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ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE IN CONDITION OF FINANCIAL CRISIS (THE CASE OF BULGARIA)

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BACKGROUND:

Twenty years ago in the Republic of Bulgaria has started a transition from centralized planning to market orientated economy and more than three years Bulgaria is a full member of the European Union. The current Bulgarian economy can be described following some specific operational market relations: completed structural changes, achieved macroeconomic stability, availability of market institutions in all spheres of the public life. The consequences of these changes have substantial economic and social dimensions.

Bulgarian economy achieved a sustainable development since 1997 till the end of 2008, when bursts forth the financial crisis. During the last years the GDP growth was within the margins of 6,2 – 6,3%. There was an increase of the capacities utilization in the industrial and construction sectors. Labour occupation of the active population increased as there were sectors with a shortage of manpower. But from the beginning of 2009 the rate of unemployment increases and in the beginning of 2010 is about 10%.

During these 20 years the Bulgarian society achieved economic inequalities of 10% rich people, 80 % poor people and 10% middle class. The health system passed through fundamental changes in its organization, management and financing. Health differences exist along many demographic or social dimensions, including sex, age, ethnic group, geographic area and economic status. Inequalities are evident not only in population health status, but also in the access and use of health care services. Poor and low educated persons, despite having higher rates of illness, disease and death, often have difficulties in locating appropriate specialist and preventive health services, they use these services less, and for certain goods and services they may be required to pay a proportionately higher share to their income.

- The purpose of the paper is to analyze the level of economic development in the six Bulgarian regions in a crisis situation and to study its impact on access to health care of the population. If it's possible data would be compared with those from European countries.
- **METHODS:** statistical, comparative analysis, documental method.

RESULTS:

The Bulgarian economy contracted in real terms in the first two quarters of 2009 (at 3.5% and 4.8% annually), as measured through GDP. The contraction of the volume of the economy coincided with the moderation of inflation and thus, for the first time after the introduction of the currency board in Bulgaria GDP declined in nominal terms on a quarterly basis. From the perspective of aggregate demand, the biggest decline is seen with industry, but the pace of deceleration is slowing down, at least compared to the previous quarter.

Agriculture, which is 5% of GDP, also had negative contribution to the realized growth, whereas services (almost 54% of the economy) grew in real terms. Investments in fixed capital shrank by 13.9% in real terms. Hence, the share of fixed capital formation in GDP declined from 37% in Q4 2008 to 29% in mid-2009. Since Q2 2008 there has been an ongoing process of shifting growth expectations, which led to cuts in the share of inventories. Official data confirms the thesis that the current crisis is materializing mainly through reduction of investment demand.

The distribution of the Gross Domestic Product (total and per capita) and the population (by number and age groups) is unequal in the six regions of Bulgaria. Interdependence between life standard, level of education and health status is found out.

POPULATION AND GDP SHARE IN BULGARIAN REGIONS IN 2008

Fig. 1



LEGEND	POPULATION	GDP share
NORTH WESTERN REGION	916054	8,3
NORTH CENTRAL REGION	924273	8,6
NORTH EASTERN REGION	991471	11,1
SOUTH WESTERN REGION	2115042	45,3
SOUTH CENTRAL REGION	1538142	14,6
SOUTH EASTERN REGION	1121569	12,1

Source: NSI, 2010.

As it's shown on the map, the population and the GDP share are uneven distributed. In the South Eastern region, where is situated the capital Sofia, lives 27.8% of the population which produces 45.3% of the GDP. There are significant differences between the GDP per capita in the six regions: SW - 7228, NW – 3063, SC 3203, NC – 3141, SE – 3609, NE - 3779 Euro in 2008.

The index beds per 10000 of population shows great differences between Bulgaria and the EU – 27 – more than 8 points. There is an unequal territorial distribution of health care institutions in the country due to disproportions in the economic development and demographic structure. According to our study results there are many villages and little towns with vacant medical practices for outpatient health care due to complex reasons.

Table 1

NUMBER OF HEALTH INSTITUTIONS AND BEDS (2008)

	Health institutions	Number	Beds	Per 10000 population
EU - 27				57.02
Bulgaria	Hospitals	351	49 507	65.08
	Outpatient help	1 679	961	
North Western Region	Hospitals	40	5 608	61.22
	Outpatient help	150	72	
North Central Region	Hospitals	40	5 548	60.03
	Outpatient help	201	82	
North Eastern Region	Hospitals	34	4 762	48.03
	Outpatient help	266	203	
South Western Region	Hospitals	103	14 548	68.78
	Outpatient help	416	143	
South Central Region	Hospitals	70	9 718	63.18
	Outpatient help	344	148	
South Eastern Region	Hospitals	53	6 846	61.04
	Outpatient help	214	119	

The registered morbidity in the medical institutions in 2008 is 1825488 persons or 23946 per 100000. During the last decade mortality reasons remain of relatively sustainable structure. About 2/3 of deaths were caused by disorders of the circulatory system (over 66%), second ranked are neoplasms (about 33%), followed by respiratory diseases (about 4%), and injuries and poisoning (also about 4%), i.e. almost 88% of mortality cases in Bulgaria are due to the aforementioned four groups of diseases. We have studied the financial resources (public – 1520 millions Euro and private – 980 millions Euro in 2009) for health care.

Bulgaria takes 63-d place in the world rank list of total health expenditure per capita in \$ (744) which is close to the average value of 790\$. If we compare the number of population in Bulgaria to the one of Switzerland and Sweden (bigger) they are close, but what concerns their Gross domestic product (total and per capita) and Health expenditure – the difference is huge.

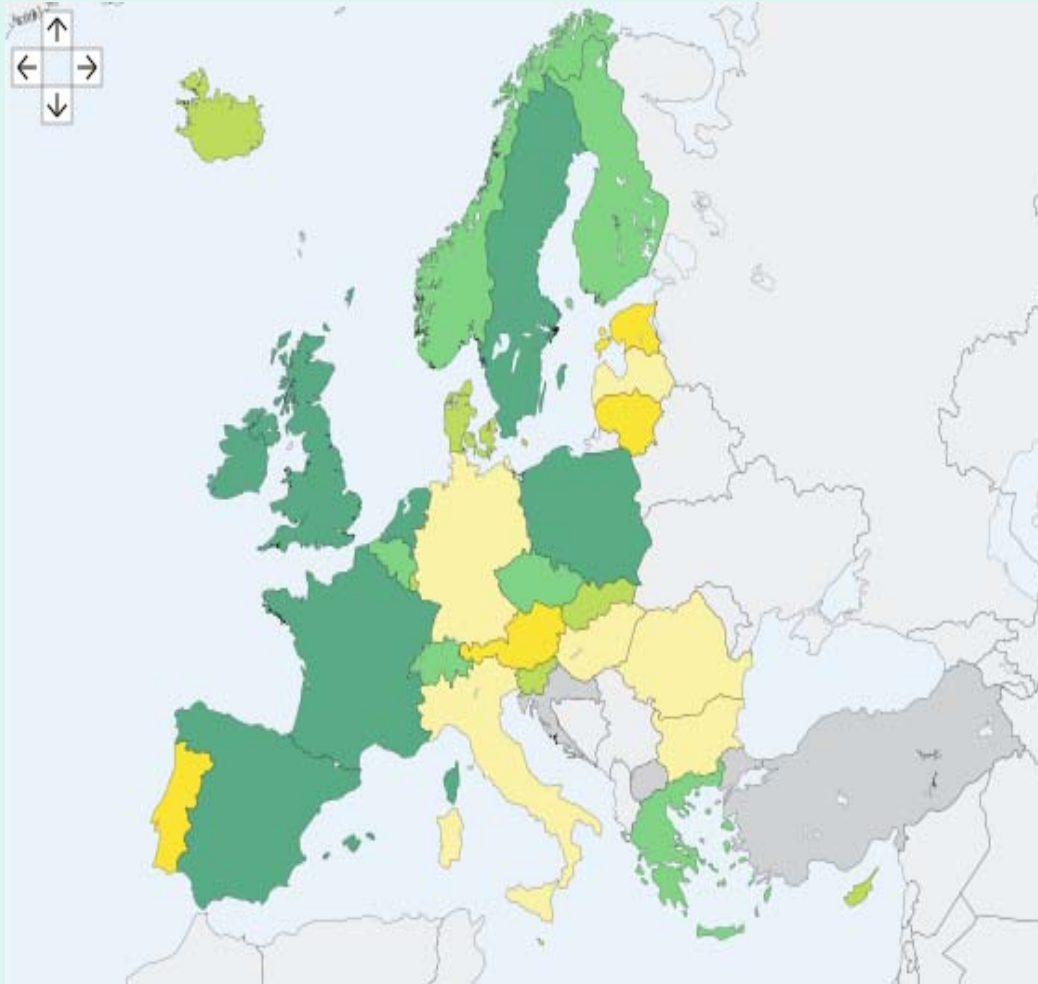
Table 2

Rank 2006	Country	Total health expenditure <u>per capita PPP Int.\$</u>	Total health expenditure % of <u>GDP</u>
	GLOBAL	790	
1	<u>United States</u>	6,719	15.3
2	<u>Monaco</u>	5,585	4.5
3	<u>Luxembourg</u>	5,494	7.3
4	<u>Norway</u>	4,519	8.7
5	<u>Switzerland</u>	4,179	10.8
6	<u>Denmark</u>	3,773	10.8
7	<u>Canada</u>	3,673	10.0
8	<u>Austria</u>	3,608	10.2
9	<u>Netherlands</u>	3,481	9.4
10	<u>Germany</u>	3,465	10.6
11	<u>France</u>	3,420	11.0
13	<u>Belgium</u>	3,236	9.9
15	<u>Sweden</u>	3,162	9.2
19	<u>United Kingdom</u>	2,815	8.2
23	<u>Italy</u>	2,631	9.0

Rank 2006	Country	Total health expenditure <u>per capita PPP Int.\$</u>	Total health expenditure % of <u>GDP</u>
24	<u>Japan</u>	2,581	8.1
25	<u>Greece</u>	2,547	9.5
26	<u>Spain</u>	2,466	8.4
27	<u>New Zealand</u>	2,448	9.3
28	<u>Portugal</u>	2,199	10.2
29	<u>Slovenia</u>	2,063	8.4
30	<u>Israel</u>	2,034	8.0
34	<u>Czech Republic</u>	1,511	6.9
35	<u>Hungary</u>	1,492	8.3
45	<u>Croatia</u>	1,169	8.2
46	<u>Latvia</u>	1,018	6.6
47	<u>Lithuania</u>	981	6.2
48	<u>Estonia</u>	958	5.2
52	<u>Poland</u>	919	6.2
61	<u>Serbia</u>	773	8.2
63	<u>Bulgaria</u>	744	7.2
193	<u>Korea, North</u>	1	3.5

The analysis of demographic indicators in Bulgaria shows a birth rate (10.2‰) comparable to the EU – 27 (10.9‰), but concerning the mortality rate and the natural growth there are significant differences (fig. 2,3). The eastern regions are with the highest birth rate, the north western and central regions – with lowest one. The population in these two regions is the poorest. Unfortunately the mortality rate in the two last mentioned regions is the highest (respectively 18.5; 15.7). The infant mortality rate in Bulgaria is higher than in EU – 27 with 3 points. This index is comparable to the average European rates only in the South Western Region – 6.4‰ (where is situated the capital Sofia).

NATURAL POPULATION CHANGE



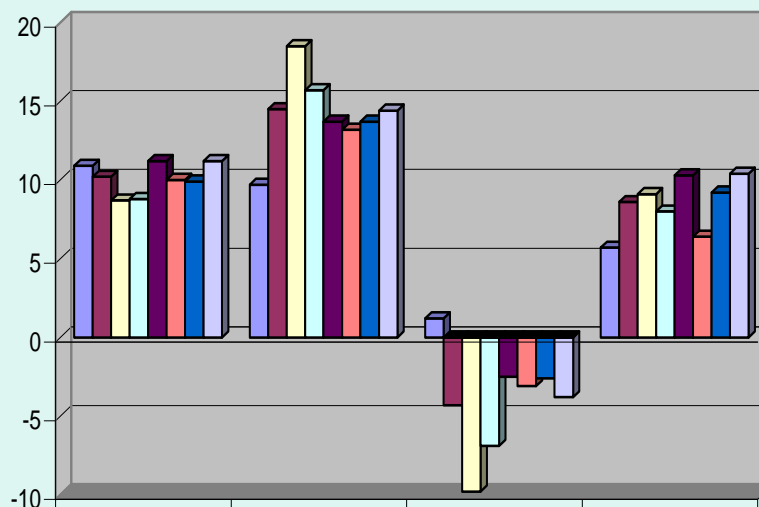
Legend	Cases
.....	-189018.0 - -7691.06
.....	-7691.0 - 656.0 6
.....	656.0 - 7897.0 6
.....	7897.0 - 22397.0 6
.....	22397.0 - 282196.07
.....	Data not available 3

Source:

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/database>

Fig. 3

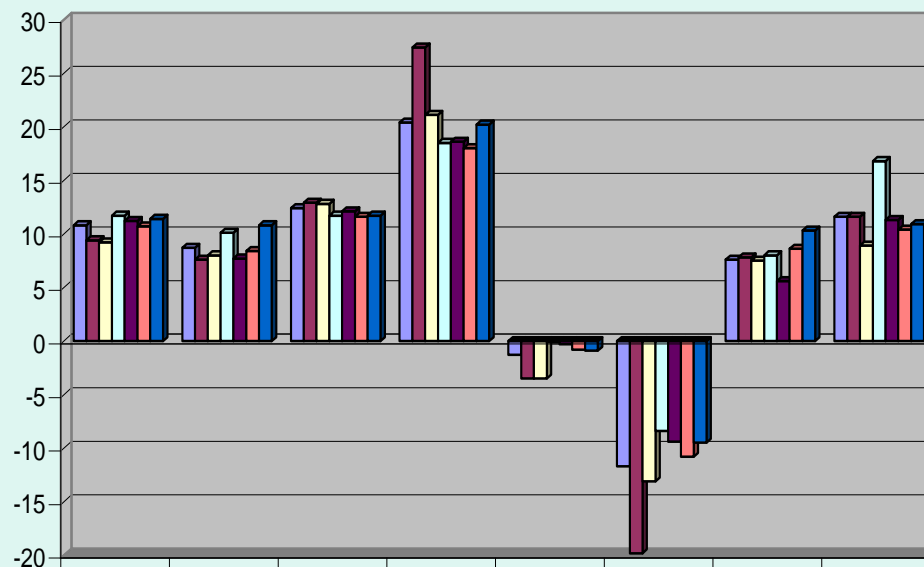
DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS (2008, per mil)



	BIRTH RATE	MORTALITY RATE	NATURAL GROWTH RATE	INFANT MORTALITY RATE
EU 27	10,9	9,7	1,2	5,7
BULGARIA	10,2	14,5	-4,3	8,6
NORTH WESTERN REGION	8,7	18,5	-9,8	9,1
NORTH CENTRAL REGION	8,8	15,7	-6,9	8
NORTH EASTERN REGION	11,2	13,7	-2,5	10,3
SOUTH WESTERN REGION	10	13,2	-3,1	6,4
SOUTH CENTRAL REGION	9,9	13,7	-2,6	9,2
SOUTH EASTERN REGION	11,2	14,4	-3,8	10,4

Studying the demographic indicators we find statistic differences between rates in towns and villages. The Bulgarian villages are depopulated (birth rate – 8.7‰; mortality rate – 20.4‰). The infant mortality rate in villages is twice higher than in EU – 27 – 11.6‰.

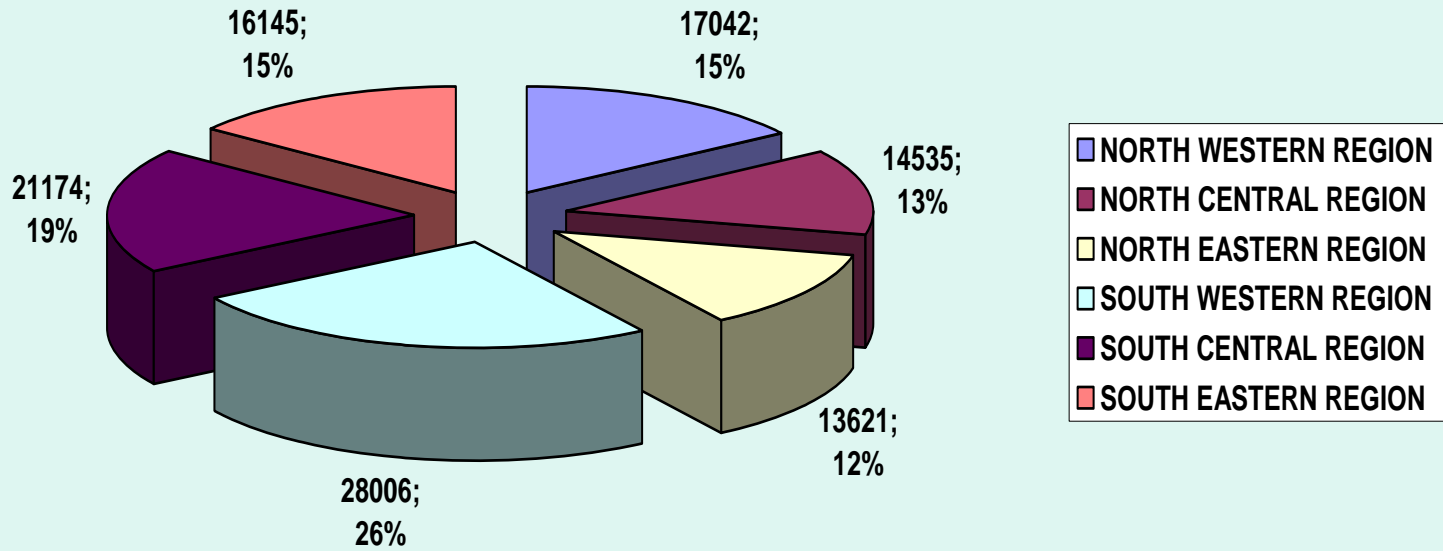
**DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS IN BULGARIAN
TOWNS AND VILLAGES (2008, per mil)**



	town	village	town	village	town	village	town	village
	BIRTH RATE		MORTALITY RATE		NATURAL GROWTH RATE		INFANT MORTALITY RATE	
BULGARIA	10,8	8,7	12,4	20,4	-1,3	-11,7	7,6	11,6
NORTH WESTERN REGION	9,4	7,6	12,9	27,4	-3,5	-19,8	7,8	11,6
NORTH CENTRAL REGION	9,2	8	12,8	21,1	-3,5	-13,1	7,5	8,9
NORTH EASTERN REGION	11,7	10,1	11,7	18,5	-0,1	-8,4	8	16,8
SOUTH WESTERN REGION	11,2	7,7	12,1	18,6	-0,3	-9,4	5,6	11,3
SOUTH CENTRAL REGION	10,7	8,4	11,6	18	-0,8	-10,8	8,6	10,4
SOUTH EASTERN REGION	11,4	10,8	11,7	20,2	-0,9	-9,5	10,3	10,9

In Bulgaria in 2008 were deceased 110523 persons. In the north western and central regions lives 24% of the population are registered 30% of all deaths. As we can see from table 1 there are more beds per 10000 population than in EU – 27, but this quantitative capacity cannot resolve complex problems.

DEATHS IN 2008



CONCLUSIONS:

Worsened health indices are partially due to the negative demographic tendencies – decreased birth rate and emigration of young people abroad aggravate the problem of population ageing. The main reason for these bad tendencies more and more becomes the limited access to health services. Serious obstacles to access to health care are the reduced incomes and the increased economic vulnerability of the population combined with the transition to health insurance system.

Bad economic and health status are bound into a vicious circle where unemployed people remain out of the health aid scope. As a result poor people's health limits their access to the labor market, increases their poverty and social isolation. The limited financial resource for the health system has to be allocated and spent more effectively. The Bulgarian health managers have to transform the curative oriented health care to health promotion and prevention.

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