



Work Package 2:

Research and Contextualisation

Partner Research Report

Bulgaria

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## Declaration

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication (communication) reflects the views of the author(s) and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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## 1. Background and introduction

### 1.1. The report aims to

- a) understand current national strategies which support the transition from non-compulsory or mature learners as well as other underrepresented groups such as students from ethnic minorities and students with disabilities to Higher Education and build on, or develop new, strategies and resources<sup>1</sup>;
- b) identify existing models, structures, strategies and pedagogies in the partner country along with good practice, strengths and weaknesses;
- c) provide information for the comparative study and then to develop supportive strategies and resources for both the transition of these groups to HE and completion of their first year of HE study.

### 1.2. Introducing the theme

Since 1989, Bulgaria's higher education sector has undergone significant transformation, marked by a rapid transition from overregulation to academic and institutional autonomy of higher education institutions (HEIs) (1990 and 1995), redesign of HEI governance models (1999), and introduction of per capita financing linked to student enrolment (1999). Bulgaria's participation in the Bologna process since 1999 has led to the introduction of the three-stage structure of higher education degrees (bachelor, master and doctor) and the institutional reorganisation and strengthening of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (NEAA).

The rapid expansion of private HEIs, in parallel to the upward trend of enrolment in public universities, has changed the sector's size and structure and enhanced competition among providers. The number of higher education students increased by 16% in the last ten years while the number of secondary education graduates dropped by 13% over the same period. The net enrolment rate for tertiary education has reached 41% of the population aged 19-23 (2010). Three main consequences have emerged from the expanded coverage of tertiary education: increased student-teacher ratios, decreased unit costs for higher education, and greater heterogeneity of students with regard to their skills and learning capacity.

In this context the main challenges that the Bulgarian society has to face in the area of higher education lie in: 1) providing support to students for finding a job during studying and immediately after graduation, and 2) providing pedagogical, psychological and financial assistance to students in order to help them overcome problems related to social problems and intensified competitive study

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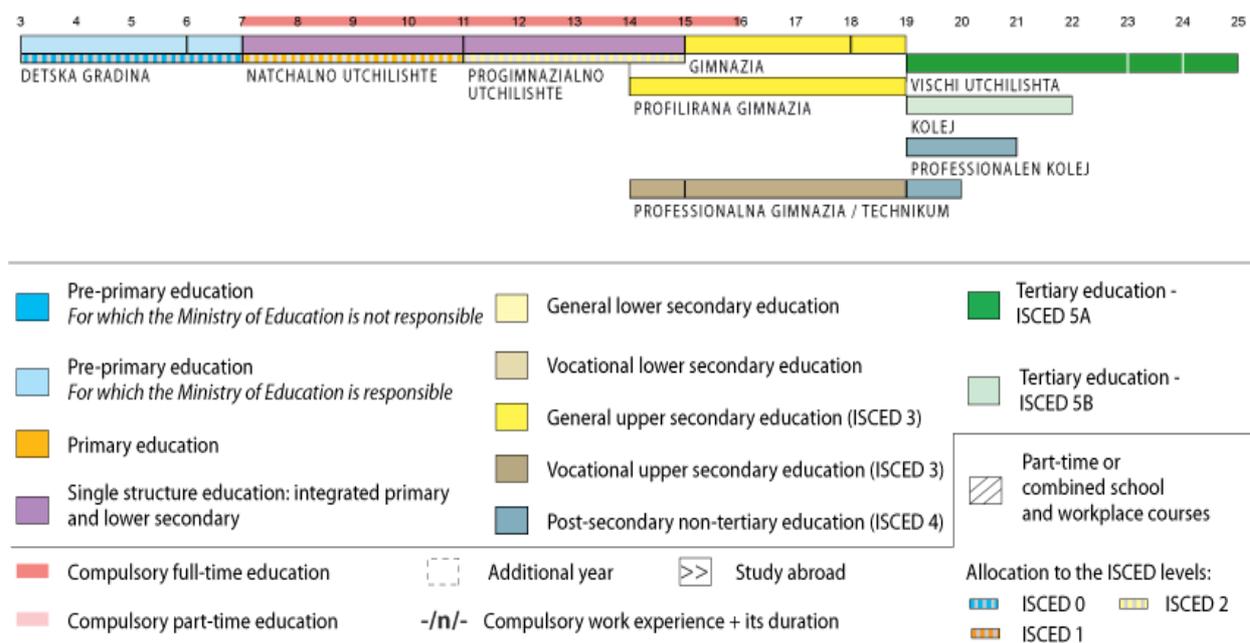
<sup>1</sup> The report was elaborated based on desk research of existing resources and information performed by the Bulgarian research team.

and professional realisation environment, which may eventually lead to dropout from the system of HE.

## 2. Theoretical guidelines

In the Republic of Bulgaria the education system is centrally managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science (MEYS).

Early childhood education and care is managed by local authorities, and is not part of the State's responsibilities. Primary and lower secondary education is organised as a single structure system, beginning at the age of 7 (or 6 at the discretion of their parents) and consisting of 8 years of compulsory schooling. Upper secondary education is compulsory for students until they reach 16 years of age, but the vast majority of the population continues studies up to 12th grade. Higher education is provided exclusively by autonomous universities (see Figure 1 below).



Source: Eurydice

Figure 1. Structure of the Educational system in Bulgaria

### 2.1. Pre-primary education

In Bulgaria, kindergartens and schools are public, municipal or private, depending on the type of their funding. The early education and care is delivered at two levels as the pre-primary care system



includes: nursery school for children aged 0-3 and kindergarten for children aged 3 to entering the first grade (children aged 6 or 7).

Pre-primary education for five-year-olds is compulsory. According to the regulations in place, from school year 2010/11 onwards, all children are subject to two school year compulsory pre-primary education, either at kindergartens or in preparatory groups at primary schools. The state provides free of-charge education aid for children enrolled in the compulsory pre-primary group. The compulsory pre-primary education can only take place on a half-day basis.

Kindergarten attendance for children aged between three and five years old is still optional and depends on parental choice.

## 2.2. School education

School education is compulsory from the age of 6/7 up to the age of 16. Within the structure of Bulgarian education, primary and lower secondary education are integrated into a single structure. Basic (single structure) education in Bulgaria (1st to 8th grade) includes primary (1st to 4th grade) and lower secondary (5th to 8th grade) schooling. Basic education can be acquired at state, municipal or private schools. All schools are coeducational. With the exception of private schools all education is free of charge. Basic education can be acquired at primary schools (1st to 4th grade), lower secondary schools (5th to 8th grade) or secondary general schools (1st to 12th grade). There are schools offering lower secondary vocational education and training, as well as specialised education (for example, in Mathematics) too. All 1st to 7th graders of all schools have free of charge textbooks. On completing their 7th grade after sitting for national standardised tests, students can enrol at vocational or specialised in a particular field of studies schools, where they finish their basic and move on to upper secondary education.

School education provides education and upbringing of pupils in accordance with social needs and their individual abilities and expectations for successful further studies and realization in society.

General education provides acquisition of the general education minimum and, where possible, specialised training, according to the State Education Requirements (SER). Basic education aims to give students basic knowledge and skills, assisting them in their studies, provoking them to be active, to think independently and critically, and to show creativity.

After the compulsory tax-free pre-school year students are enrolled in 1st grade, the choice of school being at their parents' discretion. First graders are basically 7 years of age, though children at the age of six can also be enrolled as first-grade pupils, depending on their physical and mental development, according to their parents' or guardians' judgment.



### 2.3. Upper Secondary and Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education

In the Republic of Bulgaria secondary education is single-staged (upper secondary/high school education), lasting 4 or 5 years and leading to completion of secondary education. Secondary education is acquired on completing 12th grade.

For those students who want to go further with their education it also includes successfully taking state matriculation exams. It is certified with a diploma of completed secondary education, which entitles the holder to continue his education or vocational training. In case students decide not to sit for state matriculation examinations, they are issued a certificate of completed upper secondary education, which, however, does not entitle them to university enrolment.

Education at state and municipality run schools is free of charge. Schools are co-educational.

Upper secondary education can be general (offered at general and specialised study courses schools) and vocational. General upper secondary education is acquired at general schools (with a course of study of 4 years) and specialised schools (with a course of study of 4 or 5 years). Students are admitted to specialised schools after completing 7th or 8th grade and successfully passing entrance exams (in Bulgarian Language and Literature, Mathematics, Humanities, etc.).

Upper secondary education provides the attainment of the general education minimum and, whenever possible, profile-oriented training in accordance with the State Educational Requirements. Upper secondary vocational education provides the attainment of the general education minimum and the acquisition of qualifications in a given profession in accordance with the State Educational Requirements. Educational courses for vocational technical schools of 2-year duration studies are offered after completing basic education. The acquired vocational qualification gives access to the labour market.

### 2.4. Higher Education

The state management of the higher education comes down to setting up of general framework and conditions for the system functioning. The Higher Education Act gives full academic independence to higher education institutions (HEIs). The state encourages the autonomous HEIs in their efforts to build strong and sustainable university structures with enough independence and transparency of process of decision making. MEYS has the authority of coordination, control and management of the higher education system.

Higher schools in Bulgaria are universities, specialised higher schools and self-contained colleges.

Universities are higher schools which provide training in a wide range of subjects in professional areas within at least three of the four major branches of science – humanities, natural sciences, social sciences and technical sciences; offer bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees in the respective major branches of science; have ample scientific and artistic potential and through their activities contribute to the development of major branches of science and culture. A higher school

offering academic courses in one or two major branches of science or culture may be a university with its appellation signifying its specific nature.

Specialised higher schools conduct scientific research or artistic and creative activities and offer courses of training in one of the major areas of science, arts, physical culture, and military science. Their appellations shall signify the specific area in which they train specialists. These higher schools may also offer training for acquisition of the educational and qualification degree of "master" and the educational and academic and academic degree of "doctor".

A self-contained colleges shall provide training for acquisition of the educational and qualification degree "professional bachelor in .....". The college shall have full-time faculty, holding at least a half of the classroom teaching and practical exercises in each specialty.

A college may be also established within the structure of a university or of a specialised higher school accredited for the professional areas or specialties of regulated professions for which instruction shall be offered.

Training in doctoral programmes shall also be performed in Research Organisations such as Bulgarian Academy of Science, Agricultural Academy, etc.

The structure of higher education is presented in the figure below.

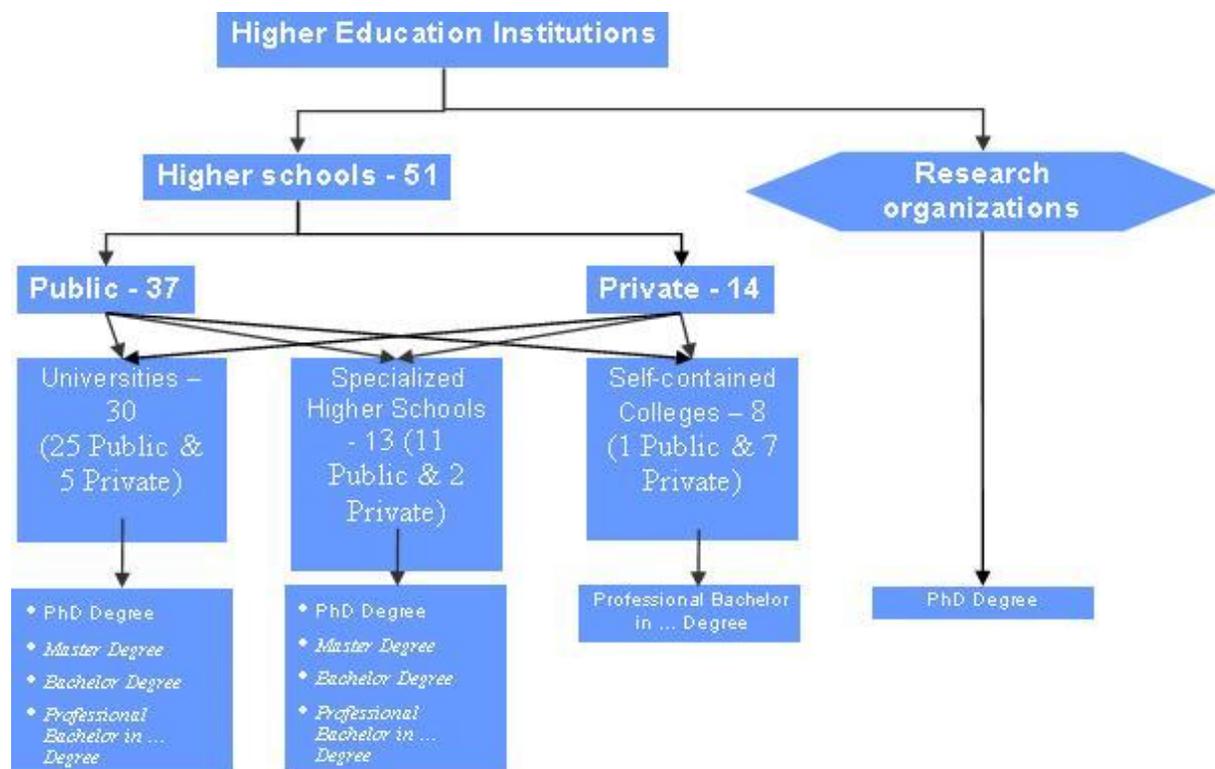


Figure 2. Structure of the System of Higher Education in Bulgaria



## 2.5. Educational profile of the population in Bulgaria

The level of education of population determines every contemporary country and plays an important economic and social role of the present and the future. One of the main headline targets of the European strategy 'Europe 2020' is to improve educational attainment levels of the population, especially to reduce the school dropout rate and to increase the number of young people with university or equivalent degree.

In 2011 compared to previous year educational structure of population aged 7 years and more improved considerably in Bulgaria, following the clearly expressed tendency of increase in the number and share of population with tertiary and upper secondary education and decrease in the number of people with lower secondary or lower education.

As of 01.02.2011 the Population census results showed that 1 348.7 thousand persons (or 19.6% of the adult population) possessed tertiary education. With upper secondary education were 2 990.4 thousand persons (43.4%). The proportion of persons with primary or lower education was only 13.9%.

Generally, the educational attainments of male population were a bit higher compared to the those of female – share of males with upper secondary and higher education was 63.6% compared to 62.4% for females. Females however completed tertiary education more often than the males and at the time of the census there were 791.8 thousand females (22.3%) with tertiary education, compared to 556.9 thousand males (16.7%).

Considerable differences were observed in the educational structure by place of residence – nearly 3/4 of the population in urban areas (71.6%) had at least upper secondary education completed, compared to hardly 40.3% in the rural areas.



### 3. Examples

#### 3.1. National/institutional policies and practices

Public funding has been the main source of income for the public HEIs in Bulgaria (65% share in total funding), growing steadily in nominal terms until 2010, but falling as a share of the total funds to reflect the higher revenues of HEIs from tuition fees, research projects and other sources. Universal tuition fees have been in place since 2000, with fee levels following an upward trend, but still affordably low for the most popular university programs. The tuition fees for state quota students have been pegged as a percentage of the per student expenditure norms defining the state subsidies for HEIs (initially at 30%, and subsequently revised to 50% and to two thirds at present). Until recently, a limited number of enrolments in masters programs were allowed beyond the state quota, with fees set on a full cost recovery basis. The austerity measures implemented by the Bulgarian Government in the wake of the global financial and economic crisis have restricted state funding to universities, and in 2010 the Government amended the Higher Education Act to allow state-funded HEIs to enrol students in all stages (bachelor to doctor) against a full cost recovery fee with the restriction that the number of students enrolled on this basis does not exceed 10% of the capacity of the institution.

Admission criteria to the universities can be classified into several categories: secondary school diploma with successfully passed matriculation exams; written examination(s); tests or competitive selection based on the school academic record. Higher Schools are autonomous, and can thus choose their preferred kind of admission procedure. During recent years, HEIs tend to simplify the models of admission, aiming to attract more students.

In line with these recent trends, Bulgaria, together with Belgium, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania and Slovenia is among the countries demonstrating a general policy approach to widening participation referring to financial arrangements they have put in place. These countries are commonly pointing out that the system of fees and financial support available for students are intended to allow all those interested in higher education to embark on studies at this level regardless of their socio-economic status or situation.

To ensure equal access against the backdrop of rising tuition fees, in addition to a means-tested merit-based scholarships program, the Bulgarian Government launched a student loan scheme covering the tuition costs of full-time students, and a loan scheme for covering the living cost of young parents studying full-time in tertiary institutions. In 2011, around 1.7% (4,800 students) of the students enrolled in Bulgarian HEIs drew student loans, and roughly 6% (16,000 students) benefited from state subsidised student scholarships. Since 2009, as part of a four-year project funded by Operational Programme 'Human Resources Development' and implemented by MEYS, the Government has made available additional resources for scholarships, whereby around 5% of the students (15,000) receive monthly scholarships and around 4% receive financial awards. In the third phase of the project, expected to be concluded by the end of October 2014, another 16,000



students are envisaged to receive monthly scholarships, while 7,000 will receive financial awards, the total resources amounting to over EUR 24 million.

### 3.2. Individual examples of underrepresented groups

In their official documents, the majority of countries also define or describe specific groups that may merit particular attention. Socio-economic status, gender, disability and ethnicity are the most commonly used terms to identify such groups. Some countries, for example Greece, Cyprus or Romania reserve a number of places for certain members of their designated under-represented groups or, in the case of Bulgaria, simplify admission procedures to higher education for certain socially excluded and disadvantaged groups.

Students with disabilities are the most common group targeted by specific measures. The aim is to adapt their study environment so that they could integrate into the higher education system on the same footing as other students. The second most common category of students targeted by specific measures, applied also in Bulgaria, is the category of those, whose socio-economical situation is likely to be a barrier to higher education studies. Although the low socio-economical status is defined differently across countries, the measures most commonly focus on those from low-income families, families with low educational background or orphans. These students are often eligible for various forms of financial support, in particular grants and subsidies, aiming to compensate their economic handicap.

Several higher education systems formally identify other under-represented groups and target them by a range of policy actions (e.g. financial support schemes, special admission regimes and guidance and counselling services). These groups are defined on the basis of various criteria, including ethnicity and/or migrant status, gender, geography (rural versus urban areas and/or deprived versus wealthy areas) or age (mature versus typical higher education students). Within these general categories, countries often express their specific national concerns. For instance, with regard to ethnicity/migrant status, Georgia pays particular attention to Azeri and Armenian students, whereas Croatia focuses on Roma students, which is also case in Bulgaria, where Roma population is the third largest ethnic group in the country, after Bulgarian and Turkish ethnic groups, with approximately 5.5% share in the total population towards 2010.

#### 3.2.1. Foreign students

In 2011/2012, students – Bulgarian citizens in universities and specialised higher schools were 253.2 thousand, or 95.9%. Their number has increased by 7.6 thousand in comparison with 2010/2011 academic year or by 3.1%.

Since 2007/2008 school year, the number of foreign students has gradually increased. During the 2011/2012 it was 10.8 thousand, or by 8.1% more than in the previous year (see Figure 3 below).

The largest increase was observed in the number of students from Greece – from 0.6 thousand in 2007/2008 to 1.9 thousand in 2011/2012 academic year, or 3.2 times, followed by students from Turkey, whose number has increased 1.8 times. In 2011/2012 the students from Turkey represented 44.7% of the total number of foreign students in Bulgaria, followed by the students from Greece - 17.5% and Macedonia - 7.8%. At the same time the number of students from Macedonia has gradually decreased - from 2.8 thousand in the beginning of the observed period to 0.9 thousand in 2011/2012 academic year, or by 69.9%.

International student mobility has gained an increased prominence in policy making in the field of higher education, which is accompanied by an increased need for statistical information. Since 2004/2005 academic year the National Statistical Institute in Bulgaria has started collecting data and computing indicators on mobile students enrolled in Bulgaria, according to Eurostat methodology. The European Commission concept for mobile student is based on citizenship, country of residence and country of prior education. In Bulgaria the student mobility is measured by 'country of prior education completed' which means that mobile student is a student who has graduated secondary education abroad.

The number of mobile students enrolled for acquiring the educational qualification degrees Bachelor and Master increase slowly - from 8.8 thousand in 2007/2008 to 10.8 thousand in 2011/2012 or 22.6% and in comparison with the previous year the increase was 8.5%.

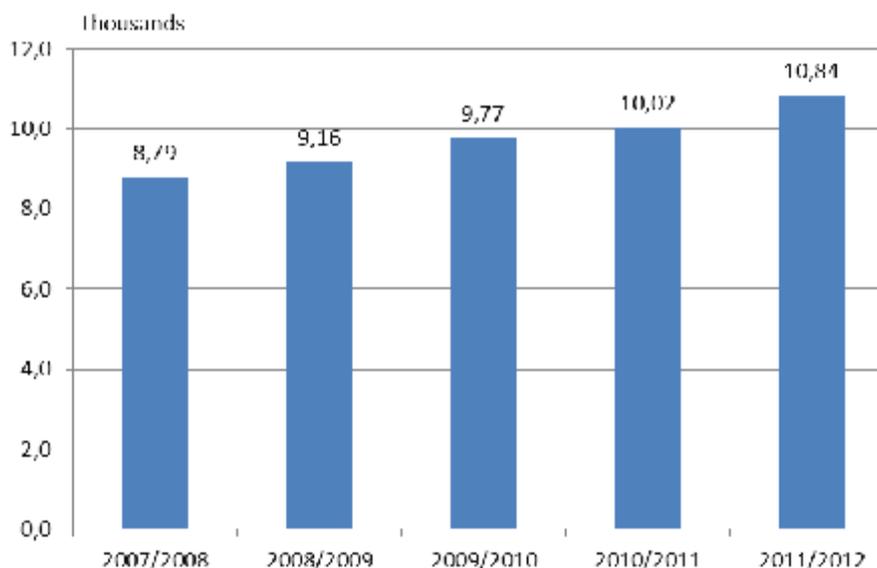


Figure 3. Foreign students in Bulgaria

### 3.2.2. Students from ethnic minorities

The concept of ethnicity is differently understood among, and even within, countries, and categories related to the notion of ethnic origin can be problematic. Indeed categories of "ethnic groups" are



culturally and historically contingent, and are not fixed in the same way as, for example, gender categories. However, despite many differences in cultural understanding, the concept of ethnic origin is most commonly used to refer to immigrant or second generation immigrant students. Unlike most other countries, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania identify Roma as an under-represented group based on the concept of ethnicity.

In the last decade Some positive trends can be observed in the educational status of the Roma community in Bulgaria (see Table 1 below). A serious barrier to the successful educational integration of Roma children and youngsters in the educational system however is the fact that the so-called functional illiteracy is three times more frequent with Romany women that with men. Having in mind that women are most often occupied in taking care for the children, the low educational level and illiteracy among the former are crucial for the educational aspirations and attainments of the latter.

Despite the experienced difficulties during the period 2001-2011 an increase is registered among the number of young Roma who attained higher educational degree in Bulgaria or abroad. The positive trends are assessed as even more intensive than those registered by the National Statistical Institute during the 2011 census, since many young people cease to identify themselves as Roma after getting a HE diploma.

Table 1. Educational level in Bulgaria by ethnicity

Level of educational attainment	Bulgarian ethnicity		Roma ethnicity	
	2001 %	2011	2001 %	2011
Higher education	19.2	25.6	0.2	0.5
Upper secondary education	47.6	52.3	6.5	9.0
Lower secondary education	24.9	18.0	41.8	40.8
Primary education	6.9	3.4	28.3	27.9
Unfinished primary education and illiterate	1.4	0.9	23.2	21.8

Source: National Statistical Institute

Although of an irregular nature and limited impact, in recent years Bulgaria has implemented measures, directed towards successful integration of representatives of Roma ethnical minority into the system of higher education. Under priority 'Education' the National Initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 envisages measures aimed at granting the right of equal access to high-quality education of children and pupils from the Roma ethnic minority. Under Activity 1.3.10 'Creation of conditions for social integration of young Roma through preparation of Romany applicants to admission exams in HEIs', a project was implemented in 2007/2008 by MEYS funded by PHARE Programme and State Budget. Under the project entitled 'Improvement of the situation and integration of disadvantaged minority groups with special focus on Roma" (Phase 1) a support was provided to 272 young Roma graduating secondary school for participation in preparatory courses for state matriculation exams and HEIs admission exams – of them 109 persons were admitted.

### 3.2.3. Mature learners

Mature learners/ students (or adult learners/adult returners) represent a category of HE students that in Bulgaria according to the Adult Education Survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute (NSI) is defined as students in active working age (between 25-64 years of age)<sup>2</sup>. In this context, the common perception is that mature students are students who are older than the typical higher education student and have re-joined formal education after a certain period outside the system. They are often likely to be found in programmes delivered under various flexible arrangements such as part-time modes of study, which in Bulgaria include extramural, evening and distance learning courses. The reason is that mature learners often face difficulties in undertaking traditional full-time studies. Therefore, policy measures which encourage alternative modes of delivering higher education programmes play a vital role in widening participation among adult returners in formal HE programmes.

Statistics shows that in Bulgaria 33.9% of the overall number of students participated in part-time studies in HE in 2008. Thus Bulgaria has a relatively high share of part-time students compared to average EU-27 level, which reaches around 21%. The information on the distribution of part-time students by age shows that in Bulgaria 83.6% of this type of HE participants are above 30 years of age, which is again higher than the EU average (49.2%).

According to NSI data, the share of full-time students in the total student population in Bulgaria remained relatively stable in the last decade and varied from 66.4% in 2008 to 71.5% in 2002. In 2012 the combined level of student participation in part-time studies reached 30.4%, following a stable 5-year downward trend. In contrast, the share of students, participating in distance HE learning courses has sustainably increased since 2001 to reach 4.2% in 2012 (see Table 2 below). This demonstrates a markedly growing interest in this mode of part-time learning, especially on part of underrepresented groups such as mature students – a fact which asks for adequate measures for further development of distance mode of learning at national and institutional level in order to support the successful integration of disadvantaged groups in HE.

Table 2. Students in Bulgaria by modes of studies

	(%)											
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Full-time mode of studies	69.3	71.5	70.4	70.0	70.4	69.7	68.8	66.4	66.9	67.2	68.7	69.6
Extramural and evening modes of studies	29.8	27.6	28.6	28.0	27.7	27.6	28.0	29.8	29.0	28.6	27.3	26.2
Distance mode of studies	0.9	0.9	1.0	2.1	1.9	2.7	3.2	3.8	4.1	4.2	4.0	4.2

Source: National Statistical Institute

<sup>2</sup> After the pilot survey held in 2007, the Adult Education Survey was conducted by the National Statistical Institute for the second time in Bulgaria in the period December 2011 - January 2012 with a representative sample of 3 600 regular households using Eurostat methodology.



One of the large-scale initiatives undertaken recently by the Bulgarian Government in this area is the distribution of grant subsidies for supporting distance learning in HE. Under scheme “Development of e-forms of distance learning in the system of higher education” as part of Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” 2007-2013, in 2012 40 HEIs were granted over EUR 17.5 million for development of e-forms of distance learning. Project activities should be completed until November 2014. The specific objectives of the grant scheme is to support lifelong learning and in particular the participation of mature learners and other types of disadvantaged groups in HE through development of e-forms of distant learning which, on their part create opportunities for building upon existing vocational skills and competences without long absence from work.

The e-forms of distance learning provide opportunities for individual planning and development of flexible study paths, adapted to the educational needs of the learner. A key element for the effective implementation of e-forms of distance learning is the establishment of centres, offering e-education and services and provided with the necessary qualified academic staff and experts, technological and information infrastructure, software and literature.

Official data of the NSI show that at present only 1.3% of the population in active working age in Bulgaria (25-64 years of age) participate in some form of lifelong learning (LLL) activity. The target of the National lifelong learning strategy for the period 2008-2013, adopted by the Bulgarian Government in 2008 is to reach 5% LLL participation activity by the end of 2013. To achieve this ambitious goal it is of key importance to improve the administration of the study process, increase the quality of education services, offered to mature students, to ensure quick and easy access to new skills and knowledge, to reduce the expenses related to the participation of adult learners in the system of HE.



#### 4. Relevance and impact

Bulgaria is among the only two countries in the EU with specific policies to increase the level of completion rates in higher education but no requirement of HEIs to report on it. In these cases, understanding of the effectiveness of policies may therefore be limited. Nevertheless, there can be identified some factors that greatly facilitate the successful transition from secondary to higher education, once the student has been admitted in a HEI in Bulgaria, which can be summarised as follows:

- Introduction of two compulsory state matriculation exams (in Bulgarian Language and Literature and an optional subject) in 2008 – those students who want to go further with their education into the system of higher education have to successfully take their matriculation exams upon finishing secondary education. This is certified with a diploma of completed secondary education, which is final and entitles the holder to continue his education or vocational training. In case students decide not to sit for state matriculation examinations, they are issued a certificate of completed upper secondary education, which, however, does not entitle them to university enrolment. As a result, first year students enter the higher education system more prepared for what is to follow and receive the opportunity do well in their studies
- The same can be stated for the existence of written examinations and/or tests as admission criteria for enrolment in universities – Higher Schools are autonomous, and can thus choose their preferred kind of examination. As already mentioned, during recent years, however HEIs tend to simplify the models of admission, aiming to attract more students – participation in preliminary entrance examinations is allowed, double entrance examinations dates have been announced, entry tests are applied besides the traditional written examinations. The majority of Higher Schools which have a college within their structure offer college graduates the opportunity to continue their education at Master degree level.



## 5. Discussion of findings

The findings presented in this report indicate that some efforts are being made in Bulgaria towards improving the access to higher education in general and underrepresented groups in particular, such as people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, economically handicapped, mature learners etc. The global financial and economic crisis however has led to the introduction of austerity measures on part of the Bulgarian Government which has resulted in serious restrictions of state funding to universities. Nevertheless to ensure equal access in response to the gradually rising in recent years tuition fees, in addition to a means-tested merit-based scholarships program, the Government launched two loan schemes: 1) student loan scheme covering the tuition costs of full-time students, and 2) a loan scheme for covering the living cost of young parents studying full-time in tertiary institutions. As a result of these interventions, in 2011, around 1.7% of the students enrolled in Bulgarian HEIs drew student loans, and roughly 6% were able to benefit from state subsidised student scholarships. Since 2009, as part of a four-year EU-funded project implemented by MEYS, the government has made available additional resources for scholarships, whereby around 5% of the students receive monthly scholarships and around 4% receive financial awards. By the end of October 2014, another 16,000 students are envisaged to receive monthly scholarships, while 7,000 will receive financial awards, the total resources amounting to over EUR 24 million.

Another field of initiatives is related to supporting the access of mature learners to HE through development of e-forms of distance learning. Over EUR 17.5 million were granted in 2012 to 40 HEIs under scheme "Development of e-forms of distance learning in the system of higher education" as part of Operational Programme "Human Resources Development" 2007-2013. The specific objectives of the grant scheme is to support lifelong learning and in particular the participation of mature learners and other types of disadvantaged groups in HE through development of e-forms of distant learning.

In addition, the measures directed at preparation of secondary school graduates from ethnic minorities for HEIs admission exams is a highly relevant measure for combating the social isolation of these highly underrepresented groups in the social life of Bulgaria. Such measures should be considered an integral part of wider-range supportive measures directed at representatives of disadvantaged minority groups and aimed at facilitating their transition from secondary to higher education.



## 6. Summary and conclusions

Despite the quantitative achievements during the past two decades, higher education in Bulgaria continues to face challenges with regard to quality, efficiency, and accountability for results. Recent reform initiatives have started addressing some of the weaknesses. Bulgaria should implement integrated measures to increase the quality and efficiency of its tertiary education by revisiting the models of governance, quality assurance and financing of higher education. These elements, together with improving the access to higher education in general and for underrepresented groups in particular, need to be addressed in a long-term strategy for higher education, which is currently missing in Bulgaria.



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