

Employment strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-30

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 BULGARIA

Timeline

2021 Implementation 2022 Implementation 2023 Implementation
2024 Implementation 2025 Implementation

ID number 41904

Background

The strategy was developed on the basis of the results achieved under the previous updated *Employment strategy 2013-20* and the experience Bulgaria has accumulated as a full member of the EU. The economic and social challenges of recent years, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, have also been taken into account. The priorities in the strategy are also linked to Bulgaria's commitments in employment, arising from the implementation of the Action Plan of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Objectives

The objectives and priorities of the strategy have been formulated on the basis of a SWOT analysis of the current state of the labour market. One of the opportunities outlined in the analysis is related to the provision of adequate education and training in the labour market, as follows:

- (a) changes in the admission plan for education for better adaptation to labour demand;
- (b) advanced training and training at the request of employers for the unemployed;
- (c) training for employees;
- (d) providing the necessary funds from the State budget;
- (e) training of the employed and unemployed for acquiring skills required by employers, including advanced training;
- (f) mass training of the population for the acquisition of digital skills.

The main priorities of the *Employment strategy 2021-30* have been set for the short-term, until 2024, and for the long-term, until 2030. As far as the short-term priorities are concerned, the recovery of the economy and the return to the employment levels of 2019 are in the foreground, along with measures aimed at improving the quality of the workforce. The focus is on the acquisition of digital skills and the preparedness for new jobs in restructuring the sectors affected by the pandemic.

The measures aim to:

- (a) improve the quality of the workforce by taking into account job requirements (based on labour demand forecasts for certain skills, digitalisation and new technologies);
- (b) assist inactive and unemployed people from disadvantaged groups (long-term

- unemployed, people with disabilities, unemployed over 55, early retirees) to improve their employability prospects (and ensure their sustainable employability);
- (c) support entrepreneurship;
- (d) increase income and pursue a policy of benefits for stimulating employment and active behaviour in the labour market;
- (e) manage workers' mobility and migration processes effectively;
- (f) ensure equal opportunities for access to employment by improving employees' skills;
- (g) ensure gender equality in the labour market and create conditions for reconciling personal and professional life.

Description

Investment in education, training and lifelong skills development brings benefits both to individuals and to society as a whole. Education is the engine for job creation, economic growth, improved social conditions and prosperity.

The strategy focuses on the modernisation of the adult education system by creating opportunities for the use of digital technologies, as well as by increasing the digital skills and competences of the workforce for full participation in digital education and the transformation of socio-economic life.

It foresees the creation of a uniform digital platform for online adult education (including the unemployed and employed), which will provide online training opportunities for the acquisition of professional qualifications and key competences. The platform will be adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. Moreover, the development of specialised e-learning programmes and learning content adapted to the needs of people with a low level of education and low digital skills, including individuals of Roma origin and the elderly, is foreseen. A network of digital clubs with modern computer equipment and internet access, where people from disadvantaged groups can participate in online training assisted by mentors, is planned throughout the country.

To increase the level of basic/intermediate digital skills of the population, uniform training programmes and tools for assessing digital skills and competences by levels and areas of digital competence will be developed, in accordance with the European digital competence DigComp 2.1. Opportunities for the validation/recognition of prior learning of basic digital skills and competences are planned. Vulnerable groups and the elderly will have easier access to training so that they can better access electronic public services.

The strategy foresees actions related to occupational standards. Scientific research and analysis of the sectors will be conducted to identify the digital skills needed for the successful implementation of professions and job posts. Key job posts will be accompanied by specific profiles of digital competences.

The European DigComp competences framework and the national specificities will form the basis for the development of sectoral frameworks of digital competences. Tools for assessing and validating specific digital competences and tools for designing training programmes on specific digital competences are planned for development.

Another area that the strategy addresses is the growing mismatch between the supply and demand of skilled labour. In this respect, it is of great importance to improve the skills of the workforce, as well as acquiring new work specific skills, that will allow the rapid and successful adaptation of employees to transforming jobs.

A methodical approach is foreseen in which the needs of employers (for qualifications and skills that their employees must have) will first be studied and analysed to outline trends in labour market demand and plan activities to adequately respond to the needs of enterprises.

The strategy aims to prevent staff shortages in sought after professions. A mechanism for external evaluation of the results of publicly funded training programmes is foreseen (through the development of the services for adult training). The annual updating of the National classification of occupations and positions 2011 will continue to reflect, in a timely

manner, the dynamics of the professional and job structure in the country.

More training and qualification opportunities will be offered to people with a low level of education, or to those without any education and qualification, to integrate them into the labour market and prevent long-term unemployment, social exclusion and poverty. A wide range of training opportunities, such as training for acquiring a profession, training in key competences, on-the-job training, internships, apprenticeships and training through work (dual system) is foreseen. The participation in training of people with a low level of education, or without any education and qualification, is to be encouraged through complex individualised training for acquiring basic skills in the Bulgarian language, mathematics, technology and natural sciences, as well as for acquiring basic practical skills in a chosen profession, which will enable them to enter the labour market. An integrated approach will continue to be applied, including the provision of training and subsequent involvement in internships and employment.

In accordance with the European and global goals in education and training, and taking into account the dynamically changing needs of the labour market, the implementation of pan-European instruments for measuring the quality of VET, through the European VET quality framework (EQAVET), is also foreseen by the strategy. State education standards and curricula will be updated to improve the quality of education and ensure the compliance of the acquired skills with the needs for successful professional realisation and active civic behaviour. Improving the quality of education requires a reform of the adult education system in close cooperation with the social partners. Elements of the reform include:

- (a) updating the existing model for monitoring and controlling the quality of vocational training provided by vocational training centres;
- (b) improving communication between the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET), the institutions offering vocational training, and other stakeholders (e.g. employers, ministries, the Employment Agency, the National Revenue Agency).

A key element of the reform is the development and implementation of a new model for monitoring the competences acquired by graduates through external independent evaluation of learning outcomes with the active participation of employers.

2021 Implementation

On 15 July 2021, the Employment strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021–30 was approved by the Council of Ministers (Council of Ministers Decree No 515 of 2021).

2022 Implementation

On 2 June 2022, the Employment strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021–30 was updated by the Council of Ministers (Council of Ministers Decree No 368 of 2022).

The only change was an update of the national target of the employment rate (for the age range 20–64) of 79%.

2023 Implementation

In order to achieve the long-term objective of the employment strategy to increase the level of employment in conditions of unfavourable demographic situation and labour force shortages, specific measures were implemented to activate economically inactive and unemployed persons. To achieve the goal of reducing the share of young people who are not employed and do not participate in education and training (NEETs), Roma and youth mediators continued to provide specialised support through the labour offices. To cover more economically inactive persons, the provisions of the Employment Promotion Act were applied for the exchange of information between the institutions responsible for the administration of data related to economically inactive persons with a view to their identification and reaching. The activities to promote active behaviour in the labour market, financed with funds from the state budget for active labour market policy, were also supported by the implementation of projects

financed under the *Human resources development programme 2021-27*.

In 2023, the regulatory framework for training by issuing e-vouchers was prepared and adopted – PMS 48/04.04.2023. E-voucher training was launched, starting with digital skills training. Employed, unemployed, and inactive persons had the right to digital skills training. Digital skills training can be implemented online or in-person. Opportunities are provided to directly sit for an exam and certify digital skills acquired through informal and/or non-formal learning. Testing and certification of digital skills were carried out online by the Unified Certification Centre for Digital Competences of the Centre for Human Resources Development and Regional Initiatives under the auspice of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP).

The development of a concept for the introduction of Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) as a new tool for financing at national level adult training courses began. At the beginning of 2023, the Council of Ministers, with its Decision No 91 of 1 February 2023 and Decision No 120 of 15 February 2023, mandated the Economic and Social Council (ESC) of Bulgaria with the task to prepare an opinion with specific proposals for the introduction of micro-credentials and individual learning accounts in Bulgaria, as well as to point out necessary changes in the vocational education and training (VET) Act (VETA). At its plenary session held on 15 May 2023, the ESC adopted an opinion which gave concrete directions for future steps. At the same time, Bulgaria was included in an EC project for the development of a road map for the introduction of individual learning accounts.

The National Employment Strategy of Bulgaria aims to create a well-skilled and adaptive workforce, reduce unemployment, and foster inclusive growth and thus *Individual learning accounts (ILAs)* are mechanisms designed to empower individuals by providing them with resources to pursue education, training, or skill development courses. They directly contribute to these strategic goals by ensuring access to lifelong learning opportunities.

A significant issue in Bulgaria's labour market is the mismatch between the skills offered by workers and the skills demanded by employers.

ILAs will allow individuals to choose training programmes tailored to labour market needs, helping to close this gap and align workforce capabilities with industry requirements.

Bulgaria's employment strategy includes preparing the workforce for digitalisation and the green economy.

ILAs can be used to fund training in digital skills, renewable energy, and sustainable practices, equipping workers for future-oriented sectors.

2024 Implementation

In 2024, the following actions were implemented to enhance workforce competitiveness:

- (a) training programmes for the acquisition of digital skills, vocational qualifications, and key competences.
- (b) dual training, internships, and apprenticeships for individuals with basic or lower education.
- (c) lifelong learning was promoted through training with vouchers and the development of a national implementation model for Individual learning accounts (ILAs).

Also in 2024, the following actions were taken to increase employment and reduce unemployment:

- (a) employment programmes targeting vulnerable groups: youth under 29, people with disabilities, individuals over 55, and the long-term unemployed.
- (b) regional programmes were created to reduce disparities in employment and support economically disadvantaged regions.

(c) entrepreneurship was supported through funding and consultations.

In 2024, the action related to the implementation of activities related to the evaluation and monitoring of the employment strategy was the launching of the *Addressing the challenges of the labour market* project (under the *Human resources development programme 2021-27*). This project focuses on assessing the effectiveness of active labour market policies, developing data-driven methodologies and conducting of labour market forecasting, and undertaking skillset analyses in regions impacted by the low-carbon transition, including Stara Zagora, Kyustendil, and Pernik.

2025 Implementation

In 2025, the implementation of the *Employment strategy 2021-30* advanced through several concrete actions that contributed directly to its strategic priorities: improving the quality of the workforce, fostering lifelong learning, promoting inclusive participation, and modernising labour market institutions.

The Council of Ministers adopted the *National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) for 2025*, providing BGN 88 million (approximately EUR 44.2 million) from the state budget for active labour market policies. Through this plan, employment was to be ensured for 7 000 unemployed persons and training opportunities will be offered to nearly 6 500 unemployed and employed individuals. Access to e-vouchers for training in professional and digital skills was extended to all persons of working age, regardless of their labour market status, thus supporting the Strategy's goal of lifelong learning for all. In cooperation with social partners, a concept for introducing individual learning accounts in Bulgaria was developed, broadening the financing instruments for continuous skills development.

Further progress was achieved in evaluation, green transition and skills mapping. With *ESF+* support under the *Human resources development programme*, a comprehensive evaluation of employment and training measures financed from the state budget and of employment services was carried out. Within the project '*Addressing labour market challenges*', activities were implemented jointly with the nationally representative workers' organisations to identify and map the skills and attitudes of workers in coal mines and thermal power plants in Stara Zagora, Pernik and Kyustendil. In parallel, work continued under the project *Mapping the skills of indirectly affected persons in the regions most strongly impacted by the climate transition*, financed by the *Programme Regional development*.

The strategy's objective of modernising labour market institutions and services was supported by amendments to the Regulation on the conditions and procedures for employment mediation, which introduced electronic registration, deregistration and certification procedures for intermediaries. This reform simplified the registration regime, reduced the administrative burden, and improved the quality of e-services.

Additional progress was made through the introduction of asynchronous formats in digital skills training, facilitated by amendments to the voucher training regulation, and through the elaboration of new state educational standards for qualifications in broad-profile professions, enabling progressive skills upgrading.

To further promote activation and inclusion, a mechanism for the exchange of information between institutions processing data on persons aged 15–65 was approved, aiming to identify inactive persons and motivate them to participate actively in the labour market.

Under the project *Provision of digital skills training and creation of an adult learning platform*, training was launched to reach 200 000 employed and unemployed individuals at foundation and intermediate DigComp levels, accompanied by the development of an electronic module for testing and certification of digital competences acquired through work or self-learning.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy(MLSP)

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)
Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)
Learners with migrant background, including refugees
Learners with disabilities
Adult learners
Older workers and employees (55 - 64 years old)
Unemployed and jobseekers
Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment
Low-skilled/qualified persons
Learners from other groups at risk of exclusion (minorities, people with fewer opportunities due to geographical location or social-economic disadvantaged position)

Entities providing VET

Companies
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
VET providers (all kinds)

Other stakeholders

Social partners (employer organisations and trade unions)

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies
Optimising VET funding
Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses
Diversifying modes of learning: face-to-face, digital and/or blended learning; adaptable/flexible training formats
Acquiring key competences
Integrating digital skills and competences in VET curricula and programmes
Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications

Using EU transparency tools (EQF, Europass, ESCO, ECTS, ECVET principles)
Learners' possibilities of accumulation, validation and recognition of learning outcomes acquired non-formally and informally

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Providing for individuals' re- and upskilling needs
Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Osnabrück Declaration

Establishing a new lifelong learning culture - relevance of continuing VET and digitalisation

Subsystem

CVET

Further reading

[Employment strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-30](#)

[Decree No 48 of 4 April 2023 on the adoption of the Regulations for determining the terms and conditions for the provision of training vouchers](#)

Related policy developments

2025 **Design**

Introducing individual learning accounts (ILAs)

To facilitate the introduction of individual learning accounts (ILAs) in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association (BICA), developed two pilot models for ILAs.

 BULGARIA

Type of development

Strategy/Action plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

“ ... ” Cite as

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/41904>

