



THE AGEING OF THE BULGARIAN POPULATION – NATURAL PROCESS OR PROBLEM

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ABSTRACT

Mankind exited the 20th century and entered the 21st century with a demographic phenomenon, which is unique and has been unknown for centuries - population ageing.

Nowadays 11 % of the world population (which is already around 7 billion people) falls into the category of elderly people, i.e. over the age of 60.

The Republic of Bulgaria is not just following the above-mentioned demographic trends, but is also one of the countries where the ageing population is occupying larger and larger “demographic territory”. Bulgaria is ranked fourth in the world with regard to the speed of population ageing according to a report by the United Nations. Only three countries are ahead of Bulgaria with respect to this population indicator - Japan, Italy and Germany.

Moreover, Bulgaria is currently among the ten countries with the highest proportion of aged population. It ranks 7th with 22.9 % of its population over the age of 65.

Globally, it is believed that the tendency for ageing is irreversible. In addition to being global in range, it includes people from both sexes all around the world. Furthermore, the durability and irreversibility of the tendency for population ageing will lead to serious economic consequences. In the not-so-distant future it will cause a reduction in global workforce, which in turn will automatically lead to a higher cost of workforce.

Providing the retirement sector with the necessary funds will lead to augmentation of public expenditures.

Key words: population, ageing, demographic crisis, migration, immigration, demographic politics, an average life expectancy, pension reform.

Mankind exited the 20th century and entered the 21st century with a demographic phenomenon, which is unique and has been unknown for centuries - population ageing.

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When people acquire the classification ‘old’? There is no doubt that in the eyes of every following generation this classification is purely individual and is even sometimes linked with outward features. According to United Nations standards, old population is the

population, where every individual member of that group is at least 60 years old.

Other organizations have chosen the age of 65 as a criterion for old age, having in mind the increasing life expectancy especially in the countries with developed economies and efficient retirement systems.

The world statistics shows that since the year 2000 the number of people over the age of 60 has grown by 100 million individuals and currently exceeds 700 million.

The median age of the world population has also been increasing. Today the median age is 28 years. Of course, there are also exceptions. Uganda, for instance, is regarded as ‘the youngest’ country - its population’s median age is 15 years.

The global demographic forecasts are that by the year 2050 the median age will be 38 years.

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Demographic forecasts in global aspect prognosticate increasing of median age until the middle of 21st century (2050) to 38 years.

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Moreover, Bulgaria is currently among the ten countries with the highest proportion of aged population. It ranks 7th with 22.9 % of its population over the age of 65.

It is obvious that the long years of crisis during the transition period have produced their long-lasting impact on the demographic situation in Bulgaria.

The specific factors determining the ageing of the Bulgarian population are:

A/ the high average life expectancy of the population, which keeps increasing (**table 1**)

Table 1

Year	Altogether /percentage/	Men /percentage/	Women /percentage/
1935-1939	51,75	50,98	52,56
1956-1957	65,89	64,17	67,65
1960-1963	68,89	67,82	71,35
1969-1971	69,59	68,58	73,86
1974-1976	71,11	68,68	73,91
1978-1980	71,31	68,35	73,55
1984-1986	71,14	68,17	74,44
1989-1991	71,19	68,02	74,66
1993-1995	71,22	67,10	74,90
1995-1998	70,60	67,10	74,30
1997-1999	70,50	67,60	74,60
1998-2000	71,70	68,15	75,34
1999-2001	71,80	68,50	75,20
2000-2002	71,87	68,54	75,37
2001-2003	72,07	68,68	75,59
2003-2005	72,60	69,00	76,30
2004-2006	72,60	69,10	76,30
2005-2007	72,70	69,20	76,30
2006-2008	73,00	69,50	76,60

B/ the decrease in the overall Bulgarian population

According to data provided by the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria (NSI), at the end of the year 2009, the Bulgarian population consisted of 7,563,710 people. In 2008 the number was 7,606,551 people and ten years ago, in 2000 the population was 8,149,468 people.

The population of Bulgaria is declining for two main reasons: the emigration and the negative natural growth of 3.5 per mil (NSI data).

C/ the increasing median age of the population
For the year 2009, the median age of the population of Bulgaria was 41.8 years. This demographic indicator had approximately the same value in 2008 - 41.7 years, but in 2001 it was lower - 40.4 years. This illustrates the durability of the tendency for increase in the median age of the Bulgarian population.

What are the tendencies in the ageing process from a global perspective and more specifically in Bulgaria?

Globally, it is believed that the tendency for ageing is irreversible. In addition to being global in range, it includes people from both sexes all around the world. Furthermore, the durability and irreversibility of the tendency for population ageing will lead to serious economic consequences. In the not-so-distant future it will cause a reduction in global workforce, which in turn will automatically lead to a higher cost of workforce.

Providing the retirement sector with the necessary funds will lead to augmentation of public expenditures.

A decrease in the living standard is also expected along with many other changes.

Locally, on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, the population over the age of 60 will continue to grow both in absolute and relative terms. The population of working age, however, is threatened with substantial reduction, which will engender serious economic consequences.

The ageing process is an ideological process. The longer (and sometimes even eternal) life have always been and still remain an aspiration of homo sapiens. From this perspective it becomes clear that the ageing tendency should not be combated, but measures need to be taken in order to maintain the harmony between the different age groups in a society.

From an economic and social standpoint, it is necessary to find the best balance between a working economy and a strong public sector.

In order to avoid the hard and perhaps even irreversible future consequences of the ageing process, Bulgaria, through its legislative and executive organs, urgently needs to carry out a long-delayed, but absolutely necessary reform in the retirement sector. The reform should not consist of palliative measures, but should be directed at establishing a modern, capital-based pension system.

A potentially effective measure could be a prolonged retirement age - either voluntary or universal. What can also be used are practices for employment of aged people such as part-time work. One of the necessary measures is the keen need for the establishment and active functioning of an effective labor market, which can regulate the cost of workforce.

The lack of serious and farsighted futuristic strategy for the demographic sector at this point is a void that needs to be urgently filled. If that does not happen, we can expect that any chance for restoring the high proportion of young people and children (0-14 years of age) will be eliminated.

The country's national strategy for migration and integration also needs to be periodically updated so that it can fulfill its positive mission.

CONCLUSION:

As a member of the global world and the European Union, the Republic of Bulgaria is obliged to find the most adequate measures to combat the ageing process in its demographic, economic and social policy.

According to EU estimates, by the year 2020, in order to compensate for its ageing population, Bulgaria will need 560 thousand people of working age.

It is obvious that to achieve this, apart from the above-mentioned measures, a revision of the immigration legislation needs to be performed.

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