

# **Seniors Go Digital: Promoting inclusive strategies for disadvantaged seniors**

Erasmus+ ADULT sector  
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## **Desktop Research – Bulgaria**

## Demographic trends of senior citizens in Bulgaria

According to the CIA World Factbook, the population of Bulgaria for 2015 was 7,186,893, which reflected a decrease from the population of 7.36 million recorded during the 2011 census. With a high death rate, low birth rate, and negative net migration, the decline is expected to continue throughout the 21st century. Along with Latvia Bulgaria is one of only two countries with a lower population today than in 1950.

The aging population trend in Bulgaria is illustrated by census data. In 2011, the percentage of people aged over 60 years was higher than that of people aged under 19 years. The 2001 census showed equal proportions of the above two groups and only 10 years later the difference between them was already 8 percentage points. NSI projections show that by 2070 elder people in Bulgaria will make up almost two-fifths of the population.

As it is written in the National Comprehensive strategy for Active Aging in Bulgaria 2016 – 2020 in 2050 the elder population in Bulgaria will be about three times the number of the youngest population - 301 people aged over 60 for every 100 people aged 0 – 14.

Population	7,101,510 (July 2017 est.)		
Age structure	<b>0-14 years:</b>	14.58%	(male 532,924/female 502,277)
	<b>15-24 years:</b>	9.58%	(male 354,872/female 325,538)
	<b>25-54 years:</b>	43.21%	(male 1,576,980/female 1,491,489)
	<b>55-64 years:</b>	13.35%	(male 445,412/female 502,924)
	<b>65 years and over:</b>	19.28%	(male 554,486/female 814,608) (2017 est.)
Dependency ratios	<b>total</b>	<b>dependency</b>	<b>ratio: 51.7</b>
	<b>youth</b>	<b>dependency</b>	<b>ratio: 21.2</b>
	<b>elderly</b>	<b>dependency</b>	<b>ratio: 30.5</b>
	<b>potential support ratio: 3.3 (2015 est.)</b>		
Median age	<b>total:</b>	42.7	years
	<b>male:</b>	40.9	years
	<b>female:</b>	44.7 years	(2017 est.)

*Table 1: Demographic statistic*

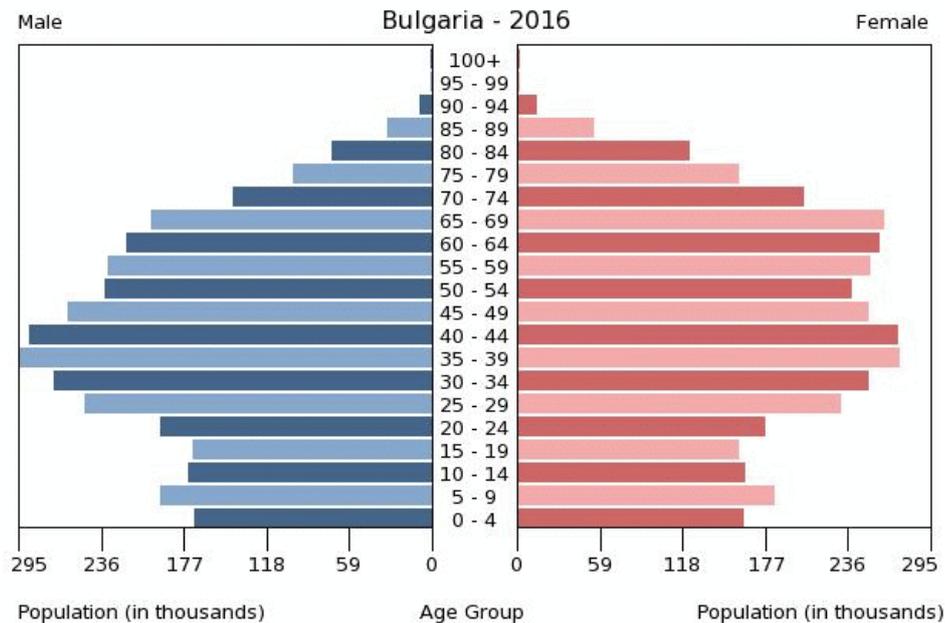


Figure 1: Population pyramid by age and sex

The population ageing trends in Bulgaria are illustrated best by the UN demographic Replacement indicator measuring the ratio between the number of population aged 15 to 19 years (persons entering working age) and the number of population aged 60 to 64 years (persons exiting working age) for 2014.

According to the United Nation Statistic data for 2014 population ageing and the declining birth rate in Bulgaria show that the number of the population aged 15 to 19 years – persons entering working age, is smaller than the number of the population aged 60 to 54 years – persons exiting working age). This reversal occurred in 2007. Before that, the demographic replacement rate registered values higher than 100 in the cities, but after 2008 the values in the cities also fall below 100. In the following years the share of the youngest population decreased to 14.8 % or 1065 thousand people in 2014. The working age population registered relative increase to 61.1 % (4 403 thousand people), but that was the result of legislative changes to the method of determining the retirement age thresholds. In 2014, the relative proportion of the working age population was 24.1 %. By 2050, one in three Bulgarians is projected to be older than 65 and only one in two Bulgarians will be of working age.

The above trends show that adult people and their access to health care and services become a challenge for the health system and the system of public services. A number of factors determine the specifics of the lifestyle of elder people in Bulgaria.

### Active Aging Index (AAI)

The Active Aging Index score for individual countries shows the extent to which the potential of elderly people is used and the extent to which elderly people are enabled and encouraged to participate in the economy and society. The AAI is based of four distinct domains: 1. Employment; 2. Participation in society; 3. Independent, health and secure living; 4. Capacity and enabling environment for active ageing.

According to the Capacity and enabling environment for active aging, the percentage of elder people using ICT is twice lower. The access of elder people to information and communication technologies comparing to the other population groups is lower and much lower compared to the other EU Member States - 18% against 38% EU average.

Overall, the developed lifelong learning system in the country creates preconditions for longer working life of the elder generations and vice versa. The absence of the well functioning adult learning system in Bulgaria does not create preconditions for quick adjustment and up-skilling of adult people according to labor demand.

According to the National Comprehensive Strategy for Active Aging in Bulgaria the access and participation of adult people in education, training and skills development in Bulgaria is less than 2%. The share of individuals who have participated in self education is little higher – 26% in 2011 but compared to 2007 this indicator decreases from 36% to 26%. Significant impact on the level of participation show the completed degree of education or the better educated a person is the greater is the possibility that they engage in self learning. Two fifths of the persons with a higher education degree – 40% - have participated in some kind of self education while the percentage of those with primary or lower education is 12%.

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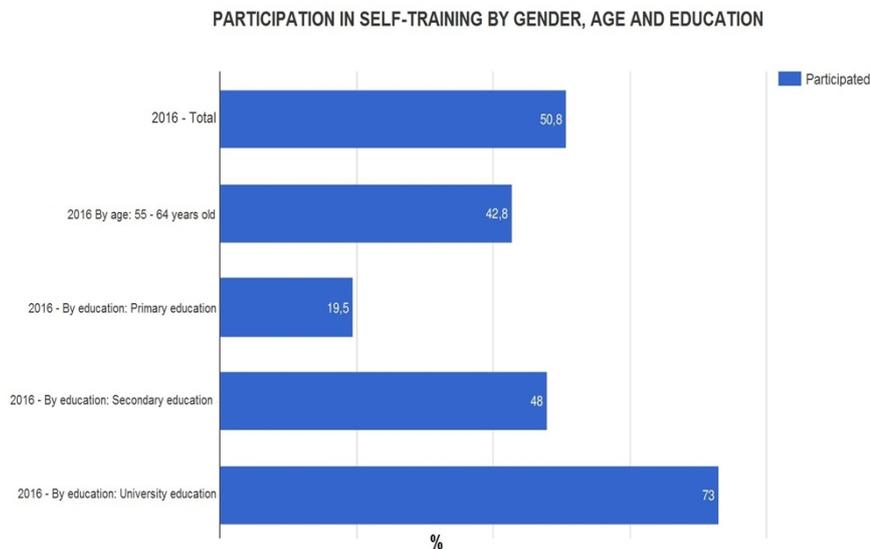


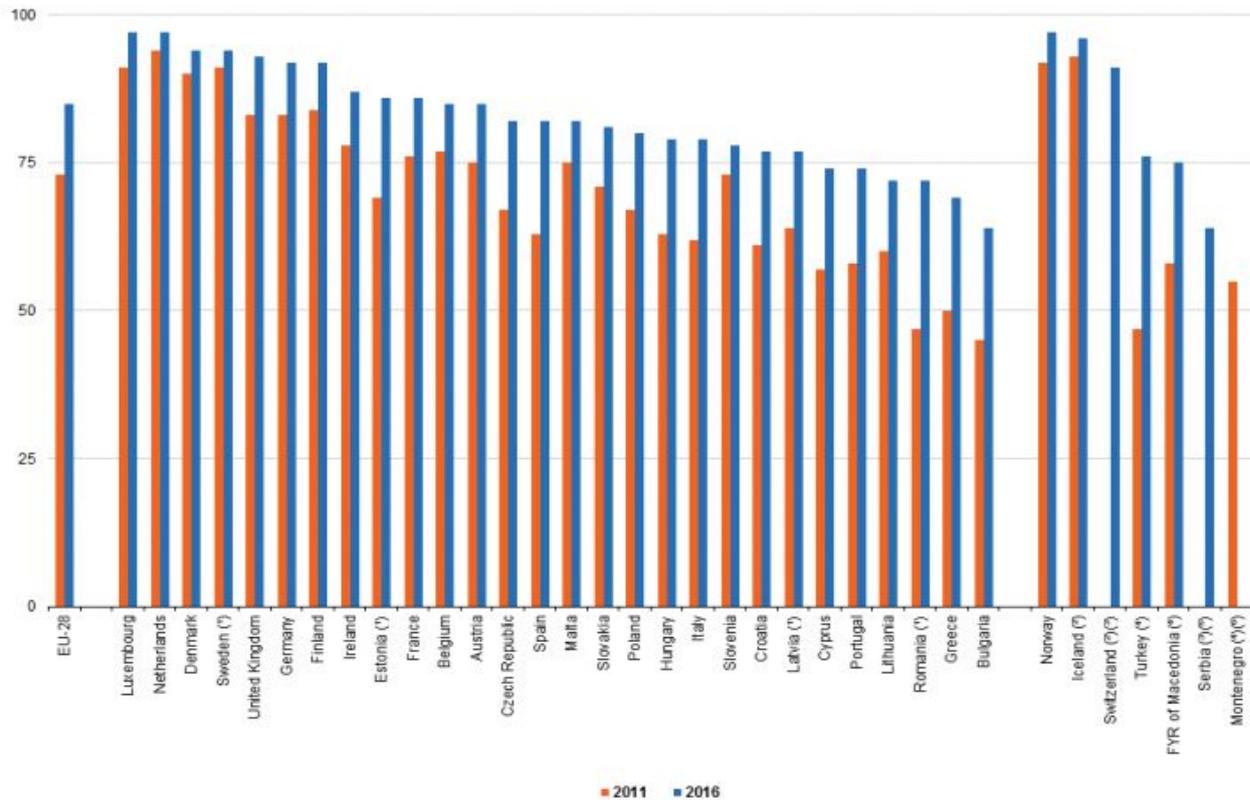
Figure 2: Participation in self-education, by age, gender and education in Bulgaria

## Internet Use by the Elderly

The political changes which have been taking place since 1989, the transition from planned to market economy and the restructuring of the Bulgarian society together with the economic crisis have led to a massive degree of migration in the Bulgarian society. It has been mostly the young people who moved abroad or to the bigger cities throughout the country looking for work. Around 10 % of the Bulgarian youth left the country to live, work and study abroad. These social phenomena have caused a breakdown in the communication between generations and the burning need of the elderly people to have the tools and the knowledge to communicate with their children and relatives who live and/or work or study away in the country or abroad. However, due to the poor economic status of the elderly in Bulgaria, the need for free special training on IT usage as well as some cheaper or free options to stay in touch with their children and grandchildren using new technology and tools like Skype. Currently, Bulgaria's elderly are lagging behind the EU for the use of the Internet: only 10% has access to the web.

The lowest rate of Internet access among the EU Member States was observed in Bulgaria (64 %). However, Bulgaria, together with Spain and Greece, recorded a rapid expansion of the proportion of households having access to the internet with an

increase of 19 percentage points between 2011 and 2016; this was the highest increase among the EU Member States. (Eurostat statistic)



(\*) Break in series.  
 (\*) 2014 instead of 2016.  
 (\*) 2011: not available.  
 (\*) 2012 instead of 2011.  
 (\*) 2015 instead of 2016.  
 (\*) 2016: not available.  
 Source: Eurostat (online data code: isoc\_ci\_in\_h)

*Figure 3: Internet access of households, 2011 and 2016 (% of all households), Source: Eurostat*

In 2015, use of the Internet by households across Bulgaria increased by almost 20% from 33,1% in 2010 to 59,1% in 2015 (National Comprehensive Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria 2016 - 2030). The Southwest Region of Bulgaria (67,8%) is the top performer nationwide, while the Northwest Region ranks at the bottom (44,9%) in 2015. Some reasons for this include the fact that the capital city, which has the highest use rate, is in the Southwest Region. Other contributing factors include the standard of living and the level of economic activity of the population.

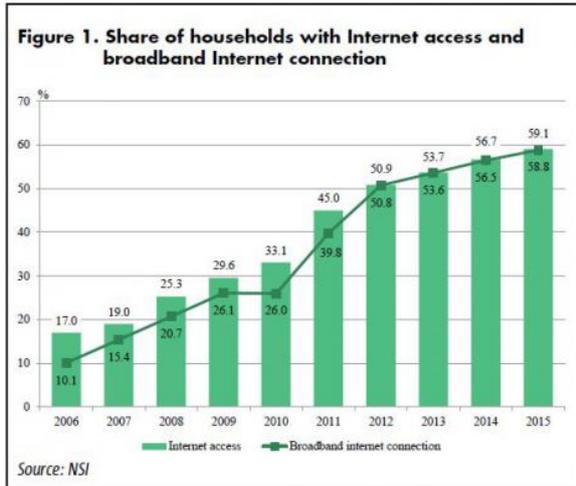


Figure 5: Share of households with Internet access and broadband Internet connection

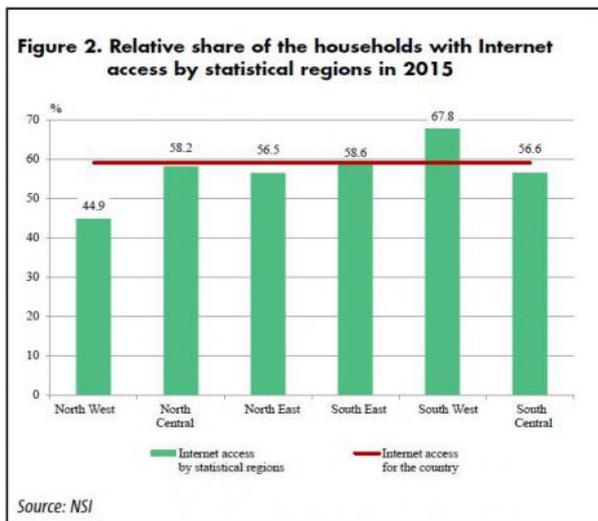


Figure 6: Relative share of the households with Internet access by statistical regions in 2015

The use of ICT became more widely for ten years - the relative share of households with internet access had increased more than three times, and the use of broadband had increased more than 5 times.

There has been observed a positive trend in the use of Internet by elderly people aged between 55 and 64 years, and the trend grows year after year (National Comprehensive Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria 2016 - 2030). For instance, in 2009, 16,4% of elderly people used the Internet services, while in 2015 the numbers increased to 37,6%. From 2004 to 2014, the highest use rate is registered in the Southwest Region, with the difference between the regions decreasing year after year. The data for 2015 show that the top performer is North Central Region in terms of Internet uptake by people aged over 55 (48,7%), which is followed by the Southwest Region (46,1%). The lowest Internet uptake by elderly people in 2015 is

registered in the Northwest Region (29,4%) and the South-Central Region (29,7%). On average, 22,2% of women and 21,8% of men aged 55 -74 years use Internet at least once a week, which means that there is little difference in the Internet uptake between women and men (National Comprehensive Strategy for Active Ageing in Bulgaria 2016 - 2030). The Internet uptake by elderly people in Bulgaria increases, but the share of elder people using the World Wide Web remains low compared to the other EU Member States. Eurostat data (Eurostat, Individuals - computer use, 2015) show that on average 59% of the population aged between 55 and 74 years in all Member States use the Internet whereas in Bulgaria only 27% do so. Besides, Bulgaria registers even lower rates on frequency of use -12% for Bulgaria against 46% for the EU use Internet at least once a week (Eurostat, Individuals -frequency of computer use, 2015). The low level of use by elder people could be attributed to the absence of technologies at home – only 18% of people aged between 55 and 74 years report using a computer at home (Eurostat, Individuals - places of computer use, 2011).

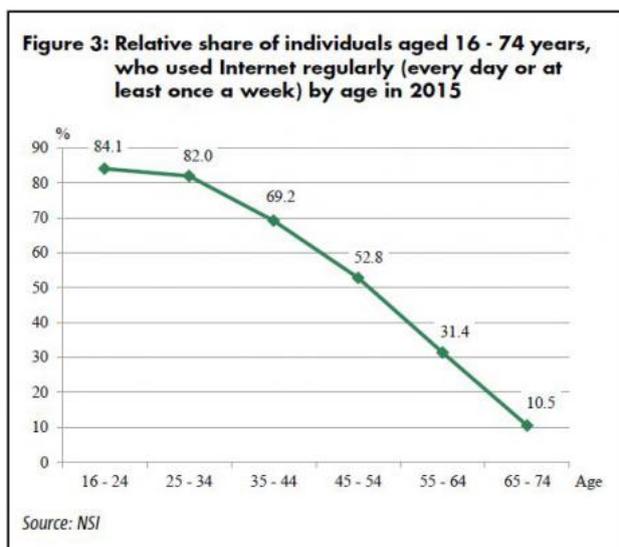
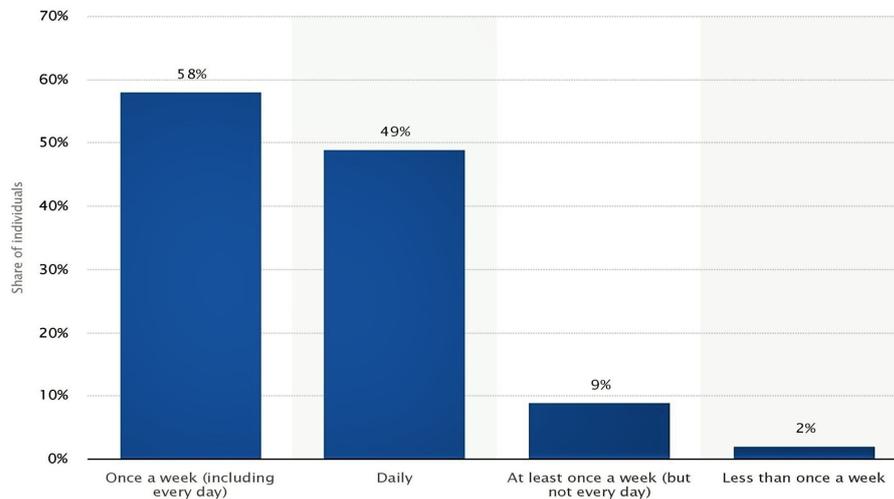


Figure 7: relative share of individuals aged 16-74 years, who used Internet regularly /every day or at least once a week/ by age in 2015

## Internet usage frequency among individuals in Bulgaria in 2016



Data visualized by  + a b | e a u

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Source: *The statistics Portal* [Figure 8: Internet usage among individuals in Bulgaria in 2016](#)

Internet and mobile technologies have come to play a great role in people's life, implying the urgent need to make them also part of the life of the elderly people worldwide and in Bulgaria particularly. There are many examples of Internet-based technologies which notably facilitate the life of elderly people, including by improving the monitoring of their condition, their contacts with relatives and friends, identifying their emotions, etc.

## Perspectives of ICT in Bulgaria and the Involvement of the Elderly

According to Export.gov, Bulgaria has a long and a rich tradition in the IT and electronics sectors (ever since the Communist era) and is still considered to be the Silicon Valley of Southeastern Europe. Nevertheless, Bulgaria needs to address a severe digital skills gap whereby only 31 % of the population have basic digital skills. The Export.gov research goes further to indicate that the Bulgarian Internet users are among the most intensive users of on-line video calls (1st place) and social networks (6th place). However, the Bulgarian Internet users seem to refrain from using the Internet when it comes to online banking or shopping on-line. Furthermore, Bulgaria ranks 19th among the 28 members of the European Union, with 82 % of Bulgarians using voice or video calls, and 74 % participating in social networks. In contrast to the popularity of on-line communication, Bulgarians are reluctant to engage in on-line

transactions, with only 7 % of Bulgarians using online banking and only 31 % shopping online.

According to the Bulgaria National Statistical Institute's survey on the information and communications technologies, the regular Internet users used Internet for communication, 78,9% used the network for e-mails, 75,9% participate in social networks and 70,7% read online news and newspaper. One of the main activities connected to the use of the global web space are: were finding information about goods or services (61.7%), searching for health information (50.1%) and consulting with online encyclopaedias (43.3%). The percentage of the consumers used the Internet for searching for a job is 19,5%, and 9.8% for internet banking.

**UNIT:** Percentage of individuals  
**INDIC\_IS:** Individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills  
**IND\_TYPE:** All Individuals

TIME ▾	2015	2016	2017
GEO ▾			
European Union (current)	55	56	57
European Union (excluding Bulgaria)	55	56	57
European Union (15)	59	60	61
Euro area (EA11-2004)	57	57	58
Belgium	60	61	61
Bulgaria	31	26	29
Czech Republic	57	54	60
Denmark	75	78	71
Germany (until 1990)	67	68	68
Estonia	65	60	60
Ireland	44	44	48
Greece	44	46	46
Spain	54	53	55
France	57	56	57
Croatia	51	55	41
Italy	43	44	:(u)
Cyprus	43	43	50
Latvia	49	50(b)	48
Lithuania	51	52	55
Luxembourg	86	86	85
Hungary	50	51	50
Malta	52	49	56
Netherlands	72	77	79
Austria	64	65	67
Poland	40	44	46
Portugal	48	48	:
Romania	26	28	29
Slovenia	51	53	54
Slovakia	53	55	59
Finland	74	73	76
Sweden	72	69(b)	77
United Kingdom	67	69	71
Iceland	:	:	85
Norway	80	75	77
Switzerland	:	:	76(b)
Montenegro	:	:	50
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	37	34	32
Serbia	32	:	39
Turkey	23	28	34

No footnotes available

Available flags:  
**b** break in time series  
**c** confidential  
**d** definition differs, see metadata  
**e** estimated  
**f** forecast  
**i** see metadata (phased out)  
**n** not significant  
**p** provisional  
**r** revised  
**s** Eurostat estimate (phased out)  
**u** low reliability  
**z** not applicable

Figure 9: Individuals' level of digital skills

At the end of 2016, the Bulgarian e-Government Agency established with a goal to combine all government efforts in implementing the proper IT infrastructure for digital public services. By 2022, Bulgaria's public administration is expected to be fully digitally transformed, according to the State e-Government Agency. Therefore, it is exigent not only to further develop ICT and IT curricula in schools, but also to train the elderly, who have fewer and fewer opportunities for upskilling in the field of IT, to go digital.

## **eGovernment in Bulgaria**

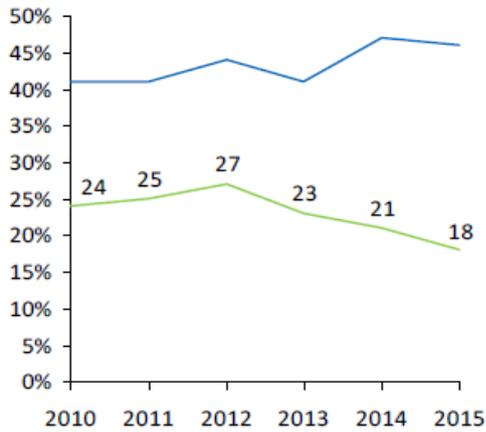
### **Internet usage for interaction with public authorities by individuals**

According to the Eurostat Statistic (Digital economy and digital society statistics at regional level) 48% of individuals between 16 and 74 years old in the EU – 28 used the Internet for e-government purposes, while interactions with e-government services is least common across the regions of Bulgaria, Italy and Romania.

48 % of individuals (aged 16 to 74) in the EU-28 used Internet for e-government purposes - 29 % used the Internet for downloading forms, 28 % for submitting completed forms, and 42% for obtaining information. The overall use of e-government increased 13 percentage points from 35 % in 2008. The use of e-government was most common in the age group 25–34 and 35–44 where it was used by about three fifths of people. Use of e-government is less common among elderly people, declining to 41 % among persons aged 55–64 and 27 % among persons aged 65–74. These declines mainly reflect lower levels of Internet use among the older generations. The use of e-government is least common in Bulgarian, Italian and Romanian regions.

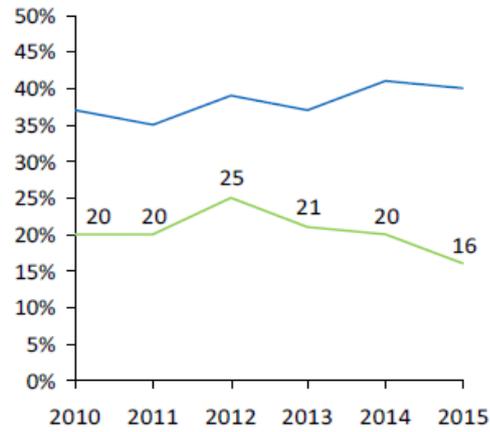


Percentage of individuals using the internet for interacting with public authorities in Bulgaria



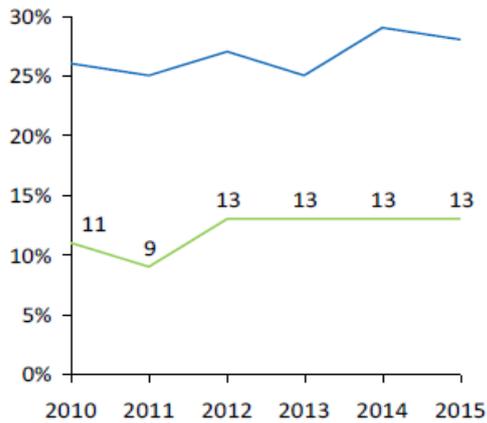
Source: [Eurostat Information Society Indicators](#)

Percentage of individuals using the internet for obtaining information from public authorities in Bulgaria

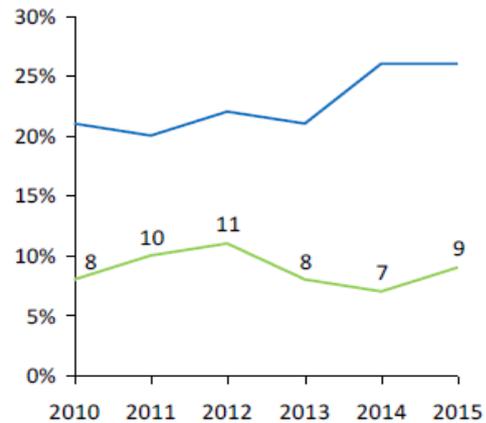


Source: [Eurostat Information Society Indicators](#)

Percentage of individuals using the internet for downloading official forms from public authorities in Bulgaria



Percentage of individuals using the internet for sending filled forms to public authorities in Bulgaria



— Bulg  
— EU

As stated in the eGovernance Development Strategy 2014-2020 in the Republic of Bulgaria, Electronic Governance (e-Governance) is governance in electronic environment comprised of regulatory relations, administrative processes and service, as well as interaction with users by means of information, strategic and mathematic models and methods to process data, information and knowledge which ensure much higher level of governance efficiency. E-Governance is a tool for comprehensive increase of process efficiency in administration, as well as alleviation of interaction process among institutions, officials, citizens, businesses using e-services.

Bulgaria's eGovernment development strategy is generally based on three pillars, the 'Concept of eGovernment in Bulgaria 2010 - 2015' , the 'Common Strategy for eGovernment in Bulgaria 2011-2015', and the building blocks, developed and implemented in the infrastructure of Bulgarian government 2011-2014. The strategy for eGovernance development in the Republic of Bulgaria 2014 – 2020, which is being currently implemented, builds upon the previous strategy.

In 2017 the State e-Government Agency (SEGA) undertook the most-significant real step at national level for limiting the use of paper administration in Bulgaria. As SEGA reports, the actual introduction of fully electronic document-flow between the administrations has become a fact after in September 2017 the Agency approved and acknowledged a single technical protocol for the exchange of electronic documents as a standard for all administrative bodies. All electronic statements between the administrations shall be carried out only through electronic document-circulation systems, and the paper exchange between the administrative structures shall be definitively discontinued from 1 November 2018.

### **eGovernment strategy**

The strategy for the development of e-governance in the Republic of Bulgaria (2014 - 2020), adopted by Decision № 163 of 21.03.2014 of the Council of Ministers,

Contains the following:

1. Analysis of the current state of eGovernment;
2. Vision of eGovernment in Republic of Bulgaria;
3. Strategic goals;
4. Sectoral policies for eGovernance;
5. Activities to achieve the predetermined objectives;
6. Coordination and management of the strategy implementation;
7. Model of e-governance: Information and Technology model.

The currently implemented strategy builds upon the previous developments in accordance with the 'Concept of eGovernment in Bulgaria 2010-2015' and the 'Common Strategy for eGovernment in Bulgaria 2011-2015'. Based on the previous experience, five key areas of development of eGovernment were identified. The areas are as follows:

1. political will: the administrative and functional conditions for the introduction of eGovernment have been created.
2. necessary financial resources: budgets of all state institutions have been significantly increased for investments related to eGovernment and electronic provision of public services.

3. intuitional provision, including management capacity and the improvement of the civil servants' qualification in eGovernment and information technologies. The eGovernment Directorate has been established to improve horizontal communications and coordination between the concerned institutions, especially between the heads of IT units in the state administration.
4. general development of the Information Society and a wider access to computers and the Internet through digital literacy: provision of public places of access to Internet services such as libraries, community centers and a national net with around 100 remote centers.
5. recognition of eGovernment by society: the need for the development of eGovernment is better recognized by businesses than by citizens, but a balance in demands is needed for an effective implementation of eServices for all.

The development of eGovernment in Bulgaria has passed through several stages, such as the preparatory stage (2002), the experimental stage (2003 – 2005), the dynamic development stage (2005-2008), and the stage of realization (2009 – 2011). Currently, eGovernment is being further implemented into all levels of administration and society, with all the necessary adjustments to the specific stage of economic development, asymmetry of demand for eServices and a generational disparity in digital skills.

### **eGovernment Services for Citizens**

The eGovernment services for citizens in Bulgaria are grouped onto eight categories as follows:

1. **Travel:** passenger rights, documents, money and charges.
2. **Work and retirement:** job search services, legal information systems, tax declaration and notification, unemployment benefits.
3. **Vehicles:** driver's license, registration.
4. **Residence formalities:** change of address, request and delivery of certificates, police records, waste utilization services, voting in elections abroad.
5. **Education and youth:** enrolment in higher education, internship opportunities, scholarships and grants, online study platforms, platforms for class registration, library resources.
6. **Health:** health status, health care abroad.
7. **Family:** child allowances.

## 8. **Consumers:** consumer protection

### **eGovernment Services for Businesses**

The following eServices are available for businesses in Bulgaria:

1. **Start and grow:** start-up information, intellectual property rights, electronic signature certificates for businesses.
2. **VAT and customs:** VAT declaration and notification, electronic payments, corporate tax declaration and notification, customs declaration.
3. **Selling abroad:** competition rules, consumer guarantees, defective products.
4. **Staff:** terms of employment, social security, health and safety.
5. **Product requirements:** chemicals REACH requirements and procedures.
6. **Public contracts:** rules and procedures, tools and databases, reporting irregularities.
7. **Environment:** EMAS certification, energy labels, eco-design EU eco-label.

### **ICT Trainings for adults in Bulgaria**

- Training in computer skills for elderly people in Training Center of the Stiliyan Chilingirov District Library in Shumen, equipped by the Glob@l Libraries - Bulgaria Program. Through this training the retired citizens was learning how to work with the MS Word 2007 word processor, use e-mail, Skype and Facebook and search for information online.
- Znanie Association in Sofia initiative for teaching adult people how to work with smart phones, Internet, Skype and other connected technologies. The course in conducted 2 days per week from volunteers.

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