure long-term financing of long-term care.

**2.2. Which special measures did your country set to close the gender pay and pension gap as well to take into account the special situation of older women?**

*Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)*

The policy of equality of women and men is horizontal and it unites the actions of the executive power at all levels. It is carried out through the combined application of an integrated (mainstreaming) approach and temporary incentive (targeted) measures, for which an effective national institutional mechanism is needed.

Since the year 2000, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has organized and coordinated at the national level the implementation of the state policy of the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of equality of women and men (CMD No. 155 of 2000, promulgated, SG

No. 65/2000), in cooperation with many institutions and organizations.

In 2004 the foundations of a national coordination structure at the highest level of the executive power were laid with the establishment of a **National Council for Equality of Women and Men at the Council of Ministers** (CMD No. 313 of 17.11.2004, promulgated, SG No. 104 of 26.11.2004). The Council is a permanent coordinating and advisory body that assists the Council of Ministers in the development and implementation of the state policy on equality of women and men, as well as a body for consultations, cooperation and coordination among central and territorial executive bodies and civil society structures.

Parts of this mechanism are the coordinators for equality of women and men. At present, the central executive bodies and all 28 district administrations have employees appointed as coordinators for equality of women and men.

The implementation of the state policy on equality of women and men in Bulgaria is regulated by the **Law on Equality of Women and Men** (Promulgated, SG, issue 33 of 26.04.2016), the purpose of which is to promote the achievement of equality of women and men, by creating conditions for building an institutional environment and determining the bodies and mechanisms for conducting the state policy on equality of women and men. It regulates the basic principles, approaches, documents, bodies and mechanisms for the implementation of a unified state policy on equality of women and men.

In order to ensure equal opportunities in access to the labour market, the realization on the labour market and equal pay for men and women, the legislation in force in the Republic of Bulgaria does not differentiate on the basis of "gender" between workers, except in specific cases of protection of women during pregnancy, childbirth and care for young children.

The National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men is the main strategic document of the conducted unified policy on equality of women and men. It is aimed at providing equal opportunities for women and men for full and active participation in all areas of life and non-discrimination on the grounds of gender.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy coordinates the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the implementation of the main programming document. Currently, a National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men for the period 2021-2030 is being implemented (adopted by the Council of Ministers with CMD No. 969 of 30.12.2020).

The National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men is implemented through National Action Plans for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men, which are adopted by the Council of Ministers. The plans contain specific measures from the competencies of various institutions and organizations in priority areas in the National Strategy.

From 2017 until now, three National Action Plans for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men have been prepared and adopted: the National Action Plan for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men for 2018, the National Action Plan for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men for 2019-2020 and the National Action Plan for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men for 2021-2022.

The current National Action Plan for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men 2021-2022 (adopted by the Council of Ministers with CMD No. 454 of 17 June 2021) includes measures according to the priority areas in the National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality of Women and Men 2021-2030: equality of women and men in the labour market and equal degree of economic independence; reducing the gender pay and income gap; promoting equality of women and men in decision-making processes; combating violence and protecting and supporting victims; overcoming gender stereotypes in various spheres of public life, and sexism.

The measures are aimed at better reconciling work and private life and at providing employment to unemployed persons by providing childcare opportunities; encouraging

employers to hire unemployed persons; developing the skills of unemployed women through vocational training to increase their participation in the labour market; reducing gender disparities in income and promoting equal degrees of economic independence; prevention of human trafficking and provision of support and protection to its victims, provision of social services to victims of violence, activities to increase the capacity of employed experts, media monitoring, awareness raising activities, etc.

According to EUROSTAT data for 2020, the employment of women aged 15-64 in Bulgaria was 64.3% (compared to 62.5% on average for the EU), and for men aged 15-64 respectively 72.5% for Bulgaria (72.9% on average for the EU).

According to preliminary EUROSTAT data for 2019, the gender pay gap in Bulgaria was 14.1%, the same as the EU gender pay gap.

According to the 2020 edition of the Gender Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality, Bulgaria ranks 6th in the EU in the category “Power”.

The results of the implementation of the plans, in accordance with the Strategy, are presented in an annual administrative report on equality of women and men, which takes into account the implementation of the set measures and the progress in the implemented policy. The report is prepared by the MLSP, summarizing the information from the involved institutions and approved by the Council of Ministers.

The Council of Ministers adopted a draft **Law for Amending and Supplementing the State Social Insurance Budget Act for 2021**, which proposes a package of measures that permanently ensure higher pension income for both current and future pensioners. The proposed amendments guarantee that all pensioners (about 2,080.0 thousand) will receive an increase of their pension income from the state social insurance, whereas the average increase per pensioner is BGN 64.

The project envisages a change in the applied weight of one year of insurance in the pension formula, which will calculate the amount of pensions related to employment with the starting date after the entry into force of the law on October 1, 2021. From the beginning of 2019 it is 1.2 per cent. The law envisages its increase to 1.35 per cent, which is an increase of 12.5 per cent. In this way, the adequacy of newly granted pensions will be increased, longer participation of individuals in the labour market is encouraged and the percentage of replacement of past labour incomes is increased.

In order to ensure equality, it is envisaged that all pensions granted before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 will be recalculated with the higher weight of the insurance period. The actual increase may be greater than 12.5 per cent if the recalculated actual amount of the pension happens to be below the proposed by the law new minimum amount, for the respective type, because in this case it will be determined by the minimum guaranteed.

2.3. Highlight in a nutshell **the most important achievement during the last 20 years** in recognizing the potential embedded in the **employment of older workers and developing labour market strategies** to promote maximum participation opportunities for workers of all ages? Give some recommendations for future action (what is planned / needs to be done).

#### *Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)*

Employment policy is an important element of the integrated policies for active ageing. In implementation of the priority area of the Updated Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2013-2020 to increase labour force supply, measures have been implemented aimed at activating the unemployed persons over 50 years of age, who are one of the vulnerable groups on the labour market. The goal set in the Strategy for achieving

employment among the elderly (55-64) of 53% in 2020 has been met. According to the Labour Force Survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, in 2020 the employment rate for this group reached 64.2%.

The implementation of a new Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030 has started, adopted by Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 515 of 15 July 2021. In the long run, priority areas and activities are set, which will encourage the active participation in the labour market of people from different age groups, including through participation in lifelong learning to build the necessary skills in older people, which are an important prerequisite for long working life.

### 3. Ensuring ageing with dignity

**3.1. Which measures have been contributing to protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and dignity, promoting their autonomy, self-determination and participation in society, and making sure that no law, policy or programme leaves room for discrimination of any kind along RIS commitments 7, 8, 9 and 10 and the goals of the Lisbon Declaration?**

- ❖ protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and dignity, promoting their autonomy, self-determination and participation in society;
- ❖ supporting the necessary infrastructure and assistance to prevent all types of abuse and violence against older persons;
- ❖ fostering the development of innovative methods and services as well as user- and age-friendly technology and products;
- ❖ raising quality standards for integrated social and long-term care and health services and continuously adapting the status, training and working conditions of professional care workers;
- ❖ supporting research on individual and population ageing processes to better address emerging needs in ageing societies;
- ❖ promoting the participation of both persons with dementia and/or mental and behavioural disorders and their informal carers in social and community life;
- ❖ respecting the self-determination, independence and dignity of older persons, especially, but not limited to, towards the end of life.

#### *Agency for Social Assistance (ASA)*

##### **Social assistance**

**Social assistance** is granted after all possibilities for self-support and assistance from those obliged by law to provide it have been exhausted. The right to social assistance is subject to an assessment of each individual case. It depends on income, property status, marital status, health status, employment, age and other established circumstances. Social assistance is granted on the basis of a social report prepared on the basis of a social survey conducted at the home of persons and families, establishing the existence of conditions for exercising the right to assistance.

One of the main accents in the conducted social policy is the **protection of persons with the lowest incomes, whereas special attention is paid to the older single persons and persons with disabilities.**

The protection of low-income persons is regulated by the Social Assistance Act, the Regulations for its implementation and Ordinance No. RD 07-5 / 2008 of the Minister of

Labour and Social Policy on the terms and conditions for granting targeted heating costs assistance.

**Under the Law on Social Assistance, monthly, targeted and one-time benefits are provided.**

**Monthly benefits** support persons and families whose income is below a certain differentiated minimum income. The basis for determining the right to monthly social assistance and the amount of benefits is the guaranteed minimum income (amounting to BGN 75). The Regulations for the implementation of the Social Assistance Act define 11 groups at-risk and the respective individual percentage (from 20% to 165%), which adjusts the guaranteed minimum income for each person. In determining these individual percentages for each target group, the factors age, health status, marital status, employment and study employment, as well as the presence of cohabitation with other persons or families are taken into account. They are highest for the older persons living alone and for persons with permanent disabilities, and in such defined groups there is a gradation depending on age (persons over 65 and over 75 years of age) and a specified degree of permanent disability (over 50% , over 70% and over 90%).

For the period 2022-2024 a gradual change of the individual percentages under Article 9 of RISAA is envisaged through an adjustment in the direction of their increase.

According to information provided by Social Assistance Directorates (SAD) in 2018, with monthly allowances under Art. 9 of RISAA in the country an average of 27,408 persons and families were supported per month. For 2019, an average of 23,699 persons and families were supported on the same basis, and in 2020 - 23,702 persons and families. For the period January-June 2021, the average monthly allowance was granted to 23,513 persons and families.

The **targeted assistance** is intended to help persons and families meet specific needs, such as paying municipal rent (**for older persons living alone over 75 years of age**). In 2018, an average of 147 persons and families per month were supported. In 2019, an average of 149 persons and families per month were supported. In 2020, an average of 136 persons and families per month were supported. As of June 30, 2021, an average of 109 persons and families per month were supported. The data also includes older persons living alone over 75 years of age.

**One-time benefits** are granted to cover incidental health, communal, educational and other needs. Emphasis is given on the specific social work and assessment of each individual case in order to prepare an objective assessment of the social, property and health status of the assisted persons and families. This aid may not exceed 5 times the guaranteed minimum monthly income. For 2018 the total number of beneficiaries to one-time granted assistance in the country was 6 963, for 2019 - 7 059, for 2020 - 14 380. As of June 30, 2021 one-time aid is provided to 6 272 persons and families.

With granting **targeted heating aid**, heating is provided during the winter period (5 months - from November to March inclusive), to people in the most difficult social situation. Here, as in the case of monthly social assistance, **the highest individual percentage is set for older persons living alone and persons with permanent disabilities** in compliance with the principles described above. The annual amendments to Ordinance No. RD 07-5 of 16.05.2008 on the terms and conditions for granting targeted heating aid, aim to compensate for increases in the price of electricity, which directly affects the most vulnerable social groups included in the targeted energy assistance programme. Applications should be submitted from July 1 to October 31 of the respective year. During the heating season 2018/2019, targeted heating aid was provided to 210,234 persons and families, for the heating season 2019/2020 - to 252,615 persons and families, for the heating season 2020/2021 - to 283,680 persons and families.

The Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria provides in 2021 for the pensioners in Bulgaria, whose pension or the sum of the pensions together with the

supplements and compensations to them is from BGN 300.01 to BGN 369 inclusive, to receive one-time annual financial support for food products in the amount of BGN 120. The aid is paid through the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy by the territorial divisions of the Social Assistance Agency. The funds are paid by SAD on the basis of information provided by the National Social Security Institute for people with a pension in the specified range and the way in which it is paid to them - through a post office in the country or in a personal bank account. As of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021, annual financial support was paid to 374,890 pensioners.

With the approval of the National Action Plan for Employment for 2020, the **Provision of Home Care National Programme** was introduced.

The programme has been developed in response to the identified needs for the care of people who do not fall within the scope of existing measures and programmes, including the personal assistance mechanism. At the same time, it is aimed at providing employment to unemployed persons as domestic helpers for providing personal care in the home environment to people with degree of 80 to 89.99 % of permanently reduced working capacity or type and degree of disability with the right to external assistance, and people over 65 years of age incapable of self-care, who have not been certified in accordance with the relevant procedure by the bodies of the Medical Expertise in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The programme has national coverage and was implemented until 31.12.2020. Employers under it were the municipal administrations. The Social Assistance Agency, through the Social Assistance Directorates, participates with specific commitments in the implementation of the Programme, as follows:

- Informing citizens about the terms and conditions for inclusion in the Programme;
- Checking the accuracy of the declared data and the existence of conditions for inclusion in the Programme of persons in need of personal care at home.

According to data from the municipal administrations, 6852 users were included in the Programme in the year 2020.

**Social services** are activities that support and expand the opportunities of persons to lead an independent lifestyle. Social services are based on social work and are aimed at supporting persons to carry out their daily activities and achieve social inclusion. They are provided according to the desire and personal choice of the persons who need them. A necessary prerequisite for the use of social services is the health condition of the persons and their needs to be correspondent to the specifics of the provided social services.

Community social services are a key factor for effective social inclusion, the fight against poverty and the participation of all vulnerable groups in society. In recent years, social services policy has focused on developing community-based and home-based services to replace the institutional model of care.

In order to develop long-term care for the elderly and improve their quality of life in the beginning of 2014, a National Strategy for Long-Term Care was adopted (CM Decision No. 2 of 07.01.2014). The strategy envisages the establishment of accessible and quality services in the community and in home environment, which will provide an opportunity for social inclusion of people with disabilities and the elderly and at the same time have a preventive role in relation to the institutionalization of these persons. Serious emphasis in the Strategy is placed on the deinstitutionalization of care for people with disabilities and the elderly, the development of services in home environment and the support of families with increased responsibility for the care of dependent family members. Promoting synergies between social and health services, including the development of innovative cross-sectoral services, as well as the implementation of an integrated approach, are also among the priorities in the Strategy. Among the main priorities of the Strategy is the creation of a more effective mechanism for financing long-term care and achieving sustainable growth of financial resources for services in the community and at home.

In 2020, the legislation concerning social services underwent a significant change - the Social Services Act (SSA) and the Regulations for the Implementation of the SSA came into force, outlining the leading role of municipalities in conducting state policy in the social sphere.

From the beginning of 2021, a new Assistant Support social service was launched. The target group, which covers the service, are persons over working age in inability to self-care, who do not have a certain degree of reduced working capacity, adults with permanent disabilities with certain external assistance, who do not receive assistance, other help or who do not receive home care assistance under another law.

For 2021, 19 993 users in 265 municipalities have been subsidized under Assistant Support. So far, the social Assistant Support service has been launched in 262 municipalities and is fully managed by them.

***The functioning social services, delegated by the state as of 30.06.2021 are:***

***Specialized institutions for adults:***

1. Centres for adults with mental retardation - 27 pieces, capacity 2 030;
2. Centres for adults with mental disorders - 13, capacity 968;
3. Centres for adults with physical disabilities - 21, capacity 1,278;
4. Centres for adults with sensory disorders - 4, capacity 133;
5. Centres for adults with dementia - 14, capacity 832;
6. Centres for older people - 82, capacity 5 598.

***Community social services for adults:***

1. Day care centres for adults with disabilities - 84, capacity 2,015;
2. Day care centres for adults with disabilities - 79, capacity 1 923;
3. Day care centres for adults with disabilities - weekly care - 5; capacity 92;
4. Day care centres for older people - 41, capacity 965;
5. Centres for social rehabilitation and integration - 112, capacity 3 387.

***Social services in the community - residential type for adults:***

1. Sheltered housings - 126, capacity 1 001;
2. Sheltered housing for persons with mental disorders - 27, capacity 230;
3. Sheltered housing for persons with mental retardation - 86, capacity 671;
4. Sheltered housing for persons with physical disabilities - 13, capacity 100;
5. Monitored dwellings - 18, capacity 88;
6. Transitional dwellings - 9 units, capacity 78;
7. Family-type accommodation centres (FTAC) for adults - 150, capacity 1 999;
8. Family-type accommodation centres for young people with disabilities - 12, capacity 168;
9. Family-type accommodation centres for adults with mental disorders - 43, capacity 593;
10. Family-type accommodation centres for adults with dementia - 24, with a capacity of 321;
11. Family-type accommodation centres for adults with mental retardation - 43, capacity 540;
12. Family-type accommodation centres for adults with physical disabilities - 22, capacity 294;
13. Family-type accommodation centres for older people - 6, capacity 83;
14. Crisis centres for persons - 8, capacity 94;
15. Temporary accommodation centres for persons - 13, capacity 667;
16. Shelters for persons - 1, capacity 25.

In the context of the set policies, the efforts of the **Social Assistance Agency (ASA)** continue to be aimed at increasing the number of social services in the community and the phasing out of all specialized institutions for adults with disabilities. According to the current Action Plan for the period 2018-2021 for the implementation of the National Strategy for



Long-Term Care, 9 specialized institutions for adults with mental disorders and mental retardation are closed and the capacity of one is reduced.

### ***Law on Integration of People with Disabilities***

Through the **Law on Integration of People with Disabilities (LIPD)** (repealed, in force until 31.12.2018) and the Regulations for its implementation were created guarantees and incentives for integration and equality of people with disabilities, incl. also the elderly with disabilities, and the parameters of their socio-economic protection were outlined by providing the following additional means to compensate for the disability:

- Monthly supplement for social integration - differentiated sum of funds supplementing own income, intended to cover additional costs for transport services, information and telecommunication services, training, balneotherapy and rehabilitation services (also used by the person's companion when in ED of TEMC / NEMC external assistance is prescribed), diet and medicines, available information and rent of municipal housing. The amount of the monthly supplement was determined as a percentage of guaranteed minimum income (GMI), determined by the Council of Ministers, which as of 31.12.2018 is BGN 75. As of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018, 553 850 individuals have been supported.

- Targeted assistance for the manufacture, purchase and repair of aids, devices, equipment and / or medical devices (ADE and / or MD was paid only for ADE and / or MD, specified in the lists under Article 35d, para. 1 of the Law on Integration of People with Disabilities (LIPD), with the exception of medical devices, which are paid in full or in part by the National Health Insurance Fund. As of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018, an average of 8,075 individuals were supported per month.

- Targeted assistance for the purchase and /or adaptation of a personal motor vehicle, amounting to BGN 1,200, granted to persons with permanent disabilities whose mobility is difficult, if the average monthly income of a family member for the last 12 months is equal to or less than three times the guaranteed minimum income, and if they have a TEMC / NEMC over 90% permanently reduced working capacity or type and degree of disability and are working or studying. As of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018, 5 individuals have been supported.

- One-time targeted assistance of up to BGN 600 for housing reconstruction, which is granted to persons with over 90% permanently reduced working capacity /type and degree of disability, moving in a wheelchair, if the average monthly income of a family member for the last 12 months is equal to or less than twice the guaranteed minimum income. As of December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018, 7 individuals have been supported.

### ***Law on People with Disabilities***

As of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2019, the **Law on People with Disabilities (LPD)** came in force, which repealed the then existing LIPD. LPD regulates public relations related to the exercise of the rights of people with disabilities in the Republic of Bulgaria, including the elderly. The law aims to create conditions for the social inclusion of people with disabilities, to promote respect for their human dignity and to provide support for them and their families.

According to Art. 20 of the LPD, people with disabilities according to their needs are entitled to individual needs assessment, which is complex and examines the functional difficulties of a person with disabilities related to his/her health and the presence of barriers to daily and other activities, as well as the type of support.

It is prepared at the current address of the person with a disability by a specialized department in the Social Assistance Directorates (SAD) of the ASA, at the request of the person with a disability or a person authorized by him/her.

Based on the findings of the individual needs assessment, the Director of the SAD or an official authorized by him/her shall issue an order granting monthly financial support and / or granting targeted assistance.

Pursuant to the provision of Art. 24, para. 2 of the LPD, people with permanent

disabilities according to the individual assessment of their needs are entitled to:

1. financial support for providing aids, devices, equipment and medical devices;
2. financial support for the purchase of a personal motor vehicle;
3. financial support for adaptation of housing;
4. financial support for balneotherapy and /or rehabilitation services;
5. financial support for rent of municipal housing;
6. monthly financial support.

The **financial support** consists of 2 components - monthly financial support according to the degree of disability and targeted assistance according to the type of disability. It is a percentage of the poverty line, which is updated annually by a Decree of the Council of Ministers. For 2019, the poverty line amounts to BGN 348.00; for 2020 - BGN 363.00; for 2021 - BGN 369.00, which is a prerequisite for an increase in the allocated funds during the year compared to the previous one.

People with permanent disabilities over the age of 18 are entitled to monthly financial support as follows:

- From 50 to 70.99 per cent degree of disability - amounting to 7 per cent of the poverty line;
- From 71 to 90 per cent degree of disability - amounting to 15 per cent of the poverty line;
- Over 90 per cent degree of disability - amounting to 25 per cent of the poverty line;
- Over 90 per cent degree of disability with external assistance, who receive a social disability pension - amounting to 57 per cent of the poverty line.

For 2019, 735,386 persons were supported with monthly financial support, in the total amount of BGN 441,499,134; for 2020 - 757 109, amounting to BGN 461,879,918 and from 01.01.2021 to 30.06.2021. - 708 105, amounting to BGN 230,614,178.

**Targeted assistance:**

**1. Provision of aids, devices, equipment and medical devices (ADEMD):**

- for 2019 – 77 684 persons, amount – 32 921 367 BGN;
- for 2020 – 74 638 persons, amount – 34 325 269 BGN;
- until 30.06.2021 – 36 860 persons, amount – 17 539 618 BGN;

**2. Purchase of a personal motor vehicle:**

- for 2019 – 7 persons, amount – 8 952 BGN;
- for 2020 – 3 persons, amount – 3 237 BGN;
- until 30.06.2021 – 4 persons, paid amount – 5 352 BGN;

**3. Adaptation of housing:**

- for 2019 – 30 persons, amount – 19 577 BGN;
- for 2020 – 23 persons, paid amount – 14 971 BGN;
- until 30.06.2021 – 3 persons, amount – 2 214 BGN;

**4. Balneotherapy and /or rehabilitation:**

- for 2019 – 4 114 persons, amount – 1 547 139 BGN;
- under Art. 76, para. 6 of the LPD – 1395, amount – 529 045 BGN;
- for 2020 – 2 650 persons, amount – 1 098 564 BGN;
- under Art. 76, para. 6 of the LPD – 813, amount – 334 516 BGN;
- until 30.06.2021 – 646 persons, amount – 259 223 BGN;
- under Art. 76, para. 6 of the LPD – 188, amount – 74 332 BGN

**5. Rent of municipal housing:**

- for 2019 – 1 232 persons, amount – 440 450 BGN;
- for 2020 – 1 268 persons, amount – 497 670 BGN;
- until 30.06.2021 – 1 215 persons, amount – 263 343 BGN;

**6. Cash aid for travel expenses in the country for persons who have received ADEMD:**

- for 2019 – 702 persons, amount – 39 817 BGN;
- for 2020 – 632 persons, amount – 41 419 BGN;
- until 30.06.2021 – 313 persons, amount – 21 586 BGN.

#### ***Law for Personal Assistance***

The **Law for Personal Assistance (LPA)** was promulgated in the State Gazette, issue 105 of 18.12.2018, which entered into force on 01.01.2019. The LPA regulates a new type of support, defined as a mechanism to support people with disabilities, including the elderly, to exercise their rights, to participate fully in society, to have opportunities for choice, independent living, active inclusion and participation in society, and access to services and activities that meet their individual needs of a personal, home or social nature and for overhauling the barriers to their functional limitations.

The mechanism is based on state-guaranteed financial support, individual needs and choices of people with disabilities. It enables persons with disabilities who have an individual needs assessment under Chapter Three of the LPD to be included in the personal assistance mechanism. It is prepared by specialized departments of the SAD.

Based on the findings of the individual needs assessment, the Director of the SAD or an official authorized by him/her shall issue a referral for the provision of personal assistance with a specified number of hours. A person with a disability who has an individual needs assessment and has been issued a referral under Chapter Three of the LPD with a certain number of hours for personal assistance may request the reintroduction of the personal assistance mechanism, to the mayor, at this person current address. The re-introduction and financing of the personal assistance mechanism has been carried out from 01.09.2019.

Users of personal assistance in accordance with the provisions of Art. 8 of the LPA may be:

1. A person with permanent disability with established type and degree of disability or degree of permanently reduced working capacity with certain external assistance;
2. A child with 90 and over 90 per cent type and degree of disability or degree of permanently reduced working capacity without certain external assistance;

#### **Current data on the implementation of the Law for Personal Assistance:**

From 01.04.2019 until 30.06.2021 51,083 applications have been submitted for carrying out individual assessment of the needs with declared need for personal assistance. The issued directions were 49 435. The valid contracts as of 30.06.2021 were 40,310 (38 975 users and 40 185 assistants).

#### ***Ordinance No. H-19 of 02.12.2008***

Persons with 50% and over 50% reduced working capacity or type and degree of disability (including the elderly with disabilities) are exempt from paying a vignette fee for a car, which is his/her property or marital common property, with a volume of the engine up to 2000 cc and power up to 117.64 kW (160 hp).

#### **Information on the 2014-2020 Food and /or Basic Material Assistance Operational Programme**

During the period under review, **support was provided for meeting the food and food products needs of persons from vulnerable groups** with below the poverty line or no income, including **elderly people living alone**, under the Food and /or Basic Material Assistance Operational Programme from the Fund for European Assistance to the Most Deprived Persons for the period 2014-2020. The programme allocated funds in the amount of BGN 241,177,458 to overcoming the main material deprivation of poor households and persons in the country - the deprivation of food. The support is realized in the form of providing individual food packages and provision of hot lunch for the poorest and most in-need persons from the defined target groups. In parallel with the provision of assistance under the programme, the partner organizations implement accompanying measures. The support

with **food packages and hot lunch** is intended for the poorest and most in-need persons from target groups determined by an Ordinance of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. These are mainly persons and families who, due to low income or lack of income, are subject to social assistance, as well as persons with severe disabilities, homeless persons and others who have been found to need this type of support. The ordinance defines a main target group for both types of support under the programme, as well as an additional target group that can receive unallocated or undelivered food products. Food packages are provided annually to persons and families supported by targeted assistance for heating, most of whom are elderly.

During the period December 2018 - May 2019, a total of 7,168,569 tons of food products were distributed in the form of 269,129 individual food packages, reaching 502,202 persons from the main and additional target groups. During the period 27.11.2019 – 28.02.2020, 451,707 people and their family members were supported, and nearly 5,934 tons of food were distributed in the form of 241,495 individual food packages. During the period 03.04.2020 - 11.06.2020 1 405 tonnes of basic foodstuff was distributed for a total of 73 036 persons, incl. family members, as part of measures taken to support disadvantaged persons and families, given the epidemic situation. During the period 05.10.2020 - 04.12.2020 a total of 6 358.41 tons of food products were distributed in the form of 279 983 individual food packages, which reached up to 406 587 persons from the main target group. Undistributed and undelivered food products with a total weight of 137.93 tons were provided in the period from 18.01.2021 to 15.02.2021 to 9 089 persons and family members from the additional target groups, in the form of 5 846 food packages. Nearly one third of the persons assisted with food packages are at the age of 65 and over.

Hot lunch has been provided by municipalities and regions throughout the country from 2015 to 30.04.2020. During the implementation period, an average of 50,000 persons in need were covered annually, incl. families and older people living alone who have low income and cannot support themselves. The predominant group of service users are elderly people over 65 years of age.

On 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021, a second amendment to the Food and /or Basic Material Assistance Operational Programme for the period 2014-2020 was approved, which increased the programme budget for activities and measures to overcome the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis through the REACT-EU mechanism. With funds amounting to BGN 39 million, 203 municipalities provide hot lunch to 58,795 persons without income or with low income below the poverty line - people in need due to the deteriorating economic situation in the country, people who due to their age or disability, are in higher risk of infection and unfavourable course of disease, persons under quarantine - without income or with low income below the poverty line, having no relatives to support them, persons, subject to social assistance, for whom a need of additional support has been identified, who in the conditions of an emergency epidemic situation are unable to meet their basic living needs. In the context of the pandemic emergency, the provision of a hot lunch has proved to be a significant aid, as it provides a real opportunity for the poorest and most vulnerable people to continue to have food, on the one hand, and receive it at home on the other hand, when anti-epidemic measures require it.

Following a public procurement procedure, contracts have been concluded for the **delivery of food products** to the warehouses of the partner organization Bulgarian Red Cross Association, which will distribute them after the completion of the deliveries and the final formation of the package. Estimates for 2021 show that by the end of the year, more than 270,000 food packages will be distributed, reaching up to 500,000 people and their families.

The funds **for the new 2021-2027 programming period**, which will provide food and material support under the programme, are almost twice as much as in the current period. This makes it possible to expand the scope of support both as a source and as target groups, whom the aid will reach. Reducing the number of elderly people living in poverty by meeting basic /existential needs, and the first step towards taking comprehensive and sustainable measures

for social inclusion is one of the goals of the new programme. Food assistance and material support for the elderly are provided by delivering **food packages, hygiene materials and hot lunch, as well as referral to appropriate integrated social and health services**. It is expected that more than 600,000 low-income and disadvantaged people will receive aid under the programme.

Experience so far has shown that this form of support is vital. The provision of hot food and basic foodstuff has become an effective and timely measure to support the unprecedented epidemic situation. Therefore, investment in the provision of nourishing and varied food will continue.

### *Agency for People with Disabilities*

#### **Funding of projects for building an accessible architectural environment for people with disabilities:**

The programme aims to overcome the social isolation of **people with permanent disabilities of all ages** by building access and adapting cultural, historical and sports sites. In this way, overcoming the architectural barriers of the external and internal environment of the sites, as well as providing utilities, people with disabilities are given the opportunity to touch the cultural, historical and sports heritage.

- In 2019, access was provided for people with disabilities of all ages to **10** cultural, historical and sports sites, by financing projects at the amount of **BGN 134,424**.
- In 2020, access is provided for people with disabilities of all ages to **12** cultural, historical and sports sites, by financing projects at the amount of **BGN 389,941**.

### *Ministry of Health*

Protection of the health of Bulgarian citizens as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being is defined as a national priority and is guaranteed by the state through the principles of equality in the use of health services, provision of affordable and quality health care, health promotion and integrated prevention of diseases, prevention and reduction of the risk for the health of citizens from the adverse effects of environmental factors. Health services are financed from various sources - state budget, compulsory health insurance, additional voluntary health insurance and voluntary payment by the patient.

The state provides emergency medical care to all those in need and special health care for children, pregnant women, mothers of children up to one year and persons with physical disabilities and mental disorders. The budget of the Ministry of Health finances emergency medical care, intensive care of uninsured individuals, psychiatric care, transplantation of organs, tissues and cells, assisted reproduction, provision of blood and blood products, provision of medical help to patients with certain infectious diseases, provision of medical help to patients with non-specific lung diseases, outpatient monitoring of uninsured persons with skin and venereal diseases, medical examinations for type and degree of disability and permanent incapacity for work, mandatory immunizations and reimmunizations, etc.

Health insurance is mandatory for Bulgarian citizens, with the exception of several groups that are insured by the state - children up to 18 years of age, students, pensioners, military invalids, people accommodated in specialized institutions for social services, the socially disadvantaged, etc. Health insured persons have access to medical care within the scope of the package of health activities guaranteed by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) budget, which guarantees them medical and health care in accordance with the stage, development and severity of the disease.

The main cause of morbidity, disability and mortality among the population aged 65 and over, are chronic non-communicable diseases, as the factors that determine them act long

before reaching this age. Improving the quality of life and reducing the severity of chronic diseases and disabilities require measures related to health promotion, disease prevention, early diagnosis, timely treatment and better health management. An important approach in terms of achieving an effect for the whole population is the promotion in various ways of early detection of diseases, including active participation in conducting preventive prophylactic examinations, as well as conducting screening programmes for major and debilitating diseases.

In this respect, the activities for health promotion, prevention and outpatient monitoring of diseases are included in the package of health activities paid for by the NHIF. Primary prophylaxis is performed by general practitioners, who, based on the results of prophylactic examinations of persons over 18 years of age, form risk groups of patients for the development of heart disease, diabetes mellitus, malignant neoplasms and others. Persons included in the risk groups have the right to consult with other specialists and conduct additional medical diagnostic tests. Depending on the disease, secondary prophylaxis is carried out through outpatient monitoring by a general practitioner and/ or a specialist doctor. Within the outpatient monitoring, opportunities are provided for examinations, tests and consultations, taking into account the individual features of the course of the disease in each case. The ordinance does not fix the number of examinations, tests and consultations. The NHIF guarantees financially that all medical institutions that have concluded a contract with the NHIF have the opportunity to perform the activities included in the package paid by the fund.

Outside the scope of health insurance, every Bulgarian citizen has the right to access to care included in national, regional and municipal health programmes, which are also outside the scope of health insurance, as well as access to medical services based on contracts for medical insurance and of medical services for a fee.

In addition, it should be noted that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the NHIF paid additionally, according to a special methodology, to the primary outpatient care providers for work in settlements with unfavourable working conditions. Since 2020, funding has been introduced from the NHIF budget for the activities of providers of medical care, dental care and medical diagnostic activities for work under unfavourable conditions in a declared epidemic situation.

### *National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF)*

In order to prevent socially significant and priority diseases for the country, the NHIF provides for preventive examinations of the health insured persons (HIP) by general practitioners (GP) - once within a calendar year, according to Annex No. 2 of Ordinance No. 8 of 2016 for preventive examinations and medical examinations and the National Framework Agreement for medical activities.

For all adults HIP annually at the preventive examination is performed: history taking, assessment of mental status, examination of visual acuity, measurement of blood pressure, electrocardiogram, urine test, calculation of body mass index. Determination of blood sugar in the laboratory is performed in the presence of FINDRISK risk > 12.

Full blood count (FBC) is tested annually for HIP over 65 years, for HIP from 30 to 65 - once every 5 years. For men over 40 years of age and for women over 50 years of age triglycerides, total and HDL-cholesterol are tested - (for persons without cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, chronic renal failure), LDL - cholesterol /for persons with cardiovascular disease, diabetes mellitus, chronic renal failure/ - once every 5 years. An SSORE risk assessment is performed according to SCORE.

For women from 50 to 69 years of age, mammography of the mammary glands once every 2 years is included. In men at and over 50, a tumour marker PSA is tested - once every

2 years, and in case of established values over 10ng /ml, a mandatory consultation with a urologist is performed.

On HIP, included in the groups of persons with risk factors for the development of the disease, GP, if necessary, consults a specialist and appoints additional medical diagnostic tests. Preventive activity of adult health insured persons with risk factors for the development of the disease is also performed by doctors specializing in Cardiology, Endocrinology and Metabolic Diseases, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Surgery and Urology.

The National Health Insurance Fund finances compulsory immunizations and re-immunizations, as well as immunizations under national programmes through the transfer of funds from the Ministry of Health. Immunizations and re-immunizations are performed by primary outpatient medical care (POMC) providers for persons entered in their registries by target groups defined in the programmes. In addition to the mandatory re-immunizations against diphtheria and tetanus, the NHIF also pays for recommended immunizations, in compliance with the requirements set out in Ordinance No. 15 of 2005 for immunizations in the Republic of Bulgaria.

Every year, influenza epidemics cause serious health, economic and social problems due to high morbidity, severe complications and mortality, especially for vulnerable groups - children, the elderly and people with certain chronic diseases. For reduction of the severe course and complications of influenza, and in implementation of the 2019-2022 National Programme for Improvement of Vaccine Prophylaxis of Seasonal Influenza, approved by Decision No. 6 / 10.01.2019 of the Council of Ministers, the National Health Insurance Fund pays by transfer of funds from the Ministry of Health, prophylactic vaccines against seasonal flu for persons at and over 65 years of age.

The incidence of chronic non-communicable diseases increases with age. These diseases often lead to disability, which worsens the quality of life of the elderly, and are also a cause for high premature mortality.

#### **Physiotherapy and rehabilitation in outpatient and inpatient care.**

In outpatient medical care, the need for rehabilitation measures for health insured persons is established by a specialist doctor and /or by the general practitioner (“personal”) doctor, and the treatment is performed according to a physiotherapeutic course of treatment prescribed by the specialist in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine. This is also essential for people after an illness or surgery, in order to achieve the maximum therapeutic effect and prevention of further injuries.

Physiotherapy and rehabilitation in hospital care is provided through clinical paths for physical medicine and rehabilitation. They achieve better identification and control of chronic diseases. The focus is on reducing disability and increasing the ability of people to remain economically active, and the physical medicine and rehabilitation play an important role. Leading are diseases of the central nervous system, peripheral nervous system, cerebral palsy and diseases of the locomotive system, included in the clinical path (CP). For this purpose, an optimal agreement has been reached between the National Health Insurance Fund and the medical institutions in the part Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

For the elderly with Alzheimer's disease the NHIF has been paying since 2013 for home remedies. 153,973.38 BGN were paid in 2018 for 907 health insured persons, and respectively 152,689.10 BGN in 2019 for 787 health insured persons. In 2020, 667 patients with Alzheimer's disease referred to the NHIF. The reimbursed value for medicinal products for home treatment was BGN 97,258.08.

From June 2021, the prescribing and dispensing of medicinal products paid for by the NHIF is done only on electronic prescriptions. They can be made up in all pharmacies, working under contract with the NHIF, regardless of their location or the choice of a general practitioner by the health insured persons.

The NHIF, as a health insurance fund, managing and spending the funds from

compulsory health insurance contributions to pay for a package of health activities guaranteed by its budget, is also responsible for providing health insured persons with information about their rights at all levels of access to health services. On the website of the institution - [www.nhif.bg](http://www.nhif.bg) a special section has been developed with subsections: For the Citizens and Online Consultations, where up-to-date materials related to the rights of the health insured are published. In the section Online Consultations, the idea is to enable citizens to ask questions at any time of the day, including holidays and weekends. The online service Online Consultations is not only available to, but also extremely used by users.

The NHIF has created an opportunity for citizens, mostly people over the age of 60, who do not use the Internet, to ask their questions not only on the NHIF website, but also on the spot - at the NHIF reception, as well as over the hotline - 0800 14 800, and over specified landlines, which can be dialled from all over the country. On the website of the National Health Insurance Fund there is an opportunity for the health insured persons to make inquiries on all contractual partners and activities carried out through the health insurance fund on the territory of the whole country.

### *Ministry of Education and Science*

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) supports the construction and operation of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe scientific infrastructure (SHARE) Bulgaria to the eponymous Pan European scientific infrastructure SHARE ERIC in implementation of the 2020 – 2027 National Roadmap for Scientific Infrastructure.

SHARE is a longitudinal, international comparative survey among citizens at and over 50 years of age in all Member States of the European Union and Israel and collects high-quality information for their health, family ties, socio-economic, pension and demographic indicators. SHARE is held every two years and thus measures the changes in the lives of people in the target group.

The information in the study is unique and aims to support national and European knowledge-based policies in the areas of retirement, employment, education and lifelong learning, health and social security, which can be used to develop fundamental and applied research. This research is based on the highest scientific standards and innovations.

Following the coronavirus pandemic, SHARE contributes to the accumulation of new knowledge for the social, health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientists and representatives of public institutions will have the opportunity to assess the impact of the pandemic on people at and over 50 years of age both in national and comparative international aspect.

In 2016 - 2018 Bulgaria participated in SHARE for the first time and gathered information for the life history of people at and over 50 years of age through 2025 individual interviews. The survey was representative for the population in this age group in Bulgaria and the data were comparable with other countries participating in the consortium. SHARE ERIC provides publicly available information for childhood, work history, health, retirement and social circumstances within human life, cognitive ability and more.

In 2018 - 2022 Bulgaria participates in data collection from SHARE for the 8th and 9th waves and thus a unique, longitudinal, multidisciplinary database for ageing, health, employment status, unemployment and retirement for Bulgarians at and over 50 years of age, will be collected.

More information can be found on the website of SHARE ERIC Bulgaria (<https://share-eric-bulgaria.bg/>) and on SHARE ERIC (<http://www.share-project.org>).

### *Ministry of Culture*



**The activities of the Ministry of Culture are aimed at creating a favourable environment for participation of the elderly in the cultural life of the country, for spiritual and cultural growth of all ages and groups of the population, for the development of the national identity and belonging to the Bulgarian nation, creating conditions for equal access of people of all ages to the cultural heritage, to the achievements of contemporary arts, supporting forms for development of creative potential and participation in cultural life of the local community, the region and the country.**

In order to achieve the *inclusion of older people at national, regional and local level in cultural life by financially supporting creative projects under programmes for support of the book sector, public libraries and community centres*, with a view to the sustainable development of these most widespread and accessible cultural institutions in the country, through the budget of the Ministry of Culture, competitive sessions for financial support are realized annually. Through its website, the Ministry provides an opportunity for all stakeholders to get acquainted with the rules of the programmes under which the competition sessions are held and to apply for financial support.

**The Ministry of Culture provides financial support for the development of the Bulgarian book sector and the network of libraries through a competition session under the Help for the Book programme**, which has a financial resource of BGN 100,000. The programme is designed for creative projects in various fields: literature; Bulgarian and translated humanities; literature for children and adolescents; cultural and historical heritage and contemporary culture. The development of contemporary writers and poets, as well as researchers in the field of cultural heritage, is encouraged. New titles with current and innovative themes by established or debuting authors are published. For the 2018-2021 reporting period, four competition sessions were conducted at the total amount of BGN 400,000. About 340 projects of publishing houses for publishing new literature and research in the field of contemporary art and cultural heritage have been approved.

**To improve the conditions in public libraries and community centres as centres for non-formal learning and self-study**, competitive sessions are held annually under the **Bulgarian Libraries - Modern Centres for Reading and Awareness Programme**, in order to renew the funds of public libraries in all 28 administrative districts of the country and provide free access to new books, specialized editions, according to the specifics of library users. During the period 2018 - 2021, 6 competition sessions were successfully held at a total amount of BGN 7 million. Over 3,000 projects of public libraries were supported. In 2018 the funds under the programme amounted to BGN 1 million, and from 2019 the fund has increased to BGN 2 million. The increase made it possible to support twice as many projects of public libraries. A large part of them are community centres libraries, established in small settlements in all regions of the country. The Ministry of Culture continues to support public libraries and community centres with a view to the sustainable development of these most widespread and accessible cultural institutions in the country.

In addition to the above, with the assistance of the Ministry of Culture, activities are carried out to coordinate the activities of the library network in the country, by providing methodological and expert-consulting assistance. A number of library initiatives are also supported for the promotion of reading, for the realization of cultural and creative events, for the attraction of more users of all ages, for library and information services.

**In 2020 for the first time, a programme was developed to support creative projects in the field of literature** for the creation of new works in all literary genres. The financial resource of the programme amounts to BGN 300,000. 115 projects have been approved at the total amount of BGN 299,950.

**In 2020, under the programme of the Ministry of Culture for the first time, 5**

**creative projects were supported at a total value of BGN 420,000 for the preservation of traditional crafts** as part of the intangible cultural heritage. In connection with the latter, a draft of a specialized programme for financing creative projects in the field of preservation of the intangible cultural heritage has been developed.

**The Ministry of Culture provides financial support for the development of the performing arts through competition sessions for projects in the field of music, dance and theatre - performances and concerts.** These project sessions aim to expand the access of the population to highly artistic works of theatrical, musical and dance art. The sessions for support of festivals and projects include the participation of artists and active citizens and spectators from all over the country, which brings the scope of impact to a national level. Projects of independent organizations aimed at or with the participation of older people are supported. The policy of the state cultural stage institutes includes special measures in the direction of attracting audiences, including spectators of retirement age. For this purpose, tickets are offered at preferential prices for retirees, and often family tickets, which makes access to the stage events affordable for the elderly. Artists and creative staff of retirement age remain professionally engaged in the staff of the stage institutes or under civil contracts if possible and if necessary are involved in the creative process. Although there is traditionally a higher concentration of theatrical and musical events in the capital, in the other cities of the country (district and municipal centres) there is also a good attendance and interest shown by diverse and wide audience. The fact that part of the supported performances is produced and distributed in alternative halls and non-traditional stage spaces contributes to attracting new and different audiences. The results achieved are good and the events, supported by the Ministry of Culture, are of serious national significance, sustainable over time, and measurable through the wide public and media interest in them.

In 2018, 6 sessions were held to support projects in the field of performing arts - music, dance and theatre. The festival sessions supported 48 festivals and competitions at the amount of BGN 281,661, 17 of which were theatre and 31 were music and dance performances. 36 theatre projects at the amount of BGN 196,524 were supported for stage realization. In the field of music and dance 10 new performances and concerts at the amount of BGN 63,500 and 9 projects in the field of contemporary dance worth BGN 89,893 were supported. Under a targeted programme for support of creative projects 33 targeted projects for creative trips, important celebrations and significant editions and annals were supported, at the amount of 326 137 BGN.

In 2019, again 6 sessions were held to support projects in the field of performing arts. The Ministry of Culture has supported festivals and projects in the field of theatre, music and dance in order to create and promote events that provide equal opportunities for the participation of professionals in highly artistic products and their distribution in the country and abroad. Through conducting 2 competition sessions, 36 festivals and competitions were supported. 22 creative projects in the field of theatre art at the amount of BGN 175,580 were supported. In the field of music and dance art 18 performances and concerts at the amount of BGN 149,827 were supported. In both sessions for support of creative projects there was an increase in support compared to 2018 by about BGN 30,000. 19 projects at the amount of BGN 80,000 were supported for the distribution of theatrical performances, and 10 projects at the amount of BGN 119,536 were supported for contemporary dance, which is an increase of about BGN 150,000 compared to the previous year. Under the target programme for support of creative projects, 36 target projects for creative trips, important celebrations and significant editions and annals, at the amount of BGN 389,453 were supported. In the field of performing arts in 2020, 5 projects received support. In 2020, 3 projects were funded with special attention to creating conditions for equality and equal opportunities for people with disabilities and effectively solving the problems of people with special needs. In 2020, 194 projects were supported under a programme to support creative projects in the field of

performing arts.

The undertaking of special measures for the development of the sense of national identity and attachment to the Bulgarian nation is also carried out by holding sessions and providing **targeted financial support to the cultural heritage related to activities for preservation and presentation of the movable cultural heritage and visual arts in museums and art galleries**. The sessions are carried out under the programmes of the Ministry of Culture for targeted funding of projects for activities in the field of museum work and fine arts.

In the first half of 2020, the Ministry of Culture announced a competition session for funding projects in the field of movable cultural heritage, museums and visual arts with two themes.

- Theme 1: "Activities for the preservation and presentation of movable cultural heritage and visual arts in museums and art galleries." The Commission has classified for funding 32 projects at a total value of BGN 199,864.94;
- Theme 2: "The museum as an educational environment", with 9 projects financed at a total value of BGN 50,213.40.

At the end of 2020, a session for financing projects was announced on the theme: "Activities for the preservation and presentation of movable cultural heritage and visual arts in museums and art galleries." Out of the received 170 projects, 34 projects were financed at a total value of BGN 515,875.22.

Visiting cultural heritage sites and participating in various initiatives related to their preservation and presentation, allows older people to fully fill their free time and develop an active life as full members of society. In this regard, the efforts of the Ministry of Culture are aimed at supporting activities that ensure equal access to the cultural heritage, its socialization and presentation to the general public. During the reporting period, over 80 projects of museums, art galleries and other cultural organizations were supported at a total value of BGN 515,000. Projects for physical and mental access of disadvantaged citizens are funded annually. All programmes in the field of movable cultural heritage, museums and visual arts take into account the need for special attention and increase the opportunities for access to the cultural world by people with special needs. For the period 2018 - 2020, 4 projects were financed with special attention to creating conditions for equality and equal opportunities for people with disabilities and effectively solving the problems of people with special needs. Through programmes for targeted funding of creative projects for activities in the field of museum work and visual arts, 115 projects were supported, amounting to BGN 1,386,420.60, related to the provision of equal access to society to the cultural heritage for all Bulgarian citizens.

With PMS No. 121 of 12 June 2020, additional funds at the amount of BGN 500 000 were allocated for the Preservation and Presentation of Movable Cultural Heritage and Visual Arts budget programme. New Rules for the terms and conditions for conducting competition sessions for project financing in the field of visual arts were drafted and approved, which created the conditions for support in this field. A session for financing projects under the established rules was announced, which was aimed entirely at private cultural organizations and the non-governmental sector. 98 projects at a total value of BGN 2,232,140.70 were received, of which the commission ranked and financed 22 projects for the amount of BGN 499,982. The greatest interest was shown in financing activities for exhibitions and laboratories for contemporary art, creative residences, catalogues, books and publications in the field of contemporary art.

**Priority application of measures for development of the community centres as centres of spiritual growth and development of the cultural identity.** The Ministry of Culture provides financial support for the implementation of creative projects, methodological support and coordination of the network of community centres and community centre

associations, as community centres are a natural environment for preserving intangible cultural heritage, for promoting national identity and for promoting diversity through forms of cultural expression. 188 creative projects related to the activity of the community centres, libraries, municipalities and organizations in the field of culture were supported, for expansion of their activity and realization of cultural events in the separate regions of the country at a total value of 938 223 BGN.

**For the development of amateur art**, projects of community centres, libraries, municipalities and organizations in the field of culture are financially supported, for conducting events in different regions of the country, focusing on children and youth activities, formation of national identity, protection of ethnic identity, integration of the Roma, education in tolerance and intercultural dialogue, active ageing, integration of people with disabilities and development of creative potential.

For the first time, a draft of rules for financial support in the field of amateur dance is being developed through a competition session.

In 2018 for the development of amateur art 50 projects of municipalities, community centres and non-governmental organizations were financially supported, with a total value of BGN 140,000, and in 2019 - 55 projects of community centres, libraries, municipalities and organizations in the field of culture were supported for conducting events in the individual regions of the country at a total value of BGN 140,000. Through the programme for development of amateur creativity and protection of the intangible cultural heritage in 2020 the Ministry of Culture has provided financial support to over 30 projects of municipalities, community centres and non-governmental organizations.

The Ministry of Culture with its programmes in various fields, such as cultural heritage, performing arts, amateur art, librarianship and publishing, annually provides **equal access and participation in cultural life for people with disabilities and people with additional needs**. In the period 2019 - 2020, under these programmes were supported many projects (totally about 2000 in the listed areas), which gives people of all ages and different social status opportunity for self-education, full social inclusion, equal participation and access to culture, for people of all ages and ethnicities. In 2019 the National Community Centre of the Blind “Louis Braille 1928” was supported for the implementation of a project at the amount of 1069, 20 BGN for the renovation of the library of the Community Centre with Braille books. In 2020 under the same programme the Community Centre received support at the amount of 2500 BGN as financial aid of a project for the publication of a series of 20 children's books in Braille, with a description of the illustrations by Bulgarian and foreign authors. Under this programme, in 2021 the Equal Partnership Foundation is supported with BRAIL FM radio to it, with an amount of 1200 BGN, for publishing a collection of poems.

Additional opportunities have been created for the implementation of projects through the Cultural Entrepreneurship, Heritage and Cooperation PA14 Programme (Programme Agreement). The Ministry of Culture continued to work for the phased implementation of the programme, which focuses on the role of culture and cultural heritage as resources for local and regional development. The programme is funded by the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism. Projects for improved cultural heritage management (innovation and digitalisation), improved access to art and culture and improved awareness for the arts and culture of ethnic and cultural minorities, are supported. The grant for the implementation of projects under the programme amounts to 10 million euros, in partnership with the Norwegian Arts Council. The EEA Measures and the Norwegian Financial Mechanisms include a multi-level approach based on the already established priorities, respecting the principles of equality between all citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria. All projects and activities funded by the EEA FM are based on common values: respect for human dignity; freedom; democracy; equality; rule of law; respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Calls for projects have been announced: under Result 2: “Improved Access to Arts and

Culture”; Call for submission of project proposals under Sub-result 1.1: “Cultural Heritage Presented in Revitalized, Restored and Renovated Places”; Call for submission of project proposals under Sub-result 1.2: “Digitally Accessible Cultural Heritage Sites”.

### *Ministry of Youth and Sports*

One of the priorities of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, included in the 2021-2022 National Programme for Development of Physical Activity, Physical Education, Sports and Tourism is encouraging physical activity and the practice of sports and tourism by citizens for improving their health. To this priority measures and activities related to the provision of conditions and opportunities for health-promoting physical activity and practice of sport for all have been planned, through the development and implementation of programmes and projects for sport for all, incl. and provision of opportunities for participation in sports activities and physical exercises for people over working age.

The current Physical Education and Sports Act, promulgated, SG No. 86 of 18.10.2018, in force since 18.01.2019 provides an opportunity for the establishment of multi-sport clubs and federations on a unifying principle for people over working age.

For the period 2017-2021, the Ministry of Youth and Sports successfully implemented a Programme for development of sports for all. The programme provides opportunities for multi-sport federations and national sports organizations to receive annual financial support for the implementation of activities related to the provision of opportunities to citizens of different population groups, regardless of their age and gender, incl. seniors over working age and veteran athletes, to take part in sports and tourism activities, national and international sports events in various sports: skiing, swimming, mountain running, table tennis, basketball, mini football, throwing, tennis, athletics, volleyball, water polo, table tennis, canoeing, rowing, wrestling, badminton and weightlifting, etc.

During the five-year period, significant mass sports events and campaigns have been successfully organized, such as the European Sports Week, May 17 - Day of Bulgarian Sports, Winter Challenge; World Challenge Day; World Walking Day; There is No Age for Sports - sports events aimed specifically at people over working age.

The results of the Programme are: positive change of the existing low and insufficient physical activity and unhealthy lifestyle; prevention of diseases associated with low physical activity and sedentary lifestyle through the practice of exercise and sports.

### *Ministry of Transport, Information Technologies and Communication (MTITC)*

The state enterprise Port Infrastructure holds events for social inclusion of the elderly - veterans of the port business in Bulgaria - celebrating anniversaries, holidays and other social and cultural events. The company has spent financial resources in the amount of BGN 3,000 for holding in 2019 the event "20 years of management of ship traffic in Bulgaria" in the town of Varna with the participation of 43 elderly people - veterans of maritime transport and port activities. This measure has been implemented at the regional level - Northeast region.

### *Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC)*

In the conditions of a dynamically changing socio-economic environment and the presence of serious challenges in the social sector, which had a significant impact, especially on the status of a large part of the elderly population, BRC made every effort to reduce poverty, improve the quality of life of the elderly people and increase their opportunities for social inclusion.

The goals and tasks of the Bulgarian Red Cross, implemented jointly and for the benefit of the elderly, continued to be a priority and were reflected in the strategic documents of the BRC and in the BRC Platform for work with the elderly and /or retired people, developed in 2009. Through the specific activities defined in these documents, the Bulgarian Red Cross has contributed to accelerating the process of social inclusion of the elderly by creating opportunities for the use of their resources for full participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the community. Since 2009, the BRC has also been a full member of the European Platform for the Elderly AGE and is recognized as an organization actively working for the benefit of the elderly and among its partners in Europe.

In May 2019, the project "Innovative models for community care for people with chronic diseases and permanent disabilities" was launched, implemented by the BRC in partnership with the Ministry of Health, MLSP and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, with the support of the Financial Mechanism EEA 2014-2021. The project has a duration of 4 years and a total budget of EUR 3,333,333.

For the period 2019-2020 the following main results have been achieved:

- Seven functioning Home Care Centres in the districts of Vratsa, Vidin and Montana.
- Established multidisciplinary teams of trained nurses and domestic helpers for the three new Centres in Vidin, Belogradchik and Montana;
  - Employment provided in the districts of Vidin, Vratsa and Montana - totally for 74 persons - nurses and domestic helpers;
  - Established system for providing integrated services in the home environment in conditions of spread of COVID-19 in strict compliance with all epidemiological measures;
  - Regular provision of integrated health and social services in the home to 648 users in the 7 municipalities, 10% of which are of Roma origin;
  - Covered elderly people living alone from 16 remote and small settlements within the districts of Vidin, Vratsa and Montana - total 25% of the beneficiaries;
  - Establishment of integrated health and social services in the home environment as a particularly useful form for long-term care in a pandemic in order to provide the necessary medical care and social support for elderly people living alone; preventing the deterioration of their health status due to the presence of chronic diseases and providing prevention of the risk of infection with COVID-19.

Within the same project, a pilot introduction of a system for teleassistance /telecare is planned in order to remotely monitor the health and psycho-social status of people 50+ with chronic diseases and permanent disabilities, building upon the activities of the 7 Home Care Centres in the districts of Vratsa, Vidin and Montana. The new services will be based on Norway's experience in the use of modern information and communication technologies in the health and social spheres.

For the purpose in 2020 a call centre was built and equipped in the town of Vratsa. The project plan envisaged the launch of teleassistance and telecare services in 2020, but the restrictive measures due to the spread of COVID-19 not only in Bulgaria but also globally, led to a number of difficulties in implementing the partnership between the BRC and the Norwegian partners and respectively to a delay of this activity. The new services are expected to be launched in the second half of 2021.

In connection with the active implementation of the joint approach for working with the elderly, in 2019 the first Resource Centre for Support of the Elderly started operating at BRC – town of Rousse. It provides information on a wide range of issues related to the daily lives of the elderly and helps them defend their rights. Older people have the opportunity not only to develop knowledge and skills there, but also to learn to formulate and summarize the social problems of their peers in need and to lobby for their solution. The volunteers from the resource centre organized on May 29, 2019 in the town of Rousse a festival "Young in old

age", which was attended by 250 people - representatives of the third age. On the occasion of October 1<sup>st</sup>, a festive procession of over 300 people was held, followed by a concert on the central square in the town of Rousse, which was attended by singing groups from retirement clubs and veterans' clubs in the area.

In the period 2017 - 2021 the BRC participated as a partner in the innovative project for older people "Virtual social assistant in support of active ageing", which was funded through the Horizon 2020 EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. It involved 10 European partner organizations from 5 countries, and its goal was to develop a prototype of a virtual social assistant to support the active and healthy life of older people. The focus of the project was the social well-being of the elderly and their interaction with social circles: family, friends, providers of social and health services and others.

Within the project, a prototype of a virtual social assistant was developed, consisting of separate modules and software applications, fully tailored to the needs of its users, which were identified after studying the needs of potential users in need of help at home. Sensors were installed in the homes of 15 adult BRC volunteers, which within 12 months sent data for the condition and physical activity of the elderly in a central server of the programme, from where, after analysis of the received data, appropriate user-directed messages were sent.

With the development of a prototype of a virtual social assistant, the ultimate goal of the project was achieved - prolonging the active and independent life of people over 60 in their own homes, while maintaining good physical, emotional and mental condition and social contacts of the users for as much as possible longer time.

Along with the large number of different events for the elderly, the BRC has made every effort to reduce poverty and participates as a partner organization in the implementation of the Operational Programme for Food (OPF) and /or basic material support under the Fund for European Assistance to the Most Deprived Individuals (FEAMDP).

By Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 632 of 08.09.2014, the Social Assistance Agency was designated as the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme. The support under this programme is realized through two main types of operations - provision of individual food packages and provision of hot lunch.

The operation "Provision of individual food packages" was implemented in partnership with the Bulgarian Red Cross Association, which carried out the distribution of food products and the provision of accompanying measures to eligible persons.

For the period 2018 - 2021, in the form of food packages, support was provided throughout the country to persons and families living in the highest degree of poverty and social integration, appointed by Ordinance No. RD-07-1 of 2016 for the terms and conditions for determining the target groups under the Operational Programme for food and basic material support.

For the needs of the programme, the BRC annually opens an average of over 300 distribution points throughout the country, thus providing full territorial coverage. The efforts made by the BRC facilitated mostly the elderly people in need, because they were given the opportunity to receive the products in the nearest and most convenient places for them.

A structured survey of end-users on satisfaction with the support received under the programme found that a larger proportion of those in need share food with all members of their households and wish to receive larger quantities. In this regard, conclusions and recommendations were made related to optimizing the number of food packages intended for support. Due to these circumstances, ASA, as the Managing Authority of OPF FEAMDP, analysed the number of household members falling within the above target groups and the available quantities of food purchased through the procurement and decided, from 2020 on, all three-member and larger families to be provided with two individual food packages.

During the reporting period of implementation of OPF FEAMDP (January 2018 - August 2021) 10 campaigns for distribution were implemented, and annually the eligible

persons received an average of 16 types of essential food products. A total of **26,034,002 kg of food products** were provided for the entire period.

The total number of assisted persons included in the lists of eligible beneficiaries for the period 2018 - 2021 **amounts to 1,094,244**, but since the food is shared with family members, the number of persons benefiting from the programme is **1,442,621**.

In addition to foodstuff, eligible persons were provided with appropriate accompanying measures tailored to their individual needs on an annual basis. In the long run, these measures are a prerequisite for overcoming the vicious circle of poverty of assisted persons and their families.

Different plans provided various types of accompanying measures, which comprised of counselling for a balanced diet and measurement of weight and blood pressure; referral of eligible persons to the Social Assistance Directorates for the provision of social benefits and social services; disseminating information on ESF-funded activities appropriate to each individual case; family budget management; preparation for dealing with adverse weather conditions and epidemic threats; rendering first aid in case of disasters, accidents and catastrophes; promotion of hygiene and methods for disinfection; prevention of socially significant diseases, etc.

Accompanying measures were implemented through:

1. Direct consultations, which included:

- Group meetings with different specialists on separate themes;
- Individual consultations with the BRC staff and volunteers involved in the implementation of the operation;
- Playing of video materials on various themes, in group meetings with eligible persons;

2. Indirect consultations included the printing and distribution of various leaflets on the separate themes, which were provided to the eligible persons together with the foodstuff at each temporary point.

The total quantity of eligible persons who received leaflets on various types of accompanying measures during the implementation of the programme **amounted to 1 094 244**, and the direct individual and group consultations on the various measures amounted to **1 942 385**.

In the implementation of the Provision of Individual Food Packages operation, the regional and municipal volunteer structures of the BRC also undertook certain commitments in filling the warehouses and distribution points, informing the eligible persons, distributing the products and implementing accompanying measures. Every year over 3,000 volunteers take part in the implementation of the various components of the programme, the most active of which were in the distribution of products at the temporary distribution points and on average they performed 115,000 hours of volunteer work per year. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a very small number of adult volunteers were involved in the implementation of OPF FEAMDP **in 2020 (58)**. Before taking action, they filled out declarations of consent to work in the face of the COVID-19 epidemic, underwent special training for safe behaviour and disease prevention. Appropriate personal protective equipment was provided for them (masks, gloves, helmets, work aprons, disinfectants for surfaces and hands, i.e. everything necessary for them to feel safe in the process of work was provided).

### *Institute for Population and Human Studies at the BAS (IPHS at the BAS)*

IPHS at the BAS implements the following projects:

**Project "Older people in Bulgaria - opportunities for social inclusion in the context of their attitudes and needs." Term: 2019-2020.** Research and analysis of people's attitudes at the end of their career towards retirement, the likelihood of fulfilling the



conditions for eligibility for pension, their intentions to remain in the labour market and self-assessment of their place in the labour market. Products: Part of a chapter of a monographic study in favour of policies for career extending (Chapter Six. "Some Aspects of socio-economic and civic participation of the elderly, and conclusions for policies. Cherkezova, S., Salchev, P., Mihova, Slavova, Z., (2020) "Measures for overcoming the demographic crisis." Volume II: "Ageing, mortality and quality of life", Prof. Marin Drinov Publishing House of BAS and conference report (Cherkezova, S. "Attitudes and participation in employment before and after retirement among people aged 45 and over in Bulgaria - survey results" 16 pages. Submitted for conference: "The older generation of Bulgaria - socio-demographic profile, positions and values", 04 September 2020, Sofia, Sofia University, postponed due to the pandemic).

**Project "How social are the social countries in an ageing Europe?" Typology and development according to long-term care. Term: 2020-2023.** The aim of the project is to make a typology of countries in Europe according to certain features related to the organization, rules for accessibility and coverage of long-term care for the elderly, based on a comparative empirical analysis according to a system of quantitative indicators. Expected results for 2021: selected indicators for comparison between countries on the grounds of a study based on the Missoc Mutual Information System on Social Protection and on research, reports and documents in the field of long-term care. Product - scientific articles and reports at scientific forums. Expected results for 2022: Classification of selected countries according to the selected criteria and statistical analysis of data. Product - scientific articles and reports at scientific forums.

**3.2. Highlight in a nutshell the most important achievement during the last 20 years to protecting older persons' enjoyment of all human rights and to raising quality standards for integrated social and long-term care and health services as well as adapting the status, training and working conditions of professional care workers. Give some recommendations for future action (what is planned /needs to be done).**

### *Ministry of Health*

The policies of the Ministry of Health are aimed at improving the quality of health care, optimizing the outpatient and hospital network according to the needs of the population, increasing the scope of national prevention programmes with emphasis on socially significant diseases, which are the most common cause of death and disability. The state has guaranteed access of the elderly to the necessary health and medical services, creating opportunities for health-promoting, prophylactic and curative activities, which are a condition for ageing in good health. It is necessary to accelerate the process of building social and integrated health and social services for long-term care. In view of this, the National Programme for Development BULGARIA 2030 envisages measures to stimulate the development of health services provided in the medical establishments, related to long-term treatment and palliative care.

## **Part III: Healthy and Active Ageing in a Sustainable World**

1. Contribution of ageing-related policies to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals

1.1. **Has your country already submitted voluntary national report(s) (VNR) to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the implementation of the SDGs? Please briefly report on whether and how the population ageing and older persons' issues were**

addressed in your country's VNR(s).

*Ministry of Health*

In connection with the preparation of the first Voluntary National Report for Bulgaria on the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in it, which was officially presented to the UN in July 2020, the Ministry of Health provided information according to its sectoral competencies. The document is available at the following internet address: <https://www.mfa.bg/bg/3379>.

In addition, it should be noted that with Protocol No. 67 of the Council of Ministers on 02.12.2020 the BULGARIA 2030 National Development Programme was adopted. The programme is the framework strategic document of the country, which defines the vision and general objectives of the policies for development in all sectors of government. The three main strategic goals are accelerated economic development, demographic recovery and reduction of inequalities, for the implementation of which 13 national priorities have been identified. The programme includes detailed strategies on the priorities, indicative financial framework, preliminary assessment of the impact on key macroeconomic indicators from the implementation of the planned interventions, as well as a mechanism for monitoring and control of the implementation of the strategic document.

**1.2. Within the national political planning are there any established links between ageing issues and the 2030 Agenda** (a mapping of the connections between MIPAA /RIS and the SDGs that shows areas for policy integration is available on the UNECE website<sup>5</sup>)?

*Ministry of Health*

The main goal of Priority 12 “Health and Sports” of the adopted BULGARIA 2030 National Development Programme is to improve the health characteristics of the population and to increase the quality of human capital in the country. The focus of the policy will be to ensure equal access for all to quality health services. Achieving the set goals will play a key role for the implementation of Goal 3 "Provision of healthy living and promoting the well-being of all at all ages" of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

**1.3. Given the information reported about MIPAA /RIS implementation, what are the most relevant SDGs which could be nourished by current policy measures** (specify which measures)? Were they or will they be included in your country's VNR(s)? Describe 1-3 good practice examples.

2. Lessons learnt from managing the consequences and impacts for older people in emergency situations: the COVID-19 pandemic

In May 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General launched a Policy brief: "The impact of COVID-19 on older persons" with four key priorities for Member States' action: <sup>6</sup>

❖ Ensure that difficult health-care decisions affecting older people are guided by a commitment to dignity and the right to health.

---

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/PS2018/00\\_MIPAA\\_RIS\\_2030\\_Agenda\\_Areas\\_for\\_Policy\\_Integration.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/PS2018/00_MIPAA_RIS_2030_Agenda_Areas_for_Policy_Integration.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/05/COVID-Older-persons.pdf>

- ❖ Strengthening social inclusion and solidarity during physical distancing.
- ❖ Fully integrate a focus on older persons into the socio-economic and humanitarian response to COVID-19.
- ❖ Expand participation by older persons, share good practices and harness knowledge and data.

Please describe briefly the main measures that have been set **in your country** to **protect older persons** and to address the four focus areas as outlined above. Please also indicate if and how policy approaches have changed, in light of the lessons learned since the start of the pandemic.

**2.1. How were older people affected by Covid-19 in your country?** Was there a higher share of hospitalisation and rate of deaths among older people in 2020 than for population in general and in relation to previous long-term observations?

### *Ministry of Health*

Information on the theme is contained in the "Analytical Report for the activities related to public health services in response to the pandemic of COVID-19, for the period 01 March 2020 - 31 May 2021" prepared by the National Centre for Public Health and Analysis (NCPHA).

**Hospitalizations - the data for the hospitalized cases total and for persons over 65 years of age by leading causes for hospitalization in 2019 and 2020 are considered.**

The hospitalized cases (discharged and deceased) in the hospitals of the medical establishments in 2020, both total and among persons aged 65 and over, decreased compared to the previous year. The number of hospitalized cases in connection with class XXII of ICD 10 - Special purpose codes (COVID-19) in 2020 is 56,989, which is 29% of the total number of hospitalizations, and for persons aged 65 and over the number is 26 290 - 3.6% of the total number of hospitalizations of persons of these ages.

Data for hospitalized cases show that in the classes of diseases leading as a cause for hospitalizations, the relative share of hospitalized cases of persons over 65 years of age from the total number of hospitalizations is almost the same in 2019 and 2020.

In 2020, the number of hospitalized cases (discharged and deceased) in the hospitals of medical institutions for persons over 65 years of age due to diseases of the circulatory system is 158,170 which is 63.0% of the total number of hospitalizations in this class for the whole population, and with regard to neoplasms in this age group the figures are 68 578 and 45.8% respectively of their total quantity in this class for the whole population. Hospitalized cases (discharged and deceased) in connection with class XXII of ICD 10 - Special purpose codes (COVID-19) in persons over 65 years of age account for 46.1% of the total number of hospitalizations in this class for the entire population. Regarding diseases of the circulatory system and diseases of the respiratory system, the hospitalizations of persons over 65 years are 38.6% and 26.5% respectively of the total number of hospitalizations due to these classes.

Intensive indicators, calculated as the ratio of the number of hospitalizations of persons over 65 years of age per 100,000 population of the same age group, show higher values than the indicators for hospitalizations of the population of all ages as a total and for the considered classes of diseases. In hospitalizations by diseases of the circulatory system, this ratio is 3 times.

**Mortality – death data is considered – as a total and for persons over 65 years of**

### age for the leading causes of death in 2019 and 2020.

According to the annual data on deaths by causes in 2020 of the National Statistical Institute, the total number of deaths is 124,735, of which 8,554, or 7% of COVID-19.

Compared to 2019, the absolute number of deaths has increased by 16,652, of which 8,554 are due to COVID-19, and the remaining increase is most pronounced in the classes diseases of the circulatory system - by 5,954 and diseases of the respiratory system - by 1813.

The structure of causes of death by classes of diseases shows that in 2020 compared to the previous year, the relative share of deaths from diseases of the circulatory system of the total number of deaths decreased from 64.4% to 60.6%, of the deaths from Neoplasms - from 16.9% to 14.9%. The relative share of deaths from COVID-19 is 6.9%, which ranks third in the structure of deaths by classes of diseases, displacing diseases of the respiratory system in fourth place. In the other classes of diseases there are no significant differences in the indicators in 2020 compared to the previous 2019.

In 2020, in the conditions of the pandemic situation, a total of 99,145 persons over the age of 65 died, which is 15.4% more than in 2019, when there were no cases of COVID-19 registered in Bulgaria yet. Of the total deaths in 2020, 16,652 persons, 79.6% are over 65 years of age, and of the 8,554 deaths due to COVID-19, 72.4% are persons over 65 years of age. In the other monitored classes of diseases, a high share of deaths of persons over 65 years of age, from the total quantity of deaths from the respective class of diseases, was also registered. For neoplasms this share is 69.8%, for diseases of the circulatory system - 56.4%, for diseases of the respiratory system - 76.6%, for diseases of the circulatory system - 57.8%.

Intensive indicators, calculated as the ratio of the number of deaths of persons over the age of 65 per 100,000 population of the same age group, show about 3 times higher values than the total mortality of the population of all ages, as a total and for the considered classes of diseases. For the mortality from diseases of the circulatory system, this ratio is 4 times.

The data reviewed shows the workload of the hospital system related to the total hospitalizations and especially of patients over 65 years of age, as well as the burden on the health system as a whole, given the high mortality of the population at these ages.

### Hospitalized cases (discharged and deceased) in the hospitals of medical institutions – total and of persons over 65 years of age in 2019

Classes of diseases, ICD-10	Quantity		%		Per 100,000 population	
	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65
<b>All classes</b>	<b>2 412 523</b>	<b>926 736</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>34 584.4</b>	<b>61 840.0</b>
Neoplasms (C00-D48)	172 549	77 386	100.0	44.8	2 473.5	5 163.9
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00-I99)	327 676	207 106	100.0	63.2	4 697.4	13 819.9
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00-J99)	229 217	61 934	100.0	27.0	3 285.9	4 132.8
Diseases of the circulatory system(K00-K93)	222 743	85 887	100.0	38.6	3 193.1	5 731.1

### Hospitalized cases (discharged and deceased) in the hospitals of medical institutions –

**total and of persons over 65 years of age in 2020**

Classes of diseases, ICD-10	Quantity		%		Per 100,000 population	
	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65
<b>All classes</b>	<b>1 963 826</b>	<b>732 087</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>37.3</b>	<b>28 321.6</b>	<b>48 673.8</b>
Neoplasms (C00-D48)	149 788	68 578	100.0	45.8	2 160.2	4 559.5
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00-I99)	250 875	158 170	100.0	63.0	3 618.0	10 516.1
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00-J99)	158 428	41 934	100.0	26.5	2 284.8	2 788.0
Diseases of the circulatory system(K00-K93)	179 931	69 420	100.0	38.6	2 594.9	4 615.5
Special purpose codes - Covid-19 (U00-U85)	56 989	26 290	100.0	46.1	821.9	1 747.9

**Total mortality and mortality of persons over 65 years of age by cause in 2019**

Cause of death, ICD-10	Quantity		%		Per 100,000 population	
	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65
<b>Total</b>	<b>108 083</b>	<b>85 888</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>79.5</b>	<b>1 549.4</b>	<b>5 731.2</b>
Neoplasms (C00-D48)	18 298	12 491	100.0	68.3	262.3	833.5
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00-I99)	69 632	60 190	100.0	86.4	998.2	4 016.4
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00-J99)	4 193	3 148	100.0	75.1	60.1	210.1
Diseases of the circulatory system(K00-K93)	4 113	2 394	100.0	58.2	59.0	159.7

**Total mortality and mortality of persons over 65 years of age by cause in 2020**

Cause of death, ICD-10	Quantity		%		Per 100,000 population	
	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65	Total	Over 65
<b>Total</b>	<b>124 735</b>	<b>99 148</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>79.5</b>	<b>1 798.9</b>	<b>6 592.0</b>
Neoplasms (C00-D48)	18 527	12 925	100.0	69.8	267.2	859.3
Diseases of the circulatory system (I00-I99)	75 586	65 295	100.0	86.4	1 090.1	4 341.2
Diseases of the respiratory system (J00-J99)	6 006	4 603	100.0	76.6	86.6	306.0
Diseases of the circulatory system (K00-K93)	4 153	2 400	100.0	57.8	59.9	159.6
Special purpose codes - Covid-19 (U00-U85)	8 554	6 191	100.0	72.4	123.4	411.6

**2.2. What has been done to ensure that difficult health-care decisions affecting**

**older people are guided by a commitment to dignity and the right to health?** Please reflect on the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

### *Ministry of Health*

Older people in Bulgaria have equal rights and access to health care in accordance with their needs. They are provided with health insurance at the expense of the state budget, which guarantees them access to health and medical care included in the package of health activities guaranteed by the NHIF budget, including preventive examinations and tests and activities within outpatient monitoring of chronic diseases. In addition, their access to activities outside the scope of health insurance, paid for from the budget of the Ministry of Health is also ensured.

### *National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF)*

Regarding outpatient medical care:

a) Changes have been agreed in the 2020-2022 National Framework Agreement for Medical and Dental Activities (NFA) for payment of the amounts for work under unfavourable conditions on the occasion of the declared epidemic situation of outpatient care providers according to the procedure approved by "Methodology for determining the amount of the sums paid by the NHIF to providers of medical care, dental care and medical-diagnostic activities, for work under unfavourable conditions on the occasion of a declared epidemic situation".

b) According to "Ordinance for supplementing Ordinance No. 9 of 2019 for determining the package of health activities guaranteed by the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund" of the Ministry of Health, the NHIF pays for a highly specialized medical diagnostic test "Polymerase chain reaction for proving COVID-19"; from the "Virology" and "Clinical Microbiology" packages.

Regarding hospital medical care:

a) Changes in the NFA for medical and dental activities for payment of the amounts for work under unfavourable conditions on the occasion of a declared epidemic situation of providers of hospital care according to the procedure approved by the "Methodology for determining the amount paid by the NHIF to providers of medical care, dental care and medical-diagnostic activities, for work under unfavourable conditions on the occasion of a declared epidemic situation".

b) According to "Ordinance for supplementing Ordinance No. 9 of 2019 for determining the package of health activities guaranteed by the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund" of the Ministry of Health, the NHIF pays for reporting patients with complications from infection with COVID-19 by:

- Clinical pathway (CP) No. 39 "Diagnosis and treatment of bronchopneumonia and bronchiolitis in persons over 18 years of age", with codes for reporting coronavirus according to ICD-10: U07.1, U07.2";

- CP No. 48 "Diagnosis and treatment of bronchopneumonia in children", with codes for reporting coronavirus according to ICD-10: U07.1, U07.2 ";

- CP No. 104 "Diagnosis and treatment of contagious viral and bacterial diseases - acute, with complications", with codes for reporting coronavirus according to ICD-10: U07.1, U07.2 ".

## **2.3. What has been done to strengthen social inclusion and solidarity during**

**physical distancing?** Please reflect on the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

*Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC)*

In 2020, even in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, volunteers from the Resource Centre for Support of the Elderly at the BRC – town of Rousse joined a number of activities and initiatives to prevent social isolation and raise awareness of the elderly, as their aspiration was to unleash the potential of the "golden age" volunteers and to expand the range of activities throughout the district. On various occasions, the elderly took an active part in the festival "Young in the Old Age" in Dve Mogili and Tsenovo villages, in the solemn programme of the Pensioners and Wisdom Association in Rousse, and in an online conference to discuss the National Strategy for Active Ageing, after which a collection of opinions, ideas and recommendations for promoting their active lifestyle was published. A team of elderly volunteers at the Resource Centre also took part in social assistance activities, supporting people with disabilities with food and assisting in shopping and providing administrative services to many other senior citizens. For the period 2019 - 2020 the various events organized by the Resource Centre in Rousse covered over 1,000 vulnerable elderly people.

**2.4. What has been done to fully integrate a focus on older persons into the socio-economic and humanitarian response to COVID-19?** Please reflect on the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

*Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)  
Employment Agency*

In 2020, under the influence of the crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19, the employment growth trend from 2014 was interrupted. According to the Labour Force Survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, in 2020 the employment rate for the age group of 55-64 decreased by 0.2 percentage points compared to 2019 and reached 64.2%. In 2019 employment in this group increased by 3.7 percentage points compared to the previous year.

Due to the negative effect of COVID-19 on the labour market, in 2020 the unemployment rate in the age group 55+ increased by 0.3 percentage points compared to the previous year. In 2019, unemployment in this group decreased by 0.7 percentage points compared to 2018.

In order to limit the negative social effects of the COVID-19 crisis, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) developed and implemented a number of measures to support employment. To preserve jobs in the country, the implementation of the measure, which gained publicity as "60/40" started - for financing 60 per cent of the amount of insurance income of persons and due social security contributions at the account of the insurer, in enterprises, affected by the crisis. (CMD No. 55 of 30 March 2020 for determining the terms and conditions for payment of compensation to employers in order to maintain the employment of employees in the state of emergency, declared by a decision of the National Assembly of 13 March 2020 and the announced by Decision No. 325 of the Council of Ministers of 14 May 2020 emergency epidemic situation on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, Council of Ministers Decree No. 151 of 3 July 2020 announced by a Decision of the National Assembly of March 13, 2020, and the extraordinary epidemic situation, announced by Decision No. 325 and extended by Decision No. 378 of the Council of Ministers of 2020). The measure has been upgraded in 2020 to be more effective and render timely support for

maintaining income and employment.

In order to limit the negative social effects, a project "Short-term support for employment in response to the pandemic of COVID-19" was implemented with the Employment Agency being the beneficiary. For maintaining the employment of workers and employees in enterprises engaged in economic activity in sectors affected by the crisis: hotels and restaurants, transport and tourism, defined by CMD No. 429 of 26.06.2020, the project supports employers, self-insured persons and municipal enterprises established under Article 52 of the AIA. Compensations were provided for part of the salary and the due tax and social security contributions at the account of the insurer and the insured person in the amount of BGN 290.

The support from the state was supplemented by a measure for payment of compensations to workers and employees, engaged in economic activities, for which temporary restrictions have been imposed by an act of a state body. The conditions and the procedure for payment of compensations were regulated by Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 325 of 26 November 2020. In 2020 the compensation was in the amount of BGN 24 per day for the period of the unpaid leave, and in cases of part-time work the compensation was determined in proportion to the agreed working hours. The list of codes of economic activities for which temporary restrictions have been introduced for carrying out the activity was determined by an order of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, bound by the orders of the Minister of Health for introduction of anti-epidemic measures for cessation of certain activities, in order to limit the spread of the infection.

Within the anti-crisis measure project "Employment for you", support was provided for hiring unemployed persons. The project provided funds to employers for wages, additional wages under labour legislation and social security contributions for a period initially set to 3 months and after 27.11.2020 prolonged to 6 months. The project was implemented by the Employment Agency with financial resources under OP HRD 2014-2020.

As a result of timely and effective measures to limit the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis, a possible sharp leap of unemployment was prevented and persons from different age groups, including the elderly, were supported.

### *Ministry of Culture*

In the last two years, especially in order to prevent the negative effects of the COVID-19 epidemic, which also affected the cultural sector, representatives of the creative sector - organizations and artists, including representatives of ethnic communities, have been actively involved in cultural policy development, respectively programmes, through participation in working groups, video meetings, discussions in which the proposals reflected their needs.

The actions taken have led to the updating of the regular programmes and activities of the Ministry of Culture by including even more opportunities to support cultural institutes, cultural organizations, including organizations representing ethnic communities, the independent cultural sector, and individual artists in adherence to the principles of equality and the promotion of cultural diversity. Up-to-date information for the initiatives related to the results of the meetings was promptly published on the website of the Ministry, projects of new programmes for participation with creative products on a competitive basis were announced. Accordingly, the budget of the Ministry of Culture has been increased in order to implement a package of possible temporary effective economic measures: guaranteed salaries and social security contributions for the state cultural institutes in the field of performing arts for the period of the state of emergency; support for self-employed artists in the field of culture and the arts in the amount of one minimum wage and accrued social security contributions for two months from the date of announcing the state of emergency until its cancellation; opportunity to apply with projects to the Ministry of Culture and the National



Culture Fund under existing programmes, the rules of which include eligible costs up to 25% of staff and administrative costs and prolongation of implementation deadlines. In 2020, as part of the anti-crisis measures in the field of culture, the National Culture Fund received an additional amount of BGN 17.2 million for financial support of programmes and projects in the field of culture and arts, with a larger share of funds going mainly to private cultural organizations and independent artists. In addition to the 6 regular programmes of the National Culture Fund, funds also reached the cultural sector through a programme for new creative initiatives.

Regarding the social dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis and the support of culture, it is reported that the sector has received exceptional support - only for freelance artists the Ministry of Culture has provided additional BGN 22.5 million under its various programmes - for individual artists and for free organizations in which freelance artists also participate, incl. BGN 1,600,000 for over 20 organizations in circus art and, through the National Culture Fund, for a total of 2,758 projects of private cultural organizations and 2,632 freelance artists, whereas freelance artists were supported both individually and through private cultural organizations. For other artists, the state also guaranteed the salaries, social security contributions and subsistence of cultural institutions.

The government budget for 2021 envisages an increase of BGN 27,572,600 in the budget for culture, compared to 2020 (or a total of BGN 245 million). The approved additional resource is intended for financial support of programmes and projects to support individual freelance artists, practicing in the field of culture and arts, and directly affected by the crisis. The funds will be provided through the National Culture Fund on the basis of respective applications. To date, seven programmes of the Ministry of Culture and the National Culture Fund for financial support have been announced, aimed at freelance artists and organizations in the field of culture.

#### *Agency for Social Assistance (ASA)*

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in connection with the state of emergency and the declared epidemic, in 2020 an opportunity was created for part of the ASA administrative services applications to be submitted not only at the counter in the Centre for Administrative Services, but also through the System for secure electronic service with a personal identification code of the National Social Security Institute or a qualified electronic signature, or through a licensed postal operator with a return receipt and also by e-mail to the e-mail address: [ao@asp.government.bg](mailto:ao@asp.government.bg) without the need for an electronic signature.

An Instruction for the use of electronic administrative services provided by the ASA for the convenience of people, including the elderly, was published on the ASA website under the heading "Coronavirus COVID-19".

As of 01.07.2021 there is an opportunity for applications for part of the administrative services to be submitted by e-mail to SAD at the current address of the person. Addresses and telephone numbers for contact with SAD throughout the country are published in the "Contacts" section of the ASA website.

Given the danger to human health and life and in order to guarantee their rights, including the elderly, with regard to the application of § 20 of the Act for the Measures and Actions during the State of Emergency declared by the National Assembly on 13 March 2020 and for overcoming the consequences of the epidemic situation, the extension of the terms of all expert decisions of the Territorial Medical Expert Commissions (TEMC) /National Medical Expert Commission (NEMC), up to three months after the cancellation of the state of emergency was granted. For this reason, in the ASA Integrated Information System (IIS), the expiration dates of the ED of TEMC /NEMC have been periodically extended.

For persons with permanent disabilities whose ED of TEMC /NEMC have expired

during the epidemic emergency and who do not have new expert decisions, the term of the orders for granting monthly financial support, targeted assistance for rent of municipal housing and the directions for inclusion in the personal assistance mechanism, have been gradually extended in the IIS.

### *National Social Security Institute (NSSI)*

The measures taken to protect pensioners with a focus on the socio-economic consequences of tackling COVID-19 are as follows:

- In 2020, the government approved a package of socio-economic measures to support household incomes in the context of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. As part of these measures, all pensioners were paid supplements in the amount of BGN 50 to the pensions for the months from August to December inclusive.
- In 2021 the payment of a supplement of BGN 50 to the pensions continued, whereas they have still been paid for the months from January to July inclusive and their payment to the pensions for the months of August and September has been approved.

**2.5. What has been done to expand participation by older persons, share good practices and harness knowledge and data?** Please reflect on the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Policy Brief, when applicable, and briefly describe the main challenges and 3 - 5 good practices.

### *Ministry of Education and Science*

**The main challenge** is to increase the participation of the population aged 25-64 in education and training from 1.5% in 2012 to more than 5% in 2020 (four-week reference period).

The target for 2020 in the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning is to reach 5% participation of the population aged 25-64 in learning activities (formal education<sup>7</sup> and training and /or non-formal learning<sup>8</sup>).

The European Commission has set a target in 2020 for the participation of people aged 25-64 in learning activities to be at least 15% on average for EU countries (then 28 countries).

For the period 2014 - 2020 there was no progress in achieving the set national goal, whereas the participation of the population aged 25 - 64 in educational activities decreased from 2.1% in 2014 to 1.6% in 2020 (Fig. 1). At the same time, the data show some details. During the period 2014 - 2018 there was progress, although very modest - on average by 0.1 percentage points, reaching 2.5% in 2018. In 2019 the share of adults (25 - 64 years) who participated in learning decreased sharply to 2.0%. In 2020, mainly due to the constraints in the conditions of the pandemic crisis situation, the participation decreased again and reached the level of 1.6%, which is the lowest for the period 2014 - 2020. Therefore, Bulgaria remains

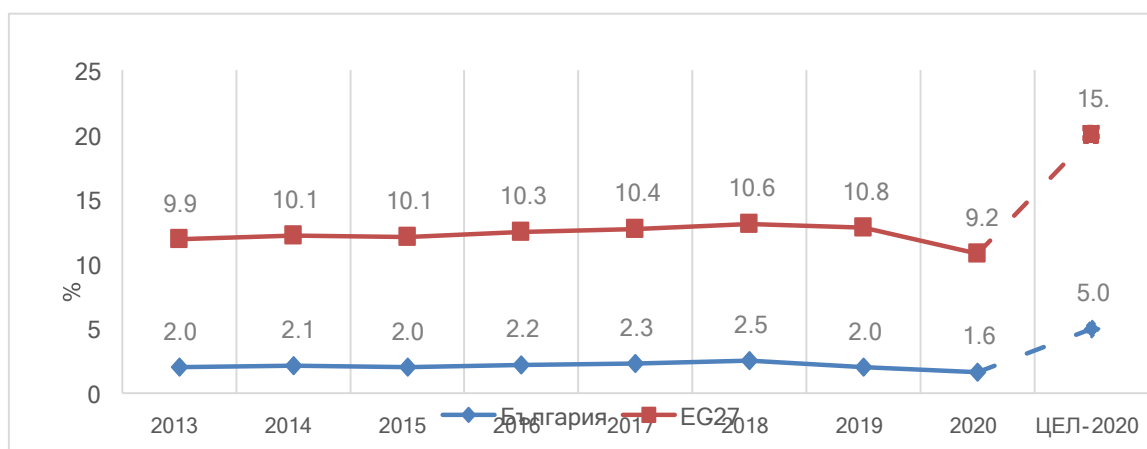
---

<sup>7</sup> **Formal education and training** is an organized form of learning for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies, and a state-recognized document is issued for the results of this training.

<sup>8</sup> **The Non-formal learning** is also purposeful and organized, but its successful completion does not lead to the acquisition of a degree and /or a degree of professional qualification. The most common forms of non-formal learning are courses, private lessons, seminars, training workshops, on-the-job training and occupational safety training.

far from the national target for 2020 (5%).

**FIG. 1. Participation of the population aged 25-64 in formal or non-formal education and training (four weeks before the interview) in the EU and Bulgaria**



Source: Eurostat, database, online code: trng\_lfse\_01

According to EUROSTAT data on this indicator, Bulgaria occupies the penultimate position for 2020 among the EU-27 countries (before Romania), despite the increase in the period 2014 - 2018. For another year in the period 2014 - 2020, the difference between the value of this indicator for Bulgaria and the average value for EU countries remains high and remains at around 9 percentage points, due to the similar and declining level of participation on average for EU countries and Bulgaria for the last three years.

**Practices.** The Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe EPAL has set up a special community for professionals in the adult learning sector. Its name is "Bulgarian good practices for adult learning". The online resource is initiated and maintained by MES in its functions as the National Unit for EPAL Support. It publishes more than 20 national good practices for adult learning, which are available to all users and visitors of the Platform.

### 3. Activities in preparation and implementation of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020 - 2030

In August 2020, the 73rd World Health Assembly have endorsed the proposal for a [Decade of Healthy Ageing \(2020-2030\)](#).<sup>9</sup> The World Health Assembly asked the WHO Director-General to transmit this decision to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for consideration of the proposal for the Decade by the United Nations General Assembly.

**3.1. Is your country preparing (or already has) a National Action Plan (or similar) for the implementation of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020 - 2030? If yes, please briefly describe the main actions foreseen.**

**3.2. Would your country agree to report on the implementation of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020 - 2030 in the framework of the next national reviews and appraisals of MIPAA /RIS?**

<sup>9</sup> The Document with the proposal for the Decade is available at <https://www.who.int/ageing/decade-of-healthy-ageing>

## Conclusions and priorities for the future

The framework in which the demographic changes in Bulgaria are taking place is well known - the population is decreasing, the labour force is shrinking, the share of the economically inactive population in the highest age groups is growing. According to EUROSTAT forecasts, in 2060 the share of the population over the age of 65 will increase from the current around 20% until over 30%. At the same time, the working age population will continue to decline - the number of working age people will decrease from the current about 67% to about 54% of the population.

The main systems of society in Bulgaria - economic, labour market, education, health, pension, the system for social protection and long-term care, are greatly affected by the pandemic of COVID-19, which requires measures at national level for stabilization and recovery, with high number of stakeholders involved. Among these measures, special attention should be paid to vulnerable groups, including the elderly. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that digital activities are vital for all age groups. As technology is constantly changing, older people need to be trained in digital skills.

In Bulgaria there is a growing need for institutions to take additional integrated action to adapt key sectors such as employment, health, education, social security and social assistance to the ageing process.

The operational documents on ageing in Bulgaria during recent years have outlined key measures that none of the institutions has recognized so far and to which attention should be paid in the future:

- Encouraging the supply of goods and services adapted to the needs of the elderly;
- Improving attitudes towards older people and communication against discrimination;
- Strengthening the capacity of stakeholders regarding policies for older people;
- Creating a favourable environment for active ageing in small and remote areas.

In order to improve its policy on ageing, the MLSP has commissioned a survey to collect up-to-date information on the indicators of the Active Ageing Index, which will serve to the monitoring and evaluation of the National Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria (2019 - 2030).

The survey aims to gather and interpret up-to-date information for the main demographic indicators, on the basis of which the separate 22 indicators of the Active Ageing Index are calculated, using data from EUROSTAT and several regular European surveys.

The planned activities include preparation of two analytical reports, conduction of a sociological survey /research, collection of data on the separate 22 indicators of the Active Ageing Index for Bulgaria and adaptation of a methodology for calculating the overall Active Ageing Index. The survey should be conducted at national level, including a representative sample also by statistical regions (at NUTS 2 level).

In connection with the census, which is conducted in Bulgaria every ten years, the data from the census in 2021, which ended in October, are expected to be published by the NSI by the end of 2021. As a result, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in cooperation with all stakeholders, in 2022 will initiate an update of the National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population, which will reflect the latest current statistics, as well as the development of demographic policy and of active ageing policy since 2012.

In its future work, our country will benefit from the initiative of the European Commission "Demographic Atlas" for the consequences of demographic change.

Bulgaria is open to the exchange of ideas and practices in connection with demographic change, as our country has one of the oldest populations among EU countries. Bulgaria has always expressed its readiness to engage in discussions on possible ways to

anticipate and respond to the socio-economic consequences of Europe's ageing population.

Bulgaria was the host country of the **Ministerial Conference on Demographic Resilience entitled "Shaping Europe's demographic future - pathways for societies to thrive in a world of rapid demographic change"**, which was held on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021 in Sofia, under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria. The conference was an initiative of the UN Population Fund, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria were co-organizers of the event.

---

## **Annexes**

Statistical information in excel format, provided by the National Statistical Institute (NSI) of the Republic of Bulgaria.