

Contribution of the Republic of Bulgaria regarding the issues to be considered on the 13th session of the Open Group on Ageing

Focus Area 2: Social Inclusion

I. National legal and policy framework

The Republic of Bulgaria has adopted a horizontal approach to legislative regulation of public relations when it comes to the rights of older persons. This means that current Bulgarian legislation guarantees non-discriminatory treatment to everyone, including the elderly, equal treatment and equal access to rights, goods and services – access to education, healthcare, labour market, income, social protection and social care, social security, transport and movement, housing conditions, household services, etc.

The guarantees of the rights of older persons are enshrined in numerous normative acts. The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria regulates the basic rights of citizens by prohibiting discrimination on all grounds and guarantees the equality of citizens. **The Anti-Discrimination Act** regulates the protection of all natural persons in the territory against all forms of discrimination, while at the same time assists in its prevention and approves measures for equal opportunities. The principle of equal opportunities and protection against discrimination, including against older persons are further regulated in the **Labour Code, Civil Procedure Code, Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, Social Security Code, Employment Promotion Act, Social Assistance Act, Civil Servant Act, Higher Education Act, Health and Safety at Work Act**, etc. Special protection is being provided to vulnerable groups with the Ombudsman Act.

The organisation, provision of services and long-term care for the elderly with scheduled commitments for the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, municipalities and non-governmental organisations also forms part of the legislative framework.

II. Domestic policy to promote the active life of the elderly

With regard to the formulation of a national strategic framework for meeting the challenges of aging of the population, the MLSP developed a **National Strategy for Active Living of the Elderly in Bulgaria 2019–2030**. The long-term goal of the strategy is to create conditions for an active and dignified life for the elderly by providing equal opportunities for their full and meaningful participation in the economic and social life. The Strategy defines four main priorities:

- 1) Employment;
- 2) Participation in society;
- 3) Independent living;
- 4) Capacity building and creating a favourable environment for the active life of the elderly at the national and regional level.

To assess and monitor the implementation of the Strategy the Council of Ministers adopts two-year plans and reports.¹ The implementation of the Strategy requires the adaptation

¹ The National Strategy for the Active Life of the Elderly in Bulgaria (2019-2030), the plans and reports on its implementation are

of policies to overcome the consequences of aging on the functioning and financial stability of social systems such as the labour market, the pension system, healthcare, social care and the education system. This implies specific activities to adapt the public sector to aging processes and to provide better conditions for the inclusion of older persons in public and economic life.

III. National mechanism for coordination and monitoring of demographic policy, incl. the policy to promote the active life of the elderly

There is a **national mechanism for coordination** and monitoring of the implementation of the state demographic policy, including the policy for promoting the active life of the elderly. Under the auspices of MLSP, there is also an **Interdepartmental Working Group** on Demographic Issues, Incomes and Living Standards operating. It is responsible for the preparation of annual plans and monitoring reports, which integrate information from various sources such as national statistics, operational information and data from sociological surveys. The functioning of the **National Council on Demographic Policy** as an advisory body to the Council of Ministers is also foreseen.

IV. Long Term Care Policy

The long-term care policy in Bulgaria is intended not only for the elderly, but also for the disabled. It combines a wide range of measures, including social and health services, financial support, support for caregivers of dependent family members (formal and informal care). The major focus of these measures is creating more opportunities for individuals to lead **independent lives in a home environment**.

Social and health services for long-term care in Bulgaria are provided by **two separate systems** – the social services system and the health care system. Financial support is regulated in the Social Assistance Act, the Disability Act and the Personal Assistance Act.

V. Social services

The Social Services Act regulates social services, including long-term care services in Bulgaria. The state has also adopted **National Strategy for Long-Term Care** with horizon until 2034.² The plan covers measures of the process of deinstitutionalization of care for the elderly and people with disabilities and increasing the efficiency of the long-term care system. Particular focus is assigned to measures and activities aimed at providing support in a home environment for the elderly and people with disabilities, development of quality and accessible social and health services, reforming existing homes for the elderly and building the necessary infrastructure to provide these services.

In accordance with the ongoing reform in the field of social services, there is a steady increase in social services financed with funds from the state budget through the budgets of municipalities. As of December 2022, the total number of social services financed by the state budget is 1 679 with the possibility of supporting 57 298 persons. Of these, the

published on the official website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy under the heading "Demographic Policy" (www.mlsp.government.bg/demokronka-politika).

² Currently its implementation is subject to the National Action Plan 2022-2027.

number of social services (day care, therapy and rehabilitation services, residential care and others) for the elderly and disabled is 582 with 10 386 places. 264 municipalities are developing assistant support with the possibility of supporting 20 226 users, incl. older persons. The homes for adults with disabilities are 75 with 4 914 places, and those for the elderly are 82 with 5 598 places.

With a view to the sustainability of the system of social services and as an expression of the state's commitment to providing support to vulnerable groups, approximately 275 million euros were allocated for the provision of social services in 2022. Of these, funds for social services intended specifically for older persons were designated approximately 40 million euros.