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**REPORT
ON THE PROGRESS
IN THE ADULT LEARNING
SECTOR IN BULGARIA
2014**

**Ministry
of education
and science**

**Sofia
2015**





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FOREWORD

Bulgaria, for more than three years now, has been part of the common European efforts for implementing the European Agenda for Adult Learning. The Ministry of Education and Science took this important step in response to the current state of the national adult learning sector. This current state is connected with existing challenges in the overall condition of the national human capital: high unemployment rate, lack of workers with the necessary qualifications, ageing population, and the need for accelerating the reforms in the Bulgarian education and training system.



Prof. Todor Tanev

The current report is developed in response to these challenges. It analyses and assesses the progress in the adult learning sector in 2014, which is the first year of the Erasmus+ programme being in place in Bulgaria. The document is an essential part of the overall process, connected with both the development of policies in the sector and the improvement of the quality of its activities. The report contains up-to-date information on key indicators for adult education and training; outlines the national contribution to the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning priorities; and provides solid conclusions and recommendations.

We would like to emphasize that everything that happened in the adult learning sector in 2014 was achieved by the joint efforts of all stakeholders. These are employers, trade unionists, heads of institutions and organizations, trainers and all participants in adult learning activities. Through this report, the Ministry of Education and Science would like to make their huge contribution even more visible. Contribution on a daily basis, often accompanied by misunderstandings and difficulties, but still – elated by the great significance of learning – the main driving force of all social changes.

By presenting this report to you, we would like to share with all of you – European partners and friends, representatives of the stakeholders, and every single participant in adult learning activities – the national efforts for the development of adult learning in Europe. Efforts, that form a solid foundation and contribute to the better quality of life of every Bulgarian, as a citizen of Europe.

Prof. Todor Tanev

Minister of Education and Science



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INTRODUCTION

This report has been developed within the framework of № 554834-EPP-1-2014-1-BG-EPPKA3-AL-AGENDA „National coordinators for the implementation of the EU Agenda for Adult Learning” project, implemented with the financial support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission.

The project is under implementation in the period 01.11.2014 – 31.10.2015 by the Ministry of Education and Science – National Coordinator for Adult Learning in Bulgaria, in accordance with Grant Agreement № 2014–2461/001–001 of the EACEA.

The report aims at presenting the progress in the adult learning sector in Bulgaria in 2014 against the national goals and the priorities of the European Agenda for Adult Learning.

1. MAIN INDICATORS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1.1. Educational structure of the population aged 25-64

In the period 2009-2014 the educational structure of the population¹ aged 25-64 continued to improve, following a marked tendency of increase of the number and the share of people with secondary and higher education attainment while reducing the number and the share of people with primary or lower education attainment. For the last 6 years the share of the population with primary or lower education attainment has fallen by a little over 3 percentage points - from 22.1% (2009) to 18.9% for 2014. It is noteworthy that the share of people with primary and lower education attainment is 5.2 percentage points below the EU average, which is 24.1% and the country ranks 15th among the EU member states (*Fig.1*). Unfortunately, compared to the previous 2013, in 2014 Bulgaria recorded a slight increase in the share of people with primary or lower education attainment (0.7 p. p.), which is the first increase on annual basis since the beginning of the survey in Bulgaria (2005)

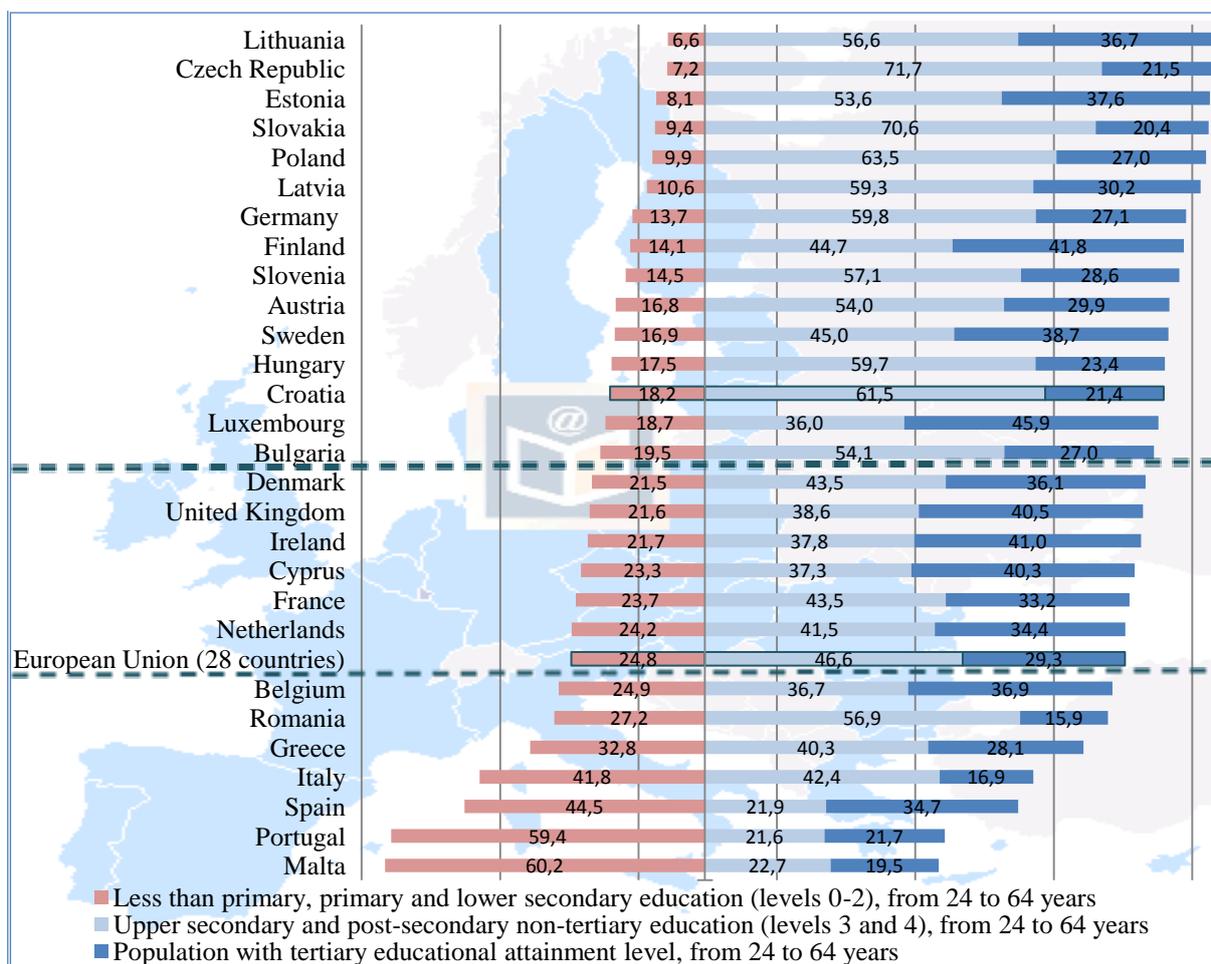
Simultaneously, the share of people with higher education attainment increased - from 23.0% in 2009 it reached 27% in 2014. Despite this increase, the share of graduates in Bulgaria remained below the EU average (29.3%) and the country retained its 19th position among the 28 EU Member States for the second consecutive year. The share of persons with

¹ Source: EUROSTAT/NSI, Average annual data of the Labour Force Survey



higher education attainment among the age group of the 25-64 year-olds is the highest in Luxembourg - 45.9%, followed by Finland - 41.8%, Ireland - 41%, and the UK - 40.5%.

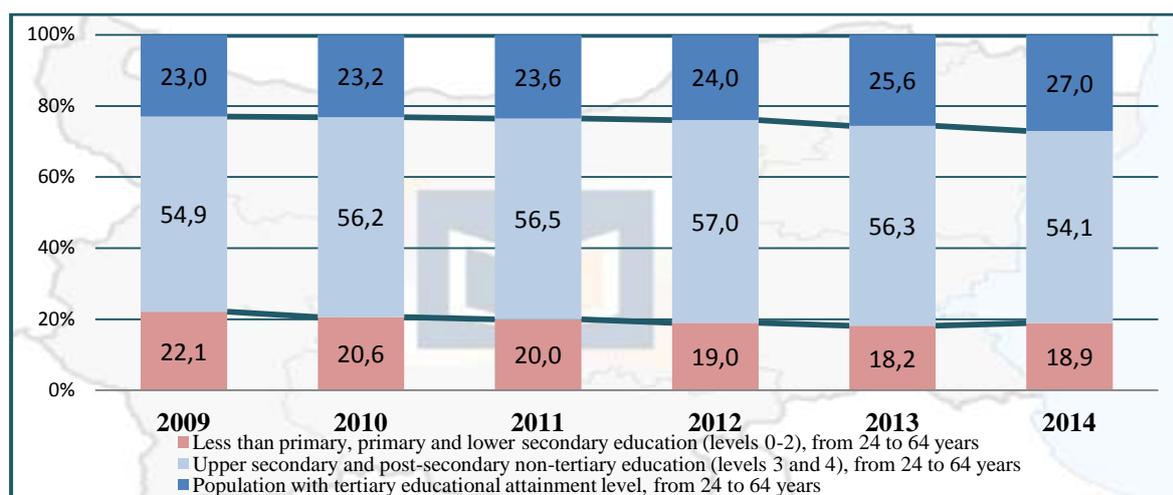
Fig. 1. Educational structure of the population aged 25-64 in the EU for 2014



Source: EUROSTAT/NSI, average annual data of the Labour Force Survey

In the last six years the people having completed secondary education or vocational college account for the largest share of the population aged 25-64 in Bulgaria. In 2014 this share shrunk to 54.1%.(Fig.2), but compared to 2009 it increased by 0.8 percentage points. If the shares of people with secondary and higher education attainment are summed up, we can see that the aggregate share has grown by 3.2 percentage points compared to 2009 and has reached 81.1% in 2014.

Fig. 2. Educational structure of the population aged 25-64 in Bulgaria for the period 2009 – 2014



Източник: EUROSTAT/NSI, Average annual data of the Labour Force Survey

These positive changes in the educational structure of the population characterize the quantitative results of the education system functioning. They are a good prerequisite for the economic development of the country. However, the results of a number of surveys (PISA, the ranking system of the higher education institutions, etc.) in the last years indicate that the quality of primary, secondary and higher education is unsatisfactory and that the structure of graduates does not meet the real needs of the economy. These facts show that despite the positive changes in the educational structure of the population, the education system is inefficient. It proves the need for new targets and reforms in education, based on international experience.

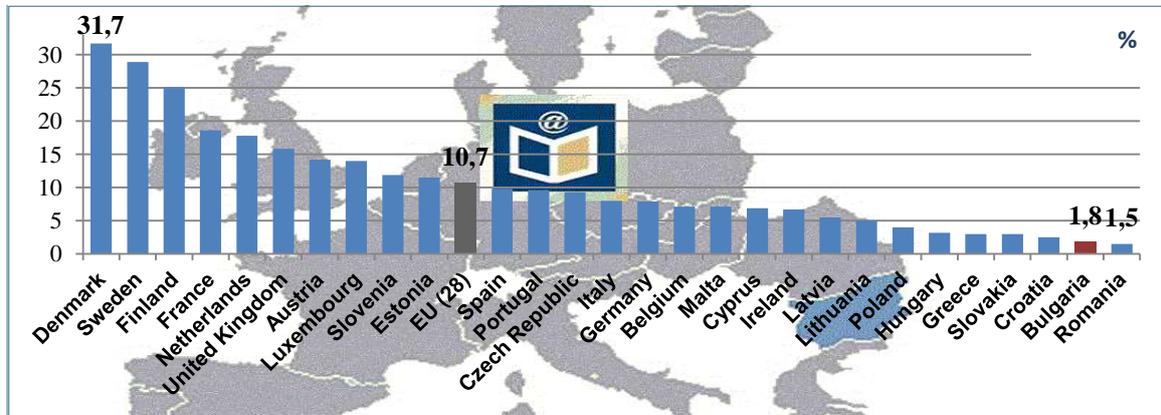
1.2. Participation in lifelong learning (LLL) of the population aged 25-64 (four-week period of observation)

According to the constant "Labour Force Survey" conducted by the National Statistical Institute, in 2014 Bulgaria did not move with the required pace to the strategic target for 2020 - 5% participation of the population aged 25-64 in lifelong learning. In 2014 there was an increase in the share of the population having participated in formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks prior to the survey to 1.8%², with positive change for the fourth consecutive year. The increase in the share of the participants, however, is insignificant - by 0.1 p.p. for 2014 or by 0.15 p. p. on average annual basis for the last four years.

² Source: Rate of participation in LLL of the population aged 25 – 64 in the four weeks prior to the survey in 2014



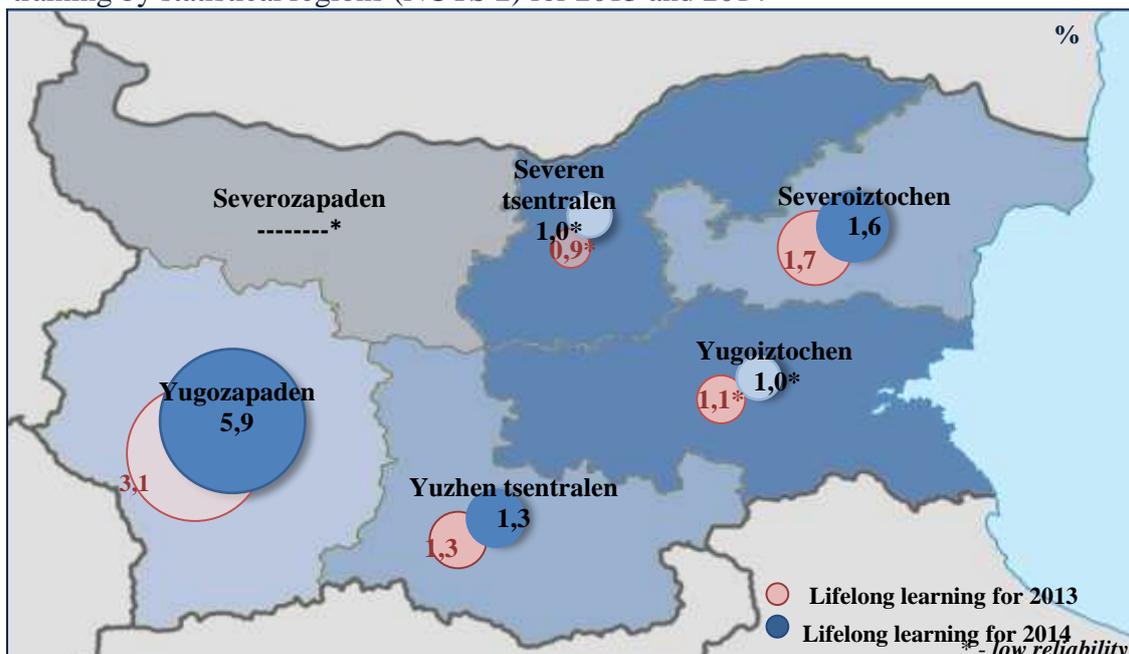
Fig. 3. Participation of the population aged 25-64 in formal or non-formal education or training in the four weeks prior to the survey in EU by countries in 2014.



Source: EUROSTAT/NSI, average annual data of the Labour Force Survey

As indicated on Fig. 3, according to this indicator Bulgaria occupies the last but one position among the EU countries, although in the last four years it achieved a rise in the share of participants in lifelong learning. For a consecutive year the difference between Bulgaria and the EU (28) average increase, in 2014 being 8.9 percentage points (an increase of 0.1 p. p.). It should be noted that in 2014 Bulgaria is one of the 12 EU Member States which achieved an increase in the share of participants in LLL, albeit with the least positive change, along with Germany and Slovakia.

Fig. 4. Participation of the population aged 25-64 in formal and non-formal education or training by statistical regions (NUTS 2) for 2013 and 2014³



³ Source: : Rate of participation in LLL of the population aged 25 – 64 in the four weeks prior to the survey by Statistical regions in 2014



Source: EUROSTAT/NSI, average annual data of the Labour Force Survey

The review of data by statistical regions shows significant disparities in the rate of participation in lifelong learning, the largest share (5.9% [1] 2104) and the most positive change (2.8 p. p.) is observed for the Southwest region (*Fig.4*). The values * for the North Central and Southeast regions are significantly lower, the share of participants in the Northwest region is small and statistically unreliable (within the stochastic error of the survey). Data by region show that to a large extent the positive change by this indicator is due to the value for the Southwest region. And this is logical in terms of educational infrastructure, as nearly ¼ of all vocational gymnasias, vocational colleges and vocational training centers (VTC) providing adult education and training have focused their activities in Sofia.

For 2014 there is no data on the **participation** of the **population aged 25-64** in non-formal training (for a period of one year) and the **participation of the population aged 25-64** in formal education (for a period of one year), which are defined as strategic indicators for assessment of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020 implementation. They are not subject to assessment and analysis for 2014 due to the periodicity of the survey which exceeds the assessment period, i.e. there is no up-to-date data for the reference period. The next Adult Education Survey will be conducted in 2016, and data on these indicators will be available in 2017.

In 2015, however, within the framework of the National coordinators for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning project, analysis of the formal school system of adult education and training was carried out. As a result a detailed picture of the state of play of formal adult education in 2014 is available.

1.3. Participation of adults in formal education and training⁴

⁴ Due to the differences in the methodological scope of adult education and training on international and national level regarding their age, a working definition was developed for the Annual report for 2014 on the implementation of the National LLL Strategy 2014 – 2020. Taking into consideration the general definition of formal education for adults as per ISCED 2011 and the Bulgarian legislation in this field, the following working definition was prepared:

The education and training of adults in the school system (incl. in vocational colleges) is carried out according to academic documentation for adults (persons aged 16+) to the end of the attainment of educational degree or vocational qualification degree. It involves the adult learners, being trained according to the respective documentation, as follows:

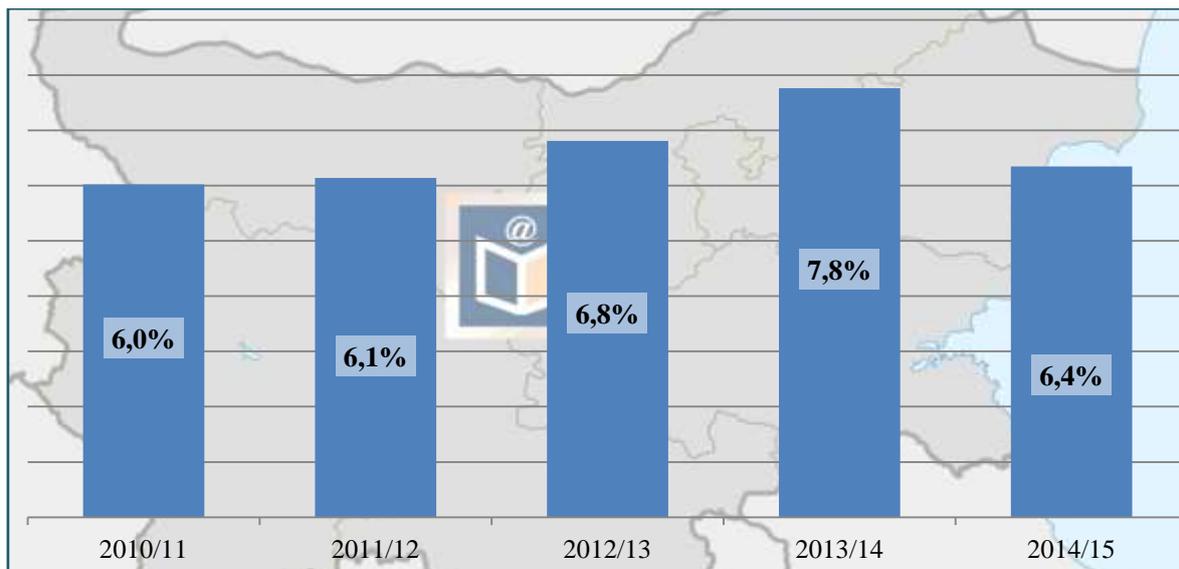
- Persons aged 16+ for the attainment of basic education (primary and lower secondary stages) in all kinds of general schools excluding gymnasias in part-time and evening mode of attendance and self-training



In the 2014/15 academic year formal adult education and training in Bulgaria was conducted in 294 general education schools, vocational schools, vocational gymnasia, vocational colleges and 362 vocational training centers (VTC). The number of adult students was 48 572 (*Table1.*).

In the school years 2010/11 - 2014/15 the number of adult learners in the formal education system in Bulgaria ranged from 48 000 to around 60 000 with significant reduction in 2014/2015. Compared to the 2010/11 school year, this number increased slightly by 417 persons or 0.9%, and peaked in the school year 2013/14 - 60 564 people. The share of adult learners of the total number of students in formal education for the period also varies, from 6.0% in 2010/11 academic year to 7.8% for 2013/14, followed by decline to 6.4% in 2014/15 (*Fig.5*).

Fig. 5. Share (%) of adult learners of the total number of learners in formal education



- Persons aged 16+ for the attainment of secondary education in part-time and evening mode of attendance and self-training in the general secondary schools
- Persons aged 16+ for the attainment of basic education and I professional qualification degree (PQD) with admission after completed VI or VII class in in part-time and evening mode of attendance and self-training
- Persons aged 16+ for the attainment of I PQD with admission 16 after completed basic education in part-time and evening mode of attendance and self-training
- Persons aged 16+ for the attainment of secondary education and/or II or III PQD in part-time and evening mode of attendance and self-training
- Persons for the attainment of IV PQD in all modes of attendance
- Persons aged 16+ for the attainment of basic or secondary education in schools at prisons
- Persons in courses for attainment of I, II and III PQD and in paid training at vocational gymnasia and colleges

The trainees in literacy courses and other short-term courses which do not lead the attainment of educational degree or professional qualification degree are not included in the scope of the adult learners in formal education, as these kinds of training courses by definition refer to non-formal training.



Source: NSI, Statistics on education

Most of the adults in 2014/15 school year were trained to attain secondary education and II professional qualification degree (PQD) in vocational gymnasia - 11,100 persons or almost one-third of the adult learners (22.9%). The second position is occupied by adult learners, striving to attain secondary education and III professional qualification degree - 9440 people or 19.4 percent of the adult learners. Adults show least interest in training for IV professional qualification degree attainment in vocational colleges (1618 adult trainees) and in the so called paid training in professional gymnasia (only 25 trainees in total for the country). (Tab. 2).

The most important constraint of adult education is the great reduction in the number of learners - from 60.5 thousand for the 2013/14 academic year to 48.6 thousand for the 2014/15 academic year or by 19.8%. It is due to the reluctance of employers to invest in long-term training of employees and the low motivation of potential learners in respect to their personal prosperity upon completion of the training.

Table 1. Enrolled learners and adult learners in formal education by education degrees according to ISCED 2011

(Брой)

ISCED/Years	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
LEARNERS - TOTAL (ISCED 1+2+3+4)	799254	780995	775708	779920	764834
incl. ADULTS*	48155	47943	52838	60564	48572
Primary education (I-IV grade, ISCED-1)	255086	252372	253675	258840	261793
including adult learners	246	600	453	560	589
<i>Of them: evening mode of attendance</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>468</i>	<i>267</i>	<i>270</i>	<i>210</i>
<i>Part-time mode of attendance and self training</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>132</i>	<i>186</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>379</i>
Lower secondary education (V-VIII grade, ISCED-2)	217850	219372	219860	218548	214723
including adult learners	1315	2332	3070	3856	4321
<i>Of them: evening mode of attendance</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>416</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>188</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>Part-time mode of attendance and self training</i>	<i>1217</i>	<i>1916</i>	<i>2871</i>	<i>3668</i>	<i>4226</i>
Vocational training - I professional qualification degree, admission after VI and VII grade (ISCED-2)	2130	1902	1979	2386	2432
including adult learners	227	249	348	589	708
<i>Of them: evening mode of attendance</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>160</i>	<i>271</i>	<i>348</i>



<i>Part-time mode of attendance and self training</i>	102	189	188	318	360
Vocational training of adults - I professional (MCKO-2)	8403	11219	13637	11176	6509
including in Vocational education centre	8098	10905	13569	10986	6499
<i>Paid training in vocational gymnasiums and colleges</i>	305	314	68	190	10
Vocational training - I professional qualification degree, admission after VIII grade (ISCED-3)	691	841	1011	831	988
including adult learners	131	214	320	168	236
<i>Of them: evening mode of attendance</i>	77	172	181	102	160
<i>Part-time mode of attendance and self training</i>	54	42	139	66	76
Upper secondary general education -(VIII) IX-XII , (ISCED-3)	147193	141490	135125	132731	131543
including adult learners	3959	4201	4681	5032	4820
<i>Of them: evening mode of attendance</i>	2510	2354	2412	2350	2280
<i>Part-time mode of attendance and self training</i>	1449	1847	2269	2682	2540
Upper secondary vocational education -II PQD (IX-XII grade, ISCED-3)	43225	40285	35469	32785	32095
Including adult learners	6676	7987	9137	10598	11100
<i>Of them: evening mode of attendance</i>	2790	3018	2926	3090	2724
<i>Part-time mode of attendance and self training</i>	3886	4969	6211	7508	8376
Upper secondary vocational education -III PQD (VIII-XIII grade, ISCED-3)	112266	99896	101893	102879	103902
including adult learners	14788	7523	8133	8841	9440
<i>Of them: evening mode of attendance</i>	777	1090	1658	1638	1768
<i>Part-time mode of attendance and self training</i>	14011	6433	6475	7203	7672
Vocational education for adults - II PQD (ISCED-3)	4737	4062	4272	7300	3789
including in Vocational education centres	4538	3836	4185	6803	3711
<i>Paid training in vocational gymnasiums and colleges</i>	199	226	87	497	78
Vocational education for adults – III PQD (ISCED-3)	4353	6660	6323	10278	5417
including in Vocational training centres	3458	5867	5581	7096	4448
<i>Paid training in vocational gymnasiums and colleges</i>	895	793	742	3182	969
Post- upper secondary vocational education in vocational colleges (ISCED-4)	3224	2804	2381	2001	1618



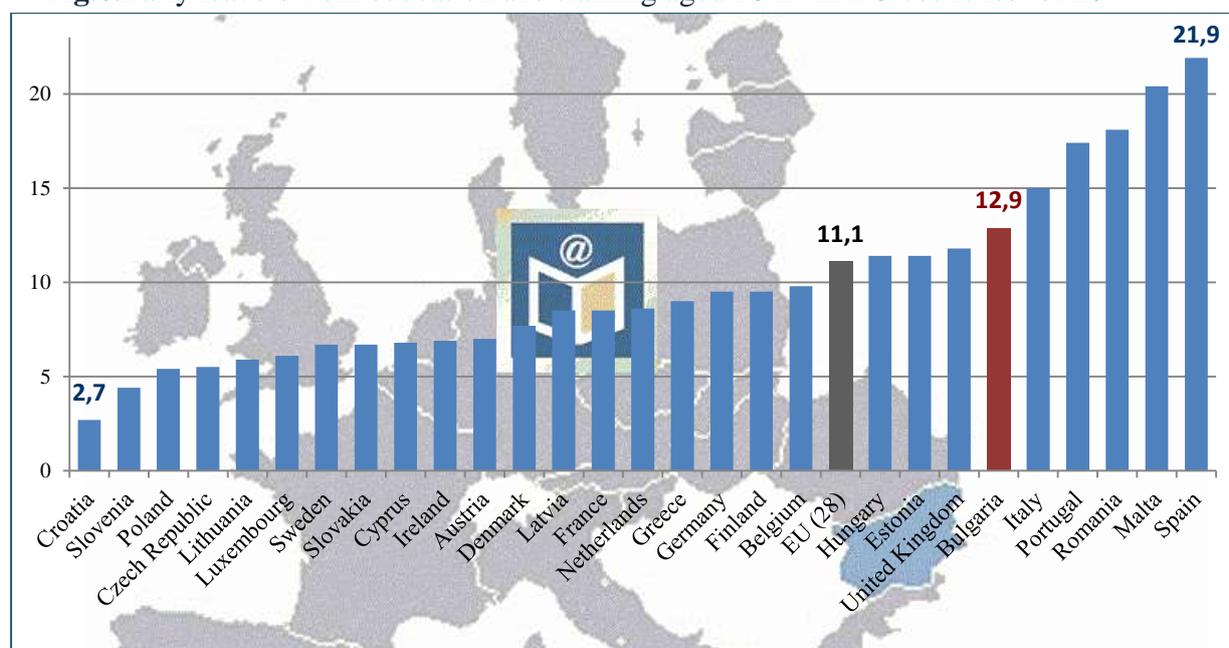
including adult learners	3224	2804	2381	2001	1618
<i>Of them: daily attendance mode</i>	679	578	546	452	318
<i>Evening attendance mode</i>	0	14	2	0	0
<i>Part-time attendance mode and self training</i>	2545	2212	1833	1549	1300
Vocational education for adults - IV PQD (ISCED-4) – paid training in vocational gymnasiums	96	92	83	165	25
Including in Vocational training centres	0	1	0	0	0
<i>Paid education in vocational gymnasiums and colleges</i>	96	91	83	165	25

Source: NSI

1.4. Share of early leavers from education and training aged 18 to 24

In 2014 the share of early school leavers (ESL) aged 18-24 for Bulgaria was 12.9%, rising by 0.4 p.p. compared to the previous year. This share indicates that approximately one out of eight Bulgarian citizens in the preceding years has prematurely left school without attaining secondary education. There is a deterioration on this indicator compared to the previous 2013 (12.5%) and compared to its EU average value. The difference between Bulgaria (12.9%) and the average for the EU countries (11.1%) reached 1.8 p.p. in 2014(Fig.6).

Fig.6. Early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 in EU countries for 2014



Source: NSI/EUROSTAT, LFS

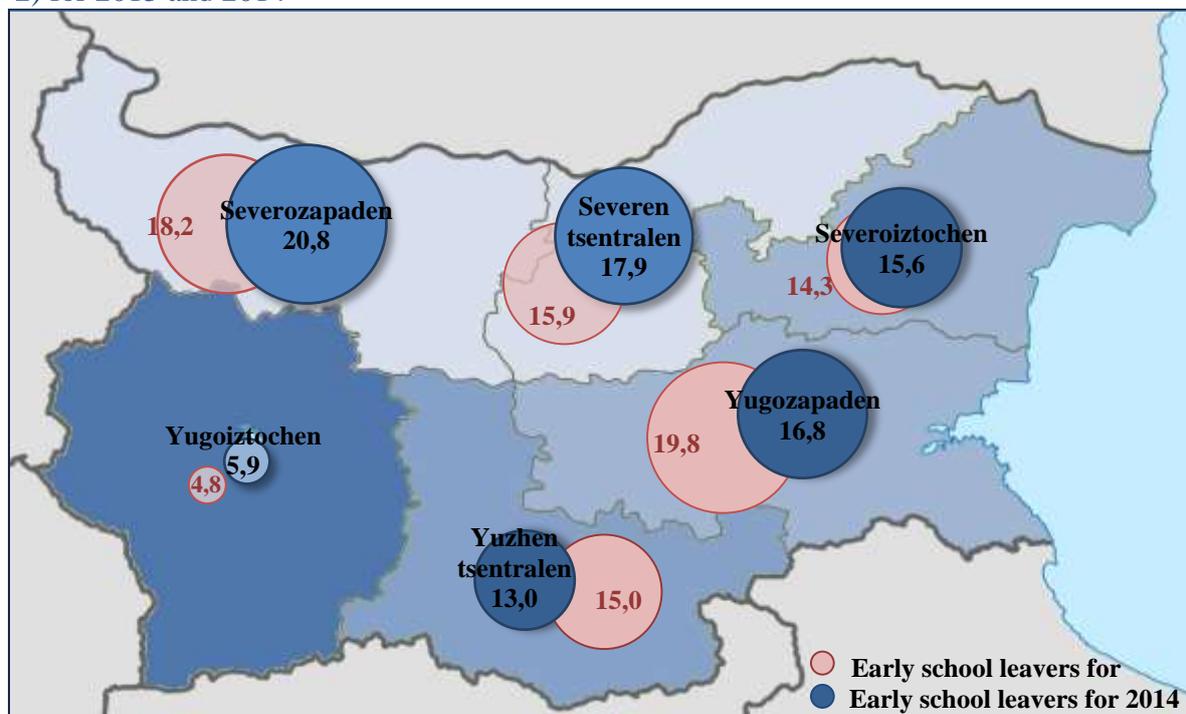


Compared to 2013, the data for 22 EU countries shows positive change, and for six countries, including five Eastern European countries (among them Bulgaria) the data shows deterioration.

According to this indicator there are no significant inter-regional disparities at the level of NUTS 2 statistical regions (*Fig.7*). The share of early school leavers is the lowest in the Southwest region, although compared to the previous year it continued to grow for second consecutive year by 1.1 p. p. The share of early school leavers is the highest in the Northwest region - 20.8%, where it increased by 2.6 p. p. compared to 2013. There is a significant increase in the share of early school leavers in the North Central region, too - 2 p. p.

At the national level there is practically no difference in the values of the ESL indicator on the ground of 'sex' - 12.8% for men and 12.9% for women. However, the differences between the values for men and women are significant in the North and the North Central regions, where the share of women is higher, and in the South Central region, where the share of men is higher.

Fig.7. Early leavers from education and training aged 18-24, by statistical regions (NUTS 2) for 2013 and 2014



Source: NSI/EUROSTAT, LFS

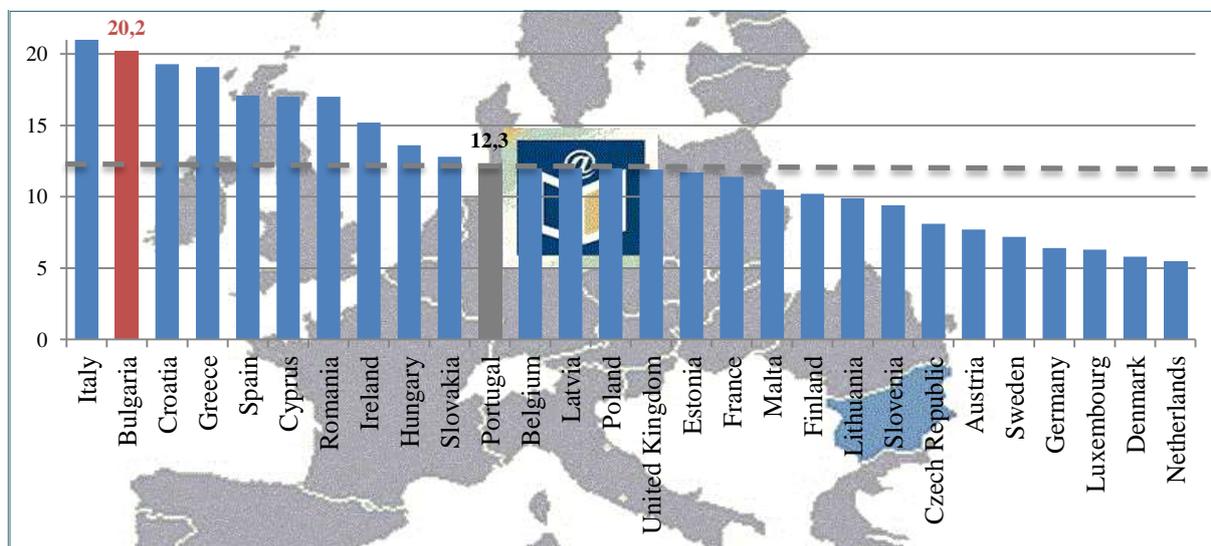


If the negative trend of increasing values on this indicator is sustained, the target for 2020 - 11.0%, will not be achieved and the share of early school leavers may reach 15.1%.

1.5. Share of the young people aged 15 - 24 who do not work and do not participate in education and training (NEETs).

Unfortunately, in 2014 Bulgaria continued to be among the first in the EU in regard to the number of young people who are not covered by either the education system or the social and labor system. They are approximately 145,091 out of a total of 718 273 persons aged 15 - 24 who live in the country - or around 20.2%. This places our country second, just after Italy among the 28 member states of the European Union, where the 2014 average level was 12.4%. Even more disturbing are the survey data, showing that for the ninth year in a row Bulgaria ranks first in terms of share of young people aged 15-24 who said that they did not seek or were unwilling to seek employment and did not return to the education system - 8.8%, whilst the EU average (28) is 3.4%.

Fig. 8. Share of young people aged 15 to 24 who do not work and do not participate in education and training, by country, 2014



Source: NSI/EUROSTAT, LFS

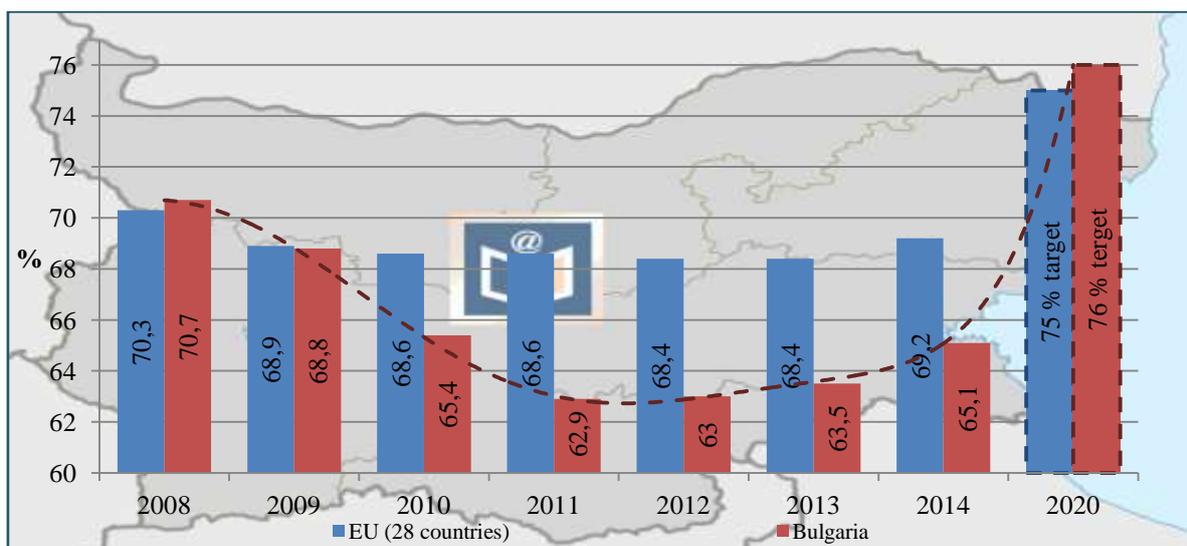
1.6. Employment rate of the population aged 20 – 64.

In 2014, the employment rate of the people aged 20-64 years old increased by 1.6 p.p. compared to the previous year and amounted to 65.1%. The employment rate remains significantly lower than it was in the period preceding the crisis (70.7% in 2008). However, it is far below the target set by the Bulgaria 2020 Strategy (76%). The increase has remained



stable for four years in a row; for the same period the difference between the average employment level in the EU and Bulgaria has decreased from 5.7 p. p. to 4.1 p. p. (Fig.8). If the current positive trend is sustained in the remaining six years, given the current pace of change of the employment rate, the target - 76% will not be reached. Apparently, after years of economic crisis, employment is recovering hard and at a slower pace than expected.

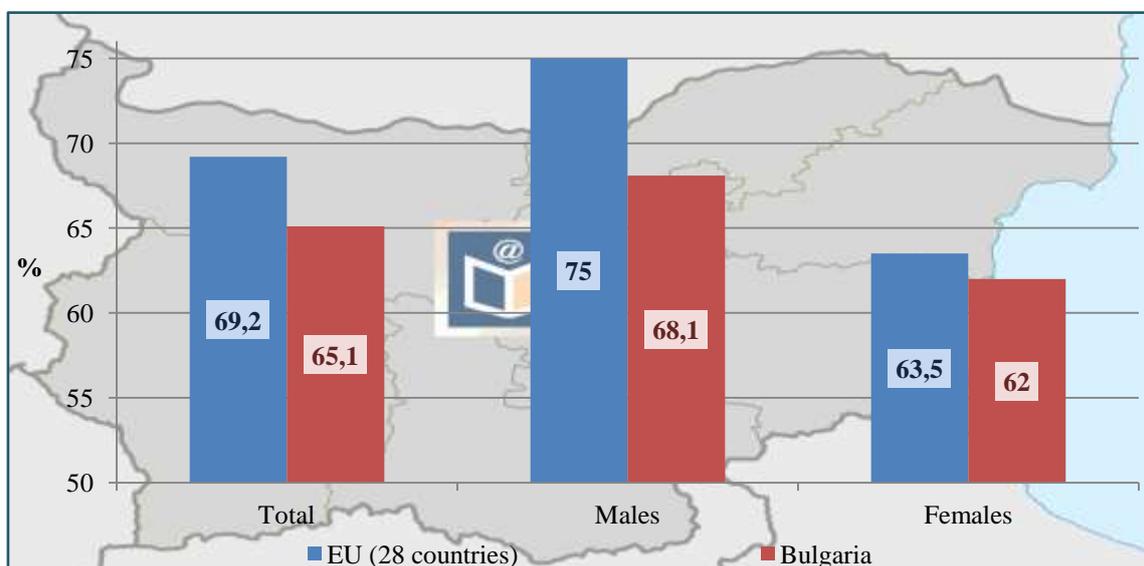
Fig. 9. Share of employed people (%) among the population aged 20-64 years for Bulgaria and the EU (28).



Source: NSI/EUROSTAT, LFS

In the last year the employment rate of men has risen slightly more (by 1.7 p.p. to a level of 68.1%) than the employment rate of women (by 1.3 p.p. to a level of 62%). (Fig.9).

Fig. 10. Share of employed (%) among the population aged 20 -64 years by sex in 2014





Source: NSI/EUROSTAT, LFS

In comparison with the EU countries, Bulgaria ranks at the bottom part of the chart and following the rise in the employment rate in 2014 remains at the 24th position.

1.7. Increasing the share of employed persons aged 20-34, having recently attained tertiary or secondary education (1-3 years).

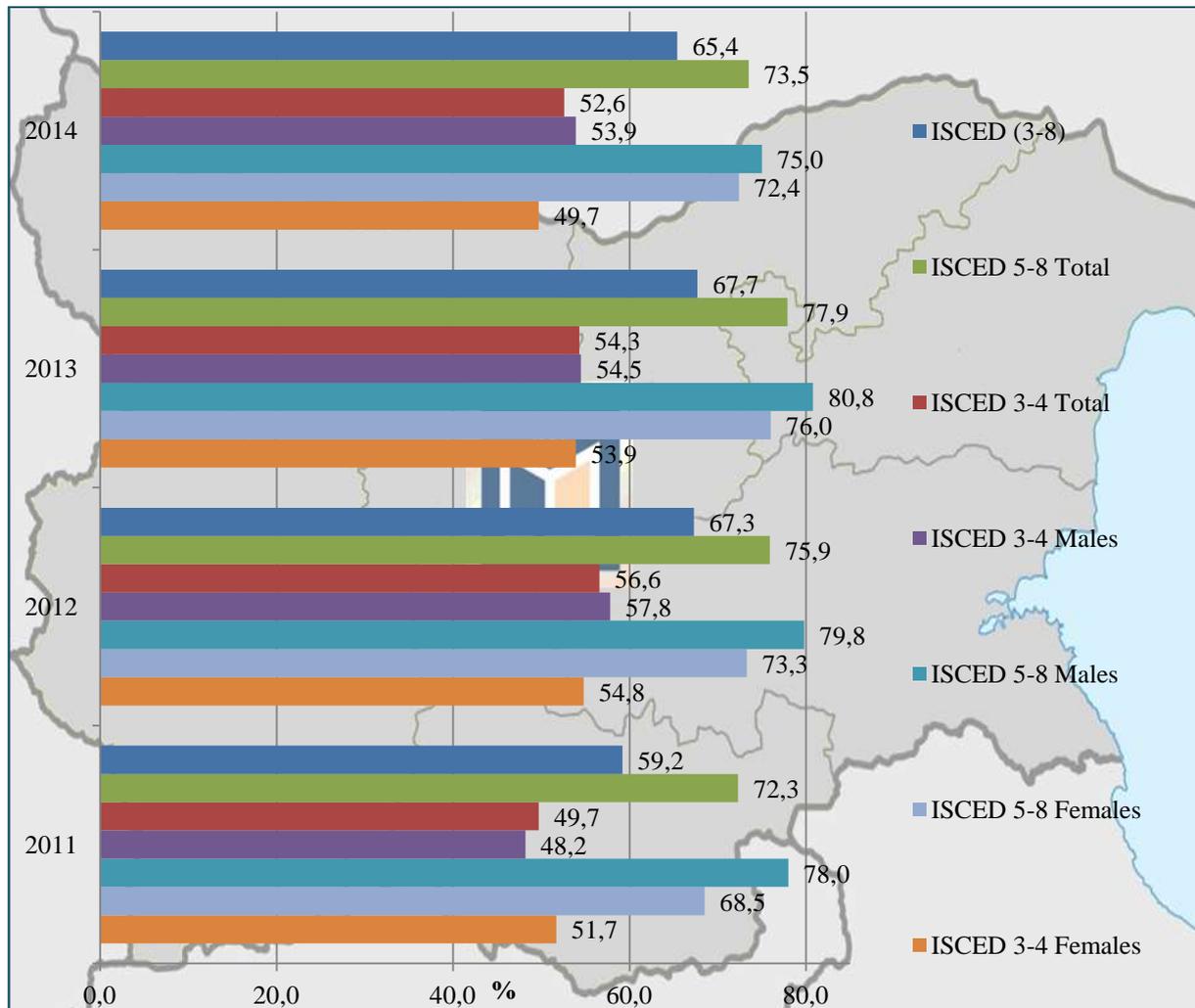
In 2014, the employment rate of the young people aged 20-34 (in a period of one to three years after the attainment of the last educational degree) fell by 2.3 p.p., reaching 65.4%. Data on the lower levels of youth employment in the period 2009-2011 clearly indicates that young workers are more vulnerable in times of economic crisis, as employers most often fire inexperienced young people and hire fewer young people.

In regard to the reduction of employment in 2014 it is noteworthy that the decline in employment among young people with higher education (by 4.4 p. p.) is much more significant than the decline in employment of young people with secondary education (1.7 p.p.). It is to indicate that despite the significantly higher employment rate of university graduates (73.5%) than of young people with lower education attainment (49.7 percent), the group of young graduates is exposed to greater risk in 2014. A review of employment by educational attainment level and by gender shows that in the last year the group of young men with secondary education was affected less, as the decline in their employment rate is only half a percentage point (to a level of 53.9%). The group of men with higher education, was the most affected one - their employment decreased by 5.8 p.p. to 75% (*Fig.10*).

In 2014 the employment rate of young women remained higher (66.4%) than the employment rate of young men (64.6%).

In the last year Bulgaria worsened its position on this indicator compared to the EU countries from 22nd place in 2013 to 24th place in 2014. Croatia, Spain, Italy and Greece rank after Bulgaria..

Fig. 11. Share of employed persons aged 20-34, having recently completed tertiary or secondary school (1-3 years ago) by sex, educational attainment level (secondary and higher education) during the period 2011 - 2014.



Source: NSI/EUROSTAT, LFS

1.8. The position of Bulgaria in regard to the European benchmarks in the adult learning sector.

The comparison with the European Union countries shows that the Bulgaria's 2014 values on the European benchmarks are below the EU average. It also applies to the "early school leavers" indicator, on which in 2012 the country had a better (lower) value than the average for EU countries.

The only indicator on which the country is above the EU average is the share of people with secondary education attainment aged 20-24, but it also decreased in the last year. Bulgaria deteriorated its position on this indicator compared to that for 2013 (from 13th to 15th position), remaining before countries like Germany, Finland, Great Britain, Italy, etc. Although the unemployment rate in the country is one of the highest among the European Union countries and close to the level of Romania, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Malta, the employment rate in Bulgaria increased significantly in 2014. Despite this improvement



(Bulgaria ranks 7th by employment growth in the EU, along with Poland) the position of Bulgaria is not improving but getting worse - from 23rd in 2013 to 24th in 2014.

Bulgaria is in the most unfavorable situation in regard to the indicator "Rate of participation in lifelong learning (LLL) of the population aged 25-64 (in the four weeks prior to the survey)." The positive change in the recent years is negligible and the value for Bulgaria remains almost 6 times below the EU (28) average and almost 2.8 times below the target value set for 2020. On this indicator Bulgaria ranks last (2008, 2009, 2011 and 2013.) or last-but-one (2012 and 2014). The participation rate in some Central and Eastern European countries - Romania, Croatia, Slovakia and Greece - is close to the one in Bulgaria (all below 3% in the last 2014).

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE EUROPEAN AGENDA FOR ADULT LEARNING

2.1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality

In order to increase and widen the participation of adults in lifelong learning, in response to the EU target of 15% rate of participation in adult learning, and to the end of increasing to 40% the share of young people with tertiary or equivalent education, in 2014 efforts were focused on:

- raising awareness and motivation among potential learners - disadvantaged groups, early school leavers and young people who are neither in education nor in training, low-skilled adults, particularly those with low literacy;
- promoting the participation of employers in the learning process;
- promoting flexible learning pathways for adults, including broader access to higher education for people not covered by the traditional qualification development systems;
- development of a functioning system for validation of non-formal and informal learning and promoting its use by adults of all ages and at all qualification levels, as well as businesses and other organizations.

Progress was achieved in respect to the development of career guidance systems for adults. Under the Employment Agency-implemented "Services for flexible labor market development" scheme 10 career centers were established at the Regional Employment Service Directorates in some big cities and at the Central Employment Agency Administration; 30



counselors were appointed. It is expected that in 2015 the centers will provide professional information and guidance to at least 10 000 adults and will prepare career development plans for at least 7200 adults.

Efforts were made to raise public awareness and understanding of some LLL instruments through the organization of a series of events, as follows:

- Three regional workshops were held for dissemination of the National report on referencing the national qualifications levels to the EQF;
- A roundtable was organized for promotion of the European framework of competencies in the ICT sector;
- The European Credit System in VET (ECVET) was presented at 8 promotional events at national level and four events were organized for its clarification,
- An information campaign, including five specialized workshops and two exhibitions was held within the Euroguidance project ;
- A national information campaign on the opportunities for validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired outside the formal education system was carried out. 30 promotional seminars were held, 3 roundtables were organized, brochures and leaflets were printed, a promotional video was made.

The efforts to raise public awareness of the objectives, procedures and benefits of the lifelong learning tools should continue and communication channels should be built not only to key stakeholders, but also to potential learners with special focus on disadvantaged groups.

The analysis of the formal school system of adult education and training which was developed in 2014 outlined on empirical basis the key role of employers in the adult learning sector in Bulgaria. The document is the main result of the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in the national context. The purpose of the document is to familiarize the stakeholders with the state of play of the formal school system of adult education and training in Bulgaria, and to make proposals for improvements of its functioning. The analysis outlines the main features of the formal school system of education and training of adults: regulatory framework, organization, state of play of the system by key indicators, conclusions and recommendations for solutions to the end of overcoming the challenges in the sector.

As regards the development of the regulatory environment in 2014 2015 important legislative changes were made that define the new and important role of employers in the



adult learning sector. The Law complementing and amending the VET Act of July 25, 2014 created legal conditions for the introduction of: internal system of quality assurance; credit system for authentication, accumulation and transfer of learning outcomes; validation of professional knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and / or informal learning, incl. based on professional experience; state-protected professions and others.

The main focus of the regulatory changes related to increasing the interaction with employers is the introduction of work-based training (system of dual training) as a form of partnership between the vocational school, vocational gymnasium, college or vocational training center and one or several employers.

The review of the regulatory framework explores the rights and the responsibilities of adult learners, identifies gaps and existing impact tools. The main conclusion which is formulated in the analysis is related to the fact that key stakeholders do not know or do not apply the regulatory framework. Some employers and representatives of various target groups do not apply it because they do not know it. The lack of a comprehensive system for control and supervision of the sector is an additional factor due to which the laws and by-laws do not lead to the provision of quality education and training for adults and the fragmented nature of the regulatory framework further hampers its application.

The role of employers in the financing of formal school adult education is also special. In Bulgaria there are three possible sources of funding and financing schemes: public funding, employers and private sources.

On 03.12.2014, the National Assembly adopted amendments to the Labour Code, which introduced the Institute of traineeship, consistent with the European Quality Framework for traineeship. The figure of the mentor is introduced, as well as a period of traineeship from 6 to 12 months.

After the amendments the Labour code stipulates the employers to conclude a labour agreement with the trainees for a period of half a year to one year. Individuals up to 29 years of age, who have graduated from secondary school education or higher education, and have no length of service or professional experience in the profession or speciality, which they have acquired, can become trainees. An employee can be appointed on the basis of an agreement with a condition for only one time traineeship.

For each trainee there is a requirement the employer to appoint a mentor with at least three years length of service and a qualification in the same or similar profession to the one



the traineeship will be conducted for, in order for the trainee to acquire practical professional skills. The Labour code requires the conclusion of a supplementary agreement to the labour agreement between the employer and the mentor, by which the distribution of the working time and the other obligations of the mentor in relation to the traineeship are settled.

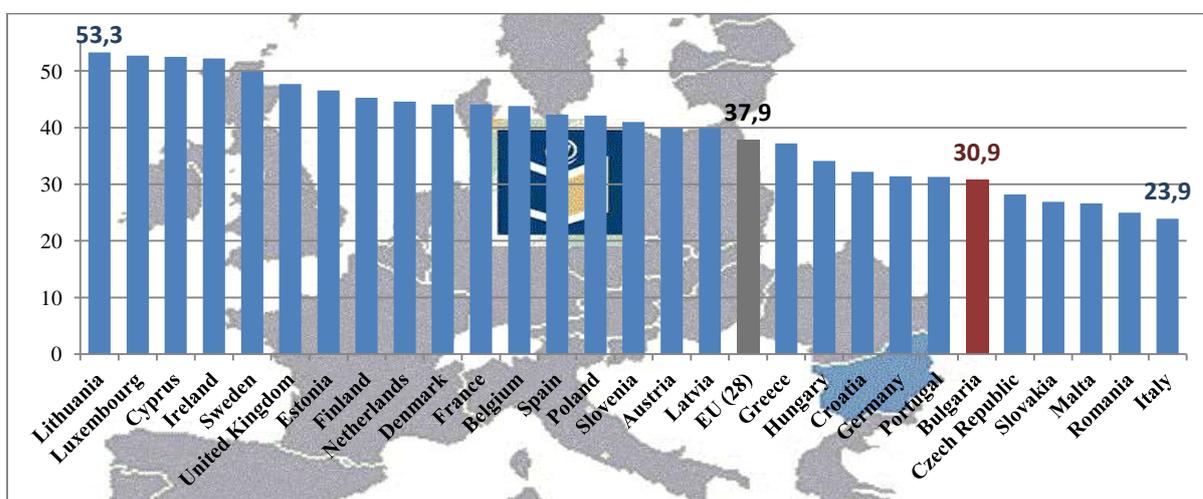
After a completion of the labour agreement with a condition for traineeship the employer must issue a recommendation, certifying the results of the training.

Amendments and supplements to the Law on VET adopted in 2014. also aim to achieve better match between the acquired competencies and the requirements of the labor market. Among other things, changes in the law regulate the possibilities of introducing a new form of vocational training - **work-based learning (dual training)**. It is applicable for persons aged 16+ (students and adults).

In 2014, for the second consecutive year the share of university graduates among young people aged 30-34 increased, reaching 30.9%.⁵(Fig.16).The increase is by 1.5 p. p. compared to the previous year and although it is smaller than the significant increase of 2013 (2.5 p. p.), it draws Bulgaria nearer the target value for 2020 (36%). In 2014 the national value of this indicator was still below the EU average (37.9%), but the difference between the shares for Bulgaria and the average for the EU countries decreased significantly, reaching 7 p. p. (9.1 p. p. in 2012)

In 2014 according to this indicator Bulgaria worsened its position among the EU countries from 21st to 23th place. This is due to the sharp increase in the number of university graduates among young people in Austria and Croatia.

Fig. 12. Higher education graduates among persons aged 30-34 in the EU countries in 2014



⁵ Source: Higher education graduates aged 30-34 by countries in 2014



Source: NSI Source:/ Eurostat, ADR / LFS

The progress achieved in 2014 focused more on "institutional" activities: introduction of flexible accreditation models; implementation of quality-oriented funding models; development of management systems of universities; improvement of the admission model, etc.

Some activities in the higher education sector in Bulgaria remain outside the scope of adult learning. These are aimed at: strengthening the role of universities as institutions for lifelong learning and encouraging potential trainees for further training in the higher education system; adoption of lifelong learning as a mission of universities and an indicator for quality assurance; adaptation of curricula to the specifics of the individual profile and the learning needs of the trainees; improvement of learning forms and assessment methods with the aim to create an innovative and flexible learning environment; promoting access of "non-traditional" students and adults through alternative forms of lifelong learning in universities; providing support and appropriate architectural environment for undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities; encouraging universities to use data on the graduates' employment rates and the growth forecasts while planning the admission and the education and training courses and programs; increasing the number of young researchers and promotion of postdoctoral training; encouraging the participation of undergraduate and graduate students in various forms of further education by establishing scientific clubs and research schools.

The actual opportunities associated with the formulation of concrete actions to achieve this priority of the Agenda are still not used. It is necessary to encourage the 54 universities in Bulgaria to take more concrete actions for the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning, incl. by creating a variety of temporary or permanent formats for interaction among them.

The Strategy for Development of Higher Education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020, adopted by Decision of the National Assembly on 26.02.2015 is of greatest importance in this respect. The Strategy outlines a target framework for the development of the higher education system, incl. in relation to the broadening and strengthening of the lifelong learning network and the widespread use of various forms of e-learning. There is a direct relationship on strategic level between the strategy for development of higher education in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2014-2020 and the national strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2014-2020. Additionally, there are other activities and measures which imply improved interaction of the main actors in the



higher education sector and the adult learning sector, which relate to: access, increasing the share of graduates, the quality of higher education and its connection with the labor market, research, modernization of the management system of higher education institutions, funding model, career development and more.

Despite the achieved progress in implementation of one of the main indicators in the field of adult education and training in Bulgaria - the one related to higher education, the sector of adult learning is faced by serious challenges. The main challenge is associated with the promotion of flexible learning pathways for adults in higher education, including through improving the access to higher education for people who are covered by the traditional systems for upskilling or for those who are outside. It is increasingly necessary the needs of the business for diversification of the range of learning opportunities for adults offered by higher education institutions to be placed in the center of public attention.

An important step towards the introduction of LLL instruments in the Bulgarian education and training system was made in 2015. The adopted amendments to the Law on Vocational Education and Training and Decree № 2 on the conditions and procedures for the validation of knowledge and competences provide conditions for the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through non-formal training and informal learning.

In 2014 the final phase of the project "New opportunity for my future," funded by the "Human Resources Development" Operational Programme 2007-2013 (HRD OP) was carried out. The main objective of the project was to widen the opportunities for vocational training, increase employability and social inclusion through the creation of a sustainable and flexible system for the identification and recognition of skills and competencies, acquired through non-formal and informal learning. Over 1,300 validation consultants were trained, nearly 11 000 people underwent initial consultation during the pilot testing of the system. 6317 people passed through the validation procedure, 3639 people received certificates. At the end of the period, however, problems related to the employment of the trained consultants as well as to the motivation and the practical ability of employees to undergo validation were reported. This calls into question the sustainability of the results of the project, which ended in January 2015.

It should be noted that by design the project "New opportunity for my future" provides for the establishment of a validation system only in respect to vocational schools. It does not include important institutional units in other sectors of the national education and training system such as vocational training centers, universities, non-university institutions that can



provide higher education, civil sector organizations etc. This partial approach focuses the national efforts only to one of the sectors of Bulgarian education, which contradicts the very essence of validation as a condition for making lifelong learning and mobility a reality. For this reason, the introduction of a system for validation, which has a broader scope and includes all the key stakeholders is envisaged in the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the period 2014 - 2020.

On 11 July 2014 the Parliament of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted amendments and supplements to **The Vocational Education and Training Act (VETA)**.

Amendments and supplements have been made to provide regulatory conditions for the implementation of reforms in the field of vocational education and training. The main objectives are:

A. **Widening the access** of citizens to opportunities for acquiring a professional qualification through:

- providing a possibility for **validation** of professional knowledge, skills and competences, acquired through non-formal or informal learning;
- In application of the provisions of The Vocational education and Training Act (VETA) an Ordinance № 2 of 13 November 2014 on the conditions and arrangements for validating professional knowledge, skills and competences of the Minister of Education and Science, Prom. SG/96/21.11.2014, effective from 01.01.2015.
- The Ordinance defines the essence and purpose of the process of validation, the persons, who have a right for validation, the institutions empowered to conduct validation, the validation procedures. The Ordinance regulates the documents (certificate for validating a level of professional qualification and a certificate for validating a professional qualification for a part of a profession), the structure of the Commission for validation, the cases, in which the validation procedure is interrupted, as well as the monitoring of the validation implementation. The obligation of the institutions, empowered to conduct validation, to include also the procedures for validation in their internal system for quality assurance, is specifically regulated. Also regulated are the issues, related to the financing of the validation procedures.
- **Introducing credits** in the vocational education and training, based on units of learning outcomes, regulated in SER for acquiring a qualification for professions from the List of professions for vocational education and training. The possibilities for accumulating credits in order to acquire a professional qualification for a profession



are regulated, as well as their transfer for acquiring a professional qualification for another profession from the same professional area. A possibility is provided for credits, awarded to units of learning outcomes for general professional training, to be transferred and accumulated for acquiring a professional qualification for all professions from the List of professions for vocational education and training.

- providing conditions for **integrating students with special education needs** in classes for acquiring vocational education and vocational training.
- providing conditions for **training of adults with special education needs**, which will improve the access of students and individuals over 16 years old with special education needs to vocational training, real opportunities will be created for their social and work realization.
- setting up a system for career guidance in school education.

2.1. Improving the quality and efficiency of adult education and training

In order to build a strong adult learning sector a number of measures aimed at ensuring the quality in the sector of adult learning were taken..

With the adopted amendments to the VET Act conditions are created for the setting up of a system for quality assurance, which will increase the attractiveness of VET, the motivation for realization on the labour market with the acquired profession, as well as the confidence of the business in the training, conducted in the vocational education and training institutions. They require the institutions for vocational education and training to build internal systems for quality assurance in VET.

A draft Ordinance of the Minister of education and science has been elaborated, which lays down the principles for quality assurance, the requirements for the institutions for VET, the indices, conditions and procedures for measuring quality. In this context a new function of the National agency for VET is regulated, in terms of carrying out supervision of the activity and an assessment of the quality of training in vocational training centres. Functions have been assigned to NAVET for the methodological support of vocational training centres with regard to the process of validating knowledge, skills and competences, as well as for the setting up and maintaining of a Register of documents, issued as a result of the validation.

In 2014 the long-awaited system for forecasting the demand for workforce with certain characteristics was finalized. Two training courses for employees of the Labour Office



Directorate and the Regional Employment Service Directorate, and 3 workshops for nearly 150 officers from various government institutions and social partners were held; a report with the medium-term (2014 - 2018) and long term (2019 - 2028) forecast of the supply and demand of labor in Bulgaria was prepared and published; assessment of the needs of employers was carried out and the results were summarized in a report.

In 2014, Bulgaria began the process of institutionalization of the sector for adult learning at the national level of government. By Order № PD 09-909 / 11.06.2014, and the Order № RD 09-1286 / 08.21.2014 of the Minister of Education and Science the National Coordination Group for lifelong learning was set up. The group consists of 31 representatives of various ministries, agencies, educational and cultural institutions, employers' organizations, trade unions, civil society and others. The functions and tasks of the Strategy Group are related to the coordination of the interaction of various stakeholders regarding implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2014-2020. In addition, the Group supports the activities of the National Coordinator for Adult Learning.

In early June 2014 a conference "Mobilising stakeholders for progress in the adult learning sector" was held. At this event all the main products developed by the national coordinator for adult learning's team in the period 2012-2014 were presented. The event was attended by representatives of the Directorate General "Education and Culture" of the European Commission, ministries, agencies, employers, trade unions and non-governmental organizations, participants in learning activities for adults of different target groups, and guests from Latvia and Romania.

On 10 January 2014 the Council of Ministers adopted the National Lifelong Learning Strategy for the period 2014 - 2020, which establishes the strategic framework of the public policy for education and training in 2014-2020. The Strategy applies a holistic approach, covering learning in all its stages - from pre-school education to adult learning, in all areas - general and vocational education and training, higher education, continuing education of adults, and in all its aspects - education, formal and non-formal training and informal learning.

One of the strategic objectives of the national strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2014 - 2020 is "Enhancing the rate of participation of the population aged 25-64 in



education and training from 1.5% in 2012 to more than 5% in 2020 (four-week reference period)".

In the second half of 2014, the National Coordination Group for Lifelong Learning discussed and adopted a framework communication plan for the interaction of stakeholders in the course of the implementation of the National LLL Strategy 2014-2020. A communication policy, providing timely, understandable and comprehensive information aims to mobilize the stakeholders to progress in the implementation of the Strategy and to motivate people of all ages to participate in education and training.

The coordination between stakeholders ensuing from the cross-sectoral nature of the adult learning policy is a key problem facing the efforts to ensure conditions for a functioning lifelong learning system in Bulgaria. The establishment of the National Coordination Group for Lifelong Learning in 2014 is an important step forward, as it is a coordination mechanism of these efforts at the national level. Work is still needed for the establishment of a multi-level system of coordination through the establishment of coordination structures at district level.

2.2. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning

In order to develop the capacity of the adult learning sector to promote social cohesion and to provide a second chance to people who need it for learning and a better life, efforts are aimed at improving the basic skills of adults.

The National strategy for promoting and raising the literacy (2014 – 2020) has been adopted with Protocol decision № 44.5 of a meeting of the Council of Ministers from 22.10.2014. Its strategic objective is achieving a level of functional literacy which will provide an opportunity for personal and social development and will contribute to the achieving of a smart, inclusive and sustainable growth of the economy.

The development and implementation of appropriate policies for stimulating the literacy among adults requires the collection and usage of data on a school, regional and national level, which would allow a study of the needs for liquidating adult illiteracy and the possibilities for their realization.

In order to raise the self-esteem and motivation of adults for learning and for enhancing their literacy, the development of the system for recognition and validation of non-formal training and informal learning is of particular importance.



2014 was the last full year of the Ministry of Education and Science-implemented project **"New chance for success."** The project is aimed at providing literacy courses and training to illiterate and poorly literate persons over the age of 16 who have not attained primary education or have not completed a grade of lower secondary education. 185 schools from across the country were involved in the provision of the courses. The project was implemented with the financial support of the Human Resources Development Operational Programme. The main objective is through literacy and formation of key competencies to facilitate further access of illiterate and poorly literate people to education and vocational training and to enhance their employability.

In 2014 5621 people over the age of 16 participated in the courses for adult literacy and for learning educational content for V-VII grade. 3324 of them after passing the exam received a document for successful completion of the training which entitles them to continue their education in the school system, and the rest - a document for participation in the training courses under the project. The project implementation is expected to continue in the next programming period with funding under the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme.

In 2014 Bulgaria ranked second in Europe by share of young people aged 15 - 24 who neither study nor work. The efforts of the Employment Agency were focused towards the solution of this problem through the implementation of various training schemes or apprenticeship as a form of work-based training and transition to employment. The amendments to the Labour Code of 2014 introduced the Institute of traineeship and the figure of the mentor. In 2014, nearly 12 000 unemployed young people under 29 with secondary or higher education and no work experience under the specialty of the education participated in internship programmes in the public administration or in the private sector and were involved in induction training for the formation of work habits. Another 500 young people participated in the "Career Start" programme in the state administration. The implementation of the National Plan for implementing the European Youth Guarantee 2014 - 2020 is also underway.

Unemployed people are also the beneficiaries of the scheme "Promoting own business development", supported by the HRD OP. The scheme supports the start of independent business by unemployed persons through the provision of training in entrepreneurship and management or management of small and medium business. Training and assistance in the



development of business plans and preparation of project proposals as well as accompanying advisory services (accounting, marketing, etc.) are also provided to the start-ups.

Unemployed people are the target group of a number of other programs of the Employment Agency, incl. ones financed through training vouchers for acquisition / improvement of professional skills or key competencies. BG051PO001-1.1.09 "Qualification and Employment Promotion" (training for the acquisition or enhancement of professional skills and apprenticeship with an employer for a period of three months of the trainees having successfully completed the courses) and BG051PO001-1.1.10 "Qualification and motivation for competitive inclusion in the labor market" (trainings for acquisition / upgrading professional skills and key competencies, motivational training) are such procedures.

The participation of social partners in the implementation of joint training programs with the Employment agency should be assessed positively. These were the initiatives of the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association (1880 trained unemployed and subsidized employment for 500 of them) and the Confederation of Independent Syndicates in Bulgaria (2220 trained unemployed and subsidized employment for 220 of them).

Whilst the young people are comparatively well covered as beneficiaries of the active policy on the labor market, only one scheme supports training at the workplace for employees aged over 55 (1,800 older workers) and training for trainers of such persons in enterprises (60 trained trainers). The Action Plan for 2014 for the implementation of the National LLL Strategy showed the almost complete lack of tasks aimed at adults aged 55+ and at other target groups disadvantaged on the labor market and in public life (pensioners, people with low skills, groups of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, etc.). The opportunities of the new operational programmes –HRD OP and SESG OP – should be used to develop programs tailored to meet the needs of these target groups.

It is also noteworthy that the 2014 activities carried out with public funding and aimed at promoting participation and access to learning for adults as a means of social inclusion and active participation in community and society, were to great extent limited to the active policy on the labor market. There are a number of initiatives aimed at Roma people, people with disabilities, people living in remote areas and other disadvantaged groups, which have proven to be good practices, but they are carried out in isolation, usually by NGOs and normally end with the end of the project funding. Important actors of lifelong learning that are underrepresented in the existing coordination mechanism at national level should be involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the National LLL Strategy -



civil society organizations, providers of non-formal education and training, local authorities. This could be done at the regional level and steps should be taken towards the setting up of regional coordination structures for operational planning and implementation of the Strategy - district coordination groups for lifelong learning.

It would be appropriate to find intersections with the implementation of publicly subsidized lifelong learning activities designed to target disadvantaged groups but laid down in other strategic documents, e.g. the National Strategy of Bulgaria for the Integration of Roma 2012- 2020, and the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion 2020. This implies greater interaction with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and its structures, which should not be limited to the active labor market policy, but should also include other relevant areas such as integration of people with disabilities, social inclusion of ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups, initiatives for active aging and others.

The implementation of the priority "Addressing the learning needs of people with disabilities and persons in specific situations of exclusion from learning" aims to achieve one of the key targets of the Europe 2020 strategy - reducing the share of early school leavers. Results were achieved in 2014 in regard to the support of students and adults with special educational needs and persons with deviant behavior to continue their education or training. 4 new curricula for the acquisition of first degree of professional qualification were developed and approved.

The measures planned for the implementation of this priority are insufficient to overcome the negative trend associated with increasing the share of early school leavers in 2014. Still a limited number of institutions are involved in the planning and implementation of activities and measures under this priority - the Ministry of Education, the Human Resources Development Centre, the Ministry of Youth and Sport; the activities are not decentralized. Intervention measures aimed at reducing drop-out rates from primary and lower secondary education, at increasing motivation and promoting re-enrollment are not planned.

An essential challenge related to the implementation of this priority is the need to stimulate the training of adults who have left the education system prematurely and to improve the conditions for effective training of persons in prisons.

In terms of improving adult literacy, developing digital literacy and providing opportunities for adults to develop basic skills through a variety of forms to increase literacy, activities are carried out based on various thematic strategic documents adopted by the Bulgarian government. Specific annual activities related to school libraries are laid down



in the National Strategy for promotion and improvement of literacy 2014-2020. Some of these activities are related to the enrichment of school libraries' funds (Measure 3 Objective 1), others are aimed at turning them into an appropriate environment to improve the skills to read electronic media (Measure 3 Objective 3), and others focus on the provision of digital products and creation of digital libraries. There is potential for widespread impact on different target groups in the initiative "to bring children back to the books," which envisages enriching the book funds of school libraries with books donated by parents.

2.4. Enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and the learning environments

2014 marked the beginning of the implementation of the "Erasmus +" programme in Bulgaria. In the first year of the program it contributed to the implementation of the national policy for adult learning and more specifically to: the modernization of the educational process; promotion of cross-border mobility; implementation of European tools designed to support learning mobility and lifelong learning, and support for the participation of teachers in the European electronic platform for school partnerships e-Twinning.

A positive change is observed in regard to activities related to modernization of teaching and support for participation in e-Twinning. In particular, the share of registered Bulgarian teachers on the Platform increased by 18.7% (from 3960 in 2013 to 4896 in 2014) and the share of registered Bulgarian schools - by 8.6% (from 1920 in 2013 to 2100 in 2014). The number of projects with Bulgarian participation on e-Twinning increased by 42.4% (from 930 in 2013 to 2780 in 2014).

The electronic platform for school partnership eTwinning continues to assert itself as a modern interactive tool in school education. In 2014, the e-Twinning ambassadors were trained to work with Webex software through which online trainings are conducted. 12 online training courses were held during the second half of 2014. 62 teachers were sent to 16 professional development seminars in European countries.

"Erasmus+" programme contributed to the training of pedagogical professionals through participation in Key Activity 1: "Educational mobility for citizens" and Key Activity 2: "Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practice". 270 teachers participated in mobility activities.

In 2014, over 2,700 individuals participated in 26 outreach seminars that are part of the activities related to raising awareness of the implementation of ECVET (European Credit System in VET) at national level to support learning mobility and lifelong learning. The



results of this activity have wide impact, since they contribute to the implementation of other activities related to the credit system in vocational education and training in impact area 1 and impact area 5 of the National Strategy for Lifelong learning for the period 2014-2020.

To modernize the teaching process through the implementation of methodological models based on ICT and distance learning in Bulgaria, a data center serving educational content and cloud infrastructure were built. As regards the implementation of these activities challenges and problems are identified associated with the timely update of the information and communication knowledge of the users and the experts who serve the cloud infrastructure and the provision of financial resources for maintenance and upgrade.

In 2014, the improvement of the training technology with alternative forms and methods, including the use of electronic content, was embedded in activities planned on a broad basis. They include: maintenance of existing educationally-oriented catalogue resources and centralized access to electronic periodicals; licensing and locating valuable international educational resources and programs available online; maintenance and upgrade of the national education portal with digital repository of educational resources, as well as provision of platforms for e-learning and control of the classes, content management and communication with parents and students.

For the development of new pedagogies and creative environment for adults advanced training programs for teachers were developed and applied. Depending on the source of funding the activities for the implementation of this priority are divided into two groups. The first group of activities is carried out under Project BG051PO001-3.1.03-0001 "Qualification of pedagogical specialists", funded the "Human Resources Development" Operational Programme 2007-2013, and the second group - through the National "Qualification" program, financed by the budget.

Creative environment for adult learning is stimulated through planned training of teachers on various themes, aiming the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies to work in innovative learning environments and with a wide range of target groups. The topics under the "Qualification of pedagogical specialists" project include work in intercultural environment, formation of competencies for student assessment, working with students with special educational needs and prevention of school violence, aggression and others.

Within the framework of Project BG051PO001-3.1.03-0001 "Qualification of pedagogical specialists" in 2014 one-year specialized training in high schools for acquisition of



professional qualification "teacher" was provided to 84 teachers in vocational training and 291 teachers from various professional fields were upskilled.

In 2014 the social partners in Bulgaria were also actively involved in the better use of information and communication technologies in the context of adult learning. New tools and eLearning platforms were created. More than the planned number of persons were trained by the Confederation of Labour "Podkrepa" and the Association of Industrial Capital in Bulgaria. The "MyCompetence" project of the Bulgarian Industrial Association developed 12 new e-learning courses.

2.3. Improving the knowledge base on adult learning and monitoring the adult learning sector

In 2014, the team of the National Coordinator for Adult Learning carried out a set of interrelated activities to improve the quality in the adult learning sector and put in place a monitoring system.

The following results were achieved: A Model for monitoring of the adult learning sector was developed and a consultative process with all stakeholders was carried out; Methodological guide for monitoring of the adult learning sector was prepared; a National Information System for Adult Learning became operational. Stakeholder representatives were trained to implement the model and use the electronic system (<http://lll.mon.bg/system/>).

The model for monitoring the adult learning sector contains basic principles related to monitoring of the sector for adult learning, incl. national policy objectives, principles and basic questions that can be answered by using the system. The Model outlines the scope of the system, the criteria for selection of indicators, the design rules, and the principles and rules for construction of the subsystem for evaluation and analysis of the impacts on the adult learning sector in Bulgaria. The model also proposes distribution of roles between the institutions and organizations at national level. The Model ensures continuity, stability and the achievement of concrete results of the implementation of activities and measures related to the implementation of all priorities of the European agenda for adult learning at the national level.

As a result of the developed model a National Information System for Adult Learning was constructed, which can be accessed from the website of the National Coordinator for Adult Learning. The information product ensures transparency at all stages of the processes



observed in the sector of adult learning. It aims at supporting the making of better management and policy decisions. The system creates an information basis for analyses and assessments of the adult learning sector at the national level and by planning regions. In 2014 representatives of the social partners, training providers, MLSP, EA and others were trained

to work with the system.

The National Information System for Adult Learning is designed not only for a narrow circle of experts who have special interests, commitments and knowledge of the sector, but also for a wide range of users, who need concise and accurate reports on the state of play of the sector or its individual components.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Conclusions:

- In 2014 a number of policy frameworks of the Bulgarian education and training were adopted at the national level. They are mainly adopted in implementation of the ex-ante conditions to the Partnership Agreement (the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020, the Strategy for Reducing the Share of Early School Leavers (2013-2020), the Strategy for Development of Higher Education in Bulgaria for the period 2014 - 2020, the Strategy for the Development of Vocational Education and Training of the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2015-2020), and some of them are thematic (the National strategy for development of pedagogical staff and the National Strategy for promotion and increasing literacy 2014-2020). Nonetheless the complementarity and consistency is still at an early stage.
- The low rate (1.8%) of adult participation in lifelong learning activities in Bulgaria in 2014 is an indication of the absence of widespread public awareness of the need and benefits of these activities. Barriers to adult learning are many, but the most common of them are related either to the cost of training (almost 40% of those who want to participate) or a lack of time and inability to reconcile learning activities and work commitments (over 20 %). The aging population and the planned pension reform will further complicate the picture of the social processes, and adult learning could provide possible solutions to these complex challenges.



- Key activities in implementation of the lifelong learning policy are still performed only on project basis (adult literacy, establishing a system for the identification and recognition of non-formally acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, etc.). Some of them will be continued in the new programming period, including through the Science and Education for Smart Growth Operational Programme, but they will still be within specific project life cycles, without turning them into major policies.
- Key actors, whose main activity is related to provision of non-formal training and continuing vocational training did not participate in the planning of the 2014 activities. These are mostly civil sector organizations, businesses, individual employers, local authorities and communities, composed of various representatives of different target groups. Some of these actors are not adequately represented at national, regional and local level and their interests are not effectively articulated. There are also cases of passivity and insufficient interest in the lifelong learning policies when such representation exists.
- Target groups which are still underrepresented on the labor market and in the public life were not covered by the planned measures (older workers and pensioners, people with low skills, groups of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, etc.). Ignoring some of these groups and the absence of effective state policy to support lifelong learning activities targeted at them is a fact of high public importance, which requires concrete action;
- Some topics related to adult education and training and, in particular, the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences in the field of andragogy remain outside the thematic scope of the training of pedagogical professionals in 2014.

3.2. Recommendations:

- Specific actions are needed at the operational level to improve the coherence between the national education and training policies. The coherence should contribute to the successful implementation of these policies' own target framework, to make effective links to other national socio-economic policies and generally form a distinct national contribution to the achievement of the European reference levels;
- Adult learners, and especially the disadvantaged groups - workers over 55 years of age, people with special educational needs, people living in remote areas and others. should be priority target groups to which targeted public support should be provided;



- Key actions in implementation of the lifelong learning policy (adult literacy and learning educational content for V - VII class, system for identification and recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies, acquired by non-formal and informal learning etc.). need to be not only project-based practices. The initiative of the teams implementing them should concentrate towards the transformation of these project activities into permanent policies;
- The development of the action plans in the coming years of the duration of the National LLL Strategy should ensure adequate, relevant and effective information channels targeted at the less active participants in lifelong learning policy, whose main activity is related to non-formal training and continuing vocational training provision. It should focus on mechanisms for involving them in the process of policy implementation at the regional level through the piloting of regional coordination groups for lifelong learning;
- The planning of specific tasks aimed at the target groups which are underrepresented on the labor market and in public life should create conditions for the construction of channels to interact with them. incl. by organizations which are not representative. It is necessary to seek intersections with the implementation of similar activities in implementation of other strategic documents and in particular the National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria for the integration of Roma 2012 - 2020, the National Strategy for reducing poverty and promoting social Inclusion 2020;
- The acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences in the field of andragogy can be directed to priority target groups in the lifelong learning system and in particular to: work with early leavers, refugees, prisoners, adults in the formal system, adult Roma, people with disabilities and others. Thus the public intervention impact will be increased through: building on the results of the implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning in the period 2012-2014; creating conditions for the promotion and exchange of innovative andragogic practices incl. through the Electronic platform for adult learning in Europe (EPALE); ensuring sustainability and dissemination of results under the National "Qualification" Programme
- and the "Qualification of pedagogical specialists" project.



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