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LIFELONG LEARNING AND NEW SKILLS IN BULGARIA: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

The main objectives of this report are threefold: (a) to present an overview of the state of lifelong learning in Bulgaria from a gender perspective; (b) to review the progress in the public debates in this area; and (c) to analyze the implemented policies for developing lifelong learning in accordance with the European strategic objectives, including gender aspects.

In the last ten years the system of education in Bulgaria has been restructuring, advancing in an uneven speed due to many reasons, mainly political. In fact, the governments in force have been very cautious with this reform, taking into account the large social effects of the changes. Nevertheless, since 2004 the changes have become more intensive in view of optimization of the system and improving its quality.

The lifelong learning (LLL) aspect, as defined in the European Employment Strategy, is a relatively new aspect of the debates and the policy actions in Bulgaria. With the EU accession process (2005) and the followed EU membership (2007), it has become a special topic of the public discussions and a subject of policy measures. Since then a number of strategic documents, programs and action plans outline the steps of the government bodies in charge of LLL policy to develop this fundamental principal in an effective national system of education at all levels – from early childhood education and school through higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning.

The Bulgarian National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (LLL) for the period 2008-2013 underlines that “its main objectives are to joint the efforts of all institutions and people of Bulgaria for establishing proper conditions and realization of lifelong learning process of each citizen of the country. In this way each person should have the opportunity to develop himself/herself as a professional and as a person, competitive in a knowledge-based labour market.”¹

The main objective of the quoted strategic document is to increase the adaptability of the people to the dynamic economic and social transformations and to improve the professional and personal development by encouraging participation in all available forms of lifelong learning.

The document specifies the main actions in the field of access to and quality of lifelong learning, as well as the recognition of the obtained competence.

The lifelong learning process is an integral part of the human capital improvement, and in this respect its main conceptual principles are connected with the National Employment Strategy and the National Strategy for Development of the School Education, the National Strategy for Professional Education, the National Strategy for Development of IT Technology and for Integration of Ethnic Minority Children in School.

¹ National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the Period 2008-2013, p. 4, http://www.minedu.government.bg/opencms/export/sites/mon/left_menu/documents/strategies/programa_MOM_N-2009-2013.pdf

As pointed in the Strategy for LLL (2008-2013), in figures the expectations by 2013 for the country are as follows:

- Participation of people aged 25-64 in LLL to reach 5% (1.3% in 2007);
- Share of early school leavers to fall to 12% (16% in 2007);
- Share of people aged 20-24 with graduated secondary education to reach 85% (83.3% in 2007).

2. Lifelong learning: national progress and debate

2.1 Early school-leavers

2.1.1 National situation (including progress towards EU target)

The National Program for Development of School and Pre-School Education (2006-2015) states that the problem of early school leavers is an expanding one in Bulgaria, since more and more children at school age remain out of the system or drop out of it. Thus the educational gap among children increases, being especially high among the Roma children. The social dimensions of increasing educational gap, i.e. poverty, are supplemented by employment disintegration and further social marginalization.²

The National Statistical Institute publishes annual information on two indicators concerning the studied issue – Group net enrolment rate by level of education and Net coefficient on enrolment of the population by age groups.

- The Group Net Enrolment Rates by level of education (level of ISCED'97) presents a relation between the pupils from respective age groups to the total population from this age group. The age groups are: 3-6 years old; 7-10 years old; 11-14 years old; 15-18 years old; 19-20 years old; 19-21 years old; and 19-23 years old.

Table 1: Group net enrolment rate of the population by age groups and level of education (ISCED'97)

Years	Pre-primary education (ISCED-0)	Primary education (1-4 grade, ISCED-1)	Lower secondary education (5-8 grade, ISCED-2A)	Upper secondary education (9-12-13 grade, ISCED-3A, 3C)	Vocational post-secondary education (ISCED-4C)	College (ISCED-5B)	University (ISCED-5A)
2005/2006	73.7	99,5	84.9	78.0	0.5	4.1	26.4
2006/2007	73.9	98,5	85.1	78.0	0.8	4.4	27.7
2007/2008	73.2	97.8	83.7	78.3	0.7	4.0	29.0
2008/2009	73.8	94.6	82.0	78.3	0.7	4.1	30.9
2009/2010	74,3	93,4	82,4	78,6	0,8	3,9	33,1

Source: National Statistical Institute, Statistical Reference Book 2009, Sofia, p. 79 and <http://www.nsi.bg/otrasal.php?otr=23&a1=2226&a2=2230#cont>

The information in Table 1 points out that in the years the enrolment rate in the primary and lower secondary education decreases, which is quite disturbing fact. In other words, more boys and girls at school age do not enter the education system or drop out of it. Thus, the enrolment rate of 94.6% in 2008 for the primary education means that 15 000 pupils are

² National Program for Development of School and Pre-School Education (2006-2015), http://www.minedu.government.bg/opencms/export/sites/mon/left_menu/documents/strategies/programa_obrazovanie.pdf

missing from the enrolment lists. Considering the mobility of the population, the numbers fall. Nevertheless, according to some authors about 11 000 children are not in the education or have dropped out of the system.³

- The Net Coefficient on Enrolment of the population by age groups for 2009/2010 is as follows:

75,8 % for the age group 3-6 years old;

95,2% for the age group 7-10 years old;

96,3% for the age group 11-14 years old;

83,5% for the age group 15-18 years old and

41,1% for the age group 19-23 years old people.

This coefficient presents a relation between the numbers of pupils in the age group, irrespective of the level of education, and the total number of the population of the same age group. The data outline the relatively low coverage of the pre-school level and the reverse relation between the age group and the enrolment rate.

With regards to the early school leavers, the national situation, based on the statistical indicators, is expressed by the data in Table 2:

Table 2: Early School Leavers in Bulgaria (%)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total	21.4	20.4	17.3	14.9	14.8	14.7
Male	22.2	20.6	17.7	15.2	14.1	13.7
Female	20.6	20.3	17.0	14.7	15.5	15.8

Source: National Statistical Institute, http://www.nsi.bg/ORPDOCS/Labour_3.2.5.xls

The positive feature during the five-year period (in 2009 compared with 2004) is that the level of early school leavers has decreased by 5.7 percentage points. This shows that the implemented policies have had positive effects. However, the gap in the decrease has been higher for males and lower for females, which leads to a conclusion that more focus should be placed on the gender point of view. The reasons causing female withdraws from education need special attention.

Nevertheless the downturn tendency, data in Table 2 indicates higher level of EES target (of 10%) by 4.7 percentage points, as well as higher level of female early school leavers compared with male ones.

Table 3 presents in dynamic the early school leavers among the people aged 18-24. Comparing data in Table 2 and Table 3, we have to outline the higher level of early school leavers among people aged 18-24. Compared with average male early school leavers rate, after 2006 men aged 18-24 are more reluctant to leave the educational system. The tendency among women is completely opposite.

Table 3: Drop outs of the educational system among people aged 18-24

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Total	20.0	18.0	16.6	15.3
Male	19.5	18.2	16.3	15.1
Female	20.6	17.9	16.9	15.6

Source: National Statistical Institute, Statistical Reference Book, 2009, p. 79.

³ School Drop Outs, 20 July 2009, <http://edu.dir.bg>

Looking on a particular school year, e.g. 2007/2008, we find out that the share of school leavers among enrolled pupils by different educational grads varies as follows:

- All school leavers present 2.7% (23 365 in numbers) of enrolled pupils (860 042);
- The highest share of school leavers has been registered in the lower secondary education (5-8 grade, ISCED-2A grad) – 3.5% of total number of enrolled pupils;
- The share of early school leavers in the primary education (grad 1-4 ISCED-1) is 2.4%; in the upper secondary education (9-12-13 grade, ISCED-3A, 3C) it is 2.2%.

The existing analysis points out a number of factors causing early school drop outs, namely:

- *Economic reasons* – low family incomes, unemployed parents, decreasing living standard, commercialization of the educational system, etc.
- *Social reasons* – lack of family control, lack of parent's interest, negative influence of other children, friends, or crime factors, poor living conditions, etc.
- *Cultural and psychological factors* – traditional ethno-cultural values, habits, etc.
- *Personnel factors* – lack of motivation to visit school, negative attitude to the institution, difficult contacts with teachers and other pupils, etc.
- *Administrative reasons* – lack of adequate control system, lack of consistency on the provided policy concerning the school dropouts, etc.

According to the information from the statistics, which studies three groups of factors for early school leavers – family reasons, low motivation and leaving abroad – family reasons are ranked highest (49.7% of those who leave school at the primary level and 47.6% of the school leavers at the next educational level). Leaving abroad is important factor for school leavers at the primary educational level. Low motivation appears as second important factor for school leavers at secondary educational level.

2.1.2 Policies

The policy, aiming to limit the number of school dropouts and to increase the coverage of the educational system, includes a wide range of preventive and post fact measures.

The policy measures are systematized in three areas:

- Improvement of the educational structure. Since school year 2007/2008, as a first step in this direction, a system for gathering information, monitoring and control over the enrolment process and the mobility of the pupils has been introduced. A program providing additional classes for pupils with special interests has been implemented, aiming to increase the attractiveness of the educational process and thus to prevent school drop outs.
- Social measures to support and encourage school enrolment. Since the economic reasons are among the main factors causing school dropouts, a package of measures has been developed and introduced to support the families' expenditures for the pupils. Thus, the program providing free books for pupils in 1st to 4th grade has been extended, and since 2008 it covers also pupils in 5th to 7th grade. For this purpose, the budget of the program has been increase from 17 to 41 million BGN. For better assessment of the local needs, the program has been decentralized by delegating the activities to the municipalities and the schools. Another measure, aiming to provide equal access to schools includes transport service for the children who live in remote places. In figures this means 860 transport vehicles at the amount of 100 million BGN. There is a program providing breakfast for

pupils, since starvation has also been considered a factor impeding participation in school of some ethnic minorities.

- Measures focused on children whose mother language is not Bulgarian, and measures focused on children who need special educational approach.

Several national programs support the decreasing of the number of early school leavers from 19 639 in 2008 to 16 639 in 2009 and to 15 752 in 2010. These are the National Program for School and Pre-School Education, National Program “With Care for Each Pupil”, National Strategy for Lifelong Learning. The indicative goals are 2000 teachers to be included in a program for supporting the pupils who have difficulties in classes.

The reintegration of those who have dropped out of the system is also a special area of policy intervention. A program “Second Chance” has been developed and approbated for people who are illiterate or have low educational level.

2.1.3 Gender issues

The problem with the dropouts from school in Bulgaria is not focused so much on gender but on ethnicity. This problem is extremely serious among the Roma population. According to a study, about 42.8% of Roma aged 15-19 drops out from school. The share of Roma pupils attending school during the educational process decreases through the years. In 2002, for example, in the 1st grade the share is 20.6%; in the 4th grade it falls to 14.5%; in the 8th grade it declines to 8.8%; and in the 10th grade it falls to as low as 1.7%.⁴ The education is not particularly valued among the Roma population. Parents do not insist on their children to attend school on a regular basis. The opportunity for the parents to receive social benefits is the only significant motivation for the attendance of Roma children in school. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Science, in the school year 2003/2004 the share of dropouts is 2.1%, in school year 2004/2005 it is 1.9%, and in school year 2005/2006 it is 1.2%. According to data of the National Statistical Institute, in school year 2003/2004 the dropouts are 3.9%, in school year 2004/2005 they are 2.9%. Sociological studies show higher share – 7.8%. These differences in the drop out rate are a result of the conflicting sources of information, including teachers, school principals and parents of Roma children.

Poverty predetermines difficulties for the parents to provide essential learning materials, clothes and even food for the children whilst at school. Therefore, the family becomes unmotivated, preferring to send them to work for acquiring means of life, or to help with raising the smaller children and do other household errands. Disintegrated from society, the Roma children have difficulties with the Bulgarian language; only 14% of the Roma families speak Bulgarian. The lack of Bulgarian language skills among Roma children is an additional constraint to the full participation in school. There is a low motivation among Roma people to encourage children to go to school. According to some information sources, the annual number of Roma pupils dropping out from school is 5000. The low motivation is due to the fact that school and education is not among the priorities of the Roma population. It is considered that in the last 20 years the trust in the educational institution has decreased even more. This attitude relates to the belief of the Roma people that school threatens their Roma identity and their way of life.

The early marriages, inherent to the Roma community, are directly attributable to the lasting isolation of the Roma women from employment, in some cases for life. This deprives the

⁴ Nunev, I. Analysis of the Actual School State. 2002; Strategy: Educational Policy and Cultural Differences (<http://www.osf.bg/downloads/File/RomaGuideFinal>).

family of income, and women – of the opportunity for labour and social integration in society and personal development.

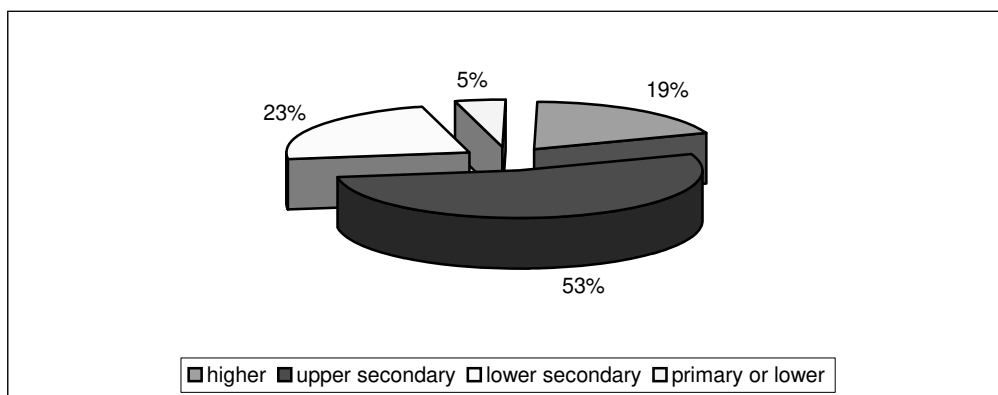
The reproduction of the poverty in the family and in the Roma community is a typical process. The opportunities for climbing out of the so-called “poverty trap” are few and far between, since “poverty breeds poverty” and continuing social isolation. Considering the present income and social differentiation a sustainable factor, which forms a certain model of social behavior, studies carried out in the country recommend implementing policies for ensuring “equal” chance for children in the education system.⁵ So far, the existing experience in implementing such policies has shown certain success but no lasting effects.

2.2 Educational level of the labour force

2.2.1 National situation (including progress towards EU targets for 22-year olds and 30-34 year olds)

The educational level of the labour force in Bulgaria is observed on a regular basis through the Labour Force Survey. The annual data for 2009 points out that 53.2% of the population aged 15-65 have graduated upper secondary education and 19% – higher education. Almost one-third of the studied population has lower level of education – 23% have lower secondary, and 5% – primary educational level. The comparison with data for 2005 shows that the educational structure has been improved, since more people have high (17% in 2005) and upper secondary education (48.9% in 2005), and less people have lower secondary (27% in 2005) and primary education (6.5% in 2005).

Figure 1: Educational structure of population aged 15-65 in 2009



Source: LFS, 2009. Sofia, National Statistical Institute.

Data in Table 4 show the educational structure of the population by age groups. Several specifics can be outlined when analyzing this structure, namely:

- relatively higher share of people with primary or lower education and with lower secondary education in age group 15-24;
- high share of people with higher and upper secondary educational level in age group 25-34;
- highest level of people with lower secondary education in age group 55-64.

⁵ Bulgaria. Poverty Challenges. National Statistical Institute, 2003, p. 118-119.

Since the age groups are more aggregated, we are not able to present the exact share of the population with tertiary educational attainment for the age group 30-34 (see table 4). The 2020 EU target points out that this share should be at least 40%. However, in Bulgaria in 2009 the share of people with tertiary educational attainment for an age group 25-34 is by almost 13% less.

Table 4: Population aged 15-65 by age groups and education level in 2009 (%)

Age groups	Total	Educational Level			
		Higher	Upper secondary	Lower secondary	Primary or lower
15-65	100.0	19.2	53.2	23.0	4.5
15-24	100.0	3.0	45.9	44.2	6.9
25-34	100.0	26.9	53.0	14.7	5.4
35-44	100.0	23.9	57.6	15.2	3.2
45-54	100.0	22.3	58.5	15.8	3.4
55-64	100.0	18.9	49.6	27.1	4.4

Source: LFS, 2009.

Based on the mentioned specifics we will draw out several conclusions:

- The increasing drops outs of school among pupils and decreasing coverage of children by the educational system has affected the educational structure of young people aged 15-24. This is clearly outlined by the highest share of people with primary and lower education – 6.9%.
- Recently, more and more people postpone the completion of higher education, combining education and work. This is confirmed by the highest share of people with higher education is in the age group 25-34. In case the educational process is not interrupted, both men and women should complete higher education at age 22-23.
- The highest level of people aged 55-64 with lower secondary education underlines the difficulties these people face to adjust to the dynamic economic and technological changes, and the low level of people participating in different forms of lifelong learning.

Progress towards EU targets for 22-year olds in Bulgaria could be seen in Table 5. Data point out that in the period 2004-2009 the share of young people with completed at least secondary educational level has increased by 7.6 percentage points and in 2009 it is 83.7%. Although the mentioned dynamic this is lower by 1.3% compared with EES target of 85% by 2010.

Table 5: Relative share of youths (20-24 years old) with completed at least secondary education

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total	76.1	76.5	80.5	83.3	83.7	83.7
Male	74.9	75.9	80.0	83.0	84.0	84.8
Female	77.5	77.1	81.1	83.6	83.4	82.5

Source: National Statistical Institute, http://www.nsi.bg/ORPDOCS/Labour_3.2.5.xls

From a gender point of view, the male share of youths with completed secondary education is quite near the target – 84.2%, but female share lags the target by 2.5%.

2.2.2 Policies

In the last years the main feature of the policy in the area of education is the intensive reforms of components, i.e. primary, secondary and high educational level. Some of the implemented changes have been prepared during the last years and discussed warmly in the public sphere. Other reforms are relatively new, they still lack public consensus, but the process of their implementation has started. It is considered that the speeded reform will contribute to a more effective use of limited financial resources. This consideration is debateable since the reform in itself needs also financial resources. Each educational level has relatively comprehensive package of activities, some of them in a process of implementation, others – already acting. The targets are clearly outlined, as well as the institutions in charge and the related financing. The EU funds are one of the main sources the implemented reforms rely on.

As mentioned, the reforms concern all levels of education, starting from the pre-school education. At this level, the main policy priority concerns the increase of coverage rate and quality of work. The main focus of the policy reform is to ensure equal access to school facilities, equality in participation in education process, encouraging outclass forms for socialization of children, brining up abilities for self-work with books, close relations between teachers, parents and other institutions, links in the educational system, e.g. public institutions, NGOs, social institutions, etc. Each package includes measures aiming at access to education, quality of educational process, assessment of the knowledge pupils obtain, improvement of facilities and human resources. Special attention is paid on lifelong learning of teachers as a tool to ensure high quality education for pupils.

Regarding primary school and lower secondary educational level, the policy focuses especially on lowering the early drop outs, updating the books and curriculum, rebalancing the “learn by heart” and “learn by analysing processes and things” approaches. Such policy is meant to increase the efficiency of the educational process and prepare pupils for the more competitive environment at the next school levels.

The policy concerning the upper secondary school aims to bring up more practical abilities and better professional orientation of pupils. The development of formal and informal forms of education is supposed to be a tool for reaching the goal. Increasing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is also recognized as an important tool in this respect. The development of the monitoring process for assessment of the quality of the education is another instrument for increasing the efficiency of the education.

The focus of the university educational policy is placed on increasing the competitiveness of the educational process. European partnership is an example for good practice. That is why its dissemination is strongly recommended. The development of more close relations with the business structures is also strongly recommended.

The reform in the science concerns restructuring, which aims to increase the quality of research and its closer link to economic and social needs.

2.2.3 Gender issues

Several gender specifics have been already mentioned above, e.g. the gender gap of the share of youth up to 22 years old with at least secondary level of education at national level and EES target.

Here we present some additional specifics concerning the educational level of people aged 25-64 by gender. LFS data shows the following specific features from gender point of view:

- In 2008 more women (60.5%) compared with men (39.4%) have completed higher education. The tendency is relatively stable in the years, since in 2004 this proportion is almost the same (60.7 to 39.2%).
- In 2008 male labour force with secondary education prevails. The proportion is 53.3 to 46.7% and has not changed since 5 years ago. In 2004 this proportion is 53.0 to 46.9%.
- In 2008 women dominate the gender difference among people with lower secondary and primary education (50.9% women and 49% men). Compared with 2004, the share of women with low educational level has increased by 0.7%.

2.3 Participation in lifelong learning

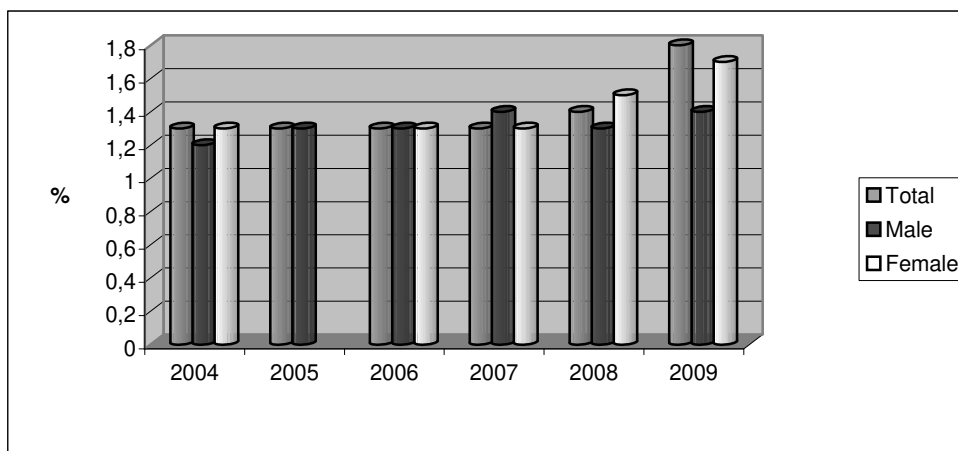
2.3.1 National situation (including progress towards EU target)

The statistical data show that in 2008 the participants in LLL (formal and non-formal) number 65 100 people. It is 1.6% of the total population aged 15-64.⁶ This percentage is far below the EU target for 2020 – “at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning”.⁷

Although below the mentioned EU target for 2020 by almost 13 percentage points, the share of participants in LLL, aged 25-64, in Bulgaria during the last 5 years has increased. Data in Figure 2 show that in 2004 this share is 1.3%, and in 2009 it increases to 1.6%. The dynamic is quite modest, and if Bulgaria wishes to reach the target in 2020, the trends should have to increase significantly. This means that very incentive tools for encouraging LLL have to be implemented.

In 2008 more women (34 500) compared to men (30 700) participate in LLL. This is not because women are less educated, but because they are more reluctant to changes. As mentioned above, women in Bulgaria are better educated in terms of completed higher level of education. In this sense, the highly educated people are more flexible and adaptive to economic and technological changes. The profile of the participants in LLL further shows that young people prevail among all participants (73%). The participation rate of young people in LLL is 5%, while that of people aged 35-54 is only 0.7%. The participation rate of people aged 55-64 in LLL is 0.2%.

Figure 2: Population, aged 25-64, participating in LLL



Source: www.nsi.bg/ORPDOCS?Labour

⁶ LFS, National Statistical Institute, 2009, Sofia.

⁷ CEU 2009:14-15.

In 2008 more people (48 800 people or 75%) participate in formal education, compared those participating in non-formal education (17 800 people or 25%), including courses, workshops, private education. Interestingly, more women participate in non-formal LLL, compared with men. A study in 2003 on current trends in LLL shows that the participation rate in non-formal LLL is 1.7% and it tends to increase with the level of education. The share of highly educated people engaged in further training (4.3%), is three times higher than the share of people with upper secondary education (1.4%). According to the mentioned study, women in the private sector reach participation rate of 55.1%, compared with 44.9% of women in the public sector. The study also shows that the average time spent on learning in the last 12 months before the interview is 84 hours. It is interesting to outline that most non-formal learning (51.7%) takes place only or mostly during non-working hours.⁸

2.3.2 Policies

The understanding of the significant role of lifelong learning for increasing the quality of the labour force and thus its adaptability to the labour market appears in a number of policy documents outlining the legal frame, e.g. National Strategy for Continuing Vocational Education during the Period 2005-2010 (adopted in 2004) and National Strategy for Adult Education 2007-2013. Besides these strategic documents, the policy frame includes a “Concept for Lifelong Learning”, adopted in 2004, and National Strategy for LLL for the Period 2008-2013, adopted in 2009. The main directions of the strategy are as follows:

- Expanding the opportunities for everyone despite age, gender, education, ethnicity, etc., to obtain additional level of education or skill ability;
- Creating opportunities for everyone to obtain key competences, supporting personal and professional development of people;
- Expanding the opportunities for lifelong learning for people with low educational level and lack of qualification, as well as for people with higher education and qualification, thus increasing the competitiveness of the Bulgarian economy;
- Active social position of the business (employers) in the implementation of LLL concept as a form of contemporary firm’s culture;
- Transforming the professional orientation and consultancy into an integral element of the LLL process for adults.

The Strategy consists of the following ten priority areas:

- Improving the access to LLL;
- Professional qualification in the context of LLL;
- On-job training;
- Key competence in the context of LLL;
- Training of teachers;
- Orientation during the life circle;
- Validation of educational outcomes;
- Scientific resources for LLL;

⁸ Daskalova, N. Informal Learning Most Popular Form (<http://eurofound.europa.eu>).

- Financial resources for LLL.

Each of the mentioned priorities is described in details in view of components and concrete policies, which are supposed to be developed, implemented and assessed. The expected results are also mentioned.

2.3.3 Gender issues

Data outline interesting gender differences concerning the participation in LLL. We have already mentioned the increasing share of women who participate in LLL (1.7% in 2008 compared with 1.4% in 2009). More women than men participate in LLL; however, the share of men in formal education prevails (51.3%), while women are majority in non-formal education. Further we have to outline the significant gender gap between the participants in non-formal education. In 2008 the number of women participating in non-formal education is 10 900, compared with 6 900 men (respectively 0.7 and 0.3%). However, the participants in formal education do not differ from gender aspect – each sex numbers 24 400 people or 1.2%. This data suggests that the access to formal education is based not only on professional but also on gender criteria.

As mentioned, the majority of the participants in non-formal LLL are women and the fact that mostly the education takes place during non-working hours suggests that participation in LLL additionally burdens women and limits their time for family and relaxation.

2.4 Summary and conclusions

The analysis on the state, policies and gender aspects of the national progress of the lifelong learning, including early school leavers, educational level of the labour force and participation in LLL, shows the following:

- There is a clear social understanding of the importance of the problems and warm public debates taking place in the last ten years.
- There are number of strategic documents and legal acts presenting the vision of the policy and the tools, which could be employed to reach the targets.
- There are number of institutions, which are in charge of the policy realization.
- Nevertheless, the progress regarding early leavers, educational structure of the population and participation in LLL is not significant; moreover, regress has been recorded in the last years.
- The main problem is that the policy is not consistent and sustainable. The financial restrictions also contribute for the delay of the reforms.

3. Lifelong learning and flexicurity

3.1 National situation

Lifelong learning from flexicurity point of view has not been an approach of special policy interest in Bulgaria until recently, when a document of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, entitled “The Bulgarian Path for Increasing Labour Market Flexicurity 2009-2011“ is adopted to stimulate the policy in this aspect. Some analyses on the topic have been published

and discussed in the public space as well. However, the statistics is quite limited and fragmented.

As already mentioned above, the data of the National Statistical Institute, based on Labour Force Survey, points out that the share of people participating in at least one form of LLL has increased modestly from 1.3% in 2004 to 1.6% in 2009. The increase of the participation of male (35%) is higher compared with female (30%). Within this general picture, the participation of people engaged in LLL under flexible forms of employment is reported by a survey, performed in 2010. According to its result, the participation in LLL of people who are engaged in flexible labour regimes, like temporary employment contract or part-time employment, self-employment, is lower compared to people employed under permanent contract and full-time employment. As expected, employers are inclined to invest in people who are supposed to be employed for longer period, while those on temporary basis have to develop their capacity on their own. In fact, the segmentation among employees from the point of view of human capital development is clearly outlined. As far as unemployed people are concerned, their options to participate in different forms of education are limited to the active labour market schemes or paid education.

Some of the findings of the mentioned study on LLL and flexicurity (2010) are shown in the tables below.

Table 6: Participation in formal and non-formal education by type of labour contract (LC) (%)

	participants	non-participants
Average for the country	50.2	49.2
Employees with permanent labour contract	56.5	43.5
Employees with temporary labour contract	46.5	53.5

Source: LFS, National Statistical Institute.

Data in Table 6 shows the higher share of people participating in formal and non-formal education among those employed under permanent labour contracts.

Table 7: Participation in formal and non-formal education by working time (%)

	participants	non-participants
Average for the country	50.2	49.2
Full-time employees	51.3	48.7
Part-time employees	27.5	72.5

Source: LFS, National Statistical Institute.

The differences among the participants in LLL depending on the working time is significant, only 27.5% of part-time employed people are included in LLL, while the share of full-time employed people participating in LLL is 51.3%.

Further information shows that within the already mentioned low levels of participation in formal LLL the participation rate of permanent employees in formal LLL education is 2.9%, while that of employees with temporary contract is 2.2%. Concerning the working time, the participation rate is 2.6% for full-time employed people and 0.7% for part-time employees.

The relatively low level of participation in formal LLL is due mostly to the fact that only 28.7% of the enterprises in 2005 provide LLL. The progress through the years has been insignificant, since in 1999 this share is 28.2%.

The participation in non-formal education is more popular, since more employed people participate in such forms – 55.4% among employees with permanent contract and 45.7% of the employees with temporary contract. The flexi gap is more clearly outlined among the full-time employees participating in non-formal education (50.3%) and part-time employees (26.8%).

As far as different forms of LLL are concerned, data show that on-job training is the most popular form. It covers 84.2% of employees with permanent LC and 90.7% of employees with temporary LC, as well as 83.5% of full-time and 88.9% of part-time employees. Other forms include different courses followed by seminars and workshops, and last is the distance education.

3.2 Policies

In June 2009 the Government has adopted a document “The Bulgarian Path for Increasing Labour Market Flexicurity 2009-2011”. The document has been prepared and performed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP). Lifelong learning is one of the 4 priority areas of this document. The document advocates for a complex strategic approach to LLL, including active participation of labour market stakeholders in the LLL process, from the design of the strategic goals through the design of concrete policies and their implementation, the monitoring process and the assessment of the efficiency of the undertaken measures. In fact, this document presents the ongoing policy in the area of LLL and flexicurity, since its activities are included in the annual action plan of the MLSP and the other ministries and institutions in charge of the activities, i.e. Ministry of Education, Agency for Professional Education and Training, etc.

The policies are oriented towards several directions.

The first is the improvement of the legal base.

- One problem to be solved is the legal regulation of the validation of competences, obtained as a result of non-formal or self-education. The concrete actions include the identification of the respective institutions and their functions, as well as the mechanism and tools of the validation process.
- Another problem is the enrichment of the legal opportunities for obtaining educational and qualification grade by creating flexible forms like “second chance”. People with no education or lower education and qualification (unemployed and inactive people) should get special attention so they will be encourage to participate in all forms of the initiative “second chance”.
- The development of a public-private partnership model in the field of professional education and qualification is the next legal activity.
- Concerning the establishment of a system for studying and projecting the qualification needs of the labour force, the policy envisages the institutionalization of the process of analyzing, studying and projecting labour market needs.

The next direction refers to the increasing quality and attractiveness of the professional education and training through the following activities:

- Modernizing the educational curricula;
- Increasing the quality of the teachers and trainers;
- Increasing the share of practical education;

- Expanding the distance education and the education in modules;
- Implementing a “credit system” and transfer of credits;
- Developing a system for external assessment of the quality of the educational process;
- Increasing the investment in the system.

The closer involvement of employers in the process of vocational education is also an object of the policy. The next activities are recognized as more appropriate:

- Adaptation of the ongoing programs to the labour market needs;
- Better adjustment of the obtained theoretical knowledge to the relevant practical skills;
- Introduction of modern information technologies in the educational process;
- More active participation of employers’ organizations in the monitoring of the educational process and its outcomes.

By the implementation of a voucher system for education, individual custom accounts, tax relieves, bonuses, etc., the policy should increase the access to LLL.

The increase of the access of employed and unemployed people to education and training for obtaining key competences (IT skills, foreign languages, business and entrepreneurial skills, etc.) is also recognized as an important element of flexicurity policy.

These and some other measures present the activities of the Bulgarian government to develop a friendlier environment for expanding the flexicurity on the labour market for increasing the adaptability of the labour force.

3.3 Gender issues

Within the presented general picture of LLL and flexicurity, we have to mention that gender statistics is very poor. The indicators for participation rate in LLL of the population aged 25-64 by gender show higher level of women compared with men (respectively 1.5 and 1.3% in 2006). Here we have to mention that in 2006 more men than women have participated in continuing vocational training in enterprises (respectively 13 and 16%).⁹ However, statistics on flexible forms of employment and LLL participation by gender is not available.

3.4 Summary and conclusions

Summarizing the issues concerning LLL and flexicurity, we have to outline several specifics:

- LLL from the point of view of flexicurity is relatively new approach of the policy on LLL.
- The available statistics on flexible forms of LLL, as well as participation of employed under flexi forms of employment in LLL, is quite poor. This is especially valid for gender information.
- Despite the above problems, the analysis shows that people engaged under flexible forms of employment are less presented in LLL, in formal LLL in particular. The participation of these people in non-formal LLL is higher, and it comes to prove that they are trying to increase their employability by investing in education and training.

⁹ Indicators for Monitoring the Employment Guidelines Including Indicators for Additional Employment Analysis. 2009 Compendium, European Commission, Brussels, November 2009.

- The policy has focused the attention on the issue only in the recent years. However, there is a relatively comprehensive understanding and action plan for increasing the opportunities for participation in LLL of people with flexi forms of employment, as well as having a more flexible system for validation and recognition of the knowledge and skills of the people.

4. 'New skills for new jobs'

4.1 National situation

In Bulgaria in the last years the mismatching of the skills grows, as in the other EU countries. This mismatch appears clearly when the situation on the labour market is characterized by structural imbalances between supply and demand of labour, and labour demand does not meet the requested supply, although there is unemployment and a surplus of available labour force. In Bulgaria the structural reforms coincide to a high extent with the current technological and climate changes. Thus, the growing structural imbalance on the labour market becomes a significant problem and draws the attention of the society and the policy makers.

The study of skill mismatches on the newly developed Bulgarian labour market is based on the national statistics. The EU statistics and Cedefop information does not include data for Bulgaria, since the country is EU member only since 2007.

The national instruments on skill matching include analytical studies on demand and supply and matching gaps, comparative analysis on demand and supply by educational and professional levels, analysis of unemployment by skill and education, case studies, ad-hot interviews, etc., as well as projections on economic and branch development and future skill needs.

The main structural changes are as follows:

➤ Changes by main economic sectors

Comparing the employment distribution among sectors in two periods – 2005 and 2009, the share of people employed in agriculture has decreased from 9.3% in 2005 to 7.4% in 2009, while the share of those in industry has decreased from 34.1 to 35.5%, and people employed in services - from 56.5 to 57%.

Figure 3: Employed people by sectors and gender in 2005 and 2009



Source: LFS for respective years, NSI, Sofia

Figure 3 presents the shifts in employment by main sectors and gender. It points out the concentration of female employment in services and male employment in industry, as well as the decreasing number of women employed in agriculture.

➤ Changes by branches

The shifts by branches enlarge the picture of the labour force distribution, indicating the skill specificity of the labour market needs. The increase of the share of employees in construction is most impressive. The sector has expanded significantly in the studied period, due to the large foreign investments, as well as local financial inflows. The dynamic growth of the branch absorbs the male labour force and the demand for skilled labour in construction increases. In 2007 and early 2008 the branch experiences shortages of labour. It is the first one hit by the crisis, and that is a reason for the sharp increase of the number of unemployed male labour force.

In the studies period 2000-2008 employment in trade, hotel and restaurants, transport, financial mediation and administration has increased, while extracting and manufacturing industries, as well as energy, health and education have shifted employment.

➤ Changes by occupational class and sex

The shifts in employment by occupational class are also an indicator for the skill development of the employed people.

According to LFS data, the main trends in the structural changes in the period 2005-2009 are:

- Decreasing of employed technicians and associated professionals; skilled agricultural and fishing workers; plant and machine operators and assemblers;
- Increasing of employed legislators, senior officials and managers; professionals; clerks; craft and related trade workers as well as employed people with elementary occupations.

Within these general trends table 8 shows the gender specificity of employed people by occupational class.

Table 8: Employed people by occupational class and gender (thousand people)

	2005		2009	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total	1603,6	1405,2	1744,6	1535,5
of which:				
Legislators, senior officials and managers	130,3	69,9	155,2	73,8
Professionals	125,0	222,5	138,8	263,0
Technicians and associated professionals	155,3	187,9	140,4	181,6
Clerks	57,4	133,2	55,4	178,2
Service workers and shop and market sales workers	151,7	296,4	218,5	341,6
Skilled agricultural and fishing workers	105,3	82,9	84,1	68,3
Craft and related trade workers	318,9	110,8	368,1	127,0
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	322,0	148,5	321,3	118,7
Elementary occupations	210,7	150,7	241,6	180,9

Source: LFS for respective years, NSI, Sofia

The general trends in employment by occupational class from a gender point of view outline some differences:

- There are many gender gaps in the occupational structure, i.e. almost twice less women employed as legislators, senior officials and managers;
- Almost three times more women employed as clerks compared with men;
- Prevailing number of men with elementary occupations, employed in the economy.
- There are also some differences between the genders in the dynamic of shifts, i.e. the higher dynamic of male employment as legislators, senior officials and managers compared with female.

4.2 Policies

The dynamic of labour demand and supply is an implicit part of the policy concerning labour market projections and relevant policies design. The presumption is that monitoring of labour market needs and their projection is an instrument for relevant policy measures in education, training and active labour market policies.

The Updated Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2008-2015 underlines the role of education and training in support of the transition to a knowledge-based economy. It stresses on the need of improving the links between education and training according to the labour market needs and on the development and promotion of the forms of life-long learning. In this way people will be better inform about the “new skills” and would have more opportunities to answer to the new requests by participation in life-long learning forms of education and training. Further, with regard to the ongoing dynamic technical changes and respective structural skill changes, the strategic document points out the need of improving the access to education and training and the quality and effectiveness of education and training.

For better matching of labour demand and supply, the Updated Employment Strategy uses the potential of the flexible forms of LLL approach implementation as well. It relies on policies and measures, contributing to increase of the labour market flexicurity, promotion and dissemination of innovative forms of work organizations, promotion of a “lifecycle” approach to work and better reconciliation of work, personal and family life.

With regard to all mentioned strategic targets, 2010 Annual Action Plan on Employment includes a number of measures, aiming to stimulate “new skill” development and adequate educational and training restructuring. Thus, different schemes are developed under the Operative Program “Competitiveness” to stimulate the entrepreneurship of technological firms managed by young people, as well as the establishment of new, innovative firms and applied-science-based firms. Another aspect of stimuli includes the transfer of scientific knowledge to innovative new productions and services.

Further the National Action Plan 2010 (NAP 2010) suggests measures to support the existing jobs and creation of new jobs in the following priority directions:

- 6.1% of GDP as investments in ecological and transport infrastructure;
- Increase of the share of renewable energy sources in the final energy consumption, and activities aiming at environmental protection at the amount of 1.6% of the GDP;
- Incentives for development of the transport infrastructure under the Operative Program “Transport”;

- Implementation of “voucher schemes” for easing the access to professional education and training for people with reduced working time. The idea is during the period of reduced working time these people to be able to undergo professional training courses, thus increasing their quality and becoming more adaptable to the post-crisis labour market. The voucher scheme is also implemented in financing the education from 1st to 3rd qualification degree (the amount of the vouchers vary between 400-1800 BGN or 200- 900 EUR) and for some segments of the education for obtaining key competences (the amount of the vouchers vary between 70-700 BGN or 35-350 EUR);
- The National Program “New Chances for Employment” includes two main directions: stimuli for employers to keep the working places (subsidized employment), and information, consultation, motivation of people to enter the labour market and to participate in education or training;
- Organizing labour exchanges (105 of them to be organized in 2010) is also a tool for better matching of labour supply and demand, and is a place where the new skills are announced to supplier of labour;
- The NAP 2010 relies very much on social partnership in the process of projecting new skill needs and implementing relevant instruments for matching labour supply and demand. The active involvement of employers in the process of planning labour demand, as well as developing the educational and training curricula, is clearly underlined in the NAP. A national system for studying and projecting labour demand and supply is under development;
- NAP also stipulates for regular studying of labour demand through case studies. Some experience in this direction has been accumulated since in 2007 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has announced a tender for studying and projecting the employers’ needs of skills. As a result, a study performed by Vitosha Research and Industry Watch has been performed and published. The study outlines the demand and supply mismatches in 2007 and makes a short-term projection on labour market skill needs until 2010.¹⁰
- As mentioned above in this report, a system for validation of knowledge and skill is developed. The system will validate the knowledge and skills obtained through informal or self-education.
- The updating of the National Classification of Professions and Occupations is an important element of the activities directed to improving the quality of the labour force.

4.3 Gender issues

Some of the gender issues related to skill changes and new jobs are outlined above where sector, branches and occupational structures are presented. Once again, we will outline the highest increase of female employment in services, the existing gender gaps by occupations where female labour force is overrepresented (like clerks) and underrepresented (like legislators, senior officials and managers). Special attention should be drawn to the prevailing male labour force with elementary occupations so as to encourage their participation in life-long learning process.

¹⁰ Studying and Projecting Employers’ Needs of Skills. Industry Watch and Vitosha Research Report, May 2007, Offered by the MLSP.

4.4 Summary and conclusions

The main conclusions from this section are:

- Incentive changes of employment distribution by sector, branch and occupation, have occurred in the country. These changes follow the economic restructuring and the technological innovations.
- Many new skills appear, while old skills disappear.
- Skill mismatches are an issue of policy concern, and many efforts are put on designing different policies to increase the adaptability of supply to demand.

5. Summary and conclusions

The review of life-long learning in Bulgaria from different points of view – as national progress and debate, from flexicurity aspect and from the point of view of changes in demand and supply of labour (new skills for new jobs), allows us to draw some conclusions regarding **the status and trends of LLL:**

- The national progress and national debate on life-long learning have relatively short history. The life-long learning issue is not among the priorities of the transitional period (1989-2000). The administrative bodies begin to focus the attention on it during the pre-accession process (2005) and after the accession in 2007. Since then a number of strategic and program documents (strategies and plans) outline the vision of life-long learning as an important tool for achieving economic and social progress.
- Concerning early school leavers and participation in life-long learning, the status and trends of the education show that there are a number of problems and concerns, e.g. increasing number of school leavers and illiterate young people, although the progress in the education. The gaps related to the European Employment Strategy targets by age groups remain, as well as the low level of participation in any forms of life-long learning, etc.
- The analysis of life-long learning from the point of view of flexicurity outlines quite modest participation of people employed under different flexible schemes in any forms of life-long learning.
- The dynamic economic and technological changes reflect on the employment structure, causing significant changes in the occupational structure of the employed people, as well as the distribution of the labour force by economic sectors, branches, activities. Meanwhile, the skill mismatches increase as the adjustment of the qualification and skill of the labour force lags behind the demand of certain skills, professions, etc.

The policy reactions to the mentioned problems concerning different aspects of life-long learning are summarized as follows:

- Measures for improving the educational structure and its administration, thus increasing the attractiveness of the school and preventive further dropouts and early school leavers.
- Measures for encouraging school enrollment by developing and implementing packages of activities to support family expenditures for the pupils.
- Developing different programs for easing the access of all population groups to school and life-long learning.

- Defining priority targets for reforms at each level of the educational system and choosing the best instruments for their achievement.
- Thus, the priority targets for pre-school level of education relate to the need of increasing the coverage rate and teachers' quality of work, while those for the primary and lower secondary educational level concern updating the curriculum and books, rebalancing the teaching approach by focusing the learning process from "learning by hearing" on "learning by analyzing and thinking".
- The priority targets for upper secondary school put the stress on bringing up more practical abilities and better professional orientation of the pupils by developing formal and informal forms of education.
- The increase of competitiveness and the closer cooperation with the business for a better matching of labour demand and supply is considered in the policy as a priority for the university education.
- The policy vision includes also a number of activities, aiming at further development of life-long learning and creating more opportunities for everyone to develop his/her personal and professional status. In this respect there are many measures and programs for improving the access to life-long learning, developing on-job training, validation of knowledge, etc.
- The life-long learning from the point of view of flexicurity is also a topic of policy actions, mentioned in a special policy document named "The Bulgarian Path for Increasing Labour Market Flexicurity – 2009-2011". The main directions related to LLL and flexicurity include efforts for expanding the legal base for LLL among employed people under flexible contracts, as well as making LLL more flexible.
- As far as the development of new skills is concerned, current action plans and anti-crisis measures focus on the need of investments in ecologically clean jobs, job support schemes for competitive sectors and branches, job stimuli for renewable energy projects, implementation of "voucher" schemes for training, etc.

It is obvious that there is an understanding of the importance of LLL, as well as policy actions for creating LLL-friendly environment. However, most of the implemented policies are quite new and the country needs time to assess whether the vision and the way for its realization are efficient.

The gender issue of LLL is not a topic of the policy due to many reasons, i.e. generally undeveloped gender approach, lack of facts outlining the gender gaps in LLL, etc. However, based on the available statistics, we have tried to outline existing gender gaps in any of the studied topics. There is some gender difference by educational level, as well as life-long learning by different type (formal and informal), but generally the country misses systematic gender statistics on life-long learning. That is why the knowledge about the gender gaps in LLL is relatively modest, and as a result the provided policy does not contain special gender oriented approach.

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