

# The OECD Bulgaria skills strategy project

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION PLAN

 BULGARIA

## Timeline

2022 Implementation

2023 Implementation

2024 Completed

ID number 46213

## Background

According to OECD country reports, Bulgaria faces immediate challenges stemming from a steep demographic decline and uncertainties about future skills demands in the country. Factors like changing and increasing skills demands, coupled with economic, demographic, and technological developments pose considerable challenges, but can also represent opportunities for innovative responses to strengthen the education and training system. This requires rethinking approaches to skills, and considering that quality expertise on formulating a strategic approach to skills is recommended by the European Commission in its Skills Agenda, it was set as a milestone in the national roadmap on Bulgaria's OECD accession.

The national implementation plan (NIP) foresees the development of a national skills strategy for quality and inclusive lifelong learning with all relevant national, regional, sectoral stakeholders and social partners. Besides education and training provision, the national skills strategy may include guidance, incentives for improved skills provision by employers, increased participation by employees, validation of prior learning and targeted public approaches for reaching out to inactive and unemployed individuals, NEETs or individuals at risk of unemployment.

## Objectives

The main objectives of project in cooperation with the OECD are:

- (a) to identify the main opportunities regarding skills in Bulgaria;
- (b) to develop tailored policy recommendations for improving Bulgaria's skills performance with the participation of the whole government, in collaboration with all ministries and stakeholders.

## Description

The cooperation with the OECD, with its methodology for skills strategies, is an action decided in the context of the proposals of the European Skills Agenda in relation to national skills strategies. More precisely, the European skills agenda recommends joint action by the Commission and EU Member States to develop national skills strategies based on the relevant OECD methodology.

Activities related to the development of the skills strategy are also reflected in the national documents within the framework of the European Semester, as the strategy supports the implementation of the *Strategic framework for the development of education, training and learning in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021-30*.

The OECD skills strategy project is implemented in two phases:

- (a) phase one: *OECD skills strategy Bulgaria: assessment and recommendations* project. In this phase the project is planned to assess Bulgaria's skills performance and provide recommendations for improving the skillset of young people and adults, for using skills effectively and for improving the governance of the skills system;
- (b) phase two: *Development of a project for a national skills strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria* which is to be built on the findings and recommendations of the OECD skills strategy Bulgaria project and support their implementation with comprehensive guidance on elaborating a *national action plan on skills policies*.

The methodological approach for the implementation of the project includes desk research, stakeholder workshops, questionnaires and reports.

This is a large-scale project targeting the whole skills system. The 4 priority categories are exhaustive in terms of target groups in the skills system – young learners, students of all age groups, adult learners, teachers, VET providers, older workers and employees (55 – 64 year-olds), unemployed and jobseekers, persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment, etc.

The thematic scope of the project is broad and comprehensive, as the skills system is, and its outputs aim to inform Bulgaria's whole-of-government strategic approach to skills, exemplifying its contribution to an agile, flexible, innovative, inclusive and quality assured VET.

From a governance perspective, the project for a national skills strategy in Bulgaria spans across multiple ministries and engages a wide array of stakeholders. It is not only aimed at raising awareness on the significance of a strategy but has also delineated a comprehensive action plan and collaborative approaches to advance it across sectors, encompassing both governmental and non-governmental entities.

The final decision on formalising the project outputs into official documentation is going to be subject to national consensus, which, given that the project completion happened during a caretaker government, lies ahead in the agenda of a regular government.

### **2022 Implementation**

A major part of the implementation of phase one of the project was carried out in 2022. It included four missions of the OECD team in Bulgaria to carry out a review of the state of skills development policies formulated and implemented by ministries and agencies with different domains - education, labour and social policy, economy, finance, tourism, innovation, etc.

### **2023 Implementation**

The completion of the first phase of the project was marked in June 2023 with the final report of the OECD, *OECD skills strategy in Bulgaria: assessment and recommendations*. This report was produced through extensive stakeholder involvement using questionnaires and holding workshops involving ministries, social partners, educational institutions, civil society organisations, etc. The report comprised recommendations in four categories identifying three opportunities for each category:

#### a. skills of youth

- (a) opportunity one: ensuring that curriculum reform and assessment practices improve students' skills;
- (b) opportunity two: developing a highly skilled teaching workforce;
- (c) opportunity three: making vocational and higher education more responsive to

labour market needs.

b. skills of adults

- (a) opportunity one: increasing motivation among adults and employers to participate in adult learning;
- (b) opportunity two: making education and training more flexible and accessible for adults and employers;
- (c) opportunity three: improving the quality and relevance of adult education and training for adults and employers.

c. use of skills in the labour market

- (a) opportunity one: activating the skills of vulnerable groups in the labour market;
- (b) opportunity two: fostering return emigration and skilled immigration to Bulgaria;
- (c) opportunity three: supporting enterprises to utilise workers' skills more effectively.

d. governance of the skills system

- (a) opportunity one: developing a whole-of-government and stakeholder-inclusive approach to skills policies;
- (b) opportunity two: building and better utilising evidence in skills development and use;
- (c) opportunity three: ensuring well-targeted and sustainable financing of skills policies.

The report prompted the second phase of the project, aiming at the implementation of the recommendations from phase one. The second phase of the project was funded by the Technical Support Instrument (TSI) of the European Commission. In 2023 the following activities were carried out:

- (a) a report identifying objectives and Bulgaria's priority policy actions for inclusion in the national skills strategy, building on the findings and recommendations of the *OECD skills strategy: assessment and recommendations Bulgaria project*;
- (b) a report providing guidance on implementing a national skills strategy by the entire government, including agreed relevant activities, instruments, timelines and stakeholders' roles and responsibilities;
- (c) a report providing guidance on developing a monitoring and reporting framework, including performance indicators for measuring the implementation progress.

## 2024 Completed

The second phase of the project was under implementation until 26 September 2024, which was the official date for the project's completion. The project delivered the agreed-upon outputs, including a report identifying objectives and Bulgaria's priority policy actions for inclusion in the national skills strategy, building on the findings and recommendations of the *OECD skills strategy: assessment and recommendations Bulgaria project* (output one). Additionally, a report was provided offering guidance on implementing a whole-of-government national skills strategy, detailing agreed activities, instruments, timelines, and stakeholders' roles and responsibilities (output two). Another report outlined a monitoring and reporting framework, incorporating performance indicators for measuring implementation progress (output three). An outline for a communication campaign to raise awareness of a future Bulgarian national skills strategy was also developed (output four). Following the outputs, a follow-up report and a capacity-building workshop for the implementation of a future skills strategy were conducted (output 5).

## Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education and Science
- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy(MLSP)
- Ministry of Economy and Industry
- National employer organisations
- Social partners
- Ministry of Innovation and Growth

## Target group

### Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices  
 Young people (15-29 years old)  
 Young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)  
 Learners with migrant background, including refugees  
 Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers  
 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)

### Education professionals

Teachers  
 Trainers  
 School leaders  
 Adult educators  
 Guidance practitioners

### Entities providing VET

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

## Thematic categories

### Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Coordinating VET and other policies  
 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

## European priorities in VET

### VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

Flexibility and progression opportunities at the core of VET

VET as a driver for innovation and growth preparing for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

VET promoting equality of opportunities

VET underpinned by a culture of quality assurance

## Subsystem

IVET CVET

## Further reading

OECD.(2023). OECD skills strategy Bulgaria: assessment and recommendations. OECD Skills Studies. OECD Publishing. Paris

### “ … ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). The OECD Bulgaria skills strategy project: Bulgaria. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

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