MENTORING AND GUIDANCE FOR ADULTS

"ADULTS MENTORING"

NEED ANALYSIS - BULGARIA

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I. INTRODUCTION

- TARGET GROUPS
- AIMS OF THE PROJECT

II. LOGICAL AND STATUTORY FRAMEWORK (REGARDING 50+ PEOPLE)

1. INTRODUCTION
2. DATA
3. BARRIERS IN FRONT OF ELDERLY PEOPLE

- SOCIAL ISOLATION AND SELF-ISOLATION
- REALISATION AT THE LABOUR MARKET

III. STATISTICAL SURVEY

1. BASIC CONCLUSIONS – PEOPLE AT AGE(50+)
2. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
   - FEMALE
   - MALE
   - HEALTH AND SUITABILITY
   - DISCRIMINATION
3. BASIC CONCLUSIONS– EMPLOYERS
   - ADVANTAGES IN EMPLOYING PEOPLE AT AGE (50+)

IV. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

1. BASIC ACCENTS
2. SERVICES AND INSTITUTIONS
3. CURRENT SITUATION
4. STATUTORY BASIS
5. CONCLUSIONS

V. RESULTS

I. INTRODUCTION

The project "Mentoring for people advanced in age" is implemented due to the financial support of European Commission programme "Leonardo da Vinci".

Seven organizations from 5 countries are partners in this project: Municipality of Sliven, Bulgaria – contractor, Evroconsulting, Bulgaria – coordinator, Zgura-M – Bulgaria, DIAKRISI – Greece, Special pedagogy faculty at the Lodz University – Poland, Special pedagogy Department at Pedagogy Faculty of Ljubljana - Slovenia, and Public training center at Edinburgh – Great Britain.

The project "Mentoring for people advanced in age" has been designed to answer the growing need of programmes which can enable the adequate presentation of elderly people at the labour market. Ageing population, the increased number of unemployed people at the age of over 50, their self-isolation and the lack of adequate social life are the elements of the problem how to re-integrate the people advanced in age in society. The project focuses on the needs of unemployed advanced in age people who would like to update their professional skills and acquire new practical knowledge using mentoring as the system of informal education and training. A system for mentoring the working place of people advanced in age will be created within the project.

Project target groups

This project and the studies are aimed at the following target groups:

- Elderly people (over 50) who are unemployed for a long period of time;
- Elderly people who used to work but lost their jobs.

Secondary target groups: legislators, labour market brokers, educational and training institutions and organizations, trade unions.

Project aims

- ✓ To create a mentoring system for people advanced in age which will ensure their realization at the labour market;
- ✓ To give unemployed people advanced in age a chance to acquire working experience in order to increase their self confidence by offering training at a professional level;
- ✓ To design and pilot supporting materials for people advanced in age (who are being mentored);
- ✓ To design and pilot training materials for employers (mentors);
- ✓ To exert positive influence on employers' attitudes regarding the needs, abilities and the potentialities of people advanced in age;
- ✓ To establish employers' networks, including employers working with elderly people.

To fulfil these aims widely available training materials will be designed, they will be offered for free use on Internet. The materials will be presented on other media (paper or CDs) for people who do not use or do not have access to Internet.

Strategies and programmes will be designed to transfer the existed materials to other target groups of disadvantaged people.

II. LOGICAL AND STATUTORY FRAMEWORK (REGARDING 50+ PEOPLE)

1. Introduction

As a preparation for designing project programmes in each of the partner countries a survey has been carried out which provided and presented information about:

- ✓ Formulating of the concept "people in advanced age";
- ✓ Retirement and retirement age legislation;
- ✓ Opportunities for integrated lifelong education and training;
- ✓ Statistical data about unemployment among people in advanced age;
- ✓ National policy to solve the problems of elderly population;
- ✓ European, national, regional and local programmes for overcoming the isolation of elderly population;
- ✓ Institutions working to solve the problems of people advanced in age.

2. Data

The process of ageing population has been registered in a lot of countries and it becomes a subject of discussion and seeking of decision for the problems connected with it all over the world. Bulgaria is not an exception. Moreover, in connection with political and social changes which occurred in the country during the last two decades and the difficult transition process make these problems even worse. Apart from the overall framework worldwide of ageing population and worsening the problems connected with this process in Bulgaria there are additional factors like:

- ✓ Heavy decrease in population growth within the country (in some regions and in some years it reached zero or negative level)
- ✓ A large number of emigrants mainly young people.
- ✓ A large increase in the level of unemployment due to the economical changes and the transfer to the market economy.

Demographic changes lead to ever growing necessity for studying, formulating and offering solutions connected with the needs of elderly people.

- At the present moment there is no explicit statutory concept of "Elderly people". The notion of "elderly people" is based on the retirement age.

- The formulation of EC about "elderly people" – it is the age defined by each of the membership countries according to their laws for the right to receive a pension.

According to this formulation we can define two groups of elderly people and thus two different bases for defining the problems connected with each of them:

1. The group of people at pre-retirement age (50+): Adults
2. The group of people at post-retirement age.

During the last years the legislation connected with the right to receive a pension underwent numerous changes and at the present moment the requirements for coming of retirement age are nearest to the laws in some European countries. According to the latest changes in the retirement law the age of receiving pension for women is 60 and the transition from 55 (retirement age according to the previous legislation) to 60 is smooth by increasing the age by six months for every year. Thus in 2006 women retired at the age of 58, and in 2007 – at 59, by 2009 retirement age will be 60. Men retire at the age of 63.

The statistical data for Bulgaria show that a high percentage of people in pre-retirement age lost their jobs for various reasons and are unemployed for long term. That reflects on their right to receive a pension due to the specific law requirements which include not only reaching certain age but also a required length of service. The necessary number of marks to get a pension is a sum of their age and length of service in years. For women – the age should be 60 and the length of service 30 which forms the required 90 marks. For men this ratio is formed by age of 63 and length of service 37 years which forms a sum of minimum 100 marks to get a pension.

The statistical data for the period January-September 2006 show that the percentage of the unemployed people at the age of 50+ and up is 20,05% from all registered people and is the highest in comparison with the other age groups which can be clearly seen by the following table (the data are got from an information from the National Statistical Institute, Bulgaria www.nsi.bg)

age	Percent from the overall number of unemployed
up to 19 years old	3,5%
from 20 to 24 years old	8,6%
from 25 to 29 years old	11,2%
from 30 to 34 years old	11,6%
from 35 to 39 years old	11,2%
from 40 to 44 years old	11,1%

from 45 to 49 years old	12,3%
from 50 to 54 years old	13,7%
over 55 years old	16,8%

It is necessary to bear in mind the fact that part of people in the pre-retirement age who do not have any qualification or have a low qualification have lost their confidence of finding new job and there are no data for their number. They do not register in the employment offices and they are not active in searching a job by their own.

From the data shown it can be seen that people at the age 50+ are disadvantaged at the labour market and the consequence they remain isolated from the active social life. It is obvious that there is a necessity of special measures to reintegrate them in social life and labour market.

3. Barriers in front of elderly people

People over 50 years old who due to various reasons remain unemployed should overcome a number of challenges in order to deal with this situation and to return to the normal course of their social and working life:

Social isolation and self-isolation

- ✓ Overcoming the reluctance to use the contemporary information technologies;
- ✓ Maintaining their activity and agility;
- ✓ Overcoming their reluctance to take part in programmes which increase their self-confidence, developing their skills for maintaining social contacts and so on.

Realisation at the labour market

- ✓ Overcoming the hidden discrimination on the age basis;
- ✓ Gaining confidence to prove their real abilities;
- ✓ Acquiring new professional skills;
- ✓ Improving existing professional skills according to the novelties in the corresponding profession;
- ✓ Acquiring skills to present yourself to the employer: preparation of necessary papers and documents according to the current requirements and skills to present during a direct contact;
- ✓ Increased motivation to get a certain job;
- ✓ Necessity to take part in the process of integrated lifelong education;

III. SURVEY

On the basis of the study in each project partner country and in accordance to the preparation of specific mentoring programmes two questionnaires have been prepared to carry out a survey about the attitudes for realization on the labour market of people over 50 years old:

- Half-standardized questionnaire (open and multiple-choice questions) for people advanced in age(50+),
- Open questionnaire – for employers, personnel selection / human resources/ managerial personnel selection officers

The Bulgarian partners on the project Euroconsulting, Municipality of Sliven and Zgura–M Ltd. have combined their efforts to carry out together a survey within the country which should find out what the situation in Bulgaria is regarding the needs of people over 50 years old according to their employment, social realization and employers' attitudes.

In order to ensure a wider range and reveal a clear picture of the country the interviews were carried out in three different in size towns: a big one – Plovdiv, a middle one – Sliven and a small one – Panagjurishte.

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Interviews with the employers were conventionally combined in three groups: Employers from small, middle and large enterprises.

Forty-five people aged 50+ and 47 employers have been interviewed.

According to the specific character of the groups of respondents several different approaches have been used:

- Sending a questionnaire via mail – paper-based and several cases of e-mails.
- Giving a questionnaire for individual filling in.
- Face to face interviews.

According to the specific character of the target groups it turned out that the most suitable way of conducting the interviews was a direct interview with a half-standardized questionnaire – face to face.

1. Basic conclusions – people over 50 years old

- ✓ It has been pointed out that the main problem is the lack of employment and impossibility to retire;
- ✓ Working people are also in search of a job as a guarantee against a possible dropping out of labour market;
- ✓ People who have already retired declare their wish to continue working;
- ✓ Unemployed people show willingness to work full time as well as part time jobs;

- ✓ As a basic obstacle to start work the interviewed people show their age (88.6%); (the social perception of age and connected with it images of low productivity and high percentage of illnesses).
- ✓ Unemployed people would agree to start a job in a new field of employment, different from their previous work;
- ✓ Most of the interviewed consider that working experience is extremely important in job search – 72.7%; but at the same time 20.5% appreciate that if they get further practice this will help them to find a job easier;
- ✓ A greater part of the respondents express their opinion that their participation in "Mentoring programmes" would be useful and 62.8% prefer their mentor to be an employer and as many as them expect to receive from their mentor advice, support and encouragement.
- ✓ A greater part of the interviewed think that their participation in Mentoring programmes would give them a chance to start a job – 77.3%.

2. Additional information

Female:

Women at the age of 50+ should overcome various problems and additional engagements of health, personal and family nature.

Typical for women health problems are reason for decreased workability and potential reason for losing a working place.

Social life of elderly people in Bulgaria is still dependent on remaining patriarchal tradition. In a house although with some degree of independence several families may live together. This lifestyle brings additional duties like:

- Duties to look after ill over age parents. Usually this care is taken by the daughters of the over aged family. .
- Duties to look after grandchildren. A large number of young people after democratic changes in Bulgaria emigrated in other countries or have a seasonal work abroad. During the time of their absence the care for their children is taken by grandmothers. It is an additional burden for working women or a problem in starting a job.

The need of support is of different degree and type for different people – from help to re-socialize to help from concrete specialists.

Most women would prefer to work half-time or to take early retirement.

Male:

Apart from typical health problems elderly men face problems like:

Discrimination attitude shown towards people whose working place requires heavy physical labour. In this types of jobs people are drained out physically earlier than in other jobs and the preferred working force consists of younger men. Country's pension system does not allow

earlier retirement even in cases when length of service is higher than the required number of years. In this way men at this age stay unemployed long term, they lose their working habits and confidence. Their social life is unbalanced. Lack of confidence, sense of inferiority, feeling that they cannot handle successfully their lives, loss of desire to be active and competitive at the labour market, are some typical characteristics of this misbalance.

The carried survey shows that the percentage of men who would like to requalify or to train at the novelties in their jobs is relatively lower than that for women.

Health and suitability:

One of the most important reasons for extreme difficulties in finding a new working place, after elderly people have lost their previous job is their deteriorated health, the lower degree of agility and mobility and as a result - a lower competitiveness. During the interviews the employers give a relatively high percentage of workers at the age of over 50 but they are people with a great length of service in their companies. From the conducted analysis it becomes clear that during the last two years the same employers haven't hired a single new employee whose age is within that range which leads to our next position in the analysis:

Discrimination on based on age:

As Bulgaria became a member of EU Bulgarian legislation is in accordance with directives against discrimination on any reason. There are positive changes and tendency to give equal chances to all candidate employees regardless their age but they are expressed mainly in official data. For example in job advertisements there is no age limit. And although these positions are taken by younger people, nevertheless this is a chance to take part and present yourself. And here it is vital to acquire skills to present to the employer – quality preparation of set of necessary documents for job application and skills to take part in a job interview.

3. Basic conclusions - employers

- ✓ Bulgarian employers are more understanding towards the problems of young people and their employment than towards the same problems faced by people at the age of over 50.
- ✓ Most employers give data that there are employees at pre-retirement age, but in comparison with the answer of the question whether they hired such people in 2006 the following conclusion should be drawn: the workers at pre-retirement age usually have considerable length of service at the same company and this is a status quo. They are employees with a great working experience and are established specialists, with good working habits and are important for the proper operation of the company. At recruiting new staff companies prefer young people and where such recruiting considers people from the target group interpersonal relationships played a vital part.
- ✓ A considerable part of studied Bulgarian employers have less than 5.00% employees who are over 50.
- ✓ The reasons to recruit employees at pre-retirement age according to employers are meeting almost the same requirements: good working experience, established speialists; they give certain professions which are highly specific for a given field.
- ✓ It is obvious that employers need additional motivation to hire people from the target group (for example tax reductions) but at the same time conversations with them make it clear that

the existing legal preferences and programmes for employing people over 50 (The Law for promoting employment are not adequately used LPE). These preferences are more widely used in the public sector.

- ✓ A great number of employers have set negative attitudes to recruit new workers from the target group. There is a need for measures which are aimed directly at this particular attitude and the preconceived notions towards elderly people as capable personalitiesl.
- ✓ A considerable percentage of those who have completed our questionnaire (85.00%) think that there are not obstacles in their companies which could make impossible recruiting people from the target group. It is clear that at this stage the provided preferences are not adequate to stimulate employers to create working places for representatives of higher age groups. Their reasons are: low workability and specific age-related features.
- ✓ A greater part of interviewed employers consider that features like "working experience", "competence", "job responsibility" are of vital importance for recruiting people from the given age group.
- ✓ Employers show understanding regarding the mentoring process but the greater part of them are not ready to take part in this process.
- ✓ A considerable percentage of interviewed employers 66.5% would prefer if they start a mentoring programme, its structure to consist of "short theoretical part followed by training practice", while the others are interested in organizing "regular weekly sessions lasting two-three hours".

Advantages in employing people advanced in age:

- ✓ Employers could use the preferences and financial advantages which the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy offer, employment according to measures and programmes for recruiting people at the age of over 50; (The Law for promoting employment). The survey shows that employers do not use adequately these preferences due to various reasons: insufficient knowledge regarding existing legislation, very rigorous requirements in preparation of necessary documentation to apply for these preferences, lack of perspective view about the usefulness of these preferences and others;
- ✓ Elderly employees have considerable length of service and well established working habits;
- ✓ Elderly employees have increased level of responsibility and are tolerant towards job related problems;
- ✓ Working together as a team younger and elderly employees gain advantages for themselves and for their employer: the working environment is more balanced, different generations can complement and help each other;
- ✓ Elderly people are willing to work part time or have flexible working hours.

IV. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Legal framework and initiatives regarding the education of elderly people:

During the last few years three basic tendencies can be traced in the process of educating elderly people:

- Growing importance and enhanced range of education regarding elderly people;
- Widening of the partnership and strengthening the interaction between institutions aimed at successful solving the problems linked with adult education;
- Gradual increasing and connecting the basic education with the adult education and their irreversible development into a comprehensive and lengthy process which is legitimated as a lifelong learning.

1. Basic accents

1. Accepting the adult education as equal in value element of the educational system.
2. Development of curriculum, supporting implementation of European standards in certification of language and computer education, teacher training.
3. Education, working with groups of people with disadvantages, conceptual and financial support of measures concerning unemployed.
4. Acquiring quality and equal access to education.

2. Services and institutions responsible for professional training and employment

Adult education becomes part of Bulgarian legislation and its contents is fixed as: education for adults over 16 which is carried out according to rules and regulations fixed by law, financed in greater part by the state and/or municipalities and organized by associations for adult education, schools and other public educational institutions parallel to their programmes for education of younger age groups: children or students, and by institutions connected with the labour market.

Adult education includes all educative activities, qualification and re-qualification for professional purposes and activities, generally aimed at personal development(the later includes knowledge in political, social and economical fields.)

Thus adult education comprises:

- Basic knowledge and skills like reading, writing, computer literacy and language competence;
- Professional education and training;
- Civil education and all other knowledge concerning personal development like a specialist and social subject.

Adult education in Bulgaria is a polycentric system which includes structures of formal and informal education which comprises the following basic fields:

Of formal education:

- Evening school on the premises of existing schools, including professional schools, extramural form of university education or centers of postgraduate forms of qualifications and others.

Of informal education:

- Different courses of basic skills and knowledge, professional courses including organized by the state or NGO and others.

Basic fields:

- Continuing professional education for enhancing and improving of professional qualification as well as prequalification of employed and unemployed, including mentor training;
- Increasing of general education in evening and extramural forms for people who are over the school leaving age but want to study combining work with education;
- Education for acquiring knowledge, skills and competences which are necessary for adults in using technical and electronic devices including new information and computer technologies;
- Enhancing and improvement of foreign language learning for adults by organizing education in different forms – without discontinuing work or with partial or full discontinuing of work;
- Acquiring popular knowledge from different fields in order to broaden the outlook, civil education, further cultural development and improvement of adults according to their interests;
- Special forms of general, professional-qualification, social-rehabilitation and cultural incorporation and development of specific social groups and strata of adult population – ethnical minorities, disabled people, immigrants, imprisoned people and others which are carried out within different projects and programmes.

3. Current situation

In Bulgarian regarding the adult education the work is still focused on forming a strategy and later a policy and an action plan. Individual elements of these are part of projects within EC programmes, national employment plan and strategies for development of human resources and other documents, as well as projects of individual institutions and NGO.

4.Statutory basis

- In the Act of Public Education everybody is given the right to access education regardless their age;
- The Act of Professional Education and Training comprises adult education as well and so on.

These legal acts achieve the following:

-define the institutions which provide adult education;

-their competences and responsibilities are outlined;

-the financial framework of the system is also defined;

-the policy of adult education is drawn up.

Thus the question of adult education is grounded in the existing legislation of the country. There isn't a special law regarding adult education yet. At the present moment in Bulgaria adult education is offered within the activities of Ministry of Labour and Social policy and is suppored at local level by local Employment Agencies developing regional plans on employment which include educational initiatives. The national employment plan accepted in April 2003 has outlined key activities for employment including adult education and a National council of Professional Qualification of Labour force was created as a part of Ministry of Labour and Social policy. We can notice two different things:

- Ministry of education and science is not cited as an instution responsible for adult education as its subsystem.
- In the part of adult education connected with employment educational activities are carried out through the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and its executive structures.

5. Basic conclusions

- ✓ In the field of adult education there is a lack of qualified personnel;
- ✓ Educational system should be more flexible in certifying and validating of acquired knowledge and skills in the informal field;
- ✓ There is misbalance, compatibility and interrelations between school and university education from one side and adult education from another;
- ✓ Steps in education adults have been carried out by the Act of Professional education and training but again they concern mainly the formal field;

- ✓ Supply of knowledge, skills, programmes, subjects in the field of education often do not meet the requirements of labour market. School curriculums do not answer the needs of employers, they often are not on practical lines
- ✓ Regardless the actions carried out in the recent years to prepare concepts, strategies, plans and other documents from the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and other responsible for adult education institutions there is still lack of clearly outlined way for development of this vital sector.

VI. RESULTS

With this report Bulgarian partners in the project present:

- ✓ The real conditions in Bulgaria for people at the age of over 50 as a project target group.
- ✓ Expectations of people from target group for meeting their needs.
- ✓ The employer's attitude towards the employment of people at the age of over 50.
- ✓ Opportunities which legislation of the country provides for elderly people and employers.
- ✓ Conditions to carry out integrated lifelong education and training.

As a result the analysis of the collected information forces the conclusion that there is a need of:

- ✓ Implementation of legislation measures to solve the problem of ageing population as a whole at EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL LEVEL.
- ✓ Programmes for informal education – Mentoring programmes.
- ✓ Validation of Mentoring programmes and ensuring of real possibilities for their implementation.
- ✓ Joint activities of politicians, legislators, institutions and nongovernmental organizations to solve the problems of elderly people.