

**Bulgaria**

## Development of a Workforce Competence Assessment System by Sectors and Regions (CASSY)

Разработване и внедряване на информационна система за оценка на компетенциите на работната сила по браншове и региони“, изпълняван от БСК в партньорство с КНСБ и КТ  
Подкрепа

### Description

### Timespan

2009-2014

### Stage

**OTHER**

Although formally concluded in 2014, the Competence Assessment System initiative continued within the framework of a 2-year project “MyCompetence”, started by MLSP in September 2016 under “Development of National System for Competence Assessment – MY COMPETENCE” of OP HRD 2014-2020, co-funded by ESF.

### Focus area

[MATCHING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET](#)[MATCHING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK](#)

### Foundations

### Policy area

[ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES](#)

The Competence Assessment System project was implemented under Priority Axis 2: 'Increasing the productivity and adaptability of employed', areas of intervention 2.1 'Improving the adaptability of employed', 2.2 'Encouraging labour market flexibility', 2.3 'Improving the working conditions at the workplace' of Operational Programme 'Human Resource Development' 2007-2013 (OP HRD).

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## Policy goal

The overarching objective of the initiative was to enhance labour market adaptability and effectiveness, as well as to strike a greater balance of labour market demand and supply by developing a system for workforce competence assessment by sectors and regions. The rationale of the Competence Assessment System can be defined, as follows: Forecasting the demand for labour force with specific qualification levels in specific sectors and regions. The policy goal, defined in section 2 were achieved through:

- Analysing and defining workforce competence requirements by considering EU, national and sector requirements and standards;
- Establishment of a Bulgarian Competence Assessment Network by sectors and regions and improvement of the coordination and information exchange of workforce competence assessment among national, branch and regional structures of the employers and trade unions and the responsible government institutions;
- Gaining national recognition and fostering prerequisites for the integration of the workforce competence assessment system in the future e-government so as to enhance adaptability and effectiveness, and to achieve a balance of the labour market demand and supply.

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## Mismatch

### EXPLICITLY DESIGNED TO ADDRESS SKILL MISMATCH

The project idea of developing a national system for workforce competence assessment arose as a result of a dialogue between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and social partners on areas where the latter could contribute to the implementation of specific labour market-related measures. The Bulgarian Industrial Association has chosen and elaborated on activities that can help to tackle a number of challenges related to skills and competencies mismatch.

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## Aim of policy instrument



ADDRESS SKILL SHORTAGES



UPSKILL EMPLOYED ADULTS



FACILITATE JOB/CAREER TRANSITIONS

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## Legal basis

OTHER

Decision for Grant Subsidy of the Executive Director of the National Employment Agency, which stipulates the specific role of socio-economic partners in the process of utilising European financial resources and the European Social Fund.

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## Administrative level

NATIONAL

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## Main responsible body

Bulgarian Industrial Association (BIA)

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## Stakeholders

	<u>TRAINING PROVIDERS (PUBLIC/PRIVATE)</u>
	<u>CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY</u>
	<u>EMPLOYER FEDERATIONS</u>
	<u>GOVERNMENT (CENTRAL &amp; REGIONAL)</u>
	<u>GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS</u>
	<u>RESEARCH CENTRES AND UNIVERSITIES</u>
	<u>SOCIAL PARTNERS</u>
	<u>TRADE UNIONS</u>

National Employment Agency - contracting authority in its capacity of Intermediate Body for OP HRD, performing monitoring and control on the implementation of the project.  
Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria - project partner.  
Confederation of Labour "Podkrepa" - project partner.  
Government institutions, employers, trade unions, education providers, NGOs - participants in the National Competence Assessment Network, which operated as an institutional infrastructure facilitating social dialogue and encompassing all relevant stakeholders. Within its framework, 20 Sector Skills Committees were set up in the pilot sectors, 10 Regional Competence Assessment Centres were established, together with a National Competence Assessment Centre and a National Competence Assessment Council.

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## Funding

The total project budget for the period 2009-2014 was BGN 8 902 959 or €4.552 million, financed by OP HRD 2007-2013, co-funded by ESF.

Another BGN 2.5 million was committed to a follow-up initiative of MLSP, which started in September 2016 under Procedure No. BG05M9OP001-1.013 “Development of National System for Competence Assessment – MY COMPETENCE” of OP HRD 2014-2020, co-funded by ESF, Project No. BG05M9OP001-1.013-0001 “MyCompetence”.

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## Intended beneficiaries

Employers - facilitates a competence-based approach in human resource management.

Employees and job seekers - allows them to determine whether they satisfy the requirements laid down in sectoral professional labour standards.

Education institutions - supports them in their efforts to better position their learning outcomes in the context of labour demand.

Students - can become familiar with the employers' expectations and requirements for given professions, hence choose the most suitable career path and education institution for themselves.

Labour market-related institutions - the Competence Assessment System lays the foundations for developing a comprehensive system for sustainable forecasting of the demands for new skills and qualifications on labour market in Bulgaria.

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## Processes

### Use of labour market intelligence



INFORM JOB-SEARCH DECISIONS OF UNEMPLOYED



INFORM CAREER-MAKING DECISIONS OF STUDENTS



ENABLE STRATEGIC BUSINESS DECISIONS



INFORM THE DESIGN OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS (NQFS)



DESIGN STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

A Workforce Competence Assessment System MyCompetence.bg was established and updated in accordance with the current and future labour market demand.

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**Financial schemes**

The initiative was financed by a grant subsidy amounting to 100% of eligible costs.

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**Frequency of updates**

The sectoral analyses on the state of each of the 20 pilot economic sectors covered by the project were first prepared in 2011 and were subsequently updated every year.

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**Development**

As Competence Assessment System was a single-project initiative, its approach remained unchanged during the period of its implementation.

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**Barriers**

No barriers to the implementation of the initiative were identified.

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**Success factors**

BIA is a nationally representative employers' organisation in Bulgaria, capable of involving the business and all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of activities. Being a social partner, BIA is called upon to assist and cooperate with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in the implementation of labour market related policies. BIA mobilised the necessary in-house expert potential to implement such a significant project.

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**Monitoring**

The indicators used to measure progress of the initiative included: the number of economic sectors covered; the number of sector competency models developed; the number of models of key positions for respective sectors; described tasks related to the job operation; described and defined skills; identified and described competencies; descriptions of the competence demonstration levels; identified and classified competence assessment tools and development pathways; specialties identified and classified by professional fields; vocational schools; universities and regions; analyses and surveys. The above indicators and descriptors were measured upon the conclusion of project activities in 2014.

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**Innovativeness**

**VERY INNOVATIVE**

The Competence Assessment System project resulted in a unique and innovative instrument for providing an effective and sustainable link between labour market demand and the system of vocational education and professional qualification. It can assist the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Education and Science in drafting policies for the gradual convergence of State Educational Requirements and professional standards, as well as in adapting academic curricula and syllabi to labour market trends.

More specifically, research and approbation of innovative approaches to competence assessment and development were conducted throughout the project's duration, including through:

- studying innovative approaches to testing individual competencies via simulation modelling;
- approbating simulation models for competence assessment in working environment.

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## **Sustainability**

### **Evidence of effectiveness**

Over 120 analysis and surveys were made by more than 200 experts during the project, including the accumulation of data bases about leading enterprises and educational centres and surveys on topical issues. In addition, the skills assessment activities resulted in a user-friendly classification of competences for each of the 20 pilot sectors in 3 categories: 1) specific competences, 2) core competences, 3) managerial competences.

The skills assessment activities, carried out produced the following results regarding competence models, standard, skills, etc, found on the MyCompetence online portal:

- 20 sector competency models;
- 485 models of positions which are key for the sectors;
- 1,760 described tasks related to the job operation;
- 2,900 described and classified knowledge bits;
- 2,200 described and defined skills;
- 3,560 identified and described competencies;
- 14,240 descriptions of the competence demonstration levels;
- 530 identified and classified competence assessment tools;
- 710 identified and classified competence development pathways;
- 2,300 specialties identified and classified by professional fields, vocational schools, universities and regions.

Overall, the benefits for the project's target groups were as expected, namely:

- Identifying the degree of compliance with workforce competence requirements and fostering favourable conditions for enhancing productivity and adaptability;

...and providing initial assessment and continuous monitoring...

- Improving initial recruitment and continuously assessing workforce competence at company level;
  - Increasing possibilities and workforce degree of participation in lifelong learning;
  - Fostering favourable conditions for improving personal and company career perspectives and enhancing workforce employability and participation in the learning economy;
  - Enhancing company activities for continuing vocational training based on an adequate staff competence assessment and the demand for VET;
  - Improving employees' abilities to face the forthcoming challenges related to restructuring of the national economy and labour market;
  - Encouraging investment in human capital both by employers and employees;
  - Providing analytical information and forecasts about the demand for qualified workforce at sector and regional level for the purposes of secondary and tertiary education, vocational training, identification and management of labour market challenges and trends by the responsible state institutions.
- In February 2017, BIA presented a newly developed electronic module "Personal profile of the job seeker" – web application for integrating MyCompetence's system and the NEA information system. The developed module will give NEA the opportunity to deliver new high-quality services to every job seeker, who would be able to actively and effectively participate in the process of describing their skills, development and implementation of their recommended plan for development, and also to use free of charge, in their full functionality, all of the instruments for competence assessment and e-learning resources of MyCompetence.

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## **Engagement of stakeholders**

There is cooperation among relevant stakeholders, namely government institutions, operating in the field of labour market and education and training; employers and employer organisations; trade unions; education providers; and NGOs within the framework of the already established 20 Sector Skills Committees and there are 5 new Sector Skills Committees to be set up under the follow-up MLSP initiative "MyCompetence".

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## **Transferability**

**EASILY TRANSFERABLE**

As the Competence Assessment Information System is available in both Bulgarian and English language at <https://mycompetence.bg/>, it can be easily transferred to other countries. It has to be noted though, that the system has been elaborated to facilitate skills matching in the labour market in Bulgaria in particular, and if transferred to another country, it has to be adapted accordingly to respective labour supply and demand specifics.

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## Sustainability

Skills assessment is expected to evolve into a sustainable policy instrument, as BIA's Competence Assessment System initiative was continued within the framework of the 2-year project of MLSP. The project's main goal is improving the effectiveness of national policies and measures on the labour market by providing relevant data and analysis of skills and competencies needs of the workforce. The main activities build upon the results of the Competence Assessment System and include the selection of 5 new economic sectors and identification of key occupations in the selected sectors, updating developed and approved sectoral competencies models in the previous 20 economic sectors developed in the period 2009-2014, as well as the elaboration, piloting and validation of electronic module (already launched) for analysing and evaluating the training needs of the workforce.

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## Flexible employment and training opportunities in companies with varying/inconstant activity intensity

Гъвкави възможности за заетост и обучения в предприятия с променлив интензитет на дейността

### Description

### Timespan

2017 - present

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### Stage

FULLY OPERATIONAL

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### Focus area



MATCHING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET

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### Foundations

## Policy area



ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES

The overall objective of the procedure is to provide an opportunity for increasing skills matching of inactive and unemployed people. It aims to create conditions for increasing the labour productivity for more sustainable employment, and better job placement by overcoming the gap between the demand and supply in the labour market (skills mismatch).

## Policy goal

The programme attempts to address the problem of relatively high personnel turnover and job vacancies in the three targeted sectors, which is caused by the inconstant intensity of activity of companies in these sectors, resulting in skills mismatch. The policy goal is to: increase skills matching; and provide better and more sustainable job placements, leading to higher and better-quality employment. A full subsidy (100%) is given to employers of three sectors with inconstant activity intensity (Manufacturing, Construction, Accommodation and food service activities) to train unemployed and inactive persons, and re-train employed persons in skills that match to their business needs, which will be done in less busy work periods; and to provide scholarships for trainees (unemployed and inactive people).

## Mismatch

**PART OF BROADER PROGRAMME, YET WITH EXPLICIT FOCUS**

It falls under an overarching programme (HRD OP 2014-2020), which in general aims to raise employability; training and skills matching are means to this end.

## Aim of policy instrument



UPSKILL AND MATCH SKILLS OF UNEMPLOYED



UPSKILL EMPLOYED ADULTS



FACILITATE JOB/CAREER TRANSITIONS



ADDRESS SKILL SHORTAGES

## Legal basis

**MINISTERIAL ORDER**

## Administrative level

**NATIONAL**

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## Main responsible body

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP is the Managing Authority of the HRD OP 2014-2020 through DG 'European Funds, International Programmes and Projects'). The MLSP is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the HRD OP.

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## Stakeholders



GOVERNMENT (CENTRAL & REGIONAL)

The National Employment Agency (contracting authority in its capacity of Intermediate Body for OP HRD OP): performs governing, coordinating and organisational functions; allocates the necessary funds and controls the implementation.

Regional Employment Services Directorates: coordinating functions at regional level; monitoring and controls functions at regional level.

The Monitoring Committee (MC) of the HRD OP, a collective body established on the principle of partnership, which monitors the implementation of the Operational Programme, comprised of all stakeholders in the area.

VET Centres - project partners.

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## Funding

The total subsidy budget is BGN 30m (€15.34m), of which: 85% ESF and 15% national co-financing.

For a single project: minimum size of the subsidy - BGN 20,000 (€10,226); maximum - BGN 391 166 (€200,000).

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## Intended beneficiaries

Employers from 3 specific sectors: Manufacturing, Construction and Accommodation and food service activities

Unemployed and inactive persons, and employed, including self-employed people.

Eligible Partners: Employers from the 3 specific sectors and VET centres (only if 100% owned by the applicant).

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## Processes

### Use of labour market intelligence



INFORM JOB-SEARCH DECISIONS OF UNEMPLOYED



ENABLE STRATEGIC BUSINESS DECISIONS

Curricula are selected to provide training for unemployed and inactive people to find employment in the three targeted sectors that have skills shortages; and re-training of employed persons to achieve better skills matching.

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### **Financial schemes**

Subsidies (100%), based on calls for proposals, are provided to employers from 3 specific sectors to train unemployed and/or inactive people, and re-train employed persons, aiming at increasing sustainable employment and improving skills matching in these sectors. The funds are for vocational training for attaining qualifications and key competencies; and involvement of inactive/unemployed persons in non-subsidised employment with the employer (compulsory). The employer should ensure employment for a minimum of 25% of the trained unemployed/inactive persons for at least 3 months after the projects end.

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### **Frequency of updates**

Progress reports on the programme's implementation are submitted annually, including progress on concrete operations; Monitoring Committee (the body approving any changes) holds sessions twice a year.

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### **Development**

No adaptation/adjustment so far.

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### **Barriers**

No barriers are identified so far, as the procedure has just started being operational.

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### **Success factors**

No own co-financing is needed (100% subsidy). Flexibility for employers is provided to choose the periods, in which their future employees will be trained; and the periods, in which their employees will be able to apply their newly acquired or advanced skills and qualifications. This enables employers to train an appropriate labour force in the less busy months of the year, and allows them to use them in periods with more intense workload.

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### **Monitoring**

The Annual Reports on the Implementation of HRD OP provide regular information about the progress of the operation, incl. reporting data on the specific outcome and result indicators, as well as on the financial resources spent.

Planned indicators: unemployed and inactive participants - at least 5,000; employed persons - at least 2,100.

Result indicators: 4,500 unemployed/inactive persons acquired qualification; 2,500 persons in jobs; 1,900 participants acquired qualification at operation's exit.

For the new programming period, the ISUN 2020 information system for management and monitoring the EU funds in Bulgaria was developed (according to Regulation (EC) No 1303/2013) and applied in Bulgaria, improving the monitoring systems of the OPs (beneficiaries report electronically).

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## **Innovativeness**

### **SLIGHTLY INNOVATIVE**

Flexibility of employers in choosing the appropriate time for the training of unemployed/inactive persons, and re-training of employees is innovative in itself.

Identifying skills gaps by collaborating with industries is quite an innovative approach too, a good example of the skills mismatch identification policies in the country.

Provision of relevant training to boost skills in specific sectors, through provision of scholarships to unemployed/inactive persons and re-training of employees, is a fairly straightforward instrument and as such, not innovative. Albeit, for those sectors, which have high demand, without such training, the impacts of future mismatch is potentially high.

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## **Sustainability**

### **Evidence of effectiveness**

The scheme is operational since 2017, but already 47 contracts have been signed (as per August 2017). Projects have just started implementation, which means that unemployed/inactive persons and employed persons are benefiting from vocational trainings.

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## **Engagement of stakeholders**

The Monitoring Committee of the HRD OP (comprising of different types of stakeholders, including representatives of employers' organisations, academia and VET providers etc) holds meetings biannually.

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## Transferability

### EASILY TRANSFERABLE

The principle of providing training to unemployed and inactive people/re-training of employed in skills acquisition is quite transferable in itself, if funding is available, and if skills mismatch exists in similar sectors with varying activity intensity.

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## Sustainability

At present, it is not clear whether the 'Flexible employment and training opportunities in companies ' operation will have further calls for proposals in the coming years of the present programming period. Thus, its future is uncertain, as the operation relies heavily on ESF funds (85% of funds).

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## New working place 2015

### Ново работно място 2015

#### Description

#### Timespan

2015 - present

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#### Stage

FULLY OPERATIONAL

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#### Focus area



MATCHING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET

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#### Foundations

#### Policy area



ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES

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The instrument encourages real-sectors' employers to create sustainable jobs for unemployed and inactive people of all ages, including VET for hired persons on a specific working place, aiming to integrate some of the most vulnerable groups into the labour market. The scheme is aimed at contributing to the achievement of the Europe 2020 National targets in the fields of employment and the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

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#### Policy goal

The aim is to address the following problems: persisting downward trend in the number of economically active people in recent years reduced employment rate of the population aged 20-64 years; and increased unemployment rate. The key priorities of the National Reform Programme (2012-2020), of which the HRD OP's specific targets are focused in the area of unemployment and employment, are the fight against unemployment among labour market vulnerable groups, above all youth and long-term unemployed, and also the achievement of higher employment rate among older-age people. Bulgaria's national targets to the Europe 2020 Strategy are: (1) at least 76% of the 20-64 year olds to be employed by 2020, and (2) reducing the number of people living in poverty by 260,000 by 2020. Attaining these targets is of paramount importance for the vision and strategy of the HRD OP. New working place 2015, as a HRD OP scheme, will contribute to achieving both national targets, i.e. contribute to increasing employment, especially of the most vulnerable groups in the labour market, and thus, to reducing poverty in Bulgaria.

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## Mismatch

### PART OF BROADER PROGRAMME, YET WITH EXPLICIT FOCUS

It falls under an overarching programme (HRD OP 2014-2020), which in general aims to raise employability, reduce poverty and promote social inclusion; training and skills matching are means to this end.

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## Aim of policy instrument



UPSKILL AND MATCH SKILLS OF UNEMPLOYED



UPSKILL EMPLOYED ADULTS



BROADLY ADDRESS SKILL MISMATCH

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## Legal basis

MINISTERIAL ORDER

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## Administrative level

NATIONAL

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## Main responsible body

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP is the Managing Authority of the HRD OP 2014-2020 through DG 'European Funds, International Programmes and Projects'). The MLSP is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the HRD OP.

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## Stakeholders



GOVERNMENT (CENTRAL & REGIONAL)

The National Employment Agency (contracting authority in its capacity of Intermediate Body for OP HRD OP): performs governing, coordinating and organisational functions; allocates the necessary funds and controls the implementation.

Regional Employment Services Directorates: coordinating functions at regional level; monitoring and control functions at regional level.

The Monitoring Committee (MC) of the HRD OP, a collective body established on the principle of partnership, which monitors the implementation of the Operational Programme. MC is composed of members with voting right, including representatives of: the managing authorities of the other OPs, the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, specialised directorates within the administration of the Council of Ministers (CoM), the Central Coordination Unit within the administration of the CoM, specialised directorates at the Ministry of Finance, the Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues; the National Statistical Institute; the institutions responsible for the policies to be supported under the programme; the National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria; the Regional councils for the development at NUTS 2 level; the national representative organisations of employers, employees and workers; the national representative organisations of people with disabilities; the academic community; non-governmental sector; and members in advisory capacity.

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## Funding

Total budget of BGN125m (€64m), of which: 85% ESF and 15% national co-financing.

For a single project: minimum size of the subsidy - BGN 50,000 (€25,565); maximum - BGN 391 166 (€200,000).

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## Intended beneficiaries

Employers/SMEs and large companies. Eligible Target groups under this procedure: unemployed and inactive persons, no matter how long they are unemployed/inactive (registration at the Labour Offices is not obligatory for unemployed); and the following specific categories:

- Unemployed with low education (under ISCED 313);
- Long-term unemployed and inactive persons;
- Unemployed or people with disabilities;
- Unemployed persons over 54 years old;
- Unemployed youth up to 29 years.

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## Processes

### Use of labour market intelligence



INFORM JOB-SEARCH DECISIONS OF UNEMPLOYED

The use of LMSI is limited to the process of determining the priority target group.

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## Financial schemes

Subsidies, based on calls for proposals, are provided to employers to hire unemployed and inactive people of all ages and to train them (for a period of 12 months). A particular focus (50%) is given to priority target group segments. The scheme provides subsidies of 100% to SMEs and 80% to large companies. The funds are for vocational training for attaining qualifications and key competencies; salaries; equipment for the new jobs; reconstruction, if people with disabilities are hired (up to 10% of the direct costs); provision of mentors for people with disabilities, who are employed; costs of purchasing work clothes, personal protective equipment, equipment and furnishings, intangible fixed assets and business inventory, if well-justified (up to 30% of the total project costs). The employer should retain a minimum of 50% the new jobs created for the hired people for at least 12 months after projects end.

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## Frequency of updates

If needed, the update of the operation, including its budget, could be done with Managing Authority decision, approved by the Monitoring Committee of the HRD OP. Due to the high interest, the budget of the 'New working place 2015' operation was increased (initially planned budget: BGN 40m or about €20.5m).

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## Development

The approach has not undergone any changes since the start of the scheme. The 'New working place 2015' scheme (under HRD OP 2014-2020) is a kind of continuation of a scheme under HRD OP 2007-2013, with a similar scope of activities (New working place), which has had a more limited target group: unemployed up to the age of 29 and more limited funding (about €9m). The 'New working place 2015' has a broader target group, i.e. unemployed and inactive persons of all ages, but with a mandatory 50% quota on those most vulnerable in the labour market. Reasons for this include: that increased long-term unemployment is a worrying obstacle for the skills supply in the country; and prolonged joblessness tends to be associated with skills atrophy and employer distrust.

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## **Barriers**

No barriers are identified so far (the scheme was opened in 2015, and the first contracts were signed in 2016).

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## **Success factors**

No own co-financing is needed for SMEs (100% subsidy), which results in a strong interest from employers for participation in the scheme.

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## **Monitoring**

The Annual Reports on the Implementation of HRD OP provide regular information about the progress of the 'New working place 2015' scheme, including reporting data on the specific outcome and result indicators, as well as on the financial resources spent. For the new programming period, the ISUN 2020 information system for management and monitoring the EU funds in Bulgaria was developed (according to Regulation (EC) No 1303/2013) and applied in Bulgaria, improving the monitoring systems of the OPs (beneficiaries report electronically).

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## **Innovativeness**

**SLIGHTLY INNOVATIVE**

Broad target group to respond to any specific employers' needs, yet with a focus on identified problematic categories of unemployed and inactive people; combination of employment and vocational training, including on-the-job training. As a result, the interest to the scheme is extremely high.

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## **Sustainability**

## Evidence of effectiveness

The scheme has been operational since 2015. It's too early for impact and effectiveness evaluations. According to the 2016 Report on the Implementation of the HRD OP: 1,077 persons were included in 2016 in 'New working place 2015'; progress was made on all performance indicators, particularly for the 54+ age group; no progress was reported on result indicators due to the late start of activities in 2016; significant increase is expected in 2017, when the result indicators will be reported. Projects are in a phase of implementation (508 contracts with employers signed in 2016), which means that unemployed and inactive persons have benefited with employment over a sustained period of time, and part of them have benefited attainment of qualification as well.

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## Engagement of stakeholders

The Monitoring Committee of the HRD OP (comprising of different types of stakeholders, including representatives of employers' organisations) holds meetings biannually.

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## Transferability

### EASILY TRANSFERABLE

The principle of providing jobs to unemployed and inactive people is quite transferable in itself. The instrument consists solely of subsidy provision; no significant increase of administrative burden is expected. Costs do not seem to pose an obstacle to transferability, if funding is available in other countries too.

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## Sustainability

At present, it is not clear whether the 'New working place 2015' operation will have further "calls for proposals" in the coming years of the present programming period. Thus, its future is uncertain, as the operation relies heavily on ESF funds (85% of funds).

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## Programme 'Career Start'

Програма "Старт на кариерата"

### Description

### Timespan

2003 - present

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## Stage

FULLY OPERATIONAL

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## Focus area



MATCHING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET

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## Foundations

### Policy area



ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES

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The 'Career Start' Programme is in line with the youth employment integration priority laid down in the National Reform Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria, and is aimed at contributing to the achievement of the Europe 2020 National target for employment.

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## Policy goal

The programme 'Career start' addresses the gap between education and employment. It facilitates the transition between education and employment by providing a possibility to gain work experience.

The Programme addresses the difficulties that young secondary school and university graduates face immediately after graduation in their efforts to find jobs that match the knowledge and skills they have acquired during their education. The 'Career Start' programme includes two components. The target group of the first component are university graduates aged up to 29 years without work experience, who are registered at the Labour Offices. They are given the possibility to gain experience in public administration (i.e. national institutions, regional and local administrations) for the period of nine months. The Minister of Labour and Social Policy approves an annual quota for the job placements.

The target group of the second component refers to young people up to 24 years old, who have completed vocational education in the past two years, have no work experience in their occupation and are registered at the Labour Offices. They are provided with an opportunity to gain experience in private companies for the period of six months.

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## Mismatch

PART OF BROADER PROGRAMME, YET WITH EXPLICIT FOCUS

The 'Career Start' Programme is implemented in the context of the National Youth Strategy 2010-2020 of the Republic of Bulgaria, as it contributes to the achievement of Strategic objective No.1: 'Encourage the economic activity and career development of young people', through provision of opportunities for gaining work experience in the state administration and private sector.

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**Aim of policy instrument**

MATCH SKILLS OF YOUNG GRADUATES

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**Legal basis**

**MINISTERIAL ORDER**

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**Administrative level**

**NATIONAL**

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**Main responsible body**

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

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**Stakeholders**

GOVERNMENT (CENTRAL & REGIONAL)



GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS

Ministry of Education and Science: promotes the programme through its Regional Education Offices.

National Employment Agency: performs governing, coordinating and organisational functions; allocates the necessary funds and controls the programme implementation.

Regional Employment Services Directorates: coordinating functions at regional level; grants employers the financial resources for participation in the programme; monitoring and control functions at regional level.

Labour Offices: carries out the actual implementation of the programme; provides intermediary services for young people and employers; concludes contracts with employers for granting resources for the young people hired under the programme; performs control and coordinating functions at the local level; assists external control organs in their work.

Employment Committees: members of the Committee participate in committees for selection of candidates for jobs in public administration at regional and local level; performs monitoring and control functions.

Regional Administrations: participates in information campaign for promoting the programme and attracting youth candidates; the Regional Governor assigns the Committee for the selection of candidates for the region and its municipalities.

Municipal Administrations: participates in information campaign for promoting the programme and attracting youth candidates.

Employers - partners under the programme: ensures suitable jobs for young people applying as part of the programme; makes a final selection among the youth candidates, pre-recruited by the Labour Offices; concludes labour contracts and pay remunerations to selected youth candidates.

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## **Funding**

A total of €3,027 million from the State Budget was allocated to the programme for 2017. The funds have constantly been increased over the years - a trend, which is expected to continue in the future.

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## **Intended beneficiaries**

The 'Career Start' Programme is implemented in two components:

Component 1: targeting young people of 29 years of age and younger with no work experience, who have completed their higher education and are registered in the Labour Offices.

Component 2: addressing young people of 24 years of age and younger, who have completed their vocational education in the past two years, have no working experience on their occupations and are registered at the Labour Offices.

The benefits for both types of beneficiaries, mentioned above, is associated with the working experience that they will gain by participating in the programme, which will facilitate their transition from education to employment.

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## Processes

### Use of labour market intelligence

● ● ● OTHER

The use of LMSI is limited to the process of determining the annual quota for job placements in the central, regional and municipal administrations and its approval by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. The annual quotas are based on the declared needs of the administrative structures and specify the available number of positions and department within the respective administration, as well as the requirements to the prospective candidates for each position including academic specialty and acquired skills (computer literacy, foreign languages, etc.).

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## Financial schemes

Resources are granted in the form of subsidies to employers, who have hired young people under the Programme, pre-recruited by the Labour Bureau Directorates, covering salaries and employer social security contributions.

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## Frequency of updates

The LMSI of the Programme is updated annually with the quotas for job placements in the central/regional/municipal administrations, approved by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy.

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## Development

The approach described above has not undergone any changes since the onset of the Programme in 2003.

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## **Barriers**

The most serious barrier to the effective implementation of the 'Career Start' Programme, especially in Component 2, is the weak interest in participation in the programme on the part of private sector employers. This issue has obviously not been effectively addressed, as since 2012 only Component 1 of the Programme has been implemented.

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## **Success factors**

The effective planning and selection procedures seem to be the key factors for maintaining the high success level of Component 1 of the programme.

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## **Monitoring**

The Annual Report of the National Employment Agency provides regular information about the progress of the 'Career Start' Programme, including reporting data on the following indicators:

- a) number of individuals, included in employment under the Programme;
- b) number of individuals, employed under the Programme during the year (average number per month);
- c) financial resources spent under the Programme.

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## **Innovativeness**

### **VERY INNOVATIVE**

The 'Career Start' Programme is the only initiative in Bulgaria that provides opportunities for young university graduates to gain work experience by being employed in the central, regional or municipal administration. Due to the systematic approach, by including the programme in the Annual Employment Action Plan, its impact has increased over the years, as a general upward trend can be observed in the number of job placements since the onset of the programme (in 2016 placement numbers has increased nearly two times compared to 2003).

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## **Sustainability**

### **Evidence of effectiveness**

Nearly 9,000 young people were newly included in the 'Career Start' Programme for the period 2003-2016, the majority of whom were under Component 1 - young university graduates up to 29 years of age. According to the Ex-post Assessment of the ALMPs Effect at Individual Level, carried out in 2015, the overall impact of the Programme is among the highest, compared to other ALMPs, implemented in Bulgaria, as 74.1% of all participants in the Programme stayed in employment. As already mentioned, the benefits were mostly for the Programme's Component 1 participants, i.e. young university graduates, while the benefits for Component 2 target group - young people with vocational education degree, were negligible. The participation in the programme substantially improved the employment prospects for young university graduates, as the level of employment sustainability among them is nearly 80%, whereas for the remaining 20%, the rate of long-term unemployment is nearly 0%.

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## **Engagement of stakeholders**

The Order of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy, issued on an annual basis, clearly describes the roles of all the stakeholders, involved in the implementation of the programme, namely: Ministry of Education and Science, National Employment Agency, Regional Employment Services Directorates, Labour Offices, Employment Committees, Regional and Municipal Administrations, etc.

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## **Transferability**

### **EASILY TRANSFERABLE**

The 'Career Start' Programme can be easily transferred in countries with:

- a) relatively high personnel turnover and hence many job vacancies in the public administration sector, which is usually caused by the lower level of remunerations there, compared to the private sector; and/or
- b) high level of employment security for those occupying positions in the state administration.

Of the two components of the programme, Component 1 is by far the most successful and can be best transferred to other countries, including the processes of job placement planning, definition of selection criteria, recruitment process and opportunities offered for sustainable employment of new youth recruits.

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## **Sustainability**

Bearing in mind that the 'Career Start' Programme has been established as one of the most successful ALMPs over the last decade, one can expect the implementation of this instrument to continue over the years to come. In addition, being financed by the State Budget, the Programme has a stable source of funding, unlike some other initiatives, which are highly dependent on EU grant funding and are hence of questionable financial sustainability.

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## Updating Higher Education Curricula in Compliance with Labour Market Requirements

**Актуализиране на учебните програми във висшето образование в съответствие с изискванията на пазара на труда**

### Description

### Timespan

2012-2015

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### Stage

OTHER

Although formally completed in 2015, the Updating Higher Education Curricula policy instrument will continue in 2018 (as per the provisional Indicative Work Programme for 2018 of the Managing Authority of the Operational Programme 'Science and Education for Smart Growth' - the Ministry of Education and Science), as part of a wider initiative for adjusting the vocational and higher education systems to the labour market needs.

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### Focus area



MATCHING SKILLS FOR TODAY'S JOB MARKET

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### Foundations

### Policy area



HIGHER EDUCATION

The policy instrument is associated with bringing the curricula, used to educate students in the system of higher education in Bulgaria, in line with labour market needs.

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## Policy goal

The policy instrument addresses the need for better defining the range of skills and knowledge offered in the system of higher education, through establishing active cooperation mechanisms between higher education institutions and business entities and their associations. Thus, the policy goal of the initiative is to translate the social order for new professionals of the Bulgarian business into the language of education. The intervention contributed to the establishment of a direct link between HEIs on the one hand and employers on the other, including at higher and mid-management level. Key business experts were attracted, together with academics to redefine and update university curricula to better respond to labour market needs. Strategies were elaborated at HEI level for the development of the different degrees of education by professional fields and/or specialties, as a direct response to the needs of the business sector.

## Mismatch

### EXPLICITLY DESIGNED TO ADDRESS SKILL MISMATCH

The Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative aims to create direct link between management bodies and academia of higher education institutions on the one hand and the employers' organisations, large enterprises and key experts, on the other, to jointly re-define and update the curricula in the system of higher education.

## Aim of policy instrument



MATCH SKILLS OF YOUNG GRADUATES

## Legal basis

### OTHER

Decision for Grant Subsidy of the Minister of Education and Science.

## Administrative level

### NATIONAL

## Main responsible body

Ministry of Education and Science

## Stakeholders



GOVERNMENT (CENTRAL & REGIONAL)



EMPLOYER FEDERATIONS



CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY



RESEARCH CENTRES AND UNIVERSITIES



SOCIAL PARTNERS

The types of stakeholders, involved in the implementation of the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative were, as follows:

- 36 Higher education institutions - project beneficiaries, responsible for implementation of their project proposals.
- Ministry of Finance, Regional structures of MES, National Employment Agency, Executive Forest Agency, regional and municipal administrations, hospitals, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, employer federations, employers, NGOs, media - project partners, directly involved in the implementation of project activities.

The overall role of all stakeholders mentioned above was to establish sustainable cooperation mechanisms for achieving the overarching objective of the policy instrument.

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## Funding

The total Budget for the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative was BGN 11 571 996.29 or nearly €6 million, financed by OP HRD 2007-2013, co-funded by ESF.

Another BGN 2 million is provisionally committed to a follow-up initiative of MES, foreseen to be launched in 2018, involving HEIs as associated partners, regarding the adaptation of the higher education system to the labour market needs.

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## Intended beneficiaries

Higher education institutions and academics - the initiative foresaw bringing university curricula closer to the labour market needs and hence improving the positions of participating higher education institutions in the market of educational services.

Students - the initiative envisaged to provide them with education experiences in practical environment, and attract representatives of business entities, government institutions and other relevant stakeholders to participate as guest lecturers in the delivery of academic courses.

Among the key benefits of the initiative are the strengthened cooperation with the business sector, deeper involvement of business experts in the education process and increasing the weight of practically-oriented education in universities.

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## Processes

### Use of labour market intelligence

● ● ● OTHER

The application guidelines of the Updating Higher Education Curricula call for proposals defined as the 'analysis of the priority specialties in compliance with the specific business needs and labour market requirements'. Thus, beneficiary HEIs engaged (either before or during project implementation) in analysis of labour market demand trends and specifics concerning their particular education fields, in cooperation with the business sector, in order to identify the key aspects of their curricula to be updated and adapt them to the actual skills needs of the business sector.

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### Financial schemes

The initiative was financed by a grant subsidy amounting to 100% of eligible costs.

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### Frequency of updates

The Application guidelines of the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative did not envisage the creation of mechanisms for periodic update of the university curricula based on observed or anticipated changes in skills needs of the business sector. Hence, no such actions were taken by participating HEIs.

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### Development

As Updating Higher Education Curricula was a single-project initiative, its approach remained unchanged during the period of its implementation.

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### Barriers

The only obstacle to the timely introduction of the updated curricula in the participating HEIs were the heavy administrative procedures, that had to be followed in the process. As a result, the university curricula, which were updated within the framework of the initiative, were introduced in 31 of 36 HEIs during the initiative's lifetime.

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### Success factors

The key factor that contributed to the success of the initiative was the involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders, including single employers, employers' organisations, government institutions etc, in the implementation of separate projects of HEIs. This involvement ensured the relevance of the updated curricula to the actual skills needs of the businesses in Bulgaria.

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## **Monitoring**

The following indicators to measure progress were defined in the Application guidelines:

- The number/percentage of HEIs that have introduced new curricula.
- The number/percentage of students, educated on the updated curricula.

The above indicators and descriptors were measured upon the conclusion of project activities in 2015.

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## **Innovativeness**

### **VERY INNOVATIVE**

The Updating Higher Education Curricula policy instrument is highly innovative for Bulgaria, as this was the first case of such a large-scale initiative being undertaken, involving 70% of all HEIs in Bulgaria, in an attempt to improve the process of matching higher education outcomes to labour market needs.

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## **Sustainability**

### **Evidence of effectiveness**

In the framework of the Updating Higher Education Curricula initiative, 36 (out of 51) higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bulgaria received financial support for the implementation of the project proposal, aimed at improving the quality of education they offer in accordance with the labour market needs. In all 36 HEIs new curricula were introduced, designed with the participation of the business sector and taking into account the specifics of labour market demand. The benefits, resulting from the implementation of the initiative, exceeded expectations and can be outlined in the following aspects:

- Established sustainable ties between HEIs, the business sector and the regional/municipal administrations for effective functioning of the 'knowledge triangle' (HEIs-research-business).
- Creation of work groups of academics, employers, key experts from the business sector, cooperating to design curricula in order to enhance the practical applicability of education outcomes in the system of higher education.
- Engaging, on a long-term basis, key experts and leading specialists as guest lecturers in the delivery of university courses.
- Active partnership between HEIs and business in providing the most adequate environment for practical training of students: organising and conducting practical exercises in a real working environment, conducting seminar exercises for students with the participation of business practitioners, etc.
- Established effective cooperation between HEIs and employers for updating the existing and designing new curricula for priority specialties in conformity with the specific needs of the business at regional level.
- Established effective cooperation with the business for professional realisation of graduates at regional level: business representatives and employers were introduced to prospective job candidates, framework agreements were concluded on providing jobs opportunities for university graduates. Besides employers and employers' organisations, a large number of government institutions, regional/municipal administrations, NGOs, etc. were involved in the implementation of the initiative as partners under the separate projects, which further enhanced the benefits for HEIs and students in terms of both economic and public sectors covered.

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## **Engagement of stakeholders**

The key pre-requisites for the sustainable engagement of employers and their associations in the continuous process of updating university curricula to the skills needs of the business sector are associated with the established partnerships under the initiative, which proved to be of mutual benefit for both HEIs and their students on the one hand, and for employers, on the other.

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## Transferability

### EASILY TRANSFERABLE

The key prerequisite for successfully transferring the policy instrument to other countries is the willingness of the business sector and all other relevant stakeholders to engage in skills matching activities in the field of higher education. This satisfied, all of the elements of the initiative could be transferred, namely:

- analysis of curricula with regards to their correspondence with labour market needs;
- involvement of business experts in the educational process in HEIs;
- updating / creation of new university curricula;
- approbation of the updated / newly created curricula in the education process;
- deeper involvement of the business sector in the application of the updated curricula through organisation of study visits for students to business enterprises.

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## Sustainability

The Updating Higher Education Curricula policy instrument will continue in 2018 as part of a wider initiative for adjusting the vocational and higher education systems to the labour market needs. This is foreseen in the still provisional Indicative Work Programme for 2018 of the Ministry of Education and Science. HEIs will be involved as associated partners under this new initiative, whereas its main goal is to continue the process of updating university curricula and vocational programmes to better answer the skills needs of the business sector, as defined in the vocational standards and competency profiles of positions and occupations in leading sectors of the Bulgarian economy. Thus, the new initiative will seek for establishing a direct link between university curricula and the Competence Assessment System 'My Competence'.

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