

# Key competences framework for active citizenship and for the labour market (2015 Pre-school and School Education Act)

POLICY DEVELOPMENT	REGULATION/LEGISLATION	 BULGARIA
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## Timeline

2015 Approved/Agreed	2016 Implementation	2017 Implementation
2018 Implementation	2019 Implementation	2020 Implementation
2021 Implementation	2022 Implementation	2023 Implementation
2024 Implementation	2025 Implementation	

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## Background

The Pre-school and School Education Act (PSEA) outlines the major changes in the philosophy and goals of education in Bulgaria and defines school education as being competence-oriented. Civic competences are among the key competences that students should develop in the process of general and vocational education.

## Description

The 2015 Pre-school and School Education Act (PSEA) emphasises the important role of key competences for active citizenship and for successful integration into the labour market. It outlines an integrated approach to key competences in general education and vocational education and training (VET) curricula. The state education standards include vocational units, based on learning outcomes, for communication in a foreign language, ICT and entrepreneurship (integrated in 2017), as well as for health, safety, environment protection, and teamwork. A VET learner’s performance in key competences is monitored by the State matriculation exams (Bulgarian language and literature, which is compulsory, and one additional exam selected by the learner). Practical tasks display learners’ teamwork skills, their ability to communicate within a team and to organise their work environment, and to assess their own progress.

2015 Approved/Agreed
2016 Implementation
2017 Implementation
2018 Implementation
2019 Implementation
Implementation continued with no changes

## 2020 Implementation

From the beginning of the academic year 2020/21, civic education was introduced into Bulgarian secondary schools as an independent subject. It became part of the general education of students, studied in grades XI and XII. Many years of effort by a wide range of stakeholders to introduce such a subject paid off. The public discussion that preceded the introduction of civic education, as well as the serious work of developing the State standard and curriculum for civic education in schools and the creation of textbooks and teacher training, mobilised many experts and institutions and led to the accumulation of significant experience.

## 2021 Implementation

In 2021, the Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-30) was adopted by the Council of Ministers. This document outlines the general framework that the education ministry intends to follow in education, training and learning until 2030.

The strategy includes nine priority areas:

- (a) early childhood development;
- (b) competences and talents;
- (c) motivated and creative teachers;
- (d) cohesive school communities and continuous work with parents;
- (e) effective inclusion, sustainable participation and education integration;
- (f) education innovation, digital transformation and sustainable development; realisation of the professions of the present and the future;
- (g) lifelong learning;
- (h) efficient governance, management and networking.

Each of the priorities was accompanied by specific goals and performance indicators.

The framework placed vocational education and training (VET) high on the agenda and focused especially on innovation in VET, its digital transformation and relation to the green economy, emphasising VET's role for the twin transition.

In particular, the objectives of priority two: competences and talents, focused on active citizenship and skills for living and working in the 21st century:

- (a) training, focused on the development of key competences;
- (b) education and development of learners' attitudes and behaviour based on ethical values;;
- (c) respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights;
- (d) development of competences for intercultural dialogue and active citizenship, children, and youth participation.

In Priority six, digital skills and competences were described as priorities for education and the priority focusses on education for sustainable development. In this context, education policies are envisaged to develop civic, financial, health, environmental and physical culture, an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and democratic culture and digital citizenship.

In Priority eight, lifelong learning, creating attractive and flexible opportunities for the acquisition of basic skills, new competences and qualifications in the formal or non-formal education system were assigned as the most important themes of the priority.

In 2021, the national programme *Building a school STEM environment*, was coordinated and implemented by the education ministry. The programme aimed to create school centres – an integrated set of specially created and equipped learning spaces with a focus on the study and application of competences in the field of natural sciences- in State and municipal schools throughout Bulgaria.

## 2022 Implementation

In 2022 the national programme *Building a school STEM environment* was discontinued, because the Bulgarian Recovery and Resilience plan contains a more concrete set of actions for further developing STEM education. due to the foreseen support for school STEM cabinets under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (support measures due in 2023).

In 2022, the programme *Education 2021–27* was adopted as one of the main instruments for the realisation of the priority 1 Education and Skills of the *National Development Programme BULGARIA 2030*. The programme reaffirmed the focus on the competence-based approach in education. Based on the identified needs, the programme concentrated its efforts- among other areas- on improving the quality of education by modernising the educational content and applying the competency model.

In particular, the programme envisages the affirmation of intercultural education through culture, science and sports, as one of the dimensions of civic education. This includes:

- (a) diversifying the forms and means for effective implementation of intercultural education;
- (b) organising and conducting the learning process in additional (not just in the classroom) environments e.g., external activities in museums, art galleries, cultural institutions, etc.
- (c) conducting information campaigns aimed at preventing discrimination based on race, ethnic origin and religious affiliation.

## 2023 Implementation

In 2023, the implementation of the action plan (2021-24) developed for the implementation of the *Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-30)* continued.

Amongst others, in priority area 2: *Competences and talents*, the plan focusses on the implementation of the competence approach and development of the key competences and skills for living and working in the 21st century. This includes reviewing and updating curricula and learning content and improving the teaching methods.

In accordance with the Strategic framework the national programme (NP) entitled *Support for the personal development of children and students* was adopted in 2023. The NPs in general are annual and are decided every year by the education ministry.

The objectives of this programme included:

- (a) creating conditions and opportunities for the development of interests, abilities and competences of children and students with the means and forms of arts, sciences, technologies and sports;
- (b) creating appropriate conditions for the development of skills and talents using various pedagogical approaches and activities.

Activities financed under the programme included those aimed to develop socio-emotional skills, agency and meaningful participation of students in the school community, establishment of a school community with shared values, rights and responsibilities, etc.

Examples of such activities were:

- (a) establishment of modern classrooms for children and students to work in various fields – science, technology, arts, and sports;
- (b) establishment of modern specialised classrooms for the rehabilitation of students with sensory impairments;

- (c) organisation of meetings, workshops, and school-level labs on topics such as violence prevention, the development of emotional intelligence, empathy, and more;
- (d) activities with students to develop social-emotional skills, activate their associations, empower them, and encourage meaningful participation in the life of the school community, including student-led initiatives for other students and similar activities;
- (e) support for parents by assessing their needs and organising community events, thematic parental meetings for informed participation in school life, and building a safe school environment through shared values, clear rights and responsibilities, violence prevention.

Approximately EUR 4 966 217 (BGN 9 715 128) was allocated for the modernisation of the educational environment, the creation of STEM centres in schools, relaxation areas, renovated classrooms, updated school libraries, and more.

Activities to support personal development and the talents of gifted children were operational in 2023 [328 scholarships totalling EUR 168 176 (BGN 328 995) were awarded to students, 203 one-time scholarships amounting to EUR 20 235 (BGN 39 585) were granted].

Approximately 2 000 individuals (1 313 psychologists and 687 pedagogical specialists) participated in activities aimed at creating conditions for the prevention and reduction of aggression and bullying and ensuring non-discrimination in educational institutions. Projects from 32 schools were funded.

Other NPs adopted in 2023, were also directly related to civic education and education for active citizenship:

- (a) *the untold stories of the Bulgarians* – includes initiatives and research aiming to preserve and affirm the Bulgarian national identity and contribution to world culture, promotion of the Bulgarian language, traditions and culture;
- (b) Initiatives and research were carried out to preserve and promote Bulgarian national identity and its contribution to world culture, as well as to popularise the Bulgarian language, traditions, and culture. Support was provided for the activities of Bulgarian state and weekend schools abroad. A total of 52 beneficiaries were approved and funded to conduct exploratory and research work abroad, and to organise forums, meetings, and conferences, with a total funding amount of approximately EUR 255 592 (BGN 500 000);
- (c) *Bulgaria – educational routes* includes initiatives aiming to the development of the modern education of the 21st century through training, upbringing, and socialising of all students anytime and anywhere. The implementation of the programme contributed to the socialisation and communication of students and pedagogical specialists outside of the school and family environment to obtain integrated knowledge and soft skills that contribute to the personal development of students. A total of 29 883 students participated in the programme in 2023;
- (d) *Studying and preserving the traditions and history of the Bulgarian army*. The programme aims to contribute to the education of sustainable values, in which patriotism has a special place, to acquire new competences in the field of civic education and the patriotic education of students, as well as conducting activities related to preserving the historical memory of the Bulgarian army and national traditions and culture.

In 2023, two annual procedures were launched under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

The first procedure with the title *Improving the quality of general education through the effective implementation of a competency model* aimed to modernise teaching and students' assessment.

The second procedure with the title *School STEM environment* aimed to create new school centres, i.e. well-equipped learning spaces for the development and application of science and maths competences. Activities under the procedure aimed to enhance the motivation of students to study science, mathematics and technology, to acquire

competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) oriented towards practice, career guidance and guiding students to select technical professions.

## 2024 Implementation

In 2024, the national programme (NP) *Ensuring a modern, secure, and accessible educational environment* was approved, with a module for creating an environment for quality education in the humanities, geography and economics, technology and entrepreneurship, and for organising the school day in a full-day format. Under this module, by August 2024, projects from 441 schools and centres for special educational support were approved.

In 2024, the NP *Vocational Education and Training* was also approved with several modules and was developed in line with the priority area *Realisation in the professions of the present and the future of the Strategic Framework for the development of education, training, and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021–30)*. The programme set three main goals:

- (a) providing material and technical resources aligned with modern technological advancements and offering high-quality vocational training in real work environments in partnership with businesses;
- (b) modernising curricula and examination content for vocational education and training;
- (c) promoting and showcasing acquired knowledge, skills, and competences through the presentation of student achievements in professional competitions.

As of July 2024, 21 projects from vocational high schools were approved for funding.

Policies for preventing violence and bullying and creating a supportive and secure educational environment continued in 2024, supported by the adoption of the NP *No aggression for a secure educational environment*. By August 2024, projects from 41 schools totalling EUR 203 269 (BGN 397 645) were approved.

In 2024, other NPs directly linked to civic education continued, including *The untold stories of Bulgarians, Bulgaria – Educational Routes, Studying and preserving the traditions and history of the Bulgarian army*, and others.

## 2025 Implementation

The National programme (NP) 'No Aggression for a secure educational environment' continued, introducing a new module aimed at developing social-emotional skills in primary school students and enhancing teachers' competences in teaching these skills through specialised training. The projects of 31 schools, including activities for the development of students' social-emotional skills, have been approved for funding. The total budget of the program is EUR 255 780 (BGN 500 000).

The national programme 'Ensuring a Modern, secure, and accessible educational environment' also continued with a budget of EUR 5 126 569 (BGN 10 020 000). The overall goal of the programme is to ensure equal access to education, improve the quality of the educational process, and protect the life and health of its participants. In 2025, under Module 1 of the programme "Ensuring a modern environment for quality education in humanities, geography and economics, technology and entrepreneurship, and for Full-day organisation of the school Day', the projects of 327 schools and centres for special educational support were funded. Another 71 schools were approved for funding to establish centres for humanities.

The National programme (NP) 'Vocational education and training' continued, aiming to provide a modern material and technical base and offer quality vocational training in a real working environment in partnership with the business sector, in order to improve students' practical skills. The program's budget for 2025 is EUR 1 036 701 (BGN 2 023 820). The projects of 18 vocational high schools and schools with vocational classes have been approved for funding for the 2025–26 period.

In 2025, other national programmes approved in 2024 continued:

- (a) 'The untold stories of Bulgarians': The programme contributes to patriotic education, the development of personal qualities, values, attitudes, and motivation. It encourages joint research projects between Bulgarian schools abroad and schools within Bulgaria. In addition to fostering patriotism, the programme promotes the application of a research-based approach, the discovery, and popularisation of little-known facts and stories about great Bulgarians, events from the past, and more.
- (b) 'Studying and preserving the traditions and history of the Bulgarian army': The programme funds school projects related to researching the historical past of the Bulgarian Army. The target group is students in ISCED 3 (from 8th to 12th grade).

## **Bodies responsible**

- Ministry of Education and Science

## **Target group**

### **Learners**

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices  
Young people (15-29 years old)

### **Education professionals**

Teachers  
Trainers  
School leaders

### **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**

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

### **Modernising VET offer and delivery**

Acquiring key competences

### **Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation**

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning  
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

European Education and Training Area and international VET

## Subsystem

IVET

## Further reading

[Pre-school and School Education Act](#)

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[Ordinance No 13/21/09/2016 on Civic, health, ecological and intercultural education. Sofia: State Gazette, 80/11/10/2016](#)

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[The Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria \(2021-30\)](#)

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[National programme Education 2021 - 27](#)

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[National programme \(NP\) Support for the personal development of children and students](#)

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[Report on the national programmes for the development of education in 2023\(in Bulgarian\)](#)

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[Report on the annual goals of the administration of the Ministry of Education and Science for 2023\(in Bulgarian\)](#)

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[National Programme \(NP\) Vocational education and training\(in Bulgarian\)](#)

## Related policy developments

**2025 Implementation**

### Teacher continuous professional development (CPD) framework

The 2016 pre-school and school education Law regulates the career development of teaching staff, identifies continuous professional development (CPD) as a significant factor for career advancement, and introduces a qualification-credits approach that may lead to certified CPD.

 BULGARIA

#### Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

#### Subsystem

IVET

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## 2025 Implementation

### Curriculum update

In 2018, updated curricula were adopted for upper secondary education (grades 11 and 12). The learning objectives are set for both general education and VET learners, including a learning module on 'civil education' aimed at the acquisition of social and civic competences.

 BULGARIA

#### Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

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IVET

#### “ ... ” Cite as

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28063>