



SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

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 organized 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 organizes 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, organization, 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

Начално училище <i>Natchalno uchilishte</i> (primary)	6/7-9/10 years of age
Прогимназия <i>Progimnazia</i> (general lower secondary)	10/11-14/15 years of age
Професионално технически училища (<i>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) Admissions 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 cooperation 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 profesiata*) 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) Admissions 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 specialized 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 specialization of the school.

Vocational studies include compulsory general education and specialized 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 specialization.

(d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

At this level, pupil assessment is similar to the arrangements for basic education. General upper secondary courses (including specialized 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 profesiata*) 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 specialized 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 context of the ongoing socio-economic changes taking place more or less rapidly in our country, the system of education and training experiences a process of wide development. Influenced by these changes, Bulgarian education makes efforts to answer the requirements of the new public and market mechanisms. The development of the national labour market depends directly on the successful implementation of a well-defined policy on schooling supported by a well-structured system of education.

The reforms that had been recently undertaken by the Government in respect of organization and functioning of the national education system were elaborated on a twofold basis. On the one hand, they had to ensure the adaptability of the education system towards new challenges, on the other, these reforms were generated to establish sustainable system of schooling harmonized with the European standards and capable to provide valuable knowledge and sound skills.

The process of reforms within the system of **secondary general education** is closely related to the implementation of the newly amended National Education Act (last amendments, 1999). To the effect of assuring quality of education the Law on the Level of Schooling, the General Educational Minimum and the Syllabus was also adopted and entered into force. This Law stipulates the introduction of the 12-years' schooling and the compulsory matriculation examinations as well as the elaboration of standards concerning the syllabi and the assessment system. In compliance with the provisions of these legal acts, a new curriculum framework was introduced (1999) and, as a new approach towards national assessment system, new State Standards for general education in respective subjects are in a process of defining. The reform process concerns also the implementation of early foreign languages and mother-tongue teaching and the integration of information technologies in the study process.

Traditionally, the links between the system of education and the labour market have been performed by the vocational schools. Tied closely to the enterprises, these schools focus on skills training and

specialization in certain profession. The enter into force of the Vocational Education and Training Act /VETA/ (1999) is one of the major steps undertaken by the Bulgarian Government in order to achieve approximation of the Bulgarian legislation with the acts of the European Union. Parallel to the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* in this field, VETA provides for the better mobility and adaptability of trainees for the labour market and for the better response of the **vocational education and training system** /VET system/ to local or regional conditions. The main purpose of the Act “to create qualified and mobile labour force that will be able to be competitive under the conditions of both national and European labour market” requires definitive actions towards decentralization of the system and providing conditions for lifelong learning, retraining, and up-grading. Another aspect of the reforms in the VET system is the involvement of the social partners and employers in vocational standards development; in assessment, certification and qualification awarding; in vocational teacher training. The Ministry of Education and Science attracted employers and the concerned state institutions in the process of elaborating the new State Register of Specialities (the List of Professions) designed in conformity with the ISCED requirements. Taking into account the needs of the labour market, the priority is given to the large-profile professions and to building essential skills such as foreign language skills, entrepreneurial skills, ICT-skills, and teamwork skills. Thus, the training will provide the necessary match of the labour needs and the ongoing structural reform of the national economy.

Furthermore, as a substantial factor in the establishment of the new VET system shall be considered the National Vocational Education and Training Agency /NAVET/. The NAVET was established to the Council of Ministers (2000) following Art. 41 of VETA. Its’ role is to co-ordinate the work of all institutions providing education, training and career-guidance and to assure the quality of training by accrediting and licensing vocational schools and organizations. The Agency is responsible for the elaboration and presentation to the Minister of Education and Science of the **List of professions** in the system of vocational education and training and the state **educational requirements** for acquiring qualification by professions. It shall also contribute to the recognition of the documents for vocational education acquired and shall develop and update the register of the Centres for vocational education and of the Information and Career Guidance Centres.

Changes are still going in the **higher education system**. Certain amendments to the Higher Education Act (1995) were adopted both in 1999 and 2000. Most of all these amendments concern providing a mechanism for a direct transition from the Bachelor’s to both Master’s and Doctor’s degrees. The process of optimization of the structure of higher education institutions is also under developing. The aim of this process is to respond to the requirements of the market economy.

The second important trend in reforming higher education system is related to quality assurance. To this effect amendments to the Ordinance governing the rules and functions of the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency were introduced providing conditions for more accurate external and internal assessment and maintenance of the quality of studies.

The third trend can be associated with the attempt initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science to widen the knowledge and skills acquired through Bachelor’s studies in order to achieve a large-profile Bachelor’s degree adaptable to and competitive on the labour market.

In order to improve the relevance of higher education to the needs of the economy and social requirements certain attention is paid to co-operation with representatives of social partners and employers and to encouragement of distance education and lifelong learning.

Unrevised English

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (http://www.eurydice.org)
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