



## National summary sheets on education systems in Europe and ongoing reforms

2005 Edition



## BULGARIA

### I. Description of education system

#### 1. Education population and language of instruction

In 1997, the number of people aged 29 or under was 3 242 600 (39% of the population), including children of compulsory school age (1 112 176). The official language of instruction is Bulgarian.

#### 2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

Almost all pupils (99.58%) attend public-sector schools, which are directly controlled and administered by the public authorities, and funded by the State.

The administration of education is organised at four levels, national, regional, municipal and school. The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) lays down and applies national education policy, and plans and organises the development of education by putting together long-term programmes and operational projects. The municipal bodies in charge of education form part of the national structure, and take part in the implementation of municipal education policy. They are responsible *inter alia* for the compulsory education of pupils up to the age of 16, pre-school education and funding. The autonomy of schools has been considerably extended in recent years. The teaching council, the board of management and the head teachers are the administrative bodies of schools, and expected to meet the necessary conditions in the areas of teaching, organisation, methodology, administration and management. The inspection of education and its results are handled by the relevant authorities, namely the MES, the regional inspectorate, head teachers and their assistants.

#### 3. Pre-primary education

Pre-school education is considered to be the first level of the school system and caters for children aged between 3 and 6 or 7. The majority of nursery schools (*Detska gradina*), at which attendance is optional, are set up by the municipalities. An enrolment fee, which is considerably reduced for low-income families, must be paid. In 1995/96, the attendance rate was 67.50%.

#### 4. Compulsory full-time education

##### (a) Phases

<i>Начално училище Natchalno uchilishte</i> (primary)	6/7-9/10 years of age
<i>Прогимназия Progimnazia</i> (general lower secondary)	10/11-14/15 years of age
<i>Професионално технически училища (Profesionalno-technicheski utchilichta)</i> technical/vocational classes	13/14 years of age
Technical/vocational Schools, Technical schools (different types of upper secondary schools)	14/15-17/18 years of age

Education is compulsory for children from the age of 6 or 7 (at the discretion of the parents) up to the age of 16. Children complete their compulsory education in upper secondary schools.

##### (b) Admission criteria

Basic (primary and lower secondary) education is free, except in private-sector schools. Additional criteria include distance and parental choice.

##### (c) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year comprises 160 days for primary education and 170 days for lower secondary education. The subjects (minimum 22 lessons lasting 35 minutes at the start of primary education and

40-45 minutes at other levels) are spread over five days a week. The minimum number of hours of teaching a year is 470 or 528 for primary education, and from 765 to 867 for lower secondary education.

**(d) Class size/student grouping**

In 1995/96, the number of pupils per teacher was 14 at primary and lower secondary levels, and 13 at upper secondary level. There were on average between 20 and 25 pupils, and 19 and 20 pupils, in each primary and lower secondary class, respectively. The law stipulates that the minimum number of pupils per class is 17, and the maximum 26. Classes are mixed and made up of pupils of the same age. From first to fourth years, one teacher works with only one class. At lower secondary level, each subject is taught by a specialist teacher.

**(e) Curricular control and content**

There is one single school curriculum for primary education, which is compulsory for all pupils in the first to fourth years of education. The curriculum for lower secondary education is also uniform and compulsory. Teachers are free to use the textbooks and teaching materials of their choice (from a list approved by the Ministry of Education and Science).

**(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications**

Pupil knowledge and skills are assessed throughout the school year (oral, written, practical and other forms of testing). Assessment is carried out regularly by the teacher and in co-operation with the state administrative bodies. First-year pupils do not repeat the year. At the end of the fourth year, pupils receive the primary education certificate (*Svidetelstvo za natchalno obrazovanie*), and automatically move on to lower secondary level. If they successfully complete their eighth year (with no final examination), they receive a basic education certificate enabling them to enter upper secondary education. Technical/vocational classes end in vocational training examinations (*izpit po teoria i praktika na profesjata*) leading to a vocational lower qualifying certificate.

## **5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education**

**(a) Types of education**

<i>Средни общообразователни училища, Профилирани гимназии</i> (general secondary schools including specialized sections)	14/15-17/18 years of age (4/5 years)
<i>Средни професионално-технически училища</i> Technical/vocational secondary schools	15-17 years of age (3 years)
<i>Техникуми</i> Technical schools	14-18 years of age (4/5 years)

**(b) Admission criteria**

In Bulgaria, secondary education is free, except in private-sector schools. The basic education certificate is sufficient for admission to this level of education. Nevertheless, in specialised schools (for example, language or technical schools), there are entrance examinations which vary according to the type of school.

**(c) Curricular control and content**

Teaching syllabuses are set at national level. The general subjects are the same and are compulsory for all pupils in general secondary schools. Compulsory and optional subjects are each selected and taught in accordance with the specialisation of the school.

Vocational studies include compulsory general education and specialised vocational training. In technical schools, the compulsory general subjects are the same for all pupils. Compulsory and optional subjects vary in accordance with the area of specialisation.

**(d) Assessment, progression and qualifications**

At this level, pupil assessment is similar to the arrangements for basic education. General upper secondary courses (including specialised sections), technical courses and technical/vocational courses end in final examinations (*zrelostnii izpitii*) leading to the secondary education certificate (*Diploma za sredno/sredno spetsialno obrazovanie*). Courses in technical and vocational schools also end with final vocational examinations (*izpit po teoria i praktika na professjata*) leading to a vocational qualifying

certificate (*Svidetelstvo za profesionalna kvalifikatsia*). The secondary education certificate is required for admission to higher education.

## **6. Higher Education**

### **(a) Types of institutions**

In Bulgaria, there are non-university higher education institutions (*kollegi*) and university higher education institutions which are universities and specialised higher schools (academies and institutes).

### **(b) Access**

Admission criteria vary in accordance with the type of institution and its own special conditions (secondary school leaving certificate with written examination(s), tests or competitive selection based on the school academic record). Higher education institutions are autonomous, and can thus choose their preferred kind of examination.

### **(c) Qualifications**

Non-university courses lead to the *Specialist po...* degree. The *bakalavur* degree is awarded at the end of university courses lasting at least four years. University courses lasting 5-6 years or more lead to the *magistur* degree, which can also be obtained at the end of a one-year course after the *bakalavur*. The *magistur* enables students to take three-year university courses for a doctorate (the *doktor*).

## **7. Special needs**

At present, the majority of children with special educational needs attend special schools. The integration of these children into mainstream education is under way, and depends on the disability concerned. The type of education provided in schools catering for special needs is very similar in structure to that of mainstream education.

## **8. Teachers**

Teachers who work in pre-primary and primary education (general teachers) are trained in non-university higher education (3-4 years) or at university level (4-5 years). Teachers in lower and upper secondary schools (specialists) acquire their qualifications through university courses lasting four or five years. Teachers work under contract and are employed by the head teachers.

## **II. Ongoing Reforms and Topics of Debate in Education**

In the field of secondary education there are two major events:

On *February 9 2005* the Council of Ministers of Republic of Bulgaria adopted with Decision N 81 the National Strategy and the Action Plan for the Implementation of ICT in Bulgarian Secondary Schools. Following that Decision, the documents will be subject to discussion and adoption by the Bulgarian Parliament. The documents are in compliance with Strategic objective 1: Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU/Objective 1.3. Ensuring access to ICT for everyone of the work program the European Commission adopted as a follow-up to the Lisbon European Council. The Strategy defines the objectives, the target groups, the activities, the financial framework and the organizational structure for the implementation of ICT. The Action Plan covers a period of 2 years 2005-2007, and foresees investments for 140 987 BGL. The expected results are: PCs delivery for primary and secondary schools, by reaching the ratio 12 pupils per PC, Internet connection, Teacher training, Specialized software development.

Further developments related to the Lisbon Strategy is the adoption on *25 February 2005* by the Bulgarian Parliament of a Program and Action Plan for increasing the enrollment rates in compulsory school age. The Program sets strategic priorities for improving data on enrollment rates by providing equal access to education for all. The objectives are as follows: provision of textbooks and school materials for pupils from grades I-IV in state and municipality schools in Bulgaria; school network optimization; provision of breakfast at school for all pupils from grades I-IV; assistance to the parents; establishment of inter-institutional cooperation within the framework of the program.

As to the higher education the most important development was the official implementation of the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement in their capacity of measures supporting mobility and assisting recognition in Europe. That legal initiative is in compliance with the decisions of the Berlin Conference of the European Ministers in charge of higher education in the framework of the Bologna Process. With the texts of the Higher Education Act adopted by the Bulgarian Parliament on June 4 2004 (State Gazette issue 48/04.06.2004) both the ECTS and the Diploma Supplement were legally introduced. Accordingly, the secondary legislation was updated thus providing the legal framework for their practical implementation. That secondary legislation consists of the Ordinance on the state requirements on the content of the basic documents issued by the higher education institutions, adopted with Council of Ministers Decree N 215 as of 12.08.2004. At the same time the Diploma Supplement has been promoted by different means (including seminars at national and university level, information brochures, meetings etc.) in order to assist the higher education institutions with these activities. Thus, as from 2005 the graduates will receive the Diploma Supplement automatically issued in English and Bulgarian. The second document is the Ordinance N 21 for the implementation of a system for credits accumulation and transfer within the higher education institutions (State Gazette issue N 89/12.10.2004)

*Unrevised English*

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