

NATIONAL SPECIFICITIES OF POPULATION AGEING IN BULGARIA

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***Summary.** Ageing is taken up as a process concerning the change of the entire demographic and economic reproduction. Its specific particularities in Bulgaria are defined taking into consideration the intensity of the age-specific restructuring of population (1990: 20,4% aged 60 and more, 2010: 25,1%, 2030: 26,6%) under transition-specific unfavourable living conditions typical of that centralised-to-market-economy transition period, a sharp birth rate decline and rising death rate. Taking as a basis the EU-launched concept of Active and Healthy Ageing and the statements published by a number of European researchers, the author defends their position on the usefulness of the elderly population under good social and State organisation. Moreover, the author assumes that this is the only alternative solution given the remarkably worsening indices of development in Bulgaria, i.e. low productivity rates, young workforce shortages, low pension and benefit levels and low employment levels among retired people at younger age having conserved their work capacity and professional skills. The author considers lengthening of human life in good health, unachieved in Bulgaria, as a future solution of an important workforce source and a good driver for the economic growth rates, and, alongside with this, of improvement of living standards of all generations and improvement of population sustainability.*

Keywords: ageing, life expectancy, life quality, population-oriented policies, social exclusion

INTRODUCTION

The objective evolution of population through the centuries changes the focuses in terms of the objective laws and trends and, accordingly, defines the priorities in social and demographic policies.

The 20th century saw the human kind face the challenge of the rapidly growing global population. This turned to be an essential issue and the UN and its specialised institutions on population issues basically focused their efforts in developing the strategies and policies addressing such issues.

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The experts in that domain consider that the utmost demographic challenge for the 21st century, which is fully displaying itself in Europe, and tending to rise to the status of a global phenomenon, is population ageing and its collateral effects for the economic and social development.

The process of ageing generates problems associated with the elderly, but not only with them. Those problems affect the lives of people from all generations and cause multiple reflections over a variety of areas of society's functioning. This is why by the end of the 2nd and particularly in the beginning of the new millennium the interest to the biological, physiological, psychological and the socio-economic aspects of elderly people's lives has seen a substantial rise. The topicality of the issue of the ageing population is predetermined by the modern demographic development tendencies globally and regionally, by the changes occurring in the elderly people's statuses and by the emerging new economic and social issues ensuing from their maintenance and way of living. And, according to the new realities, a social need is germinating to reassess the elderly people's capacities viewed as a resource in the development and their broader inclusion in a variety of life areas. The agenda has been emphasising more and more the need to put forward the issue of harmonisation of interrelations between individual generations, the issue concerning their equal access to society's resources and their participation in the development; as well as the issues concerning the mutual respect, understanding and co-operation between those generations as part of the overall social atmosphere stimulating the social progress.

The most elderly continent has been ageing most rapidly and is standing an active position vs. the imperatives of this challenge. The Eurostat projections show that by 2050 EU's population aged 15–64 will shrink by 48 million, while the ratio of working-age people to people beyond working-age (aged 65+) is expected to shrink twofold: from 4:1 to 2:1.

The emerging significant number of population in its third life cycle worldwide and particularly in Europe needs a separate evaluation of its role heretofore as a factor of public wealth's improvement as well as a factor for the economic growth achieved so far. It will be both unjustified and unjust should this population be left submerged in the complex that its contribution to the development would be challenged from many and many points of view, or to further persuade elderly people that they gradually become more and more burdensome for the society. The new concepts on the place of ageing population in the society tend to find modern solutions to that issue, so a whole generation's lives would not be deprived of sense or social acknowledgement.

Modern society stakes on approaches whereby it might ensure the existence of **balance, co-operation and mutual assistance across the generations.**

One of the priorities for the development of population in terms of global and regional policies is the approach involving setting up a **society of all ages**. The principle of age equality is fundamental to the UN's 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

Assuming the vision of a society of all ages in its theoretical and applied aspects takes into consideration one more circumstance. The growth of third-age population both as an absolute number and as a relative share, on the one hand, and the perspective of deepening the process of ageing would lead to its separation as a socio-biological group, which is increasingly self-identifying in terms of its social status or