

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme.  
Project number: 2012-1-PL1-LEO05-27455



# **ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION OF PERSONS ENTERING THE LABOUR MARKET (30-) AND PERSONS WITH EXTENSIVE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (45+) IN BULGARIA**

**NATIONAL REPORT  
BULGARIA**



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>1. Target groups</b> .....	4
1.1. Statistical characteristics of groups (30-) and (45+) in the labour market.....	4
1.1.1. Age structure of the population in Bulgaria.....	4
1.1.2. Labour force indicators.....	8
1.1.3. Educational profile of the labour force.....	11
1.2. Strengths and weaknesses of persons entering the labour market (30-).....	12
1.3. Strengths and weaknesses of employees with extensive professional experience (45-50+).....	13
<b>2. Approaches to life-long learning with focus on the selected target groups</b> .....	14
2.1. Legislative framework and incentives from the state.....	15
2.2. National and regional programmes and projects.....	17
2.3. Programmes and projects concentrated on particular sectors.....	19
2.3.1. Programmes and projects in the private sector.....	19
2.3.2. Programmes and projects in the public sector.....	19
2.4. Solutions applied in companies and institutions with focus on public institutions.....	21
<b>3. Solutions found for intergenerational cooperation between the target groups</b> .....	22
3.1. Legislative framework and incentives from the state.....	22
3.2. National and/or regional programmes/projects.....	22
3.3. Programmes/projects oriented towards economic sectors or particular industries.....	23
3.4. Solutions applied in companies and institutions.....	23
<b>4. Good practices in Lifelong Learning</b> .....	23
<b>5. Good practices in Intergenerational Cooperation</b> .....	26
<b>6. Identification of gaps in the key competences of persons entering the labour market (30-) and persons with extensive professional experience (45+)</b> .....	27
6.1. Workers entering the labour market (30-).....	27
6.2. Employees with extensive professional experience (45+).....	29
<b>7. Inventory of training needs of employees (30-) and (45+) and expectations of employers towards their skills</b> .....	30
7.1. Workers entering the labour market (30-).....	32
7.2. Employees with extensive professional experience (45+).....	32
<b>8. Evaluation of the possibilities of effective intergenerational cooperation</b> .....	33
<b>9. Conclusions</b> .....	35
<b>10. Resources</b> .....	36
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	37

## INTRODUCTION

The present Report is based on the research findings within the framework of the European project titled MODERN UNIVERSITY IN MODERN EUROPE (MUME) under the Lifelong Learning Programme, Action: Leonardo da Vinci (TOI). It is written by Adelina Simeonova with the support of the project contact person, Tsvetelina Petrova, and covers data for Bulgaria.

The main aim of the Report is to analyze the situation of persons entering the labour market (30-) and persons with extensive professional experience (45+) in Bulgaria with a focus on the public sector.

The specific objectives of the present Report is to:

### **identify:**

- the characteristics of both target groups in the labour market as well as their strengths and weaknesses;
- the lifelong approaches to the target groups;
- the solutions for intergenerational cooperation;
- the key competences gaps and training needs.

### **draw conclusions about:**

- the actual situation of the target groups on the labour market;
- the lifelong learning opportunities offered to them;
- the key competences to be improved or acquired by the target groups;
- the possibilities for effective intergenerational cooperation.

The research was based on the following methodology:

- desk research – analysis of Internet resources (reports, documents, articles, projects, best practices, scientific papers)
- field research – personal interviews, e-mails.

The research was done in the project context focusing on the employability patterns in the public sector where more persons 45-50+ are employed. They are rarely released from their positions, which indeed makes the employment of young people 30- very difficult. As a result the older employees are not motivated to improve their competences whereas there is very high competition among young employees to enter the public sector. This also deepens the intergenerational gap thus leading to poor communication and transfer of knowledge and skills.

Therefore, it is very important to know what employees 45+ and 30- can offer to their organizations and what they need to better perform at the working place. In addition, the opinion of the employees should also be taken into consideration, as well as the existing lifelong learning practices which could support both target groups in their career path.

Thus the present Report will be an attempt to respond to the issues mentioned above and provide recommendations to improve the existing situation.

## 1. Target groups

### 1.1. Statistical characteristics of groups (30-) and (45+) in the labour market

Some demographic and economic indicators will be analyzed below in order to outline the profiles of both the young people 30- entering the labour market and those 45+ with extensive professional experience.

#### 1.1.1. Age structure of the population in Bulgaria

Population ageing is affected by 3 indicators such as birth rate, mortality rate and life expectancy. Figure 1 shows that death rate substantially increased and birth rate considerably decreased from 1950 to 2000. However, both have been kept stable since 2000. In addition, fig. 2 shows a steady increase of life expectancy at birth between 1990 and 2011. However, it is still low in comparison with the other European countries.

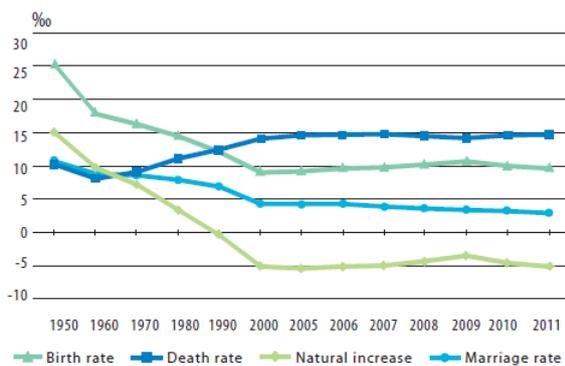


Fig. 1. Birth and Death rate.

Source: *Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute.*

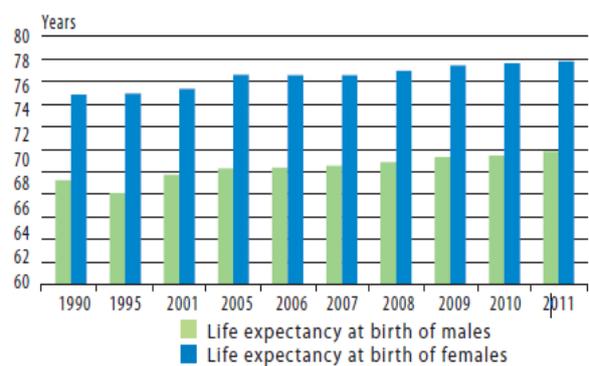


Fig. 2. Life expectancy at birth.

Source: *Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute.*

The high mortality rate, the low birth rate and the relatively low life expectancy at birth cause serious problems in the country, which in turn have negative effects on the population age structure.

The population age structure is represented by the distribution of the population by age groups. As it can be seen in fig.3, the process of population ageing continues like in most European countries as a result of the decrease of the absolute number and relative share of the population aged under 15 and increase of the share of the population aged 65 and over. Therefore the negative tendency of the population structure by age continues to deepen. Moreover, it leads to substantial changes in the distribution of population under, at and over working age.

It is of particular interest for the project that the age group 20-30 remains relatively stable between 1990 and 2011 whereas the age group 45-65 almost doubled. Considerable changes are observed within the age groups of people under 20 (a significant decrease) and people over 65 (a significant increase). However, those two groups are not subject to the present Report.

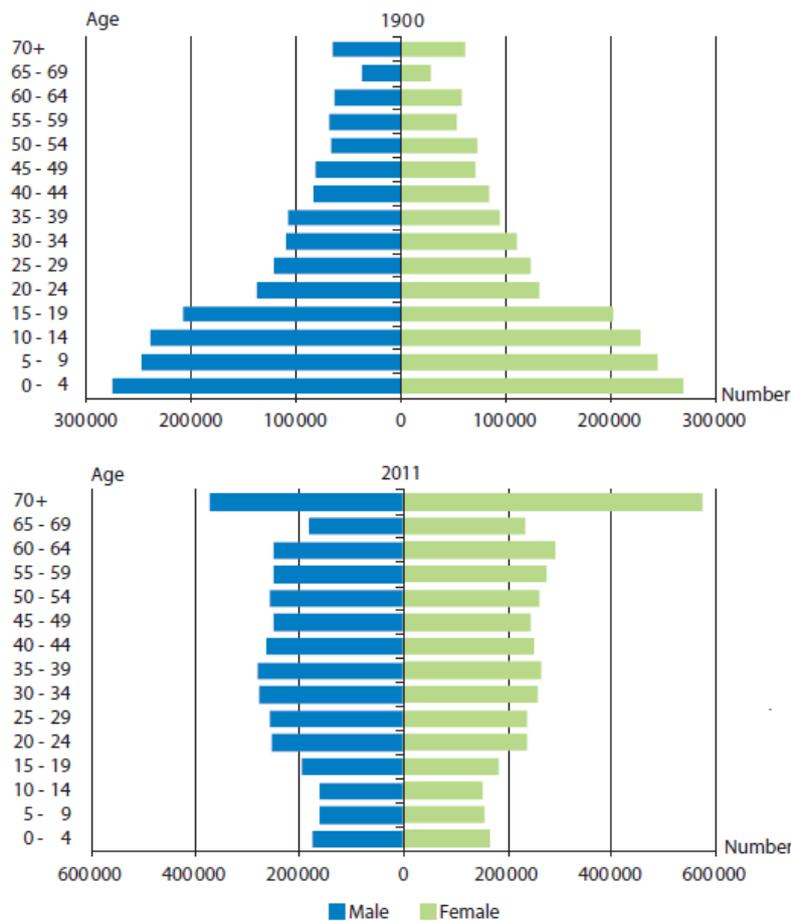


Fig.3. Population by age and gender.

Source: *Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute.*

To get deeper into analyzing the current age pyramid of the population in Bulgaria, for the purpose of the present report, it's better to focus on several age groups: 20-24, 25-29, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, and 60-64. The first and the second group constitute the young work force entering the labour market whereas the other four groups constitute the work force with professional experience. It is clearly seen that each of the age groups above has almost the same share within the age pyramid. However, in general, the total share of the first two groups is almost twice as much as the total share of the other 4 groups, i.e., in terms of employment, the share of employees with professional experience is double than the share of young people entering the labour market. Consequently, the age profile of organizations, including the public sector, has changed thus resulting in new requirements imposed on both experienced and inexperienced employees in terms of competences, cooperation and career development.

The share of age groups of the total population varies with years as well. The largest share belongs to the group 25-49 who are actually at the age of employment. As it can be seen in Table 1, it slightly decreased over the past years from 35.6% in 2007 to 35.1% in 2012.

Another important trend is the 0.9% increase of the share of people 50-64 who constitute the second largest age group of the population. This age group is also at the age of employment.

The share of young people 15-24 who are about to enter the labour market also fell within the given period from 11.8% in 2007 to 11.1 in 2012.

Table 1. *Population by age. Share of total population.*

Age groups	2007	2010	2011	2012
0-14	13.4	13.6	13.2	13.4
15-24	11.8	11.4	11.2	11.1
25-49	35.6	35.8	35.0	35.1
50-64	20.4	20.8	21.5	21.3
65-79	13.8	13.7	14.4	14.7
80+	3.5	3.8	4.0	4.1

Source: *Eurostat Statistics*

The share of people in retirement also went up over the last years by respectively 0.9 % for 65-79 and 0.6% for 80+ .

The share of the age group 0-14 remained relative constant over the past years but Bulgaria, along with Germany, has the lowest percentage of people 0-14 in EU.

There is a clear tendency that the percentage of young people at the age of employment or who are about to enter employment went down at the expense of the rise of people over 50 who are at the age of employment, pre-retirement and retirement.

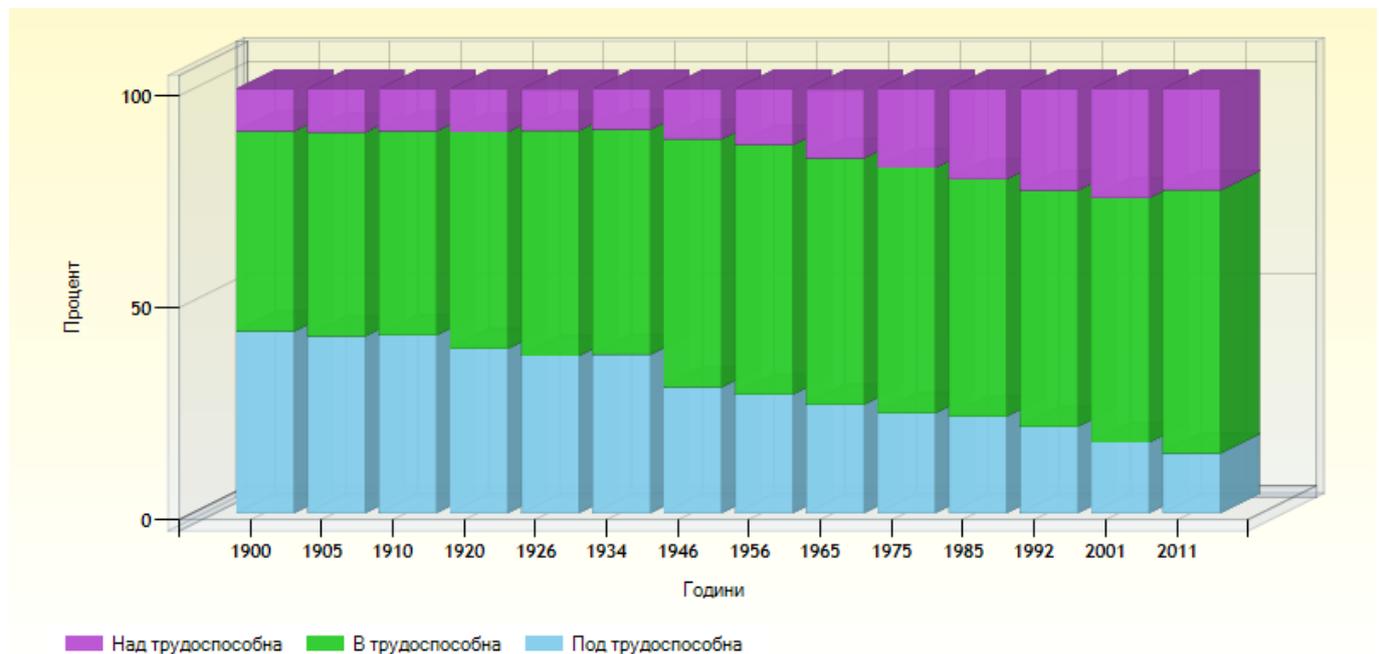


Fig.4. *Distribution of population according to the age of employability.*

Source: *Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute*

As it can be seen in fig. 4, the percentage of people under the age of employment decreased by almost two thirds whereas that of people over the age of employment rose by just over 50%. The reproduction of employable population is best represented by the demographic replacement rate which indicates the ratio between the number of the people entering the age of employability (15-19) and the number of the people leaving the age of employability (60-64). In 2001 a hundred people aged 60-64 were replaced by 124 young people, in 2008 - by

91, in 2009 - by 82, and in 2010 - by 74. According to 2011 Census this ratio is 100/70. As a result of the above trend, there are clear signs of stagnation in relation to the rejuvenation and development of the employable population.

In the future the total population in Bulgaria will continue to decrease and by 2060 it is projected to have fallen by almost two millions. Consequently this will influence all age groups.

Table 2. *Population projection by age.*

Sex Years	I variant(target) <sup>1</sup>									
	Years									
	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2055	2060
<b>Total</b>	<b>7 159 819</b>	<b>6 950 436</b>	<b>6 734 989</b>	<b>6 519 217</b>	<b>6 311 454</b>	<b>6 115 526</b>	<b>5 929 267</b>	<b>5 748 061</b>	<b>5 567 060</b>	<b>5 384 040</b>
0 - 4	337 979	312 574	278 756	257 263	253 383	256 632	254 755	244 193	229 460	217 567
5 - 9	346 346	337 486	312 296	278 594	257 174	253 392	256 736	254 938	244 429	229 723
10 - 14	316 506	346 350	337 826	312 757	279 069	257 588	253 840	257 314	255 650	245 200
15 - 19	314 842	318 119	350 476	344 149	319 654	284 947	262 113	258 402	263 020	262 377
20 - 24	377 837	315 540	320 569	355 805	350 889	326 536	290 523	266 556	263 144	268 858
25 - 29	484 754	373 225	312 628	318 288	354 235	349 831	325 814	289 949	266 046	262 859
30 - 34	484 352	478 762	368 366	309 167	315 198	351 384	347 337	323 726	288 213	264 544
35 - 39	527 925	478 176	473 130	364 056	305 957	312 217	348 418	344 640	321 404	286 309
40 - 44	536 024	520 079	471 646	467 124	359 592	302 605	309 052	345 219	341 696	318 861
45 - 49	502 172	525 691	510 874	464 024	460 234	354 595	298 819	305 515	341 646	338 439
50 - 54	481 559	488 695	512 985	499 622	454 844	452 063	348 754	294 452	301 492	337 583
55 - 59	494 991	462 767	471 791	497 112	485 726	443 551	442 013	341 709	289 230	296 689
60 - 64	492 353	467 251	439 578	450 902	477 547	468 564	429 644	429 664	333 140	282 879
65 - 69	491 928	452 933	433 586	411 145	425 053	453 047	446 933	411 993	413 898	322 148
70 - 74	360 220	434 389	405 119	392 117	375 649	392 428	421 855	419 161	389 125	393 383
75 - 79	275 059	294 090	362 151	343 890	338 134	328 704	348 749	379 508	380 940	357 321
80 - 84	204 264	192 502	213 584	271 061	264 293	265 933	264 183	287 107	318 236	324 206
85 - 89	97 380	109 671	108 516	126 589	167 310	169 084	175 724	180 020	202 891	230 989
90 - 94	29 350	35 215	42 072	44 061	54 557	75 644	79 830	86 367	92 028	108 973
95 - 99	3 604	6 427	8 155	10 286	11 367	14 927	21 669	23 878	26 947	29 917
100+	374	494	885	1 205	1 589	1 854	2 506	3 750	4 425	5 215

Source: *Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute.*

Table 2 shows that the most severely affected people will be those between 25 and 45. The next most affected group will be people aged 45-69. The only positive projection is for people over 75. As a result, population will continue to age. The population of working age is expected to decline steadily, while older persons will likely account for an increasing share of the total population – those aged 65 years or over.

The deterioration of the population age structure will actually affect the dimension and quality of the labour resources. The ageing of the labour force at the presence of a dynamic labour market whose requirements towards the qualification and professional competence of employees are getting more and more demanding calls for continuous improvement of the potential of the labour force through lifelong learning.

### 1.1.2. Labour force indicators

The labour force (the economically active population) consists of the people aged 15 and over, who furnish the supply of labour for the production of goods and services. The labour force comprises the employed and the unemployed persons.

The structure of the labour force in 2011 in Bulgaria can be seen in fig. 5. Just over 50% of the labour force is people aged 35-44 and 45-54, respectively 30% and 27%. People between 25 and 34 constitute just under a quarter of the labour market whereas people aged 55-64 amount to 14%. Very young people (15-24) are only 7%. People over 65 have the lowest percentage (1%) in the structure of the labour force.

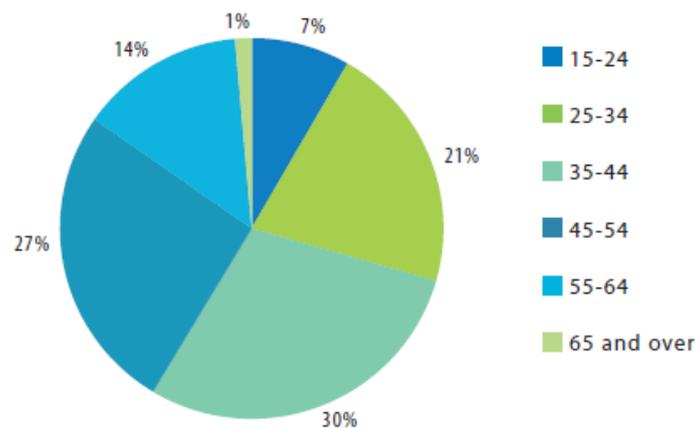


Fig. 5. Structure of the labour force by age in 2011.

Source: *Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute.*

In terms of the project target groups, 30- constitute about 28% of the workforce, while 45+ amount to 41%.

The main indicators related to the population at the age of employability, who are actually of particular interest to our Report, are economic activity rate, employment and unemployment rate.

The activity rate is the ratio between the economically active population and the total population of the same age.

Figure 6 below shows the economic activity rate by age for the period 2000 – 2006. In general, the level of economic activity of people aged 15-64 slightly increased from 60.7% to 64.5% between 2000 and 2006. However 35.5% of the population between 15 and 64 remained out of the labour force. About 20% of them were willing to work but they did not look for a job due to different reasons such as personal or family duties, illness or impairment, lack of required education, qualification, skills or work experience. The economic activity of young people is 28.9% whereas that of people aged 55-64 is 43%. The main economically active group includes people aged 35-54. The current tendency of decreasing economic activity among young people is troublesome.

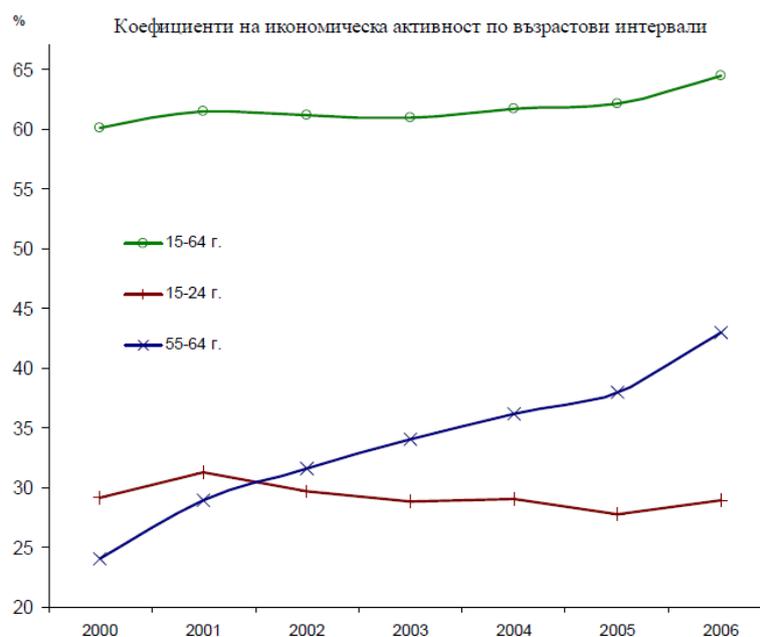


Fig. 6. Economic activity rate by age.

Source: Human Resources Development OP/ CCI 207BG051PO001.

The employment rate is the ratio between the employed population and the total population of the same age. Table 3 presents the employment rate by age for the period 2007-2011. The employment rate of all age groups increased until 2008. However, then the employment rate fell for all age groups mainly due to the world economic and financial crisis..

Table 3. Employment rate by age in %.

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Total</b>	<b>61.7</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>58.5</b>
<b>By place of residence</b>					
Urban	64.7	66.8	65.6	62.9	61.5
Rural	53.1	55.7	53.9	50.4	49.9
<b>By sex</b>					
Male	66.0	68.5	66.9	63.0	60.9
Female	57.6	59.5	58.3	56.4	56.2
<b>By age</b>					
15 - 24	24.5	26.3	24.8	22.2	20.1
25 - 34	76.2	78.2	75.1	70.7	68.3
35 - 44	82.8	84.6	82.6	79.4	77.4
45 - 54	78.4	80.6	79.0	75.8	74.9
55 - 64	42.6	46.0	46.1	43.5	43.9

Source: Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute.

The most vulnerable group affected by that drop is that aged 25-34, where the employment rate decreased by 9.9%, whereas the least affected group is people aged 55-64, where the employment rate fell by only 2.1%. Actually, the former include young people entering the labour market or with little experience while the latter - people with extensive professional experience.

This tendency is confirmed to a certain extent by the unemployment rate, shown in fig. 7.

The unemployment rate is lowest among people 55 and over, and it slightly decreased over the last few years. On the contrary, the unemployment rate among the age group 25-34 slightly increased between 2008 and 2011. The unemployment rate of people between 35 and 54 remained relatively constant during the given period. Another tendency which should be mentioned as well is that the employment rate of very young people (15-24) slightly went down from 2009 to 2011.

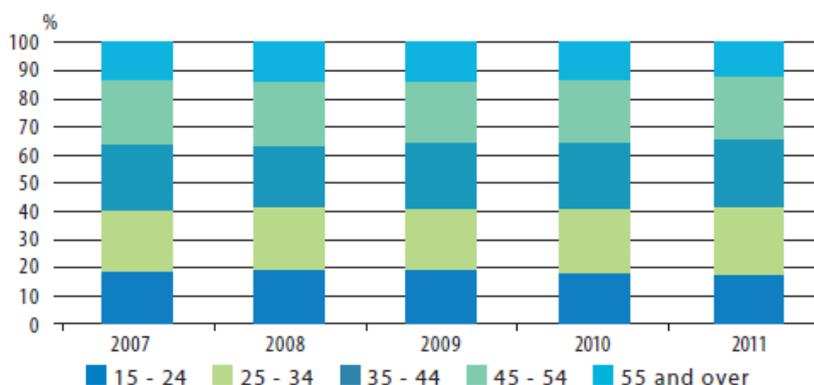


Fig. 7. Structure of unemployment by age.

Source: Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute.

To sum up, the most disadvantaged group in terms of both employment and unemployment is the age group of 25-34 who have just started their career path or possess little professional experience. By contrast, people with extensive professional experience (55-64) have an employment advantage.

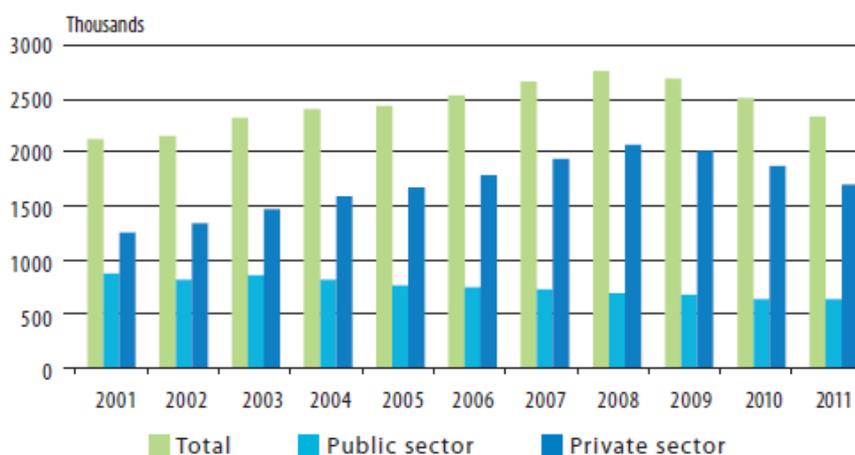


Fig. 8. Average annual number of employees under labour contract (in thousands).

Source: Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute

The total annual number of employees under labour contract increased from 2001 until 2008 and from 2008 to 2011 there was a reverse tendency. As shown in fig. 8, the private sector followed this trend. However, the annual number of employees in the public sector steadily decreased over the last 10 years.

### 1.1.3. Educational profile of the labour force

Figure 9 below shows the structure of the labour force by level of education in 2011. People of upper secondary education constitute almost three thirds of the labour force in Bulgaria. The percentage of people with higher education is relatively high - 26%.

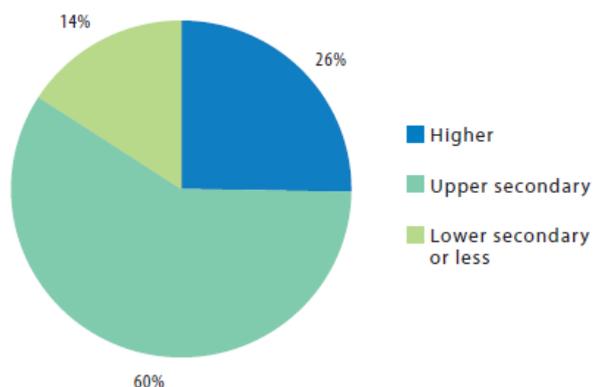


Fig. 9. Structure of the labour force by level of education (2011)

Source: Statistical reference book 2012 National Statistical Institute

According to a *Study on the Educational, Vocational and Qualification Structure of the Employed and the Workforce at National, Sectoral and Regional Level* (2010), there are three tendencies related to the educational profile of the workforce:

- a steady decrease of the relative share of the workforce with completed lower secondary or less education.
- an annual increase of the relative share of the workforce with completed upper secondary education;
- a rise of the relative share of the workforce with completed higher education.

With regard to the first tendency Bulgaria, along with Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Estonia and Latvia, has one of the lowest shares of people with completed lower secondary or less education within its workforce.

With respect to the second tendency, the country, together with Poland, Czech Republic, Latvia, Austria and Hungary, has one of the highest shares of people with completed upper secondary education in the structure of its workforce.

In relation to the third tendency, though the observed increase of people with completed higher education, this process is very slow and Bulgaria is far behind the countries with the highest share of university graduates in their workforce (e.g. Ireland, Belgium, Estonia, Luxemburg, Cyprus, Lithuania).

## 1.2. Strengths and weaknesses of persons entering the labour market (30-)

Over the past few years the professional development of young people, in particular the improvement of their employability skills, have grown in importance. It is not a choice of career we are talking about but career management through the whole life, which requires a wide range of skills and knowledge.

According to a survey conducted at the end of 2010 by the Business Foundation for Education among 119 employers the most important skills and qualities of employees are as follows:

1. professional skills and knowledge;
2. learning-to-learn skills;
3. adaptability;
4. interpersonal skills;
5. efficiency ;
6. self-management skills;
7. motivation;
8. communication in the mother tongue;
9. communication in foreign languages;
10. self-introduction/self-performance;
11. digital competence;
12. office skills;
13. ability to work with customers;
14. ethics;
15. critical thinking;
16. creativity;
17. sense of entrepreneurship;
18. leadership skills;
19. technical skills;
20. mathematical competence.

The above mentioned skills constitute the profile of the “ideal employee”. It is interesting to emphasize that the opinion of the 1023 young people having participated in the survey in relation to what the companies are looking for when hiring new employees, generally coincides with that of the employers. According to them the five most important skills are professional skills and knowledge, learning-to-learn skills, adaptability, interpersonal skills and efficiency.

Both the Bulgarian employers and the very young people share the opinion that **learning-to-learn skills, motivation, communication in the mother tongue, digital competence and creativity** are the skills best mastered and performed by the young people. By contrast the skills worst mastered and performed by the young people – in their estimation and according to the employers – are **mathematical competence, sense of entrepreneurship, professional skills and knowledge, efficiency, leadership skills, technical skills, self-management skills, critical thinking, self-introduction/self-performance and office skills**.

It is important to know that the self-estimation of the young people is higher than the evaluation made by the employers in relation to the above mentioned skills.

However, there are some more key qualities that the employers consider either missing or badly mastered by the young people but of great importance for entering the labour market. These skills and knowledge include as follows:

**Knowledge of the employees’ rights and obligations** – the time they can start working, types of documents needed, types of contracts , insurance, maternity leave, taxation, what to do when someone’s rights are infringed.

**Writing a persuasive cover letter** – although the cover letter is required less often than the CV, it also plays an important part when applying for a job position.

**Performance in an interview** – behaviour which is shaped by experience and can be rehearsed and learned with the help of a career consultant.

**Job hunting** – knowledge of how to get information and find positions.

**Behaviour at work** – employer expectations, company culture – hierarchy, communication, protocol, clothes, working hours, obligations, etc.

**Adequate expectations about the remuneration** – a real idea of how the employees' skills, experience and knowledge are evaluated on the labour market.

### **1.3. Strengths and weaknesses of employees with extensive professional experience (45-50+)**

The problem related to the increase in the average age of the workforce is about to escalate in the near future. However, the importance of age at work is, in many cases, reinforced by factors such as experience, work performance, motivation to learn throughout life and to work, educational level, health status, etc.

The survey “Use of the workforce at the age between 50 and 65” conducted among Bulgarian managers and HR experts aims at showing and explaining the positive and negative characteristics of the employees within this age group against the background of the younger age groups of the working population. The target group still has great opportunities for employment integration and real chances for extension of their work life.

According to the respondents the **seven most valued strengths** of the workforce in Bulgaria at the age between 50 and 65 are as follows:

1. valuable experience gained in the course of the professional career (12%);
2. higher loyalty (11%);
3. availability of contact and customer networks built (11%);
4. function as mentors of employees with less experience (10%);
5. lower employee turnover (10%);
6. responsible attitude to their work (10%);
7. ability to organize their priorities (9%).

The **seven biggest weaknesses** of the workforce in Bulgaria at the age between 50 and 65 are defined as follows:

1. working on repetitive tasks and assignments by using traditional approaches (14%);
2. lack of knowledge of foreign languages (12%);
3. inability to keep abreast of the new technologies (11%);
4. fear of workplace changes (11%);
5. less flexible than younger employees (10%);
6. learning more slowly than younger employees (10%);
7. negative attitude to changes in the organization (8%).

The weaknesses stated by the respondents can be divided into two main groups. The **low level of foreign language competence and digital competence** of the employees aged between 50



and 64 belong to the first group. For the reason that the foreign language competence and digital competence prove to be an essential requirement in the job ads they reduce the opportunities for paid employment of the employees under consideration. The weaknesses falling into the second group are connected with the **attitude to changes in the organization and the improvement of the working methods in the organization**. The workforce from the older age groups feels exposed to greater risk when organizational changes are implemented thus adopting them more reluctantly because of being afraid of dismissal.

## 2. Approaches to life-long learning with focus on the selected target groups

The participation of people aged 25-64 in lifelong learning in Bulgaria is very low, estimated at 1.2% in 2011, which places the country last along with Romania, Hungary and Greece. Although only 5 Member States exceeded the 15% threshold in 2011, Bulgaria is still behind the average of 9.6% for EU-27. The main reasons pointed in the EUROSTAT study are: too expensive to afford (56.6%), none with reachable distance (29.7%), no time due to family (28.8%), and conflict with work schedule (24.1%).

However, the few studies carried out specifically for Bulgaria state the following main reasons for non-participation in LLL:

- no correspondence between the skills of the labour force and the labour market demand;
- inefficient educational process;
- low level of motivation of people that are trained;
- theory-oriented rather than practice-oriented training;
- lack of assessment of the quality of training;
- there are too many structures involved in the organization and planning of LLL such as: Council of Ministers, Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (and all their sub-organizations), Employment Agency, National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, local authorities, National Council for Trilateral Cooperation.

In addition, the businesses give the following reasons:

- the employees who participate in LLL and Vocational programmes are not motivated;
- training is not conducted at the employers' premises;
- problems related to the financing of the training programmes such as slow procedures, lack of pre-financing, delay of payment after the completion of the training programmes.

As far as the participation of people aged 25-64 in LLL is concerned, the most active are those with higher education (71.1%), followed by people having completed secondary education (23.2%). The employed people are more active in LLL training (62.9) than the unemployed (19.9%). Young people (25-34) participated a little bit more in LLL (44.7%) than people aged 35-54 (39.7%), whereas only 20.3% of people between 55-64 participated in LLL offers.

## 2.1. Legislative framework and incentives from the state

Taking into consideration the target groups of our research – employees 30- and employees 45+, we focus on the vocational education and training (VET) as an essential part of LLL. A broad legislative framework in the area of VET has been established in Bulgaria. It includes a great variety of normative acts regulating the elements, processes and structural units within the VET system.

**The Vocational Education and Training Act** adopted in 1999 regulates the relations connected with guaranteeing the right of the citizens for VET in accordance to their personal interests and abilities; meeting the demand for qualified workforce who are competitive on the labour market; providing conditions for the functioning and development of the VET system based on the cooperation between its institutions and executive and local self-government bodies and social partners.

**The Employment Promotion Act** adopted in 2001 is also closely related to the VET quality in terms of the labour market needs. The Act regulates the societal relations regarding the professional orientation and adult training. According to the Act the adult training includes: adult literacy, the acquisition of professional qualification, the acquisition and improvement of the key competences and motivation.

**The Professional Qualification Recognition Act** has been passed in reply to the EU requirements for final settlement in the Bulgarian legislation of the matter related to the recognition of the professional qualification of the citizens of both EU and Non-EU countries. By adopting this Act, the Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 7 September 2005 was introduced in Bulgarian legislation. This Act regulates the recognition of professional qualifications for practicing regulated professions and encourages professional and territorial mobility within the EU.

The above mentioned acts underlie to a great extent the strategies focusing on lifelong learning, in particular vocational education and training of employees at working age.

**The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (LLL) during the period 2008 – 2013** is the basic strategic document forming the concept of LLL in Bulgaria. It was adopted by the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria in 2008 and outlines the priorities and actions our country plans to carry out in connection with the preparation of Bulgarian citizens to be actively involved in the global economy. It aims to combine the effort of the institutions and citizens in Republic of Bulgaria – learners, teaching institutions, public authorities, employers, trade unions, municipal administrations, local communities and other partners, so that conditions are created for everybody to learn and to develop their personality.

Two action plans were approved within the framework of this strategy: an Action plan for the period 2010-2011 and an Action plan for the period 2012-2013. They envisage actions and measures aiming at guaranteeing greater access to education and training, which will increase the participation level as a whole, including groups at risk. Non-formal and informal performance validation tools are provided by means of regulations. Prerequisites for implementing European tools and practices in the vocational education and training system are created. The action plans provide conditions for the acquisition of key competences for LLL and for career orientation and consulting which aims to facilitate the transitions and to make decisions on the education, training and professional development. The Development of a national system for projecting the demand for workforce with certain qualifications is scheduled to be implemented.

By 2013 Bulgaria should have achieved the following aims in the LLL area.

	2007 (base value)	2013 (aim)
LLL participation level of the population aged between 25 and 64	1,3%	5%
Share of early school dropout	16,6%	12%
Share of people aged between 20 and 24 having completed secondary education	83,3%	85%

Source: The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (LLL) for the period 2008 – 2013

**The National Strategy for Continuing Vocational Training during the period 2005 – 2010** aims to establish and improve conditions for acquisition, advancement and development of vocational qualifications of the workforce, in order to improve the latter's suitability for employment, occupational career paths and personal development.

In connection with the attainment of this strategic goal and taking into account the development prospects for 2005-2010, the following main priorities have been set:

- better accessibility of continuing vocational training;
- efficient interaction and co-ordination of the institutions involved in continuing;
- vocational training;
- quality assurance of the continuing vocational training;
- more investments in continuing vocational training;
- scientific support for continuing vocational training.

One of the strategic objectives of **The National Youth Strategy 2010 - 2020** is to promote the economic activity and career development of the young people by:

- creating a prosperous, encouraging and supportive environment, new jobs and growth on the labour market;
- improving the quality of secondary and higher education and informal learning, and encouraging lifelong learning in accordance with the needs of the labor market;
- promoting the career development of young people in public administration. To create a "fast track" for growth of young civil servants having shown exceptional qualities in the performance of their duties.

Another strategic objective is to stimulate the informal learning among the young people by:

- expanding the opportunities for informal learning for young people through public support and providing services for the expansion of knowledge, experience and skills of young people for their adherence to the values of civil society, science, culture, art, healthy lifestyles, traffic safety road and to prevent nuisance;
- promoting the forms of informal learning;

- facilitating access to the program "Youth in Action" for the young people, particularly those living in small towns and rural areas;
- promoting and encouraging the use of EUROPASS and YOUTHPASS by the young people as tools for self-knowledge and skills, including skills acquired in an informal environment.

One of the priorities set in **The National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006 – 2020** is to create firm habits of life-long learning, to ensure maximum good conditions for continuous vocational training, and to develop the system of qualification, re-qualification and continuous training.

**The Strategy for Training Employees of the Municipal Administration** aims at:

- strengthening the administrative capacity of the municipal employees by training which provides professional and career development of the employees of the municipal administration;
- actively involving the employees in the process of change by introducing individual plans for professional and career development and practices for informing and consulting employees about the opportunities for professional and career development;
- creating a system for developing the professional skills and qualifications of the employees of the municipal administration by establishing clear rules and responsibilities for elaborating and implementing measures for developing the professional skills and qualifications of the employees of the municipal administration, by implementing a contemporary system of evaluating the training needs and establishing rules for providing funding for developing the professional skills and qualifications of the employees.

## 2.2. National and regional programmes and projects

The national/regional programmes/projects of greatest significance in the area of Lifelong Learning are the **Operational Programmes** supported by the **European Social Fund**.

The most important of the above mentioned is the **Human Resources Development Operational Programme (OP)**. It is coordinated by the Ministry of the Labour and Social Policy supported by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science and the Employment Agency.

This **OP** provides training offers through the following channels:

- vouchers (for both employed and unemployed) - each person applies individually;
- funding enterprises for training and employment of a given number of unemployed persons, focusing on young people, Roma minorities, 50+.

Most of the skills addressed by the Programme are specific vocational skills, ICT and English.

Some of the most important actions within this **OP** are as follows:

- a) **Increase of Youth Employment through Their Permanent Inclusion on the Bulgarian Labour Market (2010-2012).** The action aims to train young people in ICT and foreign language skills. However, it focuses on unemployed young people.
- b) **Providing Conditions for Active Working Life of People over 50 and Long-Term Unemployed Persons (2010-2012).** It aims at improving the skills of low qualified persons and elderly people with a focus on unemployed 50+.
- c) **Qualification Services and Promotion of Employment (2010-2012).** It targets the improvement of the vocational qualification of unemployed and vulnerable groups.
- d) **Qualification Services and Training for Employed Persons-Phase II (2010-2013).** It addresses the improvement of the adaptability and vocational skills of the employees in all sectors.
- e) **Qualification Services and Training for Employed Persons-Phase III (2012-2015).** It aims to provide qualification services, vocational training and training in key competences to employees from micro, SMEs and large companies (public or private).
- f) **I CAN (2010-2012).** It targets the provision of vocational training to employed persons on a labour contract. However, it emphasizes the inclusion of a maximum number of people without education or with low qualification.
- g) **I CAN MORE (2012-2014).** It aims to provide vocational training and training in digital and foreign language competence to self-employed or employed persons on a labour contract no matter of their field of activity.
- e) **First Job (2012-2013).** The action allows unemployed 29- to apply for vouchers so as to be trained in vocational skills, digital competence, foreign languages and learning to learn skills.
- f) **A New Working Place (2012-2013).** The action allows employers to hire unemployed 29- for a given period of time and to offer them training in vocational skills and key competences.

The next **Operational Programme** of particular interest is *Administrative Capacity Operational Programme (OPAC)*, in particular Priority 2 *Human Resources Management*. It is coordinated by the Ministry of Finances. OPAC is intended for public administration at all levels, judicial system and structures of civic society.

There are two national programmes of specific importance:

- a) **National Programme "To Activate the Inactive Persons". 2012.** It is funded by the government. It is addressed to inactive or discouraged persons and Roma minorities. It offers training in vocational skills, motivation, as well as guidance and aware raising campaigns.
- b) **National Programme "New Opportunity for Employment". 2013.** It is funded by the government. It targets unemployed people and provides training in vocational skills, key competences and motivation.

There are some single projects developed within the **European Lifelong Learning Programme** under the framework of Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig Sub-Programmes. The former target mainly training in vocational skills for SMEs whereas the latter - key competences with a focus on unemployed, minorities, people at risk, etc.

## 2.3. Programmes and projects concentrated on particular sectors

### 2.3.1. Programmes and projects in the private sector

The private sector in Bulgaria mainly provides LLL opportunities to its employees by taking advantage of the *Human Resources Development Operational Programme* (priorities **d, e, f, g** of the previous point 2.2.). There are few Bulgarian SMEs which have participated in the European Leonardo da Vinci LLP, particularly in staff mobility projects.

### 2.3.2. Programmes and projects in the public sector

There are some programmes, projects and initiatives targeting the improvement of the professional qualification and competences of the employees from the public sector. They will be presented by the respective specific area below:

## EDUCATION

**a) National Programme "Qualification" 2010.** It aims to provide teachers from all educational levels (except tertiary) with the following skills:

- pedagogical skills;
- ICT skills;
- foreign languages (mainly English) skills;
- citizenship;
- entrepreneurship skills.

In addition, it offers training to school principals and educational experts related to management of education.

**b) Human Resources Development OP. Qualification of Pedagogical Specialists.** It aims to provide school teachers (35-) with access to one-year specialized training at the universities so as to get additional qualification in foreign languages, pre-school and primary school pedagogy, informatics and IT, teacher's qualification.

**c) Human Resources Development OP. A system for Qualification and Career Development of Teachers in Higher Institutions. 2012-2014.** It aims to provide university academic staff with skills in ICT for educational purposes, foreign languages, academic teaching methods and research activities, practice-oriented teaching methods, modern educational strategies and tools

**d) Human Resources Development OP. Enhancement of the Qualification and Creation of Conditions for Professional Development of Teachers, University Lectors and Principals. 2010-2012.** It targets teachers in pre-school, primary and secondary education, school principals and state educational experts. The teachers are offered training in ICT, foreign languages, interculturalism, adult learning whereas the second target group are provided with training in innovations in educational management.

e) **Human Resources Development OP. Increasing the Qualification of Teachers in the Higher Education Institutions. 2009-2010.** It aims to provide training in ICT and foreign languages (English, German and French) to the universities' academic staff.

f) **Project "We will Succeed Again". 2009.** The project was funded by the government. It aims to provide training in IT, foreign languages, entrepreneurship and professional qualification to redundant school teachers and non-pedagogical staff.

g) **Project "Optimism". 2009.** The project was funded by the government. It target re-qualification of unemployed teachers. They are offered courses so as to gain the following qualification - social worker, secretary in public administration, office manager, etc.

## HEALTH CARE

a) **Programme ESCULAP. 2009.** It was funded by the government. It covers the regions of Razgrad, Silistra, Pazardhik, Yambol and Stara Zagora. It addresses unemployed persons from the health care sector such as doctors, nurses, social workers, rehabilitation therapists, paramedics, laboratory assistants. It offers vocational training in the specific health care field.

b) **Human Resources Development OP. New Opportunities for Doctors in Bulgaria. 2013.** It targets the staff of health care providers and offers opportunities to specialized training to improve the respective professional qualification.

## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

a) **Human Resources Development OP. Project "Start in Administration". 2013.** The project aims to provide work placement of unemployed 29- with completed higher education at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and Ministry of Health, and at all their divisions and sub-structures (including social and health care services and labour market institutions) within the country. The young people will follow a course in *Introduction to Public Administration*.

b) **Administrative Capacity OP. Competent and Effective Public Administration. 2012.** It aims to improve the qualification of the employees in the central, regional and municipal administration through training.

c) **Project "Career Start". 2012-2013.** It is funded by the government. The aim of the project is to place unemployed 29- , who have completed their secondary or higher education, within organizations from the public and private sector to gain work experience.

## SOCIAL SERVICES

a) **Human Resources Development OP. Strengthening the Capacity of the Social Support Agency to Improve the Quality and Effectiveness of Social Work". 2012.** It offers training to newly appointed and old employees in the Social Support Agency and its units.

## OTHERS

a) **Human Resources Development OP. Specialized Computer Training of Prosecutors from the Public Prosecutor's Office of Republic of Bulgaria. 2008.**

b) *Leonardo da Vinci LLP*. Project "**Socially Competent Policemen next to Society**". 2011. The project aims to train policemen from all levels in social skills.

## **2.4. Solutions applied in companies and institutions with focus on public institutions**

According to a survey among 164 organizations, done by Apeiron Academy and NovaVizia in 2010, about 80 % of Bulgarian employers are willing to invest in the further training of their employees. About half of the respondents would like to invest in specific vocational skills, 31% - in commercial skills, 28% - communication and interpersonal skills and management skills, 24% - teamwork, 22.5% - foreign language skills, 19% - ICT skills.

About 60% of Bulgarian managers are willing to invest their own resources in the training of their employees rather than to take advantage of the Operational Programmes and other government-funded programmes since the latter mainly target unemployed people and require work placement for a given period time, pre-financing and balance payment is usually delayed, and there is a lot of paper work and documentation.

However, in practice, only large and multinational organizations invest their own resources in the improvement of their employees' competences, mainly in the areas listed above but they usually train employees aged 50+. Less attention is paid to employees 30-. Training is offered in the form of short-term and long-term courses, seminars and simulation games, as well as work placement and study visits in other subsidiaries of the mother company. Job rotation is not very popular as a means of learning.

According to a survey done within the Project *Key Competences for More Competitive Workforce in Bulgaria (Human Resources Development OP)*, 2012, among 118 employers, the results show that the employers have invested most in the training of vocational skills and knowledge (56.3%), teamwork (cooperation) (35.3%), communication skills (26.1%), and foreign languages (24.4%)

Another solution is the Operational Programmes and National Programmes mentioned in p. 2.2. and p. 2.3. They are preferred by SMEs, which do not possess the required internal resources to organize their own training and by the public sector. However, most lifelong learning offers target mainly unemployed people, and in terms of sectors – business, education and public administration. Training is offered in the form of short-term and long-term courses and work placement. Most of those programmes address vocational skills, ICT and foreign languages (mainly English).

The third solution is the European Lifelong Learning Programme. However, mainly SMEs and NGOs (i.e. private and volunteer sector) take advantage of it. Usually training offers include vocational skills, key competences, work placement and study visits.

The fourth solution is related to lifelong learning provided by particular institutions (public and NGOs). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy offers on-line training for professionals from the Social Support Agency and the Employment Services Offices (national, regional, local level). It is designed for social workers, experts and managers working for the above organizations. The Bulgarian Industrial Association provides specialized ICT training for government experts working in the ministries. The Institute for Public Administration offers training to employees involved in the public administration.

### **3. SOLUTIONS FOUND FOR INTERGENERATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TARGET GROUPS.**

The steady increase in the number of the elderly people poses a big challenge to the state authority to cope with. In fact 2012 - The European year of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity gave rise to actions and measures in support to the social inclusion of elderly people in Bulgaria. However, these actions are sporadic rather than systematic. A national strategy how to approach this complicated problem does not exist.

#### **3.1. Legislative framework and incentives from the state.**

**The National Demographic Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (2012 – 2030)** touches upon the question under consideration to some extent. The adaptation of the social systems to the demographic changes and population ageing – the labour market, pension system, social support and care, health care, education, culture, etc. is covered by sections 7 and 9. The measures for developing solidarity among generations aim at:

- promoting and developing the volunteering, intergenerational solidarity, positive public image and understanding the social value of the elderly people;
- promoting volunteering of the young people in favour of the elderly people;
- elaborating a scheme for passing on the experience of the elderly to the younger people;
- cultivating social sensitivity to the problems of the elderly.

#### **3.2. National and/or regional programmes/projects.**

There is a great variety of national programmes/projects addressing the needs of young and elderly people at working age. However, they are not based on the intergenerational approach.

The existing intergenerational projects target, on the one hand children or school students and, on the other hand, elderly people at or beyond the age of retirement, who actually do not belong to our target groups.

#### **3.3. Programmes/projects oriented towards economic sectors or particular industries.**

We identified a project promoting the intergenerational cooperation at the work place but it is developed within the Lifelong Learning Programme/EACEA under the framework of Grundtvig sub-programme and can apply to any particular economic sector.

The current Grundtvig project **Active Ageing Learning Community (2012 -2014)** addresses young people aged between 16 and 35 and elderly people aged 60 and over. It is about to elaborate an Active Ageing Learning Community where 60+ will learn how to age actively in terms of their health, physical and cognitive ability, social communication and intergenerational solidarity, and will be supported by 16-35 age group both in learning and practice. The project envisages learning modules in Health Self-Management, ICT for Social Networking and Intergenerational Volunteering.

### 3.4. Solutions applied in companies and institutions.

It is a common practice for the companies to organize in-company training for their staff by bringing together young and elder employee. This solution proves very useful especially when teaching and practicing team building or exchanging professional skills and experience.

## 4. Good practices in *Lifelong Learning*

### Good practice 1

Name of the project		<b>Social Competent Police Officers near to the Society</b>
Description	<p>The project was implemented within the Lifelong Learning Programme, Leonardo da Vinci sub-programme (TOI) for the period 2010-2012. It has transferred the results from the Czech Republic (EQUAL Programme – <i>Competences on the Labour Market</i> Project) to Bulgaria and Turkey. Two training centres (respectively in Bulgaria and Turkey) were developed in order to measure the social skills of police officers, to improve/build social competences and to train trainers who work with police officers. The following skills were trained:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effective communication</li> <li>• cooperation</li> <li>• efficiency</li> <li>• problem solving</li> <li>• planning and organizing</li> <li>• learning to learn</li> <li>• initiative</li> <li>• stress endurance</li> </ul>	
Strengths and achieved benefits	<p>The benefits of the project could be considered in two aspects. The first ones refer to the very organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The employees of the Ministry of Interior became more trustful in their management since they perceive the proposed training as of special attention and care.</li> <li>• The level of motivation of the employees to work considerably rose.</li> <li>• Group cohesion and loyalty to the organization were improved.</li> <li>• The vigour and self-confidence of the employees were increased.</li> </ul> <p>The second ones refer to the individuals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved vigour and self-confidence;</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive attitude to self-assessment;</li> <li>• Wider experience and possibilities to change their viewpoints towards themselves, family, friends, work and life;</li> <li>• Broadening their knowledge of the human being and the relationships in the society, which contributes to better foreseeing the responses of the surrounding people;</li> <li>• Higher level of trust in others;</li> <li>• Flexibility in the interaction with colleagues and in the communication with people;</li> <li>• Better adequacy in everyday social situation;</li> <li>• More effective response in situations of higher level of uncertainty and ambiguity.</li> </ul>
Encountered difficulties	No difficulties were reported.

## Good practice 2

Name of the project		<b>Labour Market In-Touch: New Non-Routine Skills via Mobile Game-Based Learning</b>
Description	<p>The project was implemented within the Lifelong Learning Programme, Leonardo da Vinci sub-programme (DOI) for the period 2010-2012. It involved partners from Bulgaria, Lithuania, France, Italy, Austria, Sweden, UK and Switzerland. The project aim was to provide the new generation of working adults with flexible and modular pathways to develop their crucial non-routine skills in a technological innovative way. Ten key competences for managing non-routine tasks and situational cases at work were addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication;</li> <li>• Planning;</li> <li>• Conflict Management;</li> <li>• Openness to change;</li> <li>• Decision making;</li> <li>• Team work;</li> <li>• Flexibility;</li> <li>• Strategic thinking;</li> <li>• Initiative</li> <li>• Learning improvement.</li> </ul> <p>Thirty goal-oriented situational m-learning serious games were developed to acquire the competences mentioned above.</p>	
Strengths and achieved benefits	<p>The games:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved the motivation of working adults to learn since they are interesting, enjoyable, easy to access;</li> <li>• improved some of the competences of working adults required by the new labour market;</li> <li>• saved learners' time – they can be performed at home, at work, on the bus, in the café, i.e. everywhere when possible;</li> <li>• reduced the learning costs – no printed materials or special training is needed since the games are easy and accessible via mobile phones;</li> <li>• stimulated the working adults to use ICT for learning purposes.</li> </ul>	
Encountered difficulties	No difficulties were reported.	

## 5. Good practices in *Intergenerational Cooperation*

### Good practice 1

Name of the project	 <b>Active Ageing Learning Community</b>
Description	<p>It is a current project that started in 2012 within the Lifelong Learning Programme, Grundtvig sub-programme. It involves partners from Bulgaria, Spain, Italy, Ireland and Germany. The target groups are young people 16-35 and old people 60+. The aim of the project is to provide training on how to age actively. Therefore 3 learning modules based on blending learning will be developed: Health Self-Management, ICT for Social Networking and Intergenerational Volunteering. The project is also based on intergenerational cooperation. The project envisages 3 intergenerational projects at the end of each module, respectively intergenerational health and sport event, development and support of a blog on active ageing and intergenerational volunteer event.</p>
Strengths and achieved benefits	<p>The expected benefits are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• both target groups are expected to improve their knowledge and skills in how to manage their health and practice physical activities;</li> <li>• 60+ will learn how to use social networks with the support of the young and jointly develop a blog;</li> <li>• both target groups will learn how to organize volunteer events by using the potential of each other;</li> <li>• both target groups will learn to learn by using ICT;</li> <li>• the motivation of both target groups to be involved in lifelong learning will be raised;</li> <li>• both targets group are expected to get aware of how to age actively for their personal growth, as well as to be more active in employment and society.</li> </ul>
Encountered difficulties	<p>At this point, the only difficulty encountered was to motivate both target groups to be actively involved in the project. However, after their participation in the 2 focus groups, they changed their attitude to the issue and now they are willing to further contribute to the project activities.</p>

## 6. Identification of gaps in the key competences of persons entering the labour market (30-) and persons with extensive professional experience (45+)

The gaps were identified by means of research done among public sector employees taking into account the age range required. The research was based on a semi-structured questionnaire and personal interviews. The aim of the research was to identify the competence gaps and to assess their importance in the context of the professional activity. Competences are considered as those defined in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning:

- communication in the mother tongue;
- communication in foreign languages;
- mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- digital competence;
- learning to learn;
- social and civic competences;
- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- cultural awareness and expression.

Questionnaires were sent to universities, municipalities, National Health Insurance Fund, and social support agencies. We received 22 questionnaires from employees 30- and 36 questionnaires from employees 45+.

In addition, Internet-based desk research was also done in order to get more objective information.

### 6.1. Workers entering the labour market (30-)

In 2012 a survey was done within the Project *Key Competences for More Competitive Workforce in Bulgaria (Human Resources Development OP)* where 587 young people (16-32) were interviewed, of whom 74 – in employment, 97 – looking for a job, and 417 – school and university students to identify the level of their key competences. Moreover, 118 employers were also interviewed to express their viewpoints about the competences of young people. According to the results the most important key competences according to young people in employment are - *communication in foreign languages* and *effectiveness (result-orientation)* whereas according to young people looking for a job those are *communication in foreign languages, stress endurance and communication skills (i.e. social competence)*. The least important competences according to young people in employment are *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* and *effective communication*, whereas according to young people looking for a job those are *independence (i.e. decision making)* and *learning to learn*. However, according to employers the most important key competences at the work place are *result-orientation, team work, and stress endurance* and the least important - *communication in foreign languages, independence (i.e. decision making)* and *initiative and entrepreneurship*.

Considering the above mentioned, there are some findings of particular interest. The first one refers to *communication in foreign languages*. This competence is included in all job ads in Bulgaria and therefore it is perceived as very important by young people. On the contrary, the employers think it is not of great significance but still place it as a requirement for an open job

position. Then it can be concluded that knowing a foreign language is an advantage but not very important for the quality of performance of a given employee. The other interesting aspect is that *independence (i.e. decision making)* is rated low by both employers and young people. It is probably related to the dominating value-orientation and culture in the Bulgarian socio-cultural environment, which assume high level of dependence, directive management style, centralization and strong subordination of relationships.

Young people in employment think that their most developed skills are *vocational skills, communication in foreign languages, and data collection and use* whereas the least developed skills are *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, independence (i.e. decision making)* and *stress endurance*. According to young people looking for a job their most developed skills are *data collection and use, communication skills (i.e. social competence), and communication in foreign languages*, and the least developed ones - *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, independence (i.e. decision making), and learning to learn*.

According to the field research for the purpose of the present report, the young workers from the public sector think that they need to mainly improve four of the key competences described above: *communication in foreign languages (22%), sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (18%), digital competence (16%), and social and civic competence (16%)*. Least priority is given to *mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology (4%)*. The detailed results can be seen in fig. 10 below. It is a little bit surprising that they would like to improve their digital competence since they are perceived as a generation that is used to ICT and that regularly use ICT for both working and learning purposes. In this sense to improve their digital competence, they mean to obtain ICT skills at a higher level, i.e. to be able to work with more sophisticated and specialized software, which sometimes is required at their workplace.

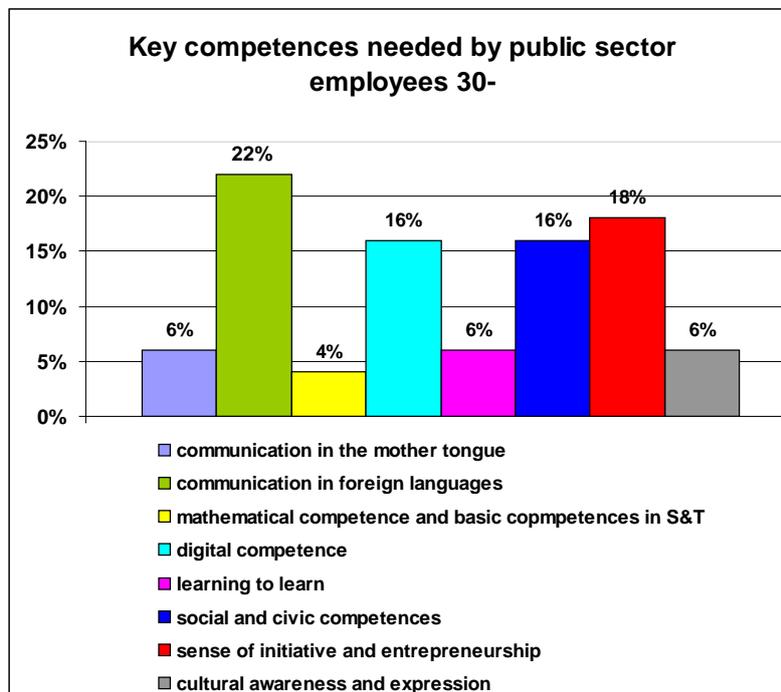


Fig. 10. Key competences needed to be improved by public sector employees 30-.

## 6.2. Employees with extensive professional experience (45+)

Unfortunately there are not any thorough studies and analysis of the opinions of 45+ employees about the competences they would like to improve or any competence gaps they may have.

The only study available is that done within the European project *55+ Employability Learning Environment* under LLP, sub-programme Leonardo da Vinci (2008-2010) and it covers 107 SMEs' employees from different manufacturing sectors. The respondents considered 3 competences as crucial for their further employment: *social competence*, *IT* and *foreign languages* (in particular English). The most preferred social skills to be improved were: *problem solving*, *teamwork* and *communication*, immediately followed by *conflict management* and *self-motivation and motivation to others*. The three areas were assigned an equal priority. Most of the 55+ were willing to improve the above three competences.

According to the field research for the purpose of the present report - fig.11, the 45+ employees from the public sector think that they need to mainly improve three of the key competences described above: *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* (23.25%), *communication in foreign languages* (20.94%), and *social and civic competence* (18.60%). Next follow other three competences which need to be improved but are not of such great significance: *learning to learn*, *digital competence*, and *mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology*. Least priority is given to *cultural awareness and expression*.

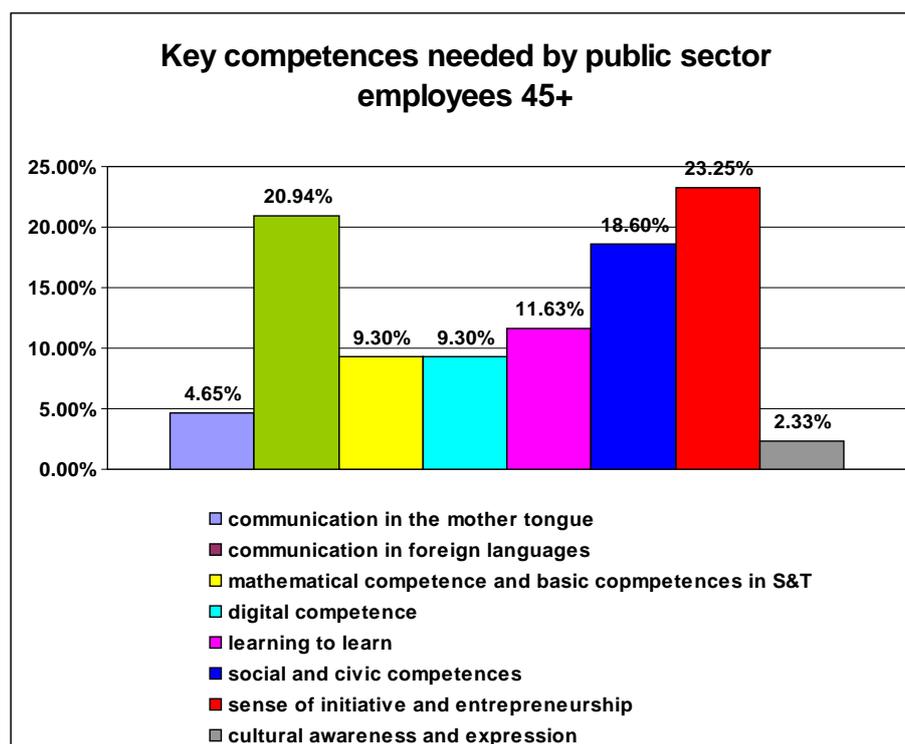


Fig. 11. Key competences needed to be improved by public sector employees 45+.

A special attention should be paid to the fact that 45+ public employees would like to improve most their *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* whereas 55+ SMEs' employees didn't mention that at all.

Comparing the data received from 30- and 45+ employees in the public sector, it is obvious that both groups clearly identify the three common competence gaps:

- *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* - respectively 18% and 23.25%,

- *communication in foreign languages* - respectively 22% and 20.94%, and
- *social and civic competence* - respectively 16% and 18.60%.

However, another a little bit surprising fact is that 30- public employees think that they need to improve their digital competence (actually it is placed third of importance) while 45+ public employees assign little priority to it (9.3%). As it was mentioned before, probably this is due to the fact that public institutions work with different and very specialized software and systems and when entering the respective organization, the new employees are not aware of them and need sometime for training and adaptation.

## **7. Inventory of training needs of employees (30-) and (45+) and expectations of employers towards their skills**

### **7.1. Workers entering the labour market (30-)**

According to the survey done within the Project *Key Competences for More Competitive Workforce in Bulgaria (Human Resources Development OP)*, 2012, the employers (118) think that the least developed skills of young people entering the labour market are: *communication with customers/clients*, *independence* (decision-making), *problem solving* and *work experience*. In relation to the unemployed young people, the least developed skills are - *flexibility* and *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship*. Therefore they highlight the importance of training in vocational and social skills for young employees. However, when asked what learning areas they had invested in so far, the results are the following:

- highest investment in the following areas - *vocational skills*, *communication with customers/clients*, *teamwork*, *communication skills* and *communication in foreign languages*.
- least investment in the following areas - *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship*, *independence* (decision-making), *flexibility*, *stress endurance*.

The findings above show a deep contradiction. On the one hand, the employers say that the most important skills at the work place are *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship*, *independence* (decision-making), *flexibility*, *stress endurance*, etc. and these are least developed in young people. On the other hand, they do not invest in the training and improvement of these competences. In addition, namely these skills are not taught in schools and universities. Therefore their acquisition/enhancement is of great importance since they contribute not only to the personal growth of employees but also to the achievement of company goals and success.

According to an analysis done by the Education Quality Control and Evaluation Centre at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science in 2006 (*Opinions and Evaluation of the Quality of Vocational Education and Training in Bulgaria*), employers state that young employees lack the following skills: responsibility, company loyalty, teamwork, tolerance, and work experience. It is highlighted that special attention should be paid to training in social skills (covering the ones above), as well as creativity and initiative.

According to the field research for the purpose of the present report, where 6 employers of public organizations were interviewed, the following results could be seen in fig.12.

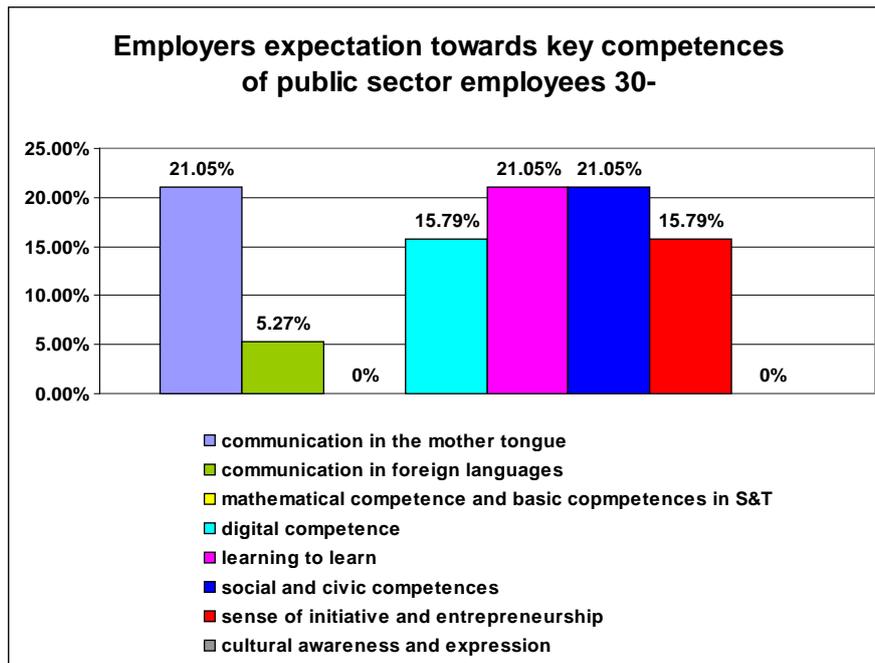


Fig. 12. Employers expectations towards the key competences of the public sector employees 30-.

Employers in the public sector expect from their very young employees to mainly improve three key competences of equal significance:

- *communication in the mother tongue,*
- *social and civic competence,* and
- *learning to learn.*

These are immediately followed by *digital competence* and *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.*

It can be immediately seen that there is some contradiction between what employers expect from young employees and what young employees think is important for employers. *Communication in mother tongue* and *learning to learn* were almost neglected by 30- as key competences at the work place, and *communication in foreign languages* and *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* were assigned higher priority.

In the personal interviews with some employers from the public sector, it was clearly stated that the most important competences in the public sector are:

- *communication in the mother tongue,*
- *social and civic competence.*

Public sector employees no matter of their age and professional area should:

- communicate very well in the mother tongue;
- be tolerant and cooperative;
- be sociable and understandable;
- be flexible and adaptable;
- keep the dress code;
- have a sense of empathy;
- keep behaviour patterns;
- work in team very well;
- possess active listening skills.

Employers are positive that young people 30- need to build (in most cases) or improve the above skills. Some young people from the Gabrovo Social Support Agency were even dismissed because they didn't make an attempt to improve their social competence.

In addition, the employers mentioned that young employees 30- lack *initiative* and *independence* (decision-making skills). Therefore, training in this aspect is also needed.

## 7.2. Employees with extensive professional experience (45+)

According to a survey done among 500 managers by the Bulgarian Industrial Chamber in 2012, employees 50+ lack skills such as *creativity*, *innovation*, and *digital competence* (only for some sectors). Moreover, the results from the research done within European project 55+ *Employability Learning Environment* under LLP, sub-programme Leonardo da Vinci (2008-2010) show that 55+ employees have low level of *adaptability*, *flexibility* and *mobility*. According to the field research for the purpose of the present report, the following results for the public sector could be seen in fig.13.

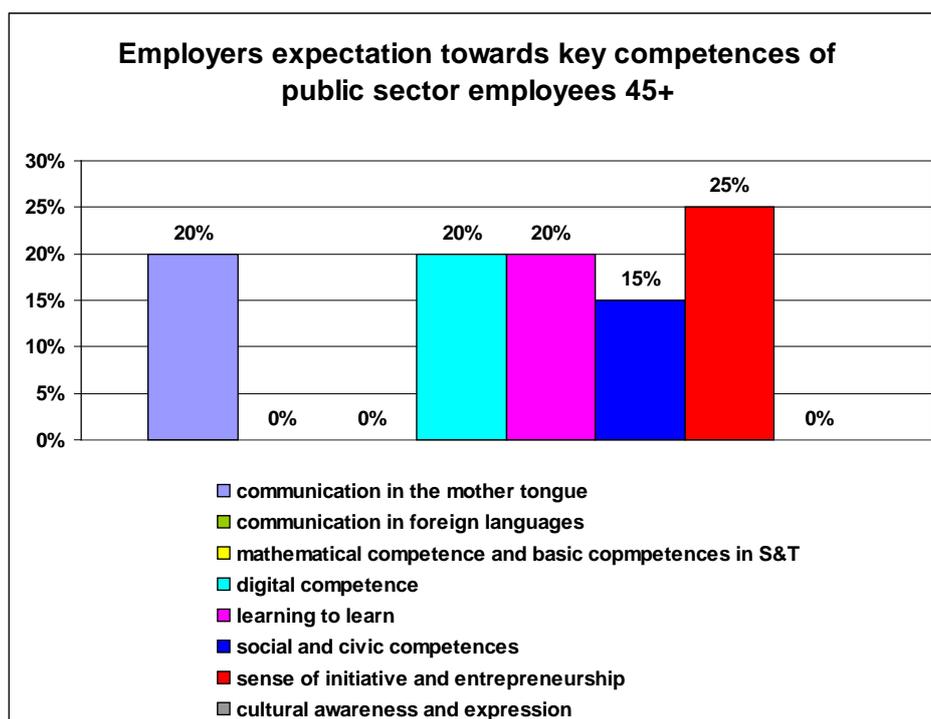


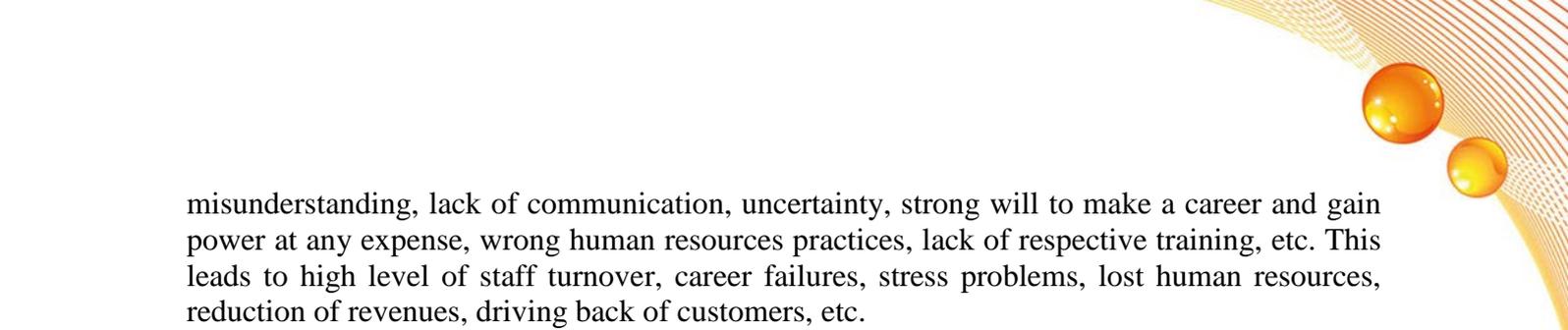
Fig. 13. Employers expectations towards the key competences of the public sector employees 40+.

Employers in the public sector give highest priority to *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* (25%), immediately followed by *communication in mother tongue*, *digital competence* and *learning to learn* (all three of equal priority - 20%). Next comes *social and civic competence*, estimated at 15%.

There are some aspects of particular interest. First, *communication in mother tongue*, *digital competence* and *learning to learn* were not mentioned by 45+ employees as important key competences to be improved but they are perceived as a disadvantage of this age group by the employers. Second, *communication in foreign languages* was given a very high priority by 45+ but it was not even pointed out by the employers as a competence expected to be improved.

## 8. Evaluation of the possibilities of effective intergenerational cooperation

Intergenerational cooperation at the work place is part of the age management policy of organizations. Unfortunately, *Age Management* is a relative new concept in Bulgaria. As a result most organizations do not recognize its potential for both its employees and the organization itself. The intergenerational gap is deepening due to several factors such as



misunderstanding, lack of communication, uncertainty, strong will to make a career and gain power at any expense, wrong human resources practices, lack of respective training, etc. This leads to high level of staff turnover, career failures, stress problems, lost human resources, reduction of revenues, driving back of customers, etc.

Today there are three generations that meet at the work place:

- *the generation of the growth*, which lives to work and make achievements (those born in 1950s and 1960s, and now 53-63 years old). They are ambitious, workaholics, self-centred, pursue their interests, and want stable high income, authority and high professional status. They want to have power over the others, to make an impression and to influence the opinions of their bosses and colleagues. Work is placed above all other things. They are willing to be trained but if there are only direct benefits. They expect their supervisor to be "one of the friends" regardless of his/her professional qualities.
- *the Transition generation (generation X)*, which works to live better (those born in 1970s, and now about 43). They are flexible, adaptable, creative, comfortable with technologies, invest in their development. Their personal life is above all other things. They prefer a safe career rather than a safe job. They want to gain their professional experience in prestigious companies. Their values are related to their personal development and wellbeing. Generation X prefers flexible work schedule and flexible structures since they desire a balance between personal and professional life. They expect their supervisor to be a coordinator who does not interfere much.
- *the Millennial generation (generation Y)*, which works to enjoy themselves (those born in 1980s and 1990s, and now 23-33 years old). They have distinctly different behaviors, values and attitudes from previous generations as a response to the technological and economic implications of the Internet. They possess attributes such as a sense of entitlement, narcissism and rejection of social conventions. They are mobile and pragmatic, and demand immediate feedback and recognition. They are willing to follow lifelong learning and to master several professions. Generation Y wants not only high salaries but meaningful jobs as well. They want diversified and interesting tasks. They expect their supervisor to be a trainer rather than a boss.

Consequently, employers should take into account the attitudes, behaviour and expectations of the three generations they have in their organizations in order to create a successful working environment that stimulates the positive attributes of their employees thus using their advantages for the growth of the organization.

However, this is a very sophisticated and tricky task and involves a lot of knowledge, resources and efforts to be successfully completed. Most of the Bulgarian organizations do not possess the required skills, resources and will to do that. Only large and multinational companies have begun to place an emphasis on age management, and respectively intergenerational cooperation at the work place. Organizations operating in the public sector rarely use age management approaches.

However, there are various tools that could be applied in the public sector to strengthen intergenerational cooperation.

### **Intergenerational Teams**

Most large and multinational companies offer teamwork training for their employees. They usually gather different generations in joint company events, usually at the weekend, in order to promote the benefits of teamwork and to unite their staff on the basis of common company goals, values and achievements. Different simulation games are played, as well as intergenerational sport activities. In addition, teamwork training in the form of brief

workshops is also provided. This is a very encouraging approach which can be successfully used in public institutions.

### **Mentoring/tutoring/coaching**

This is a very positive approach although sometimes it might become very tricky since, in most cases, knowledge and skills are transferred from older to younger employees. On the one hand it can help young people to quickly get introduced into the new job position and can provide some helpful advice and support. At the same time older employees will feel valuable for the company and will be able to transfer their experience so that knowledge and skills are not lost within the organization. On the other hand, the young people might resist their mentors if the latter go beyond tutoring and become bosses rather than coaches.

In Bulgaria this approach is mainly applied into the manufacturing industry where experienced workers help newly appointed ones to improve their vocational skills. However, it can be employed in the public sector as well but employers should very carefully define the roles of the "mentor" and "learner" in order to avoid further conflicts.

### **Job rotation**

Job rotation is rarely practised in Bulgarian organizations but it has a lot of advantages and could be successfully used by public organizations. It fosters the transfer of expertise among individuals and generations. Furthermore, the employers could best match the job positions and the respective employees, taking into consideration the job descriptions (the competences needed) and the available human resources (the competences offered).

### **Project-oriented tasks**

This approach is not very popular in Bulgaria but it could be very effective for both the employees' growth and the company success. When working on a project, employees learn how to overcome personal and intergenerational differences in order to achieve a common goal set in advance. This is one of the best ways to learn from each other, to improve self-confidence and self-esteem due to the personal contribution to the task, and to improve self-motivation and motivation of others due to the successful completion of the common assignment.

### **Non-formal training**

The organizations from the public sector can take advantage of the national and European programmes in order to provide non-formal training to their employees in relation to intergenerational cooperation. Thus they can share best practices at national and European level and foster the intergenerational dialogue within their organizations.

## **9. Conclusions**

On the ground of the analysis done so far the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Ageing has severely affected the labour force and young employees 30- appear the most disadvantaged group on the labour market.
- Participation of employees in lifelong learning is very low in Bulgaria. The most active ones are young people 25-34 with higher education.
- There are a lot of lifelong learning programmes, projects and initiatives at both national and European level but they are mainly intended for unemployed, low-skilled persons or persons at risk. In addition, they predominantly target training in vocational skills, ICT and foreign languages. Organizations from the public sector rarely take advantage of those possibilities except for public universities and schools.

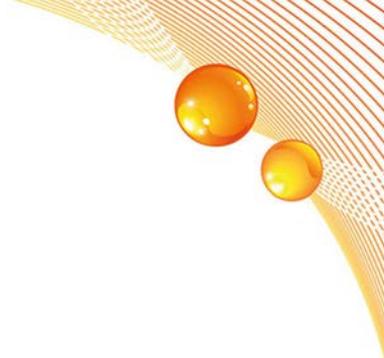
- The intergenerational approach to lifelong learning and at the work place is not fully understood in the country. There is not any strategy defining the scope of intergenerational issues and how to be tackled. Therefore, this concept is rarely applied.
- There is a mismatch between the competences that young and older employees think should be improved and the competences that employers expect to be enhanced by those age groups.
- According to young people from the public sector they need training in order to improve *communication in foreign languages, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, digital competence, and social and civic competence*. However, the employers in this sector think that employees 30- should mainly enhance *communication in the mother tongue, social and civic competence and learning to learn*.
- According to older employees from the public sector they need training in order to improve *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, communication in foreign languages, and social and civic competence*. However, the employers in this sector think that employees 45+ should mainly enhance *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, communication in mother tongue, digital competence and learning to learn*.
- Regarding the training package to be developed within the project, a special emphasis should be placed on social competence, in particular
  - tolerance and cooperation;
  - sociability and empathy;
  - flexibility and adaptability;
  - dress code;
  - behaviour patterns;
  - teamwork;
  - active listening.

Those specific skills were recommended by the employers from the public sector, especially for young employees 30-.

- Age management practices should be promoted, in particular intergenerational cooperation, since they are not very popular in Bulgaria.

## 10. Resources

1. Lancaster C., Lynne, D. Stillman. *When Generations Collide*. Klasika i Stil. Sofia. 2004.
2. *Country Report on Adult Education in Bulgaria*. 2011. European Association for the Education of Adults.
3. *Adult Education and Educational Policy in Bulgaria*. 2007. Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association.
4. *Statistical reference book 2012* National Statistical Institute.
5. *A Study on the Educational, Vocational and Qualification Structure of the Employed and the Workforce at National, Sectoral and Regional Level*. 2010.
6. *Opinions and Evaluation of the Quality of Vocational Education and Training in Bulgaria*. 2006. Education Quality Control and Evaluation Centre at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science.
7. *Employment Skills – What are They and How to Build Them?* 2010. Business for Education Foundation.
8. EU Structural Funds. <http://www.eufunds.bg/en/>
9. Bulgarian Industrial Association. Analyses. <http://www.bia-bg.com/>
10. <http://ime.bg/bg/articles/obuenieto-prez-celiya-jivot-u-nas-i-po-sveta/>
11. LLL - NSI -2007
12. <http://www.technews.bg/article-28506.html>
13. <http://socoplice.eu/site/EN/index.html>
14. <http://www.intouch-project.eu/index.php/en>
15. <http://www.a-learn.eu/>
16. <http://www.ele-55plus.eu>
17. <http://www.keycompetenceskit.eu/>



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The project team would like to extend its gratitude to all employees and employers from the public sector, that were involved in the field research for the purpose of this project, especially to the Municipality of Gabrovo, Social Support Agency-Gabrovo, and National Health Insurance Fund – Gabrovo.





This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.  
This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held  
responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

---

**Wrocław University of Economics**  
**Department of Development Projects**  
Komandorska 118/120, 53-345 Wrocław  
tel. +48 71 3680947, fax +48 71 3680754  
[www.mume.eu](http://www.mume.eu)