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MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY
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**National Work Programme
on the participation of the Republic of Bulgaria in the
European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between
Generations – 2012**

1. Foreword by Totyu Mladenov, Minister of Labour and Social Policy

**Foreword
to the National Work Programme on the participation of the Republic of
Bulgaria in the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between
Generations – 2012**

The demographic changes along with globalization and the advancements in information technologies underpin the evolution of a new social reality that the societies of Europe and the European Union face. We are witnessing a process of increase in the proportion of older people and decrease in the share of children and young people. It affects sustainable social development and complicates the transitions from one lifecycle to another. Young people now make significantly later the important choices about their life – completion of education, starting work, giving birth to and raising children.

The emerging permanent trend of population ageing and the progressive, year by year, increase in the share of older people is a process which has high significance and impact on future programming in the social area because it affects essential spheres. The growing share of older population will push up public finance costs for pensions, long-term care, health, education.

Demographically, population ageing is an irreversible process, therefore this challenge needs to be addressed not by focusing on mechanical changes in the key demographic indicators but by concentrating on the implementation and development of an integrated policy aimed at mobilization and full use of the potential of the available human resource and targeted investment in improving the quality of human capital.

Along these lines goes the planning of the government policy for demographic development. Bulgaria is among the few European countries and the first of the new EU Member States having in place **a long-term demographic strategy**. It does not focus on simple increase of birth rates but on achieving high quality of the human capital, of the people with their health condition, education, capabilities and skills. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) coordinates the implementation of the National Demographic Strategy through annual national plans designed within an inter-institutional group on demographic issues. To address the ageing challenge and the problems related to the social and economic involvement of older people, MLSP is developing a National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing.

The social reality that Bulgaria and most EU Member States face implies a new, more active and more participatory role of the older population in the attainment of the socioeconomic goals we aspire to. The demographic challenges which population ageing presents should be interpreted not only in terms of the negative trends and consequences for the economy and the society but also from a wider and more rational perspective. We have to be ready to accept ageing as an inevitable given in the next decades when we should concentrate our efforts and face in a worthy manner the whole range of changes accompanying this process. Therefore, in the light of contemporary European trends, we have to adopt a positive approach to this phenomenon and thus not only find the best way to address the occurring problems but also transform challenges into new opportunities to be benefit of the whole society.

The overcoming of the negative demographic trends in our society is a long and slow process. It calls for mobilizing the efforts of ministries, state agencies, municipal authorities, social partners, scientific institutions and civil organizations. In order to achieve sustainable and balanced demographic development there is a need to synchronize, coordinate and put on a consistent basis the policies and measures undertaken; develop a sustainable long-term policy; build a reliable system of modelling, dynamic statistics and monitoring of the population movement and the demographic processes. All this calls for putting in place a comprehensive national mechanism to meet the challenges which the demographic change in our society presents.

In the context of high dynamics of social processes, the approach to the development and implementation of a modern active ageing policy in response to the demographic challenges implies broad-based cooperation and interaction of all stakeholders. I believe that the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations – 2012 will contribute to positive reconsidering of the opportunities that can be derived given the contemporary demographic trends and challenges.

2. Promoting active ageing – from challenges to opportunities

2.1. The ageing population challenges

The continuing population ageing emerges as an acute problem of Bulgaria's demographic development. It consists in continuous rising of the median age indicator values over the past years. In 2000, the value of this indicator was 39.9 years, in 2005 - 41.2

years, and in 2010 it rises to 41.9 years. The ageing process occurs both in rural and urban areas, with rural areas registering higher median age of the population (45.5 years) compared to urban areas (40.5 years).

The population ageing trend is manifested also in changes in the basic age structure of the population – **distribution of the population under, in and above working age.**

Population under, in and above working age

Year	Age group		
	Under working age	In working age	Above working age
1990	21.6	55.5	22.9
1995	19.1	56.6	24.3
2001	16.3	59.2	24.5
2005	14.8	62.4	22.8
2006	14.6	62.8	22.6
2007	14.5	63.0	22.5
2008	14.5	63.2	22.3
2009	14.5	63.1	22.4
2010	14.6	62.7	22.7

Source: National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria

At the end of 2010, the population in working age is 4 700 600 people, making up 62.7% of the total population, 73 thousand people down on the previous year.

In 2010, the population above working age is 1 706 000 people, 15 thousand people up on the previous year.

From the perspective of future development it should be pointed out that a serious **demographic problem for Bulgaria presents the relatively low share of the population in the 0 – 14 age group inclusive - 13.8%**. The population aged 65+ is continuously increasing and now stands at 17.7%.

The total age dependency ratio – showing the number of persons under 15 and above 65 years of age per 100 individuals of the population aged 15 – 65 – is 46.0%. In 2005 and 2009 the values of this ratio were 44.5 and 45.1% accordingly. The ratio is more favourable in the urban areas – 40.1% compared to the rural areas – 63.3%.

Another indicator revealing the acuteness of the problem is the **demographic replacement ratio**. In 2001, every 100 individuals exiting working age were replaced by 124 people entering working age. After 2008 this ratio reverses – 100 individuals exiting working age are replaced by 91 in 2008, 82 in 2009 and 74 in 2010. This indicates an emerging stagnation in the country as regards the rejuvenation and development of the population in working age.

2.2. Republic of Bulgaria's position in support of promoting active ageing

The Republic of Bulgaria supports the common European active ageing policy. The improvement of the general social and economic activity should be accompanied by putting in place the necessary conditions to guarantee the dignified and equal life of older people. Republic of Bulgaria's view on the undertaking of specific measures at national level to promote active ageing concerns the spheres of employment, healthcare, education,

improving the standard of living and overcoming poverty, stabilizing the pension system, developing long-term care, promoting free voluntary activity, developing the so-called “silver economy”, overcoming the negative stereotypes and building a positive public image of elderly people.

The efforts for encouraging older people to remain on the labour market and for promoting their active behaviour have to be accompanied by adaptation of the training and qualification system to their needs and provision of incentives to remain on the labour market, by overcoming discrimination based on age and by taking account of the importance and experience of the elderly. Along with that, there is a need to take action to ensure conditions for dignified, healthy ageing, develop measures to prevent socially significant diseases and disabilities and promote a healthy way of life, develop services for elderly people as well as long-term care, and to interpret in a new way the positive social role of the elderly as active citizens with full rights. The role of the non-governmental sector and the social partners in the process should also be duly considered.

The Republic of Bulgaria has expressed its position in support of the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012). Population ageing is a process affecting all of Europe and presenting challenges of extremely high social significance. In the context of the high development targets which the European Union sets in its “Europe 2020 – A Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, the special focus on ageing problems and promotion of active ageing is well-grounded. The specific view of the Bulgarian government on the implementation of the activities within the European Year 2012 is fully in line with the content of measures set out in the Proposal for a Decision of European Parliament and of the Council, namely conducting research and surveys about the condition and needs of elderly people, organizing events, implementing activities for exchange of good practices and conducting a national campaign to raise the awareness on issues concerning the impact and consequences of population ageing.

3. Existing policies and initiatives

3.1. Existing policies and strategic framework

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is responsible for the development implementation, monitoring and reporting the progress in the field of the policy for demographic development.

The basic strategic document of the Bulgarian government in the field of demographic development is the **National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria with a horizon up to 2020** which formulates the priority areas and tasks oriented to slowing down the population decrease rate, bringing about a stabilization trend in the long-run and making possible the high quality of the human capital which refers to the health condition, educational attainment, capabilities and skills of the people. In the context of a demographic transition from a situation of population increase to a situation of stabilization (decrease) and ageing, the Strategy is based on the “population balance” concept, the leading element of which is better quality of life and well-being for every Bulgarian citizen and every Bulgarian family, and ensured conditions for the nation’s best development while maintaining its integrity and unity.

The Demographic Strategy sets out the following priorities:

- Slowing down the negative demographic processes and the decrease of population size;
- Overcoming the negative effects of population ageing and improving the quality characteristics of human capital;
- Achieving social cohesion and creating equal opportunities for an ample reproductive life for all social groups;
- Limiting the disproportions in the territorial distribution of the population and the depopulation of some of the regions and villages.

The specific tasks, measures and activities for the accomplishment of the strategic priorities lie in the following main directions:

- Encouraging the increase of the birth rate by creating an environment conducive of child-raising and upbringing;
- Increasing the average life expectancy;
- Decreasing significantly the number of emigrating young people in reproductive age;
- Developing an adequate immigration policy;
- Overcoming the effects of population ageing;
- Improving the reproductive health of the population and preventing sterility;
- Increasing the general educational attainment, knowledge on demographic issues, as well as the sexual and reproductive culture of the population;
- Ensuring equal opportunities for adequate reproductive life in good health for all social groups;
- Developing the solidarity among the generations;
- Limiting the disproportions in the territorial distribution of the population and the depopulation of some regions and in rural areas;
- Improving and synchronizing the legal basis of the demographic development.

The main guidelines on identifying opportunities to promote active ageing are contained in the **National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing** developed within the inter-institutional working group on demographic matters, which will be adopted within the European Year 2012. The concept's vision is oriented to creating conditions and ensuring equal opportunities for dignified life of full value for elderly people. The National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing develops and builds on an important direction of the National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria with a horizon up to 2020, i.e. Overcoming the effects of population ageing. Through the National Concept of Active Ageing the Republic of Bulgaria aims to create conditions for economic growth, sustainable social system development, improved standard and quality of life of the people and building a cohesive society. The National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing offers a specific perspective for addressing the effects of population ageing in the context of an integrated approach reflecting the particular specifics of ageing.

Regardless of the common characteristics of demographic trends in the European Union, the current situation in Bulgaria as regards the population characteristics has its specifics. Typical for population of some of the older Member States are the low birth and mortality rates and high average life expectancy. The situation in Bulgaria shows lower life expectancy and higher mortality rate of the population. Unfavourable are the data about

average life expectancy in good health. Therefore, the descriptive parameters for development of the National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing should conform to the real condition of the older population with a view to maximizing the correspondence of planned activities to identified needs. There is a need to place a special focus on promoting a healthier way of life, improving health services and improving and diversifying the social services for elderly people.

The National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing identifies nine key operational objectives which relate to:

- Ensuring equal opportunities for active employment of older people;
- Ensuring financial stability of the pension system and equal opportunities for active and dignified life in retirement age. Creating conditions to curb poverty among pensioners;
- Creating conditions to improve the standard of living of elderly people (including through creating opportunities to increase incomes, rehabilitate housing, modernize the living environment);
- Ensuring equal opportunities for access to health services and increasing the life expectancy in good health for elderly people;
- Ensuring equal opportunities for access to education, lifelong learning, qualification improvement and requalification with a view to improving labour market mobility;
- Developing and modernizing long-term care and ensuring equal opportunities for access to social services;
- Development of voluntary work;
- Development of the so-called “silver economy”;
- Overcoming the negative stereotypes and building a positive public image of older people.

3.2. Existing measures and initiatives for promotion of active ageing

The Bulgarian Employment Promotion Act provides for support of employment with allocations from the state budget for persons aged 50+ through the National Action Plan for Employment which is the operational document for implementation of the National Employment Strategy till 2015.

A number of schemes targeting provision of quality care for elderly people, including older people with disabilities, seriously ill and living alone are implemented within Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2007-2013 which is the main instrument for implementation of the funds from the European Social Fund. As data show, in the period between 2007-2010 one out of ten (10%) persons included in the measures under the Operational Programme aimed at promotion of social economy and social inclusion of vulnerable groups was in the 55 – 64 age group. On the other hand, measures directly aimed at ensuring high-quality and independent life of the people above working age, i.e. in the 65+ age group, are also implemented within the operational programme. These include:

- Procedure *“Care in family environment for independent and decent living of people with different types of disabilities and people living alone – activities “Social Assistant” and “Domestic Assistant”*. The budget of the scheme is 44.3 MBGN. Beneficiaries include municipalities and non-governmental organizations – registered providers of social services. The scheme is implementing in the period 2007-2013.

- Procedure *“Improvement of the service “Personal Assistant” for people with different types of disabilities and for people who live alone”*. The aim of the procedure is to improve the community-based service “Personal Assistant” provided to people who require permanent assistance in their daily activities , as well as to provide a professional development alternative for families (with special focus on women) having a member with permanent disability and/or seriously ill. The budget is 38.8 MBGN.
- Procedure *“Alternatives”*. In response to the higher demand of the service “Personal Assistance” by people with disabilities, allocations of 35.0 MBGN are provided under this scheme to ensure the availability of this service to more than 9 000 individuals. The procedure is implemented by the Social Assistance Agency in partnership with Bulgarian municipalities in the period 2010-2012.

Elderly people or the so-called “older workers” in the 55–64 age bracket are a target group of all schemes of Human Resources Development Operational Programme 2007-2013 aimed at employment integration of the disadvantaged groups in the labour market and improvement of the adaptability and labour productivity of employed persons. In that light, in the period between 2007-2010 one out of ten individuals included (10%) in labour market measures was in the age group 55 and 64.

Measures specifically aimed at promoting the employment of elderly people and their longer stay in the labour market are also implemented under Human Resources Development Operational Programme. One such measure is *“Social Innovations in Enterprises”* with a budget of 37.9 MBGN. It was approved in December 2010 and its objective is to create adequate conditions for improving the social climate in enterprises. The measure targets employers and allows them to choose from wide range of activities, including involvement of employed persons aged 55+ in train the trainer courses and their subsequent inclusion as mentors of new employees – disadvantaged persons in the labour market (older employees, young people under 29 years of age, single parents, parents with young children under 3 years of age and parents of children with disabilities). Another option provided by the scheme is the introduction of flexible working hours for older workers, for example part-time, whereupon they will be provided with material incentives in the form of additional labour remuneration with funds from the programme. The scheme will be implemented in the period until the end of 2013.

4. Mobilization and involvement of stakeholders

To ensure the full involvement of MLSP as a responsible institution in the field of demographic development, there is a need to achieve at national level specific organization of coordination and monitoring consisting in setting up an **institutional framework** and maintaining a **National Implementation Mechanism for the demographic policy**, through:

1. Development of Annual Implementation Plans for the National Demographic Strategy – implementation of activities by key institutions – in applying an integrated approach;
2. Monitoring of the demographic processes and of institutions’ actions to address demographic challenges – drafting annual monitoring reports integrating national statistics, administrative information and data from sociological surveys;

3. Coordination and leadership of the Inter-institutional Working Group on Demographic Issues with the participation of representatives of the central administration, non-governmental organizations, statistical and scientific institutes;
4. Monitoring the effect of the government demographic policy through the System of Indicators for Monitoring of the National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006-2020.

The National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing is elaborated and the Working Programme for Republic of Bulgaria's participation in the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations is coordinated and formulated within the Inter-institutional Working Group on Demographic Issues, ensuring thereby wide representation of all stakeholders, including all central public power ministries and agencies, as well as representatives of the National Association of Municipalities, the National Statistical Institute, the National Social Security Institute, non-governmental organizations, UN Populations Fund, UNICEF, BRC, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, etc.

5. Agenda of events and activities within the European Year 2012

The specific activities which the Republic of Bulgaria plans to develop in connection with the European Year for Active Ageing – 2012, concern:

1. Developing forecasts of the impact of ageing on public finance on the basis of an interdisciplinary study on "Evaluation and analysis of the social and economic effects of population ageing" within the European Year for Active Ageing – 2012;
2. Raising the awareness of the general public and all stakeholders and promoting the objectives and ideas of the European Year for Active Ageing – 2012, through official opening and holding of 4 thematic workshops and a closing conference. Workshop topics will include: Media and the Public Image of Elderly People; Active Ageing in the Labour Market; Active Ageing and Development of Social Security and Protection Systems – pension, health, long-term care; Active Social Ageing – solidarity between generations, development of voluntary work, different forms of self-organization and good practices.
3. Developing and disseminating information materials on the European Year 2010, including:
 - 3.1. Information brochure, a package of information materials accompanying promotional materials, etc.;
 - 3.2. Creating and maintaining a special internet space in the official website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to inform on national activities within the European Year 2012.
 - 3.3. Organizing a competition for best journalistic work on "Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations" in TV, electronic and printed media
 - 3.4. Organizing a competition for employers supporting active ageing by introducing labour force age management practices;
 - 3.5. Appointing ambassadors of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations.
4. Preparing and publishing a collection of the most important strategic documents addressing population ageing and demographic challenges such as: National Concept for Promotion of Active Ageing, information materials, results of the interdisciplinary study within the European Year for Active Ageing – 2012.