

3. Country Analysis (8-10) pages each country

Bulgaria

- **Country and regional context**
 - **Key strategies and policies** related to Age management (1-2 paragraphs): Focus at national, or lower regional (local level) – if worth mentioning. If those are connected to EU level policies, you can mention it too. (You can use information from the D1.2.2 eventually)

The key strategies and policies in Bulgaria related the concept of age management are as follows:

National Strategy for Active Life of the Elderly in Bulgaria (2019 – 2030)

The strategic goal of the Strategy is to create conditions for active and dignified life of the elderly by providing equal opportunities for their full participation in the society's economic and social life, which will be achieved by implementing the following priorities by 2030:

- Priority 1: Promoting the active life of older people in the field of employment
- Priority 2: Promoting the active life of older people in the field of participation in society;
- Priority 3: Promoting the active life of the elderly in the field of independent living
- Priority 4: Creating capacity and a favourable environment for active living of older people at a national and regional level

National Strategy for Demographic Development of the Population of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012 – 2030

One of the main priorities laid down in the national strategy is: II. Overcoming the negative effects of population ageing, and improving the quality characteristics of human capital. The accomplishment of the second priority includes taking measures to meet the challenges created by the ageing of population. The measures are directed to overcoming the negative effects of the growth of unfavourable changes in age, e.g. the decreasing size and aging of the active population, the growing burden on the social insurance system and the state budget. The measures help improve the requirements for the quality and extending the scope of health care and social services for elderly people; and also providing better opportunities for education and formal and informal learning as a basis for professional realization on the labour market and a means of development of human resources in the process of life-long education; conducting a consistent policy for encouraging the labour activity of the elder workers.

National concept for promotion of active ageing (2012-2030)

The National concept for promotion of active ageing is a continuation of one of the key lines of action of the Updated national demographic strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria with a horizon to 2030: Overcoming the negative effects of population ageing. The Concept offers a

clear perspective for dealing with the effects of demographic ageing in the context of an integrated approach tailored to the specificities of the issue. The strategic objective of the National concept for promotion of active ageing is to create conditions for active and decent living of elderly people by ensuring equal opportunities for full economic and social participation.

The national concept for active ageing comprises six operational objectives and targets.

- Operational objective No 1: Promoting active working life for older people.
- Operational objective No 2: Ensuring the financial stability of the pension system, conditions for an active and decent life, and reduction of poverty among retired individual
- Operational objective No 3: Ensuring access to health services and prolonging life in good health condition.
- Operational objective No 4: Ensuring access to education, promoting life-long learning, further trainings and requalification of older people for the purpose of enhancing labour market mobility.
- Operational objective No 5: Developing and modernising long-term care and promoting access to social services; encouraging “silver economy”.
- Operational objective No 6: Promoting volunteering

National strategy for geriatric care and aging well health in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-2030

The objectives of the strategy include ensuring enabling more people to live longer in good health, stay active longer and reduce the growing inequality among older people; to facilitate access to quality health and social services for older people in need care and support; to enable older women and men to stay fully integrated into society and to live with dignity, regardless of their health and degree of need for someone else's care; to create a favorable environment for entrepreneurship of actions to promote health and prevent disease in relation of risk factors among the elderly; to adapt the health system to the needs of healthy aging.

- Main findings from the A1.1 country analysis (1-2 paragraphs): Efficiency of existing measures; Challenges to be tackled ((You can use information from the D1.2.2 eventually)

The main conclusions from the qualitative analysis and interviews with interested stakeholders (academia, ministry, companies, trade union, NGO) show the following conclusions:

- The age management is not very known and applied as a concept by the Bulgarian employers;
- Employees aged 55 and older face a variety of challenges in the workplace, which can be both professional and personal including age discrimination, technology skills gap, physical and health mental Issues, generational differences, work life balance, lack of training and development opportunities, feeling undervalued or marginalized.

- Most of the companies have not heard about policies/strategies at state level directed to specific age management measures.
 - Different Initiatives that promote cross-generational mentorship should be developed including skill-sharing workshops, lunch-and-learn sessions, cross-generational team projects.
 - Age discrimination remains a prevalent issue in many workplaces. Older employees are facing bias in hiring, promotion, or training opportunities, leading to feelings of marginalization and reduced job satisfaction
 - There are not sufficient measures laid down in the strategic documents that are dealing with the issue of the aging population
 - More initiatives that promote cross-generational mentorship should be developed including skill-sharing workshops, lunch-and-learn sessions, cross-generational team projects.
 - The concept of healthy aging lacks popular support due to prevailing ageism and negative stereotypes of older adults
 - Healthy aging policies should be encouraged and adopted to reduce the social and economic pressures placed on the nation.
- **Regional methodological approach**
 - **Process.** How did you proceed? Which of the recommended steps did you use, or how did you adjust the process based on the preferences and needs of your region/country (your stakeholders).

BCCI organised physical meeting at the premises of the Chamber on 10th of December. 9 representatives of the stakeholder groups attended the event – regional chambers of commerce and industry, employees’ organisations, companies, civil society representatives. They participated in the definition of the long list of possible measures and its impact assessment within activity 1.2.1. The assessment was made during a co-creation workshop organised on 22nd of May at the Chamber. The present event was a continuation of the previous one in order to give the possibility to the stakeholder group to validate the recommendations.

- **Main stakeholders and participants.** Describe how you identified and approached main stakeholders using quadruple helix approach. Structure of participants (stakeholder validation meeting)

The stakeholders were identified at the beginning of the project implementation. They regularly participate in all meeting and co-creation workshops in order to discuss the problems/challenges of the age management and to validate the suggested measures/recommendations.

- *Figure no.: Structure of the stakeholder meeting participants*

Type	Name of (selected) institutions	Number
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Employers	Regional chambers of commerce	3
Trade Unions	Employees organisations	1
Companies	Almarex, Market test, International media concept, Smart group	4
Civil society	Association of women entrepreneurs	1
	TOTAL	9

Source: own processing

- **Selected measure 1: Flexible hybrid model of work**

- **Description of the measure**

A work arrangement that blends remote and in-office work, giving employees the freedom to select where and occasionally when they work, is known as the flexible hybrid model of work. This model aims to balance the benefits of remote work, such as increased autonomy and reduced commute times, with the advantages of in-person collaboration and team cohesion found in traditional office settings. By adopting a flexible hybrid model, organizations aim to attract and retain talent, improve employee satisfaction, and maintain productivity while adapting to the evolving expectations of the modern workforce. This model has become especially popular after the COVID-19 pandemic, as companies seek to maintain flexibility for employees while still fostering collaboration and productivity.

The key characteristics of the flexible hybrid work model include work location flexibility, work schedule flexibility, customized workspaces, technology integration, employee-centric approach and focus on outcomes over hours.

- **Barriers and preconditions**

The implementation of a hybrid work model in Bulgaria faces a number of specific barriers and requires the creation of certain prerequisites in order to be successful. Bulgarian labor legislation, infrastructure and cultural factors also influence this process.

Legal and regulatory ambiguities

- Barrier: The lack of specific and detailed regulation of the hybrid model in labor legislation.
- Reason: Although remote work is regulated in the Labor Code, the hybrid model that combines office and remote work is not specifically regulated.

Cultural and mental barriers

- Barrier: The traditional culture in some Bulgarian companies is related to physical control and physical presence in the office.
- Reason: Many employers and managers in Bulgaria still attach great importance to the control and monitoring of employees, which makes it difficult to accept remote work.

Technological infrastructure

- Barrier: The underdevelopment of the technological infrastructure in some regions of Bulgaria.
- Reason: In smaller towns or rural areas, Internet connections may not be fast or stable enough for effective remote work.

Administrative and bureaucratic burden

- Barrier: Implementing a hybrid model may require complex administrative procedures.
- Reason: Introducing new contractual clauses related to hybrid work, as well as ensuring safe conditions for remote work, require additional administration and document flow.

Low levels of digital skills

- Barrier: The lack of sufficient digital skills among part of the workforce.
- Reason: In some sectors or among older employees in Bulgaria, digital skills may not be sufficiently developed to effectively use online platforms and tools.

Adopting a hybrid working model provides significant benefits for employers when it comes to attracting and retaining older workers. This flexible form of employment is particularly suitable for older workers, as it meets their needs and preferences while contributing to a number of positive effects for the companies themselves. The main benefits for the employers are - retention of experienced and qualified personnel, improved efficiency, improved physical and mental health of employees, better time and resource management, team diversity and company culture enrichment, reduction of office space costs, positive public image.

- **Policy actors and instruments for implementation**

Labor Code

In Bulgaria, the hybrid work model, in which employees combine remote work and work from the office, is not explicitly defined in the law. However, elements of this model are regulated in the Labor Code (LC), especially through legislative changes made in 2023 to adapt labor relations to the new realities of remote work. These changes can be used to implement hybrid forms of employment. Adjustments regarding the hybrid model of work with focus on elderly people should be made in the Labor Code.

Public awareness campaign for employers in order to promote the hybrid model of work and its benefits. The officially recognised social partners in Bulgaria – the employers organisations should be actively involved through organisation of events promoting the hybrid model of work for elderly people.

- **Impact Assessment** Provide comments and insights based on the discussions and collected feedback on each of the measure. Focus on the most important (or surprising) results/comments.

Regarding the impact assessment the following feedback was collected by the participants in the workshop:

- The introduction of a measure as the hybrid model of work is relevant to the needs of the ageing population. The flexible model provides to the elderly people the possibility to combine professional and personal obligations effectively reducing the stress level and increasing the productivity.
- The measure is in line with the National Strategy for Active Life of the Elderly in Bulgaria, National Strategy for Demographic Development and the National concept for promotion of active ageing. The introduction of the model will contribute to the implementation of the main objectives laid down in the mentioned strategic documents.
- **Effectiveness** of the measure:
 - Employers note that the hybrid model frequently boosts productivity for IT and knowledge-based occupations, with workers reporting greater flexibility and shorter commutes. The advantages are more constrained for industries like manufacturing and logistics because these positions frequently require physical presence.
 - The hybrid model can reduce commuting time, especially in high-traffic cities like Sofia, improving work-life balance.
 - Hybrid work can improve collaboration by promoting in-office days for teamwork and creative sessions, while remote days can be used for targeted tasks.
- **Operational costs and efficiency:** Real estate and office rental prices are rising in Bulgaria's urban centers, and a hybrid model could provide cost savings by reducing the need for large office spaces.
- **Impact and sustainability:**
 - Hybrid work has the potential to increase job accessibility across Bulgaria, where some rural areas have less access to high-paying roles available in urban centers.
 - Employees working remotely contribute to local economies, spreading economic benefits beyond the big cities.
- **Feasibility:** Adjustments regarding the hybrid model of work with focus on elderly people should be made in the Labor Code. It is feasible in long term period.
- **Other comments and insights from the participants:**
 - Many Bulgarian employees value work-life balance, especially as younger workers prioritize family and personal time.
 - A hybrid model may increase stress if employees find it hard to disconnect, particularly in companies with a strong "always available" culture.
 - Face-to-face interactions are highly valued in Bulgarian companies, especially in traditional industries and SMEs.
 - Bulgarian workplaces often have close-knit cultures, where in-person interactions and informal communication play a significant role in fostering trust.

- For companies with a strong in-office culture, hybrid work may weaken relationships and engagement, particularly for new hires who struggle to integrate remotely.

Selected measure 2: Health insurance programmes for employees 55+

- **Description of the measure**

Health insurance programs tailored for employees aged 55 and older often include specific features and benefits to address the unique health needs and concerns of this age group. These may include additional medical care, regular preventive medical examinations and screening, mental health services including therapy and counselling, long-term care insurance. By implementing these features, employers can help ensure that their older employees have access to the healthcare they need to maintain their health and productivity as they approach retirement.

There are various health insurance programs and services in Bulgaria like additional health insurance (health insurance packages for employers, individual health care packages, preventive cares), private health insurance packages, long term care plans, voluntary health insurance funds, preventive health care programs, programs for health consultations and support, specialized programs for working pensioners.

- **Barriers and preconditions**

Barriers

Low level of awareness

- Problem: Many people over the age of 55 are not aware of supplemental health insurance options or the benefits they can receive from such programs.
- Impact: Lack of information makes it difficult to make an informed decision about health insurance and reduces interest in these programs.

Limited financial opportunities

- Problem: Health insurance programs often include monthly premiums or other costs that can be prohibitive for people on limited incomes, such as many retirees or people nearing retirement age
- Impact: This financial barrier limits the access of people over 55 to additional health services.

Lack of specialized services for adults

- Problem: Health insurance companies rarely offer specialized programs that address the needs of seniors, such as chronic disease management, rehabilitation and mental health care.
- Impact: This reduces the attractiveness of the packages offered to people over 55 who often need specific health services.

Slow adoption of technology in healthcare

- Problem: Telemedicine and electronic health services are not yet sufficiently developed and integrated into the Bulgarian health system.
- Impact: For people over 55, access to remote health services and the convenience of eHealth would be a significant advantage, but the lack of such development limits their utility.

Insufficient capacity in the public health system

- Problem: The burden of the health care system, insufficient number of specialists and long waiting times for examinations and procedures hinder access to quality health care.
- Impact: This reduces confidence in health insurance programs and creates a barrier for people who would like additional coverage.

Preconditions

Increasing life expectancy and health care needs

- Positive factor: As life expectancy increases and the number of seniors over the age of 55 increases, the demand for specific health services and insurance increases.
- Effect: This encourages insurance companies and health funds to develop new products tailored to the needs of the elderly.

An evolving market for private healthcare services

- Positive factor: In recent years, there has been an increase in private health services and private clinics in Bulgaria, which offer high-quality care and faster access to specialists.
- Effect: Private health insurance programs can complement the public system, increasing options for people over 55.

Financial incentives for employers

- Positive factor: Some employers are starting to provide additional health insurance for their employees, including those over 55, which creates a prerequisite for wider access to health services.
- Effect: This helps people over 55 to have greater access to health services through their employers as part of their employment benefits package.

European programmes and funding

- Positive factor: Bulgaria has access to European programs and funds aimed at improving the health infrastructure and increasing the quality of health services.
- Effect: These funds can be used for the development of infrastructure for telemedicine, prophylaxis and prevention of chronic diseases.

For health insurance programs for people over 55 to be effective, it is important to work to overcome existing barriers such as low awareness and lack of specialized services. At the same time, favourable factors such as the development of the private sector and European funding create good conditions for the introduction of quality health services adapted to the needs of the elderly.

- **Policy actors and instruments for implementation**

The policy actors involved are the Ministry of labor and social policy, the Agency for social assistance, Ministry of Health, National insurance institutes, employers' organisations

Health Insurance Law

According to the law the compulsory health insurance covers basic examinations, consultations and hospitalization, but people over 55 often need additional services that are not included in the standard package. Changes should be made in direction to cover more services especially for the needs of the elderly people.

Social Services Law

The Legislation should encourage employers to provide additional health insurance to their employees, including for the elderly. The additional insurance may include preventive examinations, hospital and outpatient care, dental services and rehabilitation.

Tax incentives

Some tax incentives should be provided to the employers in order to stimulate them to cover additional health insurances for their elderly employees.

Bulgaria lacks specialized health savings accounts with the status and tax benefits that exist in some other countries. Regulations in this area may evolve if the state decides to create similar tax-incentive accounts, which would make health care costs more affordable and predictable for citizens.

New measures financed by the Recovery and Resilience Plan of The Republic of Bulgaria

Concrete measures regarding health insurance programmes should be included in the National strategy for geriatric care and healthy aging 2030.

New programs for prevention and early diagnosis should be implemented for people over 55 years of age. The programmes should be focused on the prevention of socially significant diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer.

Measures to improve the access to health services could be implemented especially by introducing programs for telemedicine and remote health monitoring.

- **Impact Assessment**

Regarding the impact assessment the following feedback was collected by the participants in the workshop:

- The introduction of the measure is relevant to the ageing population and demographic situation in the country. It provides to the elderly people the possibility to maintain their health and productivity and extend their working life.
- The measure is in line with the National Strategy for Active Life of the Elderly in Bulgaria, National Strategy for Demographic Development and the National concept for promotion of active ageing.
- **Effectiveness** of the measure

- Improved access to preventive care, early diagnosis, and regular health screenings, which are crucial for managing age-related conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and joint issues.
 - Older employees can face health-related limitations that impact productivity, and they may benefit from health programs that reduce illness or manage chronic conditions.
 - Access to tailored health programs can improve energy levels, reduce health-related work interruptions, and enhance productivity.
 - Such programs may reduce presenteeism, where employees are physically present but less productive due to health issues.
 - Offering comprehensive health insurance to employees aged 55+ can be a strong incentive for retention, as such programs demonstrate that employers value the well-being of their senior workforce.
 - Increased financial security can reduce stress and improve focus, contributing to a more stable workforce.
- **Efficiency:** Evaluating the efficiency of health insurance programs for employees aged 55 and older requires a comprehensive approach that assesses how well the program supports employees' health, satisfaction, and retention while maintaining cost-effectiveness for the employer. The efficiency should be measured including all interested stakeholders employees, employers, trade unions and government. Different surveys to assess how satisfied employees are with their coverage and benefits from the health programmes could be made.
 - **Impact and sustainability:**
 - Reduced out-of-pocket expenses for employees, relieving financial stress that might otherwise impact their health and productivity.
 - Health insurance programs can mitigate the financial burden of medical expenses, which may be especially valuable for older employees who may be preparing for retirement.
 - Offering tailored health insurance can strengthen the company's image as a responsible employer, making it more attractive to prospective hires of all ages.
 - Health benefits are a valuable tool for retaining experienced employees, helping companies avoid the costs associated with recruiting and training new hires. Retaining skilled, older employees can preserve institutional knowledge and maintain continuity within the organization.
 - **Feasibility:** There are legislative barriers that would be a challenge to be overcome as the policy actors involved organisations as Ministry of labor and social policy, the Agency for social assistance, Ministry of Health, National insurance institutes, employers' organisations. A change requires close cooperation between all stakeholders and is feasible in long term period.

Selected measure 3: Continuing education to increase digital competences

- **Description of the measure**

Continuing education to increase digital competences refers to the ongoing learning and development of skills needed to effectively use digital tools, technology, and information. This concept is crucial because technology evolves rapidly, and new digital tools and platforms frequently emerge, affecting both personal and professional spheres.

Continuing education to increase digital competences for older employees is particularly important in ensuring that they remain productive, competitive, and engaged in a rapidly evolving digital work environment. Tailoring education programs to meet the specific needs and learning styles of older employees can help bridge the digital divide and enhance their confidence and proficiency with modern technology. Continuing education may include tailored training programmes, practical workshops, peer support and mentoring, on line courses and webinars, blended learning sessions combining on line learning with in person sessions.

- **Barriers and preconditions**

Lack of confidence and fear of technology:

Many adults feel insecure about their ability to cope with new technologies, which can discourage them from taking courses. Fear of making mistakes and preconceptions that digital skills are for younger generations are also common.

Low digital literacy and lack of basic skills:

Many people over 55 are not familiar with basic digital skills, such as working with a computer, navigating the internet or using a smartphone. This creates additional challenges as it requires courses to start at very basic levels and include practical exercises.

Limited access to training in small settlements:

Remote regions often lack learning centres and digital resources, making it significantly more difficult for older people in these areas to engage in digital learning programs. Despite the development of online courses, they require internet and devices that are not always available in small towns.

Financial barriers:

Even when there is a desire to learn, many older adults have limited financial means and cannot afford paid courses or specialized devices that may be required. The lack of subsidized programs also hinders participation.

Lack of adapted training methods:

Many of the digital skills courses available are not adapted for learners over 55 and do not take into account the differences in learning pace or the needs of older people. The lack of an approach that is clear, practical and easy to understand can lead to difficulties in learning the material.

- **Policy actors and instruments for implementation**

EU funding for organisation of digital competencies courses for elderly people

The Recovery and Resilience Plan, as well as other European initiatives, provide funds for life long training for elderly people. There is a possibility to organise more trainings related to the digital competencies that could be financed by plan. Special trainings oriented to the needs of the elderly people 55+ should be developed. There are not tailored oriented trainings at the moment and the curriculums are the same for all participants not having into consideration the peculiarities of the target groups.

Provision of subsidies and free courses:

The state and the EU can provide additional funding to ease the financial barriers for older people to participate in such programs.

Raising awareness and building confidence:

Organizing campaigns and workshops to explain the benefits of digital skills and help people over 55 overcome their fear of new technologies. These initiatives may include free trial classes or demonstrations.

Creating partnerships between institutions and local communities:

Through cooperation between local administrations, libraries, community centres and educational institutions, affordable courses can be provided for people over 55, especially in smaller towns.

Providing access to devices and the Internet:

Through device donation programs or subsidized internet packages, access to digital learning can be facilitated for adults, especially in rural areas.

- **Impact Assessment**

Regarding the impact assessment the following feedback was collected by the participants in the workshop:

- Continuing education aimed at increasing digital competences among individuals aged 55+ in Bulgaria is relevant and essential initiative, given the ongoing digital transformation and the aging population.
- The measure is in line with the National Strategy for Active Life of the Elderly in Bulgaria and the National concept for promotion of active ageing. The introduction of the measure will contribute to the implementation of the main objectives laid down in the mentioned strategic documents.
- **Effectiveness** of the measure: The education aimed at enhancing digital skills in the 55+ age group lead to significant positive impacts as: increased self confidence and independence; stronger connections with family and friends; improved employability; reduced generational gap; knowlege sharing and volunteerism. Th positive outcomes demonstrate the multifaceted benefits of improving digital competences among the 55+ age group. They not only empower individuals but also contribute to societal growth and digital inclusivity
- **Efficiency**
 - Increased efficiency: Productivity can be impacted if employees are unable to effectively use digital tools, slowing down processes and creating

inefficiencies. Digital upskilling helps employees contribute more effectively to digitally dependent workflows.

- Bulgaria has a rapidly aging workforce, with fewer younger people entering the labor market, creating demand for retaining older, skilled employees. Increasing digital competencies can make employees aged 55+ more valuable and versatile, thus enhancing their employability.
- Reduced need for assistance from younger colleagues or tech support, allowing for smoother and more efficient team collaboration.
- **Impact and sustainability:**
 - Improved proficiency in essential digital skills, such as using software, managing online communication tools, and understanding basic cybersecurity. Enhanced ability to work with digital platforms required for remote or hybrid work, facilitating workplace inclusion in digitally driven industries.
 - Digital upskilling among older adults can contribute to regional economic growth, especially in rural areas where technological adoption tends to be slower. Improved digital skills among the workforce can support the development of local economies.
 - Increased job security for older employees who can now perform digital tasks that are integral to many roles.
- **Feasibility** – the measure could be implemented through measures financed by the Recovery and Resilience Plan and other EU initiatives. It is feasible in long term period.

a. Summary (1 paragraph)

- main findings of the overall impact assessment of all measures

In Bulgaria, the impact of the flexible hybrid work model is influenced by the country's unique labor dynamics, technological infrastructure, and urban-rural divide. Overall, the hybrid model offers clear benefits in terms of employee satisfaction, work-life balance, and operational cost savings, particularly for companies in urban areas and tech sectors. However, to fully realize the benefits, companies need to address challenges around collaboration, inclusivity, and regulatory compliance while tailoring their approach to fit the local workforce's needs.

Health insurance programs for employees aged 55+ in Bulgaria offer tangible benefits in terms of health, productivity, retention, and corporate social responsibility. However, these programs require careful assessment to balance costs, maintain inclusivity, and ensure positive impacts on employee well-being and engagement. By adopting a structured and data-driven approach to impact assessment, Bulgarian companies can effectively support their aging workforce, fostering a healthier, more motivated, and loyal employee base.

Continuing education programs aimed at increasing digital competencies among employees aged 55+ in Bulgaria provide significant benefits in terms of skill enhancement, employability, productivity, and social inclusion. By adopting a structured approach to assessing these programs and tailoring them to local needs, companies can help bridge the digital divide, retain valuable employees, and support broader economic and social development within Bulgaria.

b. Implications for action plan (1 paragraph)

- Anticipated steps in the context of the country cluster (country persona) or recommended adjustments for the purpose of the AP.

The anticipated steps related to the measures will be described with details in the country persona strategy and action plan.

Appendices

- e.g. Photos from workshops (stakeholders, flipcharts...), print screens (if online or in hybrid; e-flipcharts like Mural, Miro...).





