

Population aged 25-34 years in Bulgaria: Structural changes and participation in education and training*

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Abstract. Current trends in Bulgaria's demographic development are characterized by a number of structural specificities of each age group, including youths, who in socio-economic terms are a current and future component of the country's labour force. In the context of the continuing decrease of youth population groups, the article focuses on the structural specificities of their evolution and the prerequisites for the improvement of their knowledge and skills through increased participation in education and training. The article systematizes some key trends, since the year 2010, in the quantitative and qualitative parameters of the Bulgarian population aged 25-34 years. The study results and conclusions could be a useful contribution to the information base that serves for developing and updating policies and strategies in the field of employment, education and training, regional development, etc.

Keywords: population, labour force, young people, structural changes, participation in education and training

Data on the state and development trends of the country's population are traditionally part of the information base serving for the elaboration of updated public policies and strategies in the field of employment, education and training, regional development, etc. The main causes of this can be sought in various directions, of which a distinctly important one is the role of the **population as a source of labour force**, which in turn is a precondition for the growth and competitiveness of the national economy. The dynamics of population size and structures has become increasingly important for our country in recent years due to the growing awareness of the consequences of active emigration and the growing demands of business requirements with regard to the quality of human capital (Vladimirova 2010; Vladimirova 2018; Atoyán et al. 2016). In this connection, it is necessary to observe systematically and analyse in-depth the quan-

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titative and qualitative changes of the population, including of **youth groups**, which are continuously decreasing in number and proportion in Bulgaria. Under these conditions, the attention devoted to youths, as a present and future component of the country's labour force, is focused on the creation of preconditions for **continuous improvement of competencies through participation in lifelong education and training** (Atoyán et al. 2016; Nelson, O'Donnell 2012).

The main aim of this article is to study and systematize some key trends in the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the population aged 25-34 in Bulgaria, in order to make a useful contribution to the information base serving to design and update public policies and strategies in the field of employment, education, regional development, etc. A variety of approaches is used in the world and in Europe to define the age range of the youth population: practices in different countries vary within the overall range of 15 to 35 years (Perovic 2016). This article is focused on persons aged 25-34, who have ahead of them a relatively long (compared with older age groups) work path under conditions of growing demands for quality labour force. Moreover, the education structure and economic activity of persons in this age range mirror certain aspects of policies for employment, education and training, including for providing opportunities for people above the age of 16 to complete their primary and basic education at a later than usual age.

In the course of the study, a number of **limitations** have been applied, which may be systematized under the following areas:

- Falling outside the topic of study are a number of important and topical issues related to the quality of education and the population migration (inside the country and outward migration), which are of key importance for the formation of policies in the area of employment, education and training, and which may be the object of future research.

- The study is focused on the period following the year 2010, which embraces the main part of the implementation of the first National Strategy for Lifelong Learning and the continuing implementation of the National Strategy in this area until the year 2020.

To achieve the above-mentioned objective, two basic tasks have been fulfilled, which determine the structure of this discussion: a) studying the dynamics of numbers and structures (by sex, age, education level, economic activity, etc.) of the Bulgarian population aged 25-34; b) analysing the participation of this age group in education and training, and outlining the basic motives for, and obstacles to, participation.

Dynamics of the size and structure of the population aged 25-34 years

The dynamics of the number of persons in the population aged 25-34 years in Bulgaria during the period 2010-2016 does not differ from the trend characterizing the entire population: it is a trend of decrease (Table 1). During the seven years of the period under study, the total decrease of this group was by more than 145,000 persons, which is more than 14%; this downward trend was relatively even across the whole time period. During the period 2012-2016, the annual decrease was between 10 and 18 thousand persons. More than half of the total decrease

in this period was registered in the year 2011 with respect to 2010 (by more than 80,000 persons). In this connection, it should be said that such large differences in the registered size of the population between the census year and the preceding year¹ have been observed in our country at every census taking in the last three decades. These differences appear when comparing the data from the current population statistics with the data from the respective population census, and are not caused by abrupt one-off changes in demographic trends. The number and structures of the population at the end of each year are calculated based on data for the previous year and data regarding the natural movement and migration of the population during the current year (Metodologiya). The observed differences are mainly due to inaccuracies connected with the annual data on the country's external migration, registered by the population statistics. The problem is related to the fact that the registering of one's changes of place of residence within and outside the country is voluntary for citizens, and most probably is not done by a considerable part of the emigrants. Hence, the annual differences in population numbers accumulate over the years between two censuses and the correction only appears in the year of the new census (see, for instance, Moraliyska-Nikolova 2015, 156-157).

While the overall population of the country has also declined during the period under study, we observe that the proportion of decrease is slightly greater among the age group in question. Thus, its share of the total population decreased from 14.6 to 13.3%. The causes of this trend in the age group under study should be sought both in the demographic evolution of the country and in changes taking place in the national economy. The dynamics of the population, including the different age groups within it, is foremost determined by long-term changes in the demographic reproduction in Bulgaria. During the last 25 years, the population reproduction has been invariably reducing. In 2010, the age group in question comprised larger generations of persons born during the period 1976-1985. In 2016, the age group included generations born in the period 1982-1991, when

Table 1. Indicators of changes in the size of population aged 25-34 years over the period 2010-2016

Indicators	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total number	1,093,219	1,011,162	996,091	987,115	974,889	965,354	947,398
Decrease from the previous year	-	-82,057	-15,071	-8,976	-12,226	-9,535	-17,956
Share of the age group in the total population (%)	14.6	13.8	13.7	13.6	13.5	13.5	13.3

Source: National Statistical Institute. Population by statistical regions, age, place of residence and sex.

¹ In this case, between 2010 and 2011.

the fertility in the country fell considerably lower than in the first range of years. Hence, part of the registered decrease is due to the decrease in size, over the period under study, of the generation of people aged 25-34. We should also mention another particularity of population reproduction in the country during the last 30 years that impacts on the size of the population. The reduced demographic reproduction (fertility below replacement level and relatively high mortality level) is accompanied by high level of emigration - primarily of people in the young and middle age groups - and a negligibly small (for now) inflow of immigrants in these age groups. Moreover, the percentage (out of the total number of people emigrating from the country) of persons aged 25-34 years during the period 2010-2016 was over 27%, while the share of immigrants in this age group was considerably smaller: about 17-19% (see data of the National Statistical Institute on external migration by age and sex²). Due to the described trends of development of the registered external migration of persons in the age group under study, its numbers have decreased additionally under the impact of the negative external migration balance (7,000 persons in 2010, which gradually fell to over 4,000 in 2016).

This decrease has affected to a similar degree the two five-year age groups that make up the total age group under study. Within the observed period, the decrease was greater for persons in the age group 30-34 years (83,000 persons), while among those aged 25-29 it was 63,000 persons. As a result of this trend, the age structure of the group remained comparatively stable (Fig. 1), while the changes of the shares of the two age groups did not exceed 1 percentage point.

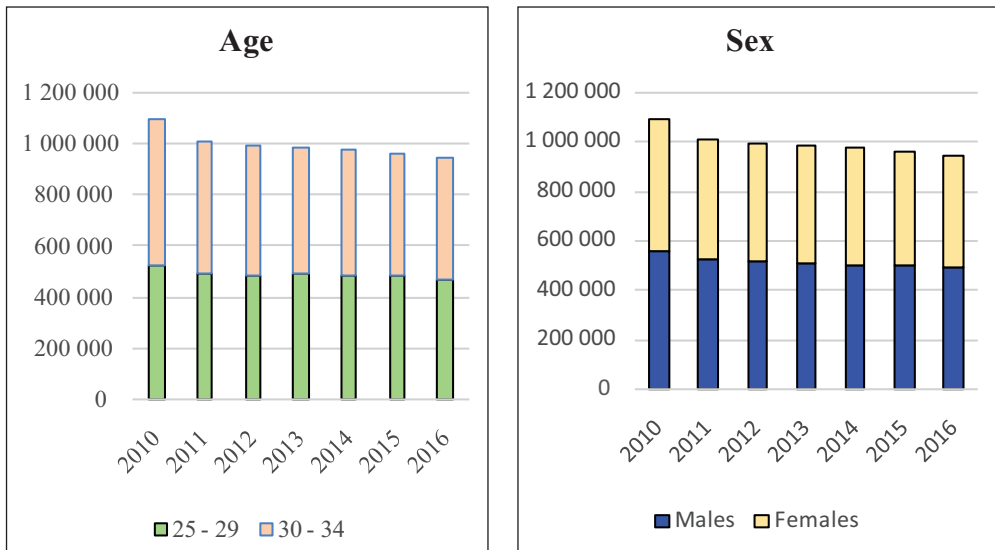


Fig. 1. Distribution by 5-year age groups and by sex of persons aged 25-34 years over the period 2010-2016

Source: National Statistical Institute. Population by statistical regions, age, place of residence and sex.

² Source: National Statistical Institute. International migration by age and sex.

During this period, the evolution trends of the population under study were completely identical by sex: the decrease occurs at the same rate among men and women (72,000 among men and 74,000 among women over the whole period). As a result, the structure by sex of the studied population groups remains almost unchanged, with a slight prevalence of men (52% of the total number), combined with a slight decrease of the indicator “women per 100 men” (from 95 in 2010 to 93 at the end of the period).

Together with the quantitative changes, described hitherto, in the studied population, we observe certain unfavourable changes in its qualitative dimensions. With regard to economic activity, we should note that the number of economically active persons aged 25-34 decreased by over 60,000 during the period 2011-2016.³ At the same time, their number among the people outside the labour force (economically inactive people) remained the same and even increased slightly (by about 3,000 persons). Taking into account the general decrease of the population, these data show a rather unfavourable trend in the economic activity of youths in the country - the percentage of inactive persons aged 25-34 grew from 13% to 15% over a period of six years. Another unfavourable trend during the period in question is related to the low levels of economic activity in Bulgaria in a comparative European aspect (the total activity rate in Bulgaria was 67.7% in 2016, while the average EU-28 rate was 71.1%⁴). This trend applies to all age groups in the country: although some fluctuations dur-

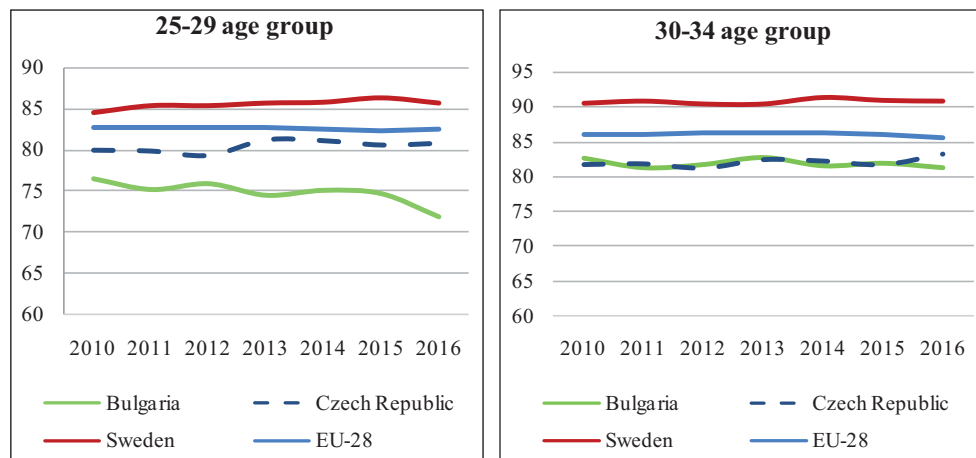


Fig. 2. Economic activity rates of groups aged 25-29 years and 30-34 years in EU-28, Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Sweden over the period 2010-2016

Source: Eurostat, Activity rates by sex, age and citizenship (%) [lfsa_argan].

³ Source: National Statistical Institute. Employment and Unemployment 2011; Employment and Unemployment 2016 - annual data.

⁴ Source: National Statistical Institute. Indicators for Europe 2020. Strategy.

Table 2. Distribution of the total population and the population of persons aged 25-34 years by level of education in 2010 and 2016 (%)

Education level	Total population		Persons aged 25-34 years	
	2010	2016	2010	2016
High	19.7	24.4	27.5	32.8
Secondary	55.1	53.7	53.7	49.7
Low	25.2	21.9	18.8	17.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: National Statistical Institute. Labour Force Survey - annual data 2010, 2016.

ing the period under analysis have been registered, there was a stable increase only among people in pre-retirement age (over 55). A particularly unfavourable trend was the decreasing economic activity among young and middle age groups, such as the group of people aged 25-29 years (Fig. 2). The combination of long-term low or decreasing levels of economic activity among them⁵ has a negative effect on the numbers and age structure of the labour force and of the economically inactive persons, as well as on the economy, the pension system, education, healthcare and other systems in society (Grant et al. 2004; May 2012; EC 2013, 3-10; Borissova-Marinova 2015, 145-153, etc.).

The structure by education levels (Table 2) of the population under study⁶ differs from that of the total population (persons aged 15-64 years) by its larger share of persons with high levels of education (reaching one third of all persons in the age group) and its smaller share of low-educated persons (17.5% in 2016, compared with 22% in the total population).

At the same time, we observe growing differences in the educational structure of the population under study in terms of its economic activity (Fig. 3).

Among the economically active, there is a growing percentage of people with high education levels (37% in 2016) and a decreasing share of low-educated persons (up to 11% in 2016). Among those outside the labour force during this period, there remains a very high share of people with low education levels (38%, or 86,000 people). The growing number of inactive persons aged 25-34

⁵ For the sake of comparison with the dynamics of economic activity among persons aged 25-34 at European level, we have chosen two countries that serve as good examples: Czech Republic, an East European country characterized by successful economic development and a replacement reproduction of the population (the population number remains the same), and Sweden, which for decades has had the highest levels of economic activity in the EU (over 84% of the population aged 20-64 during the period in question).

⁶ For the sake of greater clarity and distinctness of the main trends of change in this structure, the separate education levels are united in three groups: persons with tertiary education comprise the high education group, persons with general and specialized secondary education comprise the middle group, and persons with basic or lower education, the low education group.

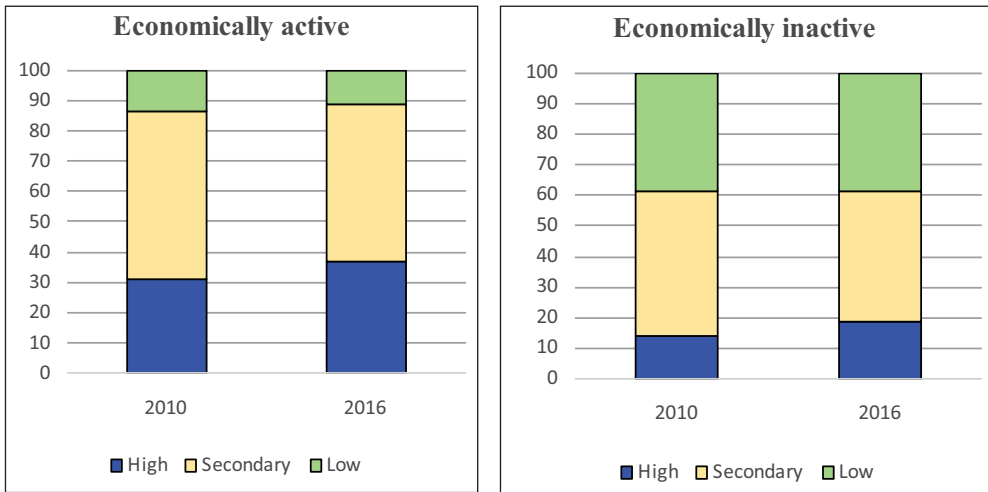


Fig. 3. Educational structure of persons aged 25-34 years by their economic activity in 2010 and 2016 (%)

Source: National Statistical Institute. Labour Force Survey - annual data 2010, 2016.

with high education levels during the period (between 30,000 and 42,000), and the continuously high number of inactive persons with a secondary education in this age group (99,000), are two more unfavourable trends: overcoming them requires the implementation of special policies and programs precisely aimed at specific target groups among these persons (ILO 2017, 9-42).

The analysis results warrant several conclusions.

First, the size of the population aged 25-34 years in the country was decreasing continuously during the period in question. The observed decrease was going at a faster pace than the overall population decrease in the country, as a result of which the share of this age group became ultimately smaller. The basic causes of this observed trend are the reduced population reproduction over the last 30 years and the emigration level - relatively high for this country - among the age group in question during the period 2010-2016.

Second, the structure of the youth group by sex remained stable over the period in question, with a slight prevalence of men. The age structure of this group also remained relatively stable during the period.

Third, the economic activity level of youths in Bulgaria is low compared to the European average. During the period under study, we observe a decrease in the activity rate among the group aged 25-34 years, and a fall below the indicator values achieved during the pre-crisis years 2007 and 2008. Such a trend has unfavourable effects on the evolution of demographic parameters of the labour force, on the economy, and on a number of systems in modern society.

Four, the education structure of persons aged 25-34 years is more favourable than that of the total working age population. Moreover, the development trends of this age group over the period in question point to improvement of

the education structure. A significant problem for the socio-economic development of the country, now and in coming years, is the trend of change in the education structure of the economically inactive persons in the group. People with low education level amount to over one third of the whole group; this high percentage remained unchanged over the period. A change that would improve this trend can be achieved only by applying special programs and policies precisely targeted at concrete subgroups among the overall age group, and by active restructuring of the education system in order to provide a more adequate response to the labour market requirements (Borissova-Marinova et al. 2018).

The constantly decreasing number of persons aged 25-34 years in the country, and the decreasing number of economically active among them enhances the labour force problems in Bulgaria, but also the problems related to future economic growth and social development. There is a great difference between the situation here and the situation in a number of European countries, where the problem of reduced labour resources and decreasing labour force is not so acute, chiefly due to the more or less high levels of positive migration balance in those countries (Borissova-Marinova, Moraliyska-Nikolova 2011, 41-74, 108-111).

Participation in education and training of the population aged 25-34 years

The participation in education and training of persons aged 25-34 years is considered an important factor for building and improving their competencies and ensuring their sustainable employment in the context of greater demands addressed to human capital in the knowledge economy (Forrier, Sels 2003; McQuaid, Lindsay 2005). Participation in education and training of the population (as a strategic indicator of the performance of national lifelong learning strategies) in all EU countries is measured by an indicator that reflects the relative share of persons - within the total population of the respective age groups - who have participated in the system of **formal education and training** (resulting in the obtainment of an education degree or degree of professional qualification corresponding to the national norms), but also in organized and purposeful **informal training** that does not result in obtaining an educational degree or professional qualification degree (for instance, instructions on work with new technologies, teaching workshops, courses, etc.). The basic source of information is Adult Education Survey (AES)⁷ which is conducted every 5 years according to Eurostat methodology. The data of the last two waves of the Adult Education Survey show that after 2011, **the relative share of youths aged 25-34 in Bulgaria participating in education and training decreased from 31% in 2011 to 29.6% in 2016**. This negative tendency is registered among the whole population of people aged 25-64, at all educational levels, among the employed and unemployed as well as the economically inactive (Table 3).

⁷ The statistical data of the Adult Education Survey (2011 and 2016) were provided by the National Statistical Institute in the framework of the 'Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria' research project carried out by IPHS-BAS over the period 2017-2018.

Table 3. Participation in education and training among basic groups of the population aged 25-64 years in Bulgaria during the period 2011-2016 (%)

	Basic groups of the population	2011	2016
1	Population aged 25-64 years	26.0	24.6
2	Population aged 25-34 years	31.0	29.6
3	Economically active persons aged 25-64 years	38.4	33.5
4	Economically inactive persons aged 25-64 years	4.7	4.5
5	Persons with low education aged 25-64 years	12.3	7.6
6	Persons with high education aged 25-64 years	40.1	38.2

Source: National Statistical Institute. Adult Education Survey 2011, 2016.

Based on the results of this periodically conducted survey, a number of indicators have been deduced, which were used for the elaboration of the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (National Strategy 2014-2020, 40-46). The survey covers people participating in formal education and training and in various forms of informal training. The varieties of informal training indicated in the Adult Education Survey methodology can be supported by information technologies and can be conducted in an electronic environment.

Data on the reduced participation in education and training during the period in question should be viewed in the context of the large-scale efforts and resources invested for the inclusion of the working age population in various competency improvement activities through macro-level policies and strategies in different sectors: general education, professional education and training, professional guidance, youths, adult education, higher education, labour market policies, employment policy, policies related to poverty and social exclusion, innovation policies, social and cultural policies, sustainable development, regional development, etc.

The analysis of the dynamics in the number and basic structural segments of the population aged 25-34 years shows that this group is **heterogeneous in terms of the education levels (including persons with high and low levels of education)** and economic activity of its subgroups. During the period under study, there was a growing share of persons with high levels of education (university education) - and these are a valuable component of the country's labour force: they have higher employment levels (compared with people of lower education levels) and a greater interest in and capacity for improving their competences. The data show that, over the period, the number of economically active youths aged 25-34 years decreased, but there was a slight increase of the number of persons not participating in the labour force - among the latter, the share of low-educated youths (with basic or lower education) has grown. The modern knowledge economy is marked by a growing demand for knowledge and skills; these demands cannot be met by people with low educa-

tion levels. The problem is particularly serious among the low-educated youth groups, who are facing long periods of expected labour realization. It is known that, in the modern knowledge economy, the opportunities of obtaining stable employment are very small for low-educated people, which has negative social consequences in terms of income, quality of life, the public finance systems, etc. (Froehlich et al. 2014). In such a context, this part of the article is focused on **two youth groups: those with low and high education levels**. In designing appropriate policies and measures for activating participation in education and training, it is necessary to take into account certain specificities in the behaviour and preferences of these groups. Hence, in this section the analysis of the 2016 survey data on the reasons and obstacles to participation in education and training examines the specificities of these two basic groups: youths with high and low education levels.

Reasons for, and obstacles to, participation in education and training

Based on the methodology of the adult education and training survey, the main reasons for, and obstacles to, participation in formal education or informal training can be classified under various categories, which are reflected in the respective sections of the questionnaire contents (following Eurostat methods). Regarding **reasons to participate**, the respondents must assess, choose and indicate as many options as they wish out of the following: *better work performance; increased opportunities for career growth; less risk of losing one's job; increased opportunities to find work or change one's job/profession; starting a business of one's own; due to organizational and/or technological changes in the job; obliged to participate by the employer or the law; acquiring knowledge and skills that are useful in everyday life; improving knowledge and skills in topics of personal interest; obtaining a certificate; meeting new people (for the sake of variety); health-related reasons; better performance of volunteer activities*. A similar approach has been used in collecting data about **obstacles to participation** in formal or informal training. The following options have been provided: *does not meet participation requirements; the education program is too costly; lack of support from employer or social services; lack of spare time; training is conducted at a too long/inconvenient distance; lack of access to computer or Internet; family reasons; health-related reasons; age is an obstacle to participation; other personal reasons, lack of appropriate training for the person; negative prior training experience*. In view of the goals of this article and its limitations in length, we have selected and systematized only that part of the data that gives the basic reasons for, and obstacles to, participation in education and training (Table 4).

The analysis of the survey data on the **reasons for participation in education and training** reveals a number of **specificities** based on the **education level** of youths. These particularities should be taken into account by the providers of education and training programs and when preparing and structuring lifelong learning and active labour market policies. The data in Table 4 show that among youths with a **higher education** the leading reason for participation in education and training is the desire to achieve higher work performance

Table 4. Basic reasons and obstacles to participation in education and training of persons with high and low education levels, aged 25-34 years in Bulgaria in 2016 (% of responses)

Basic reasons for, and obstacles to, participation in formal education and training or informal training	Persons aged 25-64 years	Persons aged 25-34 years		
		with elementary or lower education	with basic education	with higher education
Reasons for participation in formal education and training or informal training				
Better work performance	70.8	36.9	44.1	73.9
Increased opportunities for career growth	32.9	0.0	27.0	60.3
Increased opportunities to find work or change job/profession	7.4	0.0	27.0	16.8
Participate because obliged by the employer or by the law	51.2	100.0	72.0	40.1
Acquiring knowledge and skills that are useful in everyday life	26.5	55.2	54.0	28.6
Improving knowledge and skills in topics of personal interest	25.5	18.4	31.7	30.0
Obtaining a certificate	11.9	0.0	22.3	13.4
Obstacles to participation in formal education and training or informal training				
Does not meet participation requirements	19.3	55.8	27.2	8.0
Education program is too costly	48.3	0.0	87.7	29.9
Lack of support from employer or social services	18.3	29.9	6.3	4.5
Lack of spare time	59.7	51.0	21.3	74.7
Training is at a too long/inconvenient distance	24.0	21.2	43.3	21.5
Lack of access to computer or Internet	7.0	17.9	29.9	2.2
Family reasons	22.2	56.2	39.6	13.1
Other personal reasons	20.9	22.2	11.5	12.7
Lack of appropriate training for the person	23.1	55.8	20.1	11.2

Source: National Statistical Institute. Adult Education Survey 2016.

and career growth. More than 60% of the respondents indicated “better work performance” (73.9%) and “increased opportunities for career growth” (60.3). Considerably fewer (40.1%) indicated reasons like “participate because obliged by the employer or by the law”. Among youths with higher education, there is a distinct prevalence of inner motivation (over the external obligation imposed by the employer or the law); this must be taken into account by the providers of

education and training. When designing and offering training, it is necessary to emphasize the evident connection between the study content and the successful performance of current and future work tasks/positions/roles. This makes training more attractive and increased interest in training initiatives. Among youths with **basic or lower education** the leading reason for participation in education and training is “obliged by the employer or by the law”, indicated by 72% of persons with basic education and 100% of persons with elementary or lower education. The second most important reason for participation among these youths is “acquiring knowledge and skills that are useful in everyday life” - indicated by 54% of persons with basic education and 55.2% of persons with elementary or lower education. Relatively small shares have indicated “better work performance” as a reason to participate - these are 44.1% of persons with basic education and 36.9% of persons with elementary or lower education. Among this age group, we observe the dominant role of outwardly imposed obligation (instead of inner conviction and personal initiative) to participate in training. Knowledge of this correlation is useful for providers of education and training (including employers). The programs should indicate a clear connection between the requirements of the laws and the knowledge and skills taught in the course of training. The trainees do not have strong inner motivation to study and this fact should be taken into account throughout the whole organization of training, including the selection, preparation and motivation of the trainers.

The data in Table 4 show a number of **specific obstacles to participation depending on the education level** of the youths. Analysis of the information shows that for youths with **higher education**, the leading obstacle to participation is “**lack of spare time**”, indicated by 74.7% of the respondents. Providers of education and training (including employers) should take into account this specificity and offer suitable training forms that reduce the need to travel long/inconvenient distances to the training (an obstacle indicated by 21.5% of respondents). Among youths with higher education, almost 30% indicate the high cost of training as an obstacle. These data are useful references for providers of education and training. When preparing education and training programs for youths with higher education, suitable forms should be sought (including distance and extramural training), in order to save attendance time and travel costs. Meeting this condition would require using appropriate information technologies that provide access to study resources and a connection with the respective teacher/instructor. Among youths with **basic education**, the leading obstacle proves to be the **high cost** of the education program, as indicated by 87.7% of the respondents. We see a relatively high share (more than 39%) of persons indicating “too long/inconvenient distance” of the training location and “family reasons”. The evidently strong concern of this group of people regarding the cost of education and training programs shows these people lack the necessary financial resources: hence their education and training must be supported through other (including state) resources. The survey results show that more than one fourth of respondents with basic education have indicated as a major obstacle to participation in education and training that they “do not meet the participation requirements” (27.2%). The same obstacle is indicated by youths with **elementary or lower education**, combined with “lack of appropri-

ate training for the respondent”: nearly 56% of respondents in this education category have indicated these two obstacles. The survey data serve as a basis for formulating **recommendations in two areas**. On the one hand, the conditions for participation in education and training programs must be analysed and reconsidered with a view to reducing the obstacle for youths with low education levels. The basic factor in this respect is the normative base (including the Professional Education and Training Act and the Employment Promotion Act), which ought to ensure wider access to training for youths with low education levels. On the other hand, the offered training programs (including the study materials and approaches) should be adapted to the capacity and cognitive skills of adults with basic or lower education.

The conclusions, presented above, regarding the participation of youths aged 25-34 years in education and training and specificities based on their education level, while not comprehensive, emphasize some key challenges to providers of education and training. Based on these analyses and data, we have formulated certain conclusion regarding these youths as a present and future potential labour force, with an emphasis on their motives for, and obstacles to, participation in education and training.

Conclusion

In pursuing the main goal of this study, we have presented in systematic form the key tendencies regarding the quantitative and qualitative parameters of the population aged 25-34 years in Bulgaria. These may be generalized under the following points:

- In the context of continuously decreasing numbers of persons aged 25-34 years in Bulgaria after 2010, and the decreasing economic activity rates of persons aged 25-29 years, we see emerging the positive trends, in the latter age group, of stable sex and age structure, a growing share of university graduates and an improved education structure. Efforts at improving the conditions for present and especially future socio-economic development of the country should be focused on the group of economically inactive young people in this age group, in which the number of persons with low educational levels has become stable. Changing and improving this trend may be achieved by applying special policies and programs targeted at specific groups among this category, and through active restructuring of the country's education system in order to enable it to respond more adequately to the labour market requirements.

- During the period 2011-2016, there has been decreased participation in education and training of youths aged 25-34 years; their main reasons for, and obstacles to, participation are marked by specificities based on the youths' education level - this should be taken into account by providers of training (including employers). The education and training programs offered to youths with a higher education must clearly show a potential to develop their competencies and career growth and to provide the conditions for saving the necessary time for access to study resources (including for travel and attendance). Increasing participation in education and training of youths with basic or lower education

requires removing the obstacles (including systematic review of incoming requirements) to inclusion in the available education and training programs and providing a suitable study environment corresponding to the specificities of this group's resources and motivation to study. Activating participation in education and training of youths with low education is a precondition for developing their competences and improving their opportunities for economic activity and employment.

The systematized account of changes occurring in the quantitative and qualitative parameters of the population aged 25-34 years in Bulgaria must be viewed as a valuable component of the information basis for decision-making and the updating of policies related to employment, education and training, regional development, etc.

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